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Huang Zuolin: China's man of the theatre

Fei, Faye Chunfang, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1991

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A

HUANG ZUOLIN: CHINA'S MAN OF THE THEATRE

by

FAYE CHUNFANG FEI

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1991

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

HUANG ZUOLIN: CHINA'S MAN OF THE THEATRE

by

Faye Chunfang Fei

Adviser: Stanley Waren

This dissertation analyzes the life and work of Huang Zuolin (1906-), a leading Chinese theatre director. Huang is among the first generation of Chinese theatre artists who studied theatre in the West and returned to China to help develop spoken drama (huaju), based on Western-style modern drama, as differentiated from traditional Chinese sung dramas, such as Beijing opera. His life and career closely reflect the social, political, cultural and artistic reality of Chinese theatre in the 20th century.

After the introduction, the study covers the background of Huang's theatre, his theatre during the war years, his theatre in the pre- and post-Cultural Revolution years, and his impact on contemporary Chinese Theatre.

Huang and his wife, Danni, were the first to teach formal courses on Stanislavsky techniques in China, and he founded one of the first successful professional spoken drama companies in China, the Bitter Toilers' Troupe. After the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, Huang helped to found the Shanghai People's Art Theatre,

one of China's leading national theatres, and was its President and Artistic Director till he retired in 1985. He was also the first theatre artist to introduce both Brecht's theories and plays to China. Huang's 1979 production of Brecht's Galileo was such a phenomenal success that it signaled the resurrection of spoken drama after the end of the so-called Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

Huang's own distinctive concept of theatre, xieyi theatre, which he first advocated in 1962, and which attempts to create a kind of spoken drama that blends elements of Chinese traditional sung drama and the Brechtian model, continues to influence new generations of Chinese spoken drama artists. In recent years, he has also made his ideas influential in Chinese traditional theatre circles.

There are three important characteristics fundamental to Huang and his theatre: global perspective, engagement to the reality and progress of China, and a combined Shavian and Brechtian comic vision. He relies on written texts for his directorial concept, and has always searched for plays to realize his ideals, a torturous pursuit partly due to the volatile socio-political circumstances in contemporary China. Huang's artistic endeavors have often been compromised, but his ideals remain intact.

PREFACE

I am deeply indebted to Huang Zuolin, who inspired this endeavor and has given me cooperation of the most generous kind. I have known Huang personally and professionally since 1983. In fact, in 1987 he directed China Dream, a play I co-authored with William H. Sun. During my research trip to China in 1988, I spent a great amount of time talking with Huang, some of which resulted in over twenty hours of recorded interviews. He led me through his own personal library, showing me the works of various Western and Chinese artists who contributed to his global artistic perspective, including a couple of surviving letters to him from Bernard Shaw. Huang always responded promptly whenever I wrote to ask him more questions.

This dissertation is a critical historical study of Huang Zuolin, one of China's leading theatre directors. Even though the wars, revolutions and other historical torrents of 20th century China had destroyed some valuable records of Huang's remarkable long career, I was able to uncover extensive resources concerning Huang's life and work through my numerous research trips to libraries in China, especially the archive at the Shanghai People's Art Theatre. These include program notes, production photos and designs, audio and video recordings of some rehearsals and productions, promptbooks, transcripts of speeches and

lectures, films Huang directed and so on. There are published reviews of Huang's productions, interviews with Huang, and the actors and designers who worked with him, and discussions and critiques of his influential new theatre concept, xieyi. A collection of Huang's essays and speeches, entitled The Director's Words (daoyande hua 1979) has been published, in addition to his many writings about theatre, scattered in various newspapers and journals all over China. My research has further convinced me that Huang's endeavor to create a distinctive Chinese modern theatre deserves a conscientious and comprehensive study. It is hoped this dissertation will also contribute significantly to world knowledge about theatre in China.

I wish to express my heart-felt gratitude to Professor Stanley A. Warren, chair of my dissertation committee, for his guidance at every stage of this study.

I would like to thank Professor Daniel Gerould and Professor Stanley Kauffmann for their interest and encouragement.

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INTRODUCTION

On November 30, 1986, an historical event in Chinese theatre took place in Shanghai: a celebration of Huang Zuolin's eightieth birthday and the fiftieth anniversary of his professional theatre career. Participants at the celebration included almost all of the important theatre people in Shanghai and many leaders of the Shanghai municipal government. Cao Yu, the well known Chinese playwright and chairman of the Chinese Theatre Artists Association, and Chen Yong, one of China's most respected directors, flew from Beijing to join the celebration. Two eminent Japanese theatre artists, the director Senda Korenari and the actress Kuli hala Komaki, arrived from Tokyo. As part of the celebration, twenty-four former students who had worked with Huang--now either leading figures or retired celebrities of Shanghai theatre--presented scenes selected from seven of Huang's productions. All major media in Shanghai covered the event.

No other theatre director in China had ever been so honored before. Huang's scenes were performed, however, for only one night, mostly for insiders. The Shanghai People's Art Theatre, which Huang headed for over three decades, until he retired in 1985 and became honorary president, has planned several times to form a repertory by reviving some of its early productions, many of which were directed by

Huang, but these plans have never materialized. The fact is, only a few of the productions that Huang directed after 1949 are possible to revive for the audience of the late 1980s and '90s. Huang's productions before 1949 had not been revived either, though for different reasons.

What a paradox: China's most prestigious director who has over a hundred productions to his credit, and whose seminal new concept of theatre has influenced several generations of Chinese theatre artists, has spawned no revivals of his productions even at the celebration of a career extending over fifty years. What kind of man is this Huang Zuolin? And what kind of theatre has he been making?

Huang Zuolin (1906-) is among the first generation of Chinese theatre artists who studied theatre in the West. He returned to China to develop spoken drama (huaju), based on Western-style modern drama and so different from the traditional Chinese sung dramas such as Beijing opera (jingju). He studied in Great Britain on two occasions, first from 1925 to 1929 and then from 1935 to 1937. He remains the only one of this early group of Chinese theatre artists who is still living and active in theatre--in both "spoken" drama and "sung" drama. Huang and his wife, Danni, were the first to teach formal courses based on the Stanislavsky Method in China (in Chongqing 1939-40), and he founded one of the first professional spoken drama companies in China, the Bitter Toilers' Troupe (kugan jutuan, Shanghai, 1940-46). After the People's Republic of China was

established in 1949, he helped to found the Shanghai People's Art Theatre, became its vice-president and later its president. He was the first theatre artist to introduce both Brecht's theories and some of his plays to China.

Huang's first Brechtian production, Mother Courage and Her Children (1958, Shanghai), was not successful. Neither the audience or the critics were prepared for the play. His second one, The Life of Galileo (1978, Beijing), however, was a phenomenal success and signaled the resurrection of spoken drama after the end of the ten-year so-called Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-76).

Huang's own distinctive concept of theatre, xieyi (see explanation and discussion in Chapters 3 and 5), which he first advocated in 1962, and which attempts to create a kind of spoken drama that blends elements of Chinese traditional theatre and the Brechtian model, continues to influence many innovative Chinese playwrights, directors, stage designers, and actors. Recently he has worked with Chinese sung drama artists, bringing his ideas even into the traditional theatre circle.

What distinguishes Huang Zuolin most from other Chinese theatre artists is his global perspective. The English education he received--first, the missionary school in Tianjin (1916-25) and then British institutions (1925-29 and 1935-37)--and his constant contacts with his Western friends and colleagues have enabled him to see things from a much broader perspective than most other Chinese artists. This,

however, is not always an advantage in China, especially in the years after 1949. Sometimes his productions seemed to alienate the common people, as was the case in his 1959 production of Brecht's Mother Courage and Her Children. Another production, Resist the U.S. and Assist Korea: A Great Live Report (1951) was accused of portraying decadent "cosmopolitanism" because the play's actions took place on different continents and employed some foreign production styles, although the content was completely in keeping with the guidelines issued by the Chinese government.

In fact, Huang is never a "blind worshipper of the West," his label during the Cultural Revolution. On the contrary, he is always concerned with both reality and progress in China, a second important characteristic of Huang and his theatre, especially after the 1949 Communist revolution. Like many artists in China, Huang believes in the revolution and is more than willing to serve the revolution with his art. However, because China's leaders constantly make sweeping changes of rules, making the absolute truth of one moment obsolete in the next, Huang's strong commitment to keeping up with China's immediate reality--sometimes in the form of agitprop for a new campaign or a new policy--has often hindered his theatre from having productions of long-lasting value.

Huang's third theatrical characteristic is a combined Shavian and Brechtian comic vision. He is committed to social issues but presents them in a distanced or humorous

manner. Theoretically, this vision and Huang's once well-known comic style might have made his theatre more enduring, but China's rigid propaganda policies after 1949 deprived many productions of their comic element.

Huang's theatre is an intricate blend of a uniquely strong personality and a complicated society. While his personality remains intact, his artistic style has changed a great deal under the volatile circumstances with which he has had to cope. In over fifty years, he never maintained a single long working association with any playwright. Two is the maximum number of plays of a single playwright he has directed for full productions. Only three playwrights, Shakespeare, Brecht, and Cao Yu, China's most famous spoken drama writer, have had their plays chosen twice by Huang, and in each case the two productions were decades apart. This strange director-playwright relationship provides perhaps another reason as to why this prestigious director's works are not revived.

I got to know Huang personally in 1983 during the heated nation-wide discussions about his concept of xieyi theatre. We have kept in contact ever since. In 1987 he directed China Dream, a play I co-authored with William H. Sun. At our very first meeting, I was fascinated by Huang's knowledge of world theatre, his global perspective, his sense of humor and his confidence in the future of Chinese theatre. Years of sociopolitical turbulence had brought him grave disappointment and suffering, but he

remains neither bitter or cynical. I was impelled to find out more about the man and his theatre. His deep concern about past and present conditions of Chinese theatre steered me into a deeper understanding of modern Chinese theatre, most particularly how it relates to Western influences and to China's internal sociopolitical conditions.

China's modern drama, spoken drama, was created in the wake of China's turbulent revolutions in the early 20th century and was strongly influenced by modern Western literature and drama, both in form and substance. From its beginnings there have always been two modes of confrontation and conflict: one between the eagerness to learn from the West and a determination to be distinctively Chinese; the other, between what the regime allows and what the people and/or artists want. Developments in 20th century Chinese theatre have often closely reflected, and even strongly influenced, national political and cultural events and trends. In order to understand Huang's theatre and its paradox, one has to understand modern Chinese theatre in general, and first of all, to understand the sociopolitical conditions of modern China.

CHAPTER 1

THE BACKGROUND OF HUANG'S THEATRE

Modern Chinese history is full of ironies. Up to the mid-twentieth century, when China broke with the U.S.S.R., there were invasion and interference by both Western powers and the Japanese. China also learned from the West and Japan. Furthermore, the Chinese learned from the West how to defend itself. After China was defeated in the 1894 Sino-Japanese war, it became clear to those Chinese prepared to face facts that, to defend herself, China must, as Japan had already to a large extent done, appropriate Western knowledge, and adjust her own political system to the needs of self-defence and national strength.

The Chinese began sending students abroad on a large scale, mostly to Japan. Having learned that Japan had transformed its feudal society into a modern industrial nation through the Meiji Reform, Chinese intellectuals also wanted to reform Chinese society in the same peaceful way. However, their first attempt failed. Six members of the abortive 1899 court reform were publicly executed in Beijing; others escaped to Japan.¹ Their supporter, Emperor Guangxu, was put under house arrest by the powerful Empress Dowager, Cixi.

The Boxer Rebellion broke out in 1900, and an allied army of eight Western countries invaded Beijing ostensibly to put

down the anti-Western boxers. The Chinese government agreed to pay more indemnities. After these suppressions from the inside and humiliations from the outside, more Chinese intellectuals went overseas to study--Europe, America as well as Japan, to search for ways to make China strong and prosperous enough to compete with the Western powers.

Huang Zuolin was born in the final years of China's last feudal dynasty. At the tender age of four, he observed the arrest of a neighbor, a revolutionary who had returned from France. A few months later, he and his family saw the parade of celebration in the Tianjin streets, and they cut off pigtaails on men and boys--the symbol of the Qing Dynasty. On October 10, 1911, Chinese revolutionaries led by Sun Yat-sen overthrew the Qing Dynasty by force and the Republic of China was established.

A result of the long struggle of the Chinese people against a corrupt feudal system and foreign imperialist invasions, the 1911 revolution largely benefited from the influence of the West, especially Western bourgeois thought and education. Some pivotal figures of the revolution had studied in Japan, others including Sun Yat-sen had been in the United States. Sun's revolutionary organization, Alliance Society (tongmeng hui), the predecessor of the Nationalist Party, was born overseas. Enlightened intellectuals in China founded some Western-style schools--as opposed to traditional schools that taught only ancient classics--to disseminate modern science and thought.

Missionary schools founded by Western missionaries, such as the one Huang attended later, also brought Western culture to the Chinese.

On the other hand, modern Western influence was not strong enough to rock the foundation of the old feudalistic infrastructure even though the revolution had overthrown the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty. Soon after the 1911 revolution, Sun Yat-sen gave up the presidency of the Republic, and Yuan Shikai, the Qing mandarin-turned-warlord, usurped power and attempted to restore the monarchy. After Yuan failed, other warlords vied for power. Though the emperor was gone, feudalistic social and ideological systems remained. In 1919, a few years later, the May Fourth Movement, an anti-Western nationalistic movement developed into a large-scale cultural movement inspired by Western democracy and science.

Led by such preeminent intellectuals as Chen Duxiu², Hu Shi³, Li Dazhao⁴, and Lu Xun⁵, The May Fourth Movement was generally intended to sweep out the residue of feudalism and to build a modern China able to share the same ground as the industrial powers. The movement gained momentum after China's repeated defeats and humiliations by Western and Japanese forces in a series of wars that imposed treaties which demanded from China both indemnities and "concessions" on Chinese territory. At the post World War I Versailles Peace Conference, victorious China's sovereignty over her own Shandong Province was transferred from Germany to Japan.

Responding to this outrage, thousands of students mounted nationalistic demonstrations in Beijing. The demonstrations triggered a nation-wide movement and accelerated the New Culture movement, which had been under way in Beijing and a few other major cities since 1915, when Chen Duxiu first published Youth Journal (qingnian zazhi). Soon this journal was moved from Shanghai to Beijing and became New Youth (xin qingnian), the flagship journal of the New Culture Movement. Chen, Hu, Li, and Lu all wrote articles for New Youth, advocating democracy, science and other elements of modern Western culture, including the realistic drama. After May 4, 1919, when the students influenced by Chen, Hu, Li, Lu and other New Culture advocates demonstrated in Beijing streets and consequently ignited nationalistic demonstrations and New Culture propagations in many other cities, "May Fourth" was put on the banner of the general cultural and political movement.

The main goals of the May Fourth Movement, democracy and science, were not achieved in the following decades. When the new Communist Party, founded in 1921 by Chen, Li, Mao Zedong and others and the Nationalist Party formed an alliance and began the Northern Expedition to fight the warlords in northern China, there seemed some reason for hope. Chiang Kai-shek, however, broke the alliance by killing thousands of communists in 1927, leading to the chaotic ten-year civil war between Chiang's military dictatorship, Mao's fledging communist guerrillas and the

remaining warlords.

Nevertheless, the May Fourth movement did accomplish a great deal. The classic written language, the equivalent of classic Latin in China, was largely replaced by vernacular Chinese in schools and in a growing number of publications. These schools and publications spread ideas against feudalist subjugation of women and youth, against arranged marriages, and against superstition. From Western missionary schools like the one Huang attended, students went to the streets to advocate the new culture. Modern themes were widely presented in newly born or newly legitimized literary genres, such as modern blank verse, vernacular fiction, and spoken drama, genres which were advocated as the antitheses of their old counterparts: classical verse with strict patterns regulating every syllable and rhyme, novels in classical Chinese, and traditional sung drama. Depicting contemporary subjects in a straightforward way and able to express feelings more freely and powerfully, these new genres helped remould Chinese people's minds, even though they could not build the democracy hoped for during the May Fourth period.

Among these genres, spoken drama played an especially important role because theatre was traditionally more accessible and entertaining to the common people, and because of another Chinese tradition--the use of theatre as a "preaching" place (gao tai jiaohua). Compared with other modern literary genres, spoken drama was more often

entangled with its traditional counterpart and more closely involved with politics.

It was Western missionary schools that first produced spoken drama in China in the late nineteenth century. The first spoken drama performances were Western plays in English, such as Shakespeare's and Molière's plays. Soon, students of missionary schools developed the skills to do their own plays in Chinese. In 1889 at a Christmas celebration at St. John's College in Shanghai, students not only performed in an English play but also presented their own Chinese comedy, without singing, Scandalous Officialdom (guanchang chou shi), satirizing corrupt officials of the day. The next year two other missionary schools in Shanghai did several original Chinese plays dealing with current affairs, such as The Boxers (yihe tuan), The Allied Army of Eight [Western] Countries Invades Beijing (baguo lianjun ru Beijing), yet another example of using Western forms to counterattack Western power. By 1906 there were six or seven school theatre groups in Shanghai. However, these school groups only performed for very limited audiences on special occasions, usually one performance for each play. Therefore, they had little impact on Chinese society beyond their school walls.

Chinese scholars today are in general agreement that Chinese modern drama evolved in 1907, one year after Huang

Zuolin's birth and four years before the 1911 revolution. Perhaps, the most decisive event for Chinese modern drama occurred in Japan. In the spring of 1907 in Tokyo, the Spring Willow Society (chunliu she), a Chinese students' theatre club, presented a full five-act play, A Black Slave's Cry to Heaven (heinu yu tien lu) an adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin. The performance was highly commended by the Japanese press and practitioners of shimpa, forerunner of the Western-style Japanese modern drama. Another production of the same play was staged that same year in Shanghai by Spring Sun Society (chunyang she), an amateur troupe. These early successes led to further translations and productions of European plays in Tokyo, and with students returning from Japan, to several dramatic societies and many performances in Shanghai. At the time this form of theatre was called "new drama" (xinju) or "civilized drama" (wenming xi), but since the late 20s it has been defined as an early form of "spoken drama" (huaju) to distinguish it from the essentially operatic mode of traditional forms.

The "civilized drama" already had some features of western theatre. It was usually divided into acts; it used prose far more than verse or song; it made extensive use of scenery and more authentic costume; and it dealt with contemporary subjects instead of old legends. The appeal of "civilized drama," however, was not purely through realistic staging because some stage conventions of traditional

theatre were employed, such as, singing and stage combat, to attract the audience and make up for the lack of training in realistic acting. Some theatre historians argue that "civilized drama" was not only modeled on Japanese shimpa drama which was influenced by Western modern drama, but that it was also developed from an indigenous trend in the traditional theatre circle, specifically "new plays in modern costumes" (shizhuang xinju) which were experimentally presented from late 19th century on by some traditional theatre performers who wanted to address contemporary concerns (Ding 1983). Anyway, the "civilized drama" blossomed and was effectively used to expose social problems and spread the word of the revolution.

Unfortunately, when the Republic of China once again became a battlefield of warlords, the prevailing revolutionary enthusiasm waned, and the artistically immature "civilized drama" deteriorated--becoming more and more vulgarized in order to appeal to the baser instincts of the populace.

Both "new plays in modern costumes" and the "civilized drama" are extinct today, but they served to bridge the traditional theatre with Western-style spoken drama. In other words, they prepared Chinese audiences for purely spoken plays. To some degree they revived the habit of performing full length story-plays. Perhaps more important still, they had established acting institutions, new traditions, experiences and personnel.

It was with the beginning of the New Culture movement in

1915 that spoken drama gained a serious following. The number of Chinese with direct experience of Europe and America and knowledge of European languages was rapidly increasing. Works of Ibsen, Wilde, Chekhov, Shaw, and many other modern Western dramatists were introduced into China in translation, and the first attempts were made to write original Chinese plays along Western lines. The impetus for literary and political change given by the May Fourth Movement and the general movement toward colloquial, analytical, Western modern literature also encouraged spoken drama. The cinema provided competition but also helped to accustom the public to purely spoken and Western style realistic performance, and to create a taste for it.

During the May Fourth period, there was a heated debate about what kind of theatre China should have. Traditional "sung drama" was ruthlessly deemed decadent and pernicious by radical intellectuals. As the new culture advocates saw it, the content of sung drama's repertory was nothing but the Confucian teaching that protected feudalistic social order, perpetuating blind loyalty of the people to the emperors, blind submission of women to men, and blind faith in superstition. Its nonrealistic forms were considered backward because they could not present verisimilitude on stage (Xiong 3). In short, sung drama was considered part of China's dying old culture. The "civilized drama" was attacked too not only because it had become vulgar, but also because of its many resemblances to the sung drama.

During this period more and more Western plays and dramatic theories were translated or introduced in Chinese publications. For example, in 1918 and 1919 every issue of New Youth had one or more articles on theatre. There was even a special issue on Ibsen in which Hu Shi published his controversial "Ibsenism." Western plays welcome in China then were by such playwrights as Ibsen, Gorky, Chekhov, and Shaw. An early "spoken drama" production was the Shanghai production of Shaw's Mrs. Warren's Profession in 1920. The costumes and scenery were new and faithful to the script. There were over a hundred rehearsals and three previews before the opening night, October 16. The production, however, ran only three nights. Many spectators left during the performance, some even protested loudly while leaving. Chinese theatregoers were simply not accustomed to long retrospective speeches in prose. The artists had wanted to do an authentic Western drama production as a contrast to sung drama and the already obsolete "civilized drama", but they had ignored their audiences' expectations.

If the 1920 production was a first if abortive attempt at Chinese "spoken drama", a true birth took place four years later--with the Chinese adaptation of Oscar Wilde's Lady Windermere's Fan (shaonainai de shanzi, May 1924), also in Shanghai. The adaptor and director, Hong Shen, had returned from his studies in the United States to become China's first director using Western professional rehearsal techniques. He even abolished the convention of female

impersonation. Directing two short Chinese plays about contemporary life, Hong used one all-male cast and one male-female cast to make a point. By showing the weakness of using China's century-old convention--female impersonation--in modern drama, Hong convinced people of the necessity of realistic casting. On the other hand, Hong was also aware that modern Chinese theatre must look Chinese.

In order to make a Western play like Lady Windermere's Fan work in China, Hong Shen sinicized the story, giving it the local flavor of Shanghai. This production was a great success, moving from a small theatre to larger sold-out houses. About this time, Hong named this kind of theatre huaju--spoken drama.

Following Fan as a successful paradigm, adapted translation (gaiyi) became the major method of bringing Western drama into China. Many of Huang Zuolin's productions in the 1940s were done in this same manner. Without worrying about copyright, the Chinese found free adaptations the most convenient way to tailor Western drama for Chinese theatregoers.

Original plays written by Chinese in the late 1910s and 20s often dealt with such themes as arranged marriage, poverty, and nationalism, three of the most pressing social issues of the time. Most of the plays were both short and unsophisticated. The fledging spoken drama theatre wanted to put on more and more shows but could not yet afford to support professional playwrights. Playwrights were often

prolific but wrote hastily for only a few, if not single, performances. For example, Tian Han⁶, the most committed modern playwright then, often finished a play after half of it had already been rehearsed. The important playwrights of this period, such as Tian Han, Guo Moruo⁷, Ouyang Yuqian⁸, Hong Shen, Xiong Foxi⁹, and Ding Xilin¹⁰, had all studied overseas, mostly in Japan and the United States. Many had not been theatre specialists when abroad, but they all played pivotal roles in bringing Western theatre into China. Besides presenting Chinese audiences with their Western style plays about Chinese life, many nurtured the first generation of Chinese-educated spoken drama professionals in schools and theatres.

Xiong Foxi's Theatre Department at Beijing University's School of Arts was China's first higher educational institution with a specialty in theatre. By and large, the department trained spoken drama artists, but only after a debate on spoken drama versus "national theatre" in 1926. This occurred on the return of Xiong from Columbia University to take over as the chair of the department after his friend Yu Shangyuan had resigned.

Yu was among a group of intellectuals who shifted their "anti-old-culture" stance of the May Fourth Movement to that of "pro-national-treasure" several years later. Typical of that group was Hu Shi, one of the foremost intellectuals of modern China. Hu had believed in literary evolution and had ardently advocated the abolition of China's old sung drama

and the creation of Western-style modern drama in China. He was the first Chinese to write a spoken drama script, The Greatest Event in Life (zhongsheng da shi, 1919), modeled after Ibsen's A Doll's House. In the mid and late 1920s, however, Hu drastically changed his position. Turning away from modern drama, he became the leading advocate of "collating national treasures" (zhengli guo gu). He supported his friend Yu Shangyuan's "national theatre" movement, a movement opposed to Ibsenite social-problem spoken drama and intended to develop so-called purely artistic "national theatre" based on traditional sung drama. This was a serious setback, and it did not meet China's needs of the time. Its plans, however, remained on paper, and never realized on stage. Yu had hoped to use his Theatre Department as a base to carry out the plans of their "national theatre," but he encountered resistance from students who wanted to study spoken drama--the socially oriented new theatre. That was one of the reasons why he left the department to Xiong in 1926, only a year after its inception.

Xiong took the job and immediately conducted a department-wide debate on the direction of the department. Most faculty and students opted for spoken drama, which happened to be the choice of Xiong himself. Xiong recruited more faculty to teach students all aspects of the theatre--from theatre history to playwriting to prop making. Until 1933, when it was closed by the government under the

cloud of the Japanese invasion, this department was a solid training base for spoken drama in northern China. Many students later became leading figures in China's theatrical circles.

A similar kind of debate--spoken drama versus sung drama-- also took place in Shanghai. In 1927 Tian Han was the president of a small private university, Shanghai Arts University. Although there was not a theatre department in name, Tian attracted many theatre enthusiasts and artists. They often argued about the kind of theatre needed in China. Hong Shen and some other professors asserted that only spoken drama was legitimate. Ouyang Yuqian and others, however, argued that the old sung drama was much more popular in China and therefore they should reform it into a new kind of opera. Tian's idea was eclectic: spoken drama should be their major focus whereas sung drama should not be excluded. He organized a production of Ouyang's "new opera," Pan Jinlian, casting his spoken drama students together with Ouyang and other Beijing opera stars. The production became a major event in Shanghai. Soon after Tian founded Nanguo Arts Institute in which a theatre department was officially established (1928).

Around that time there was a catch phrase in the spoken drama circle: Tian in the south and Xiong in the north. Tian and Xiong were not only playwrights themselves but more importantly, as theatre educators they nurtured many spoken drama artists. Tian's plays were often more romantic and

poetic than realistic. Influenced by Chinese sung drama, Tian in his own plays often used songs and other nonrealistic devices. One of his major plays, Death of a Famous Star (ming you zhi si), incorporates sung drama scenes into a spoken drama.

After teaching briefly at Tian's two schools, Ouyang, in 1929, went south to head the Guangdong Theatre Institute in Guangzhou. Ouyang was one of the founders of "civilized drama"--he performed in the first adaptation of Uncle Tom's Cabin, a playwright of spoken drama and opera, and an established Beijing opera performer. He was particularly interested in bringing spoken drama and sung drama together. In his new Theatre Institute he experimented with a dual curriculum of spoken drama and sung drama. There were two departments, one, spoken drama, the other, "opera"--a new genre based on the traditional sung drama, but many courses were cross listed, and students of one department often performed in the other department's productions. In order to make spoken drama more accessible, Ouyang directed some productions in Cantonese dialect, traditionally a privilege of sung drama. Unfortunately, in less than a month Ouyang's promising institution was forced to close by its political rivals. Ouyang and his colleagues struggled hard to survive on their own for two years, but in 1931, the work was finally stopped. Most of his students went in separate directions later, either into sung drama or into spoken drama. Ouyang's attempt to bring sung drama and spoken drama

together did not reach fruition, but he certainly was not the last one to try, as we will see from Huang Zuolin.

Compared to Ouyang, Tian, Hong, and Xiong, Huang Zuolin joined the professional theatrical circle late. When Xiong was heading Beijing's Theatre Department and planning a little theatre movement, Huang was a freelance writer and translator deeply interested in theatre. In 1930 in a note to the article he translated for Xiong's journal Theatre and Arts and Literature (xiju he wengyi) he said:

Recently Hu Shi, Xiong Foxi and some others are organizing a little theatre movement in Beijing¹¹. I am very excited by that news. Therefore I translated this article to show my support for them. (qtd. in Chen Duo 142)

Huang, however, did not really join the ranks of professional theatre artists until 1939 when he assumed a double duty, theatre teacher and practitioner--a career combination common to many leading members of the first generation of modern Chinese theatre artists. Why was Huang removed from the theatre community for so long? The reason is found in Huang's family background and in his early education which most of his theatre colleagues did not share.

On October 24, 1906, Huang Zuolin was born into an affluent family in the British concession of Tianjin, northern China's international trade and business center. Huang's father, Huang Songban, a graduate of the Huangpu

Marine Academy and formerly a clerk of a German trading company, was then a senior staff person of an English company, Asianic Petroleum, a subsidiary of Shell. Unlike most Chinese of the time, Huang was born into an environment with close ties to international affairs, Western business and culture. Yet the Huang family was not just a Westernized Chinese family. Huang's father was the head of a Cantonese Music Club and a connoisseur of Beijing opera and Cantonese opera. An amateur female impersonator, he sometimes performed on the professional stage. When there was a good troupe playing in town, the older Huang would buy a season pass for the entire family. Therefore Huang had many opportunities to see traditional sung drama when he was a child. As a youngster Huang also showed interest in the then flourishing "civilized drama", especially impressed by such shows as Napoleon and an adapted version of Hamlet called Killing the Brother and Stealing the Sister-in-law (shaxiong daosao). Huang's maternal grandfather, a former teacher at a traditional Chinese school, taught Huang some classical Chinese. Although little Zuolin like other children was not interested in learning classical Chinese, this classical education provided an important foundation for his future work in Chinese theatre.

Huang Zuolin's first formal schooling (1916-1925) was at Sino-Anglo College, an English missionary school. The school was headed by a British physicist, Dr. Hamer, and all classes were taught in English except for one Chinese

course. In Huang's brief "autobiography" written for the Communist Party in the 1950s, however, he said that the missionary school made him an "uncreative, unsociable, and obedient person" (Bai Weng 1983, 242). The Sino-Anglo College was not very open and exciting when compared to schools in England that Huang went to later, but there was still more freedom and exposure to the outside world in the English school than in traditional Chinese schools. It was there Huang first read Shakespeare and other classics as well as his first modern Western play, Ibsen's Pillars of Society. In one of the school productions, Huang even played the part of Lorenzo in Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice. At the school Huang, then thirteen, joined the Boy Scouts, hailing patriotism, democracy and science in the streets during the May Fourth Movement. He mastered English, a second language that benefited him throughout his entire life. Huang was also exposed to the treasures of Western civilization. Although the school's curriculum had a Eurocentric bias, for Huang who lived in a society permeated with China's ancient culture and who had already had some classical Chinese education, Sino-Anglo College's Western curriculum provided cultural preparation for his later creative work, his attempt to bridge the Western and Eastern theatrical traditions.

Huang was not aware of what the future had in store for him when he graduated from the college in 1925. In obedience to his parents' wishes, his designated career was to be in

international business. He raised no objection when he was sent off to the University of Birmingham to study commerce. Soon, however, he found that commerce was not the right major for him, and he often flunked accounting exams. Two years later he changed his major to social studies. What excited him far more than school was the communal life he had with his international student friends at Woodbrooke College, a dormitory complex in suburban Birmingham.

Huang believes that his life at Woodbrooke College changed his personality, or rather, it made him rediscover himself. There, his sense of humor and social skills were released. He spent four years, his entire study period at Birmingham, in Woodbrooke College. Even now he still keeps in touch with his former schoolmates in Japan, the United States, Norway, Switzerland and other places. There, he, the only Chinese student, lived with about seventy fellow students from all over the world as one big family. They ate meals together, played sports, attended international affairs seminars, listened to readings of the college journal, and had get-together nights every weekend performing and appreciating variety shows of all nationalities.

At Woodbrooke College Huang began editing the college journal. The journal was to be read in front of the community members at the end of each term. Huang initiated a new format, humorously describing everyone at the College in the journal. People were amused and pleased at his readings

of the journal (Huang Shuqin 47). At the college Huang's nationalistic spirit also flourished. The reticent Huang of Tianjin's missionary school now found himself very outspoken and even eloquent. At almost every international affairs seminar he spoke out, often arguing for his homeland's rights and dignity. After China's May Thirtieth Event in 1927, when nearly one hundred people were killed by the armed police of the Western concessions in Shanghai, Huang was invited by various organizations to give talks on the workers' and students' movement in China. To prepare for these speeches, Huang read and learned a great deal about the Chinese poor that he had not known before. Not until now in England did Huang realize how acutely he was concerned about China and how often China was misunderstood in the West.

It was at Woodbrooke College--at its get-together nights--that Huang did his first theatre work, writing, directing, and acting. In theatre, comedy in particular, he found a way to blend his concern about China with his sense of humor. At first, Huang acted in other students' pieces. In a German student's tragic piece about slave trading, the inexperienced Huang overacted the role of a black slave, causing roars of laughter from the audience. The director rebuked him and did not want him to act again. Soon Huang started writing and performing in his own pieces. In the spring of 1926, Huang's very first production WE--standing for West-East--was presented at one of Woodbrooke College's

weekend nights. In this short piece, an engineer criticizes the imperfections of both the West and the East. To prove his ideal of combining West and East, he invented a vehicle made of a Western bicycle and an Eastern rickshaw.

WE had only one performance. It was not a success--it was neither a satire nor a serious drama of ideas. The audience did not laugh, nor were they convinced, but Huang was not discouraged. On the contrary, this first attempt at a theatre piece whetted his appetite. He went on to write, direct, and act in another short comedy, Chinese Tea. This was a more elaborate piece, satirizing a self-proclaimed China-hand, a British spinster who had been a missionary in China but was confused about Chinese customs. She mistook a Chinese funeral for a wedding because of the same color scheme--white. At the end of the play she thought a bag of Manchurian tobacco was Chinese tea and boiled it to serve a Chinese student.

Chinese Tea had only one performance too--a common practice of the weekend nights, but it was the big success of the night. His schoolmates not only loved it, but praised it as a Shavian comedy, and urged him to send the script to Bernard Shaw. Huang did send it, without too much hope for a reply. To his surprise, Shaw wrote back to him in only a few days:

An Ibsenite is a disciple, not a master.
 A Shavian is a disciple, not a master.
 Ibsen was not a Ibsenite: he was Ibsen.
 I am not a Shavian: I am Shaw.
 If Huang desires to be a master, he must not be a
 disciple,

He must create Huangites by being himself (qtd. in Chen Daming 18).

Surprisingly, Huang stopped writing plays after receiving Shaw's maxim. He began to think seriously about theatre. Knowing Shaw in person was a crucial factor in his decision to drop his major in commerce. In 1927, Huang went to summer school in Stratford to get more exposure to Shakspeare. He spent a great deal of time going to the theatre, reading Shaw's plays and essays, and he even acted the role of Confucius in an amateur production of Shaw's Back to Methuselah. Rather than becoming a theatre specialist, however, he was first drawn to Shaw's socialist thought and changed his major to social studies.

Shaw's ideas reinforced Huang's in many ways. Shaw's view of the "life force" coincided with Huang's optimistic outlook on life, helping him especially during the difficult times of his life, such as the Cultural Revolution period. (This will be discussed in length in Chapter 4.) Shaw's Fabianism made immediate impact on Huang. Now Huang began dreaming about social reform for the poor in China. Unlike the communists, however, who were fighting a guerrilla war against the Chiang Kai-shek government, Huang's modest social reform plans later proved to be utopian and naive.

Shaw was involved with social conflicts and social expectations. He held views on almost all issues, such as feminism and social reform--views that agitated the world of his youth in the 1880s, of his mature years before World War

I, and of his old age. Huang shared many of the same concerns. He was particularly concerned about the repression of women in China. In his discussion with a friend after seeing a six-hour production in London of Shaw's Man and Superman, Huang opined that "women are 'superior' to common mankind because all the cheating, warring, vying for power and so on are done by men whereas many basic human skills for survival, such as farming, herb collecting, and sewing, were initiated by women" (qtd in Huang Shuqin 49). While sitting in Birmingham's social studies classes, he conceived some plans to help Chinese women, preparing a detailed proposal for a kind of "family construction school." He asserted that the education of family construction should start before kindergarten, that everybody should have a diploma from such a school before his/her marriage, so that the rate of family dispute and divorce could be reduced and women's lives could be improved.

Plans like Huang's were more suited to talk than action. One of his many public speeches, after his return to China in 1929, was entitled "A Bachelor Looks at Women." In this speech Huang expounded his superwoman theory and called on his audience to help found "family engineering" schools. His speeches and articles were fascinating to his female audiences and readers, but no one could carry out his plans.

Huang's only plan to materialize to some extent was his rickshaw reform project, also conceived in England. In one of his papers, "On the Industrialization of China," he urged

the abolishing of rickshaws, or at least, the reduction of rickshawmen's pain, when he returned to China. On his way to Tianjin, his hometown, he spent a week in Shanghai investigating rickshawmen's conditions. After going to slums and obtaining information from the All China Trade Union, the Christian Association's Labor Department, and the foreign concession's government, he decided he would begin his China reform by first helping rickshawmen to rid themselves of their burdens. He personally designed a pedal-driven vehicle combining a bicycle with a rickshaw--the very thing he had fancied in his first play WE. He then had a rickshaw manufacturer produce a model and showed it to many rickshaw companies, hoping they would replace the old rickshaw with this advanced vehicle. This new invention, however, was three times more expensive than a rickshaw--far too expensive for any rickshaw company owner to develop. Despite this setback, Huang did not give up his "help the rickshawmen" campaign. He persuaded his father to replace the family rickshaw with a car and to train the rickshawman as a chauffeur. In fact this did not help many rickshawmen, but it did upgrade his family into the car owning class. Huang also introduced a new rule at the Returned Students Association by reversing the fees for car drivers and for rickshawmen. Rickshawmen were to be paid more than chauffeurs.

Huang knew that what he did for rickshawmen only salved his own conscience, and only rich people were able to

do even that. But his optimistic vision and his belief in an inexorable life force propelled him to go on anyway. Seeing the irrelevance of Shavian socialism in China and the necessity for compromise, Huang took an easy but high-paying job that his father had arranged for him at the Asian Petroleum Company so that he could continue with his Quixotic deeds, and at the same time have the time to read Shakespeare and Shaw and other literary figures. He also went on with his Shavian studies and became an educator. He became honorary chancellor at his Alma Mater, Sino-Anglo College, when the previous chancellor, Dr. Hamer, retired. He helped found a new secondary school called Talent Nurturing (shu ren) Highschool where he taught without pay. He also taught at Nankai University, Tianjin's leading university. One of the courses he taught there was "Shaw Studies." In 1931 he published a little book in English, A Comparative Study of Shaw and Galsworthy.

In this first book, Huang demonstrated his characteristic broad perspective and interest in eclectic comparisons. Unlike most of his Chinese contemporaries who used comparison to praise one thing and renounce another, Huang used comparison to highlight different strengths. (This comparative method would eventually lead to Huang's most important artistic and academic achievement, the comparison and synthesis of Chinese sung drama, Stanislavsky Method, and Brechtian theatre, see Chapters 4 and 5.) His "comparison" of Shaw and Galsworthy also demonstrated a

director's ingenuity and humor, if not always accuracy, in capturing and representing the writers' idiosyncrasies. He first told a little story, then wrote a dramatic scene in Shaw's style and a poem in Galsworthy's style to point up their differences. His conclusion revealed that Shaw was more philosophical and Galsworthy more poetic, two features that Huang later sought in his own theatre.

Shaw visited China in 1931. Chinese of different political persuasions gave this famous socialist writer very different receptions. Hu Shi, then the leading scholar of the government's camp, told the public through the media in Beijing not to pay any attention to Shaw, calling him "a crazy old man". But Lu Xun, the foremost dissident writer, gave Shaw a big welcome in Shanghai. Huang Zuolin, a wellknown theatre critic and social commentator in Tianjin but not yet a national name, published an "Open Letter to Bernard Shaw." When the Shanghai- to-Beijing train stopped for a few minutes in Tianjin, Shaw received Huang's one-man warm welcome and the most impressive open letter. In this letter Huang wrote: "Although such senior scholars as Hu Shi are keeping a distance from you, China's proletariat will hail you!" The letter also demonstrated Huang's special sense of humor: "Just take a walk in Tianjin streets, you will hear all the rickshawmen hailing you: 'Shaw! Shaw!' (the Chinese pigeon English for "rickshaw")" (Chen Damin 19). This daring gesture was noticed by Hu Shi, who offered Huang an enviable official position, division head of

international communication in the government, but Huang turned it down. He did not want to work for a person who disliked Shaw.

During these years of preparation for his theatre career, Huang met his future wife Jin Yunzhi (better known in China by her stage name Danni). Their meeting resulted from Huang's interest in theatre, and soon contributed to his theatre career.

Huang first saw Jin in 1930 in As You Like It, an English production she starred in at Zhongxi Girls School, a missionary school that Jin and Huang's sister went to. Huang was not enthusiastic about seeing this production at first, because he did not think that an all female cast from a missionary high school could do a good job. Yet to Huang's pleasant surprise, there were some excellent performances, especially the Rosalind of Jin. Huang wrote and published a review in a local paper, commenting on the production, especially Jin's acting. Then Huang's sister played the go-between arranging for Huang and Jin to become acquainted. Soon, they fell in love, but they did not marry until 1935, five years later, when Jin finished her degree in education at Columbia University.

During these five years the situation in China went from bad to worse. The Japanese accelerated their invasion of China, occupying Manchuria in 1931 and preparing to move south. Chiang's government did not fight back strongly because it was more worried about Mao's rapidly growing Red

Army in the south. Chiang did mount five military attacks against the Red Army in Jiangxi Province. All failed except for the fifth attack. In 1934 the Red Army retreated from its Jiangxi base and began the famous Long March towards the northwest to fight the Japanese. Meanwhile political conflict in theatrical circles also intensified. Spoken drama matured, sophisticated plays like Cao Yu's Thunderstorm and Beijing Man appeared, but theatre had become a very dangerous field. Many theatre people were involved in the partisan struggle, mostly pro-left-wing. Productions were always censored; troupes often banned; some activists arrested, even killed (Tian Han et al. 161-82). Apparently it was the wrong time for Huang, a Shavian social critic living in the safe European concession, to actively join the theatrical circle. Besides the danger, the other reason preventing Huang from doing theatre work then was that he, unlike many Chinese theatre people of the time who were simply drawn into the profession by political desires and emotions, believed he needed professional training in order to make good theatre.

Huang left Tianjin in 1935 to join his fiance Jin, whom he married in New York. They spent their honeymoon touring the United States, seeing a lot of theatre productions including the Group Theatre. Presently the newlyweds headed for England to resume their theatre studies, Huang enrolled in Cambridge's King's College and Jin went to a small acting studio in London before transferring to the London Theatre

Studio.

Why did Huang go to Cambridge instead of a professional school to study theatre? Again his family played a role. It was not easy for Huang's father to agree with his son's decision to change his career. Huang Songban's own love for theatre had certainly helped to foster his son's interest, but he had never thought his son would opt for a career in theatre, a profession, traditionally much looked down on in China. When Zuolin was planning to study theatre, Cambridge doubtlessly seemed to be the most decent institution to propose. Huang eventually did study Shakespeare at Cambridge and earned a Master's degree with his thesis "A Short History of Shakespearean Production." Strangely, Huang told his daughter in reminiscence that he did not like his Cambridge years, and they did not benefit him either personally or as a scholar (Huang Shuqin 46). In fact, however, Huang's study of Shakespearean productions provided some basis later for his xieyi concept of theatre.

Having had a stimulating Birmingham experience, Huang had gone to Cambridge with high expectations, but the atmosphere was completely different. He spent his time either in the library or with his tutor--in contrast to the exciting community life at Woodbrooke. Huang also found that the time he later spent at Michel Saint-Denis's London Theatre Studio much more exciting.

Besides being a distinguished actor and director, Michel Saint-Denis is best remembered for his consistent dedication

to the training of theatre artists, especially actors.¹² He founded the London Theatre Studio, a school for professional actors and stage technicians in 1935. He was the school's managing director, and such luminaries as John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier, Tyrone Guthrie, Bronson Albery and Ian Black were on its board of directors. Later when discussing the school in his book Theatre, the Rediscovery of Style, Saint-Denis recalls:

I drew up the plan for a school. The kind of actor I wanted was not to be found ready-made. Training and experiment seemed to me more important than the quick gathering of a company without either meaning or unity (44).

Soon after Huang and Jin began their theatre studies in England, they both decided to take classes at the school. Jin studied acting full time, and Huang studied directing four times a week. The purpose of the London Theatre Studio was made clear to its staff and students from the very beginning: to form a self-contained theatrical organization composed of a permanent company of actors, a school of acting, and a group of artists and technicians. Saint-Denis believed that no valuable theatrical ensemble could be achieved without the existence of a permanent company of actors, accustomed to working together and to playing a varied and growing repertory.

The school was to supply the basic elements of the permanent company and act as a reservoir of talent. The group of artists and technicians, preparing for productions, would have the time and the means to evolve various methods

of presentation through practical experience. Huang was greatly influenced by this three-in-one way of running a theatrical organization--a permanent company of actors, a permanent team of stage technicians, and a training school for new talents. Later, whether with his Bitter Toilers' Troupe or with the Shanghai People's Art Theatre, Huang always tried to work with a permanent company of actors and stage technicians, and he and Jin were always personally involved in the training of young theatre students. Many leading performers of Shanghai People's Theatre, such as Xie Dehui and Li Weijian, were formerly students of its acting school.

At the London Theatre Studio, Huang and Jin took courses designed to give them a grounding in theatrical and artistic culture and technical training. The study of the world's great paintings through visits to museums were a part of their curriculum. They studied the history of important theatrical movements, the plastic arts, music and literature. As a beginning acting student, Jin had to study with experts on a wide range of courses: gymnastics and acrobatics, classical dancing and tap dancing, rhythm; voice production, diction, verse speaking, choral speaking and singing; working in costumes of different periods, and practical work on costumes, décor, masks, properties, and make-up. Besides cultural and technical training, another area of study, and perhaps the most significant, was concerned with improvisation and interpretation.

Saint-Denis repeatedly pointed out:

We never worked from or toward a system (92). I avoided giving the students any theory about acting. We tried to guide them as they went along, so that they understood the purpose of each phase of their work and discover slowly in their practical classes what it meant (98). Academic attitudes were avoided. Behind all scholarly knowledge or intellectual considerations, there had to be the requirement of dramatic necessity (99).

In developing his concept, Saint-Denis and the teachers tried to ensure that as far as possible every new technical or cultural development presented to the students should have a dramatic justification. For instance, study of the *Commedia dell'Arte* was justified by the need to support practical work in the improvisation of comic characters, and acrobatics by the need for physical freedom, better timing, and control of one's body. This same reliance on dramatic justification is prominent in Huang's career as a director; he is not dogmatic about any one system, he takes what he needs for a given work. It was during his years in London that Huang first learned of the Stanislavsky technique and read about Bertolt Brecht. They both offered something to Huang that he would utilize later in the development of his own theatre.

Improvisation was truly a major emphasis in the training at London Theatre Studio. As Huang recalls, the students, for a time, did not work on the dramatic text. They did improvised acting. The purpose of this was to give them the opportunity to discover for themselves, within themselves, what acting consists of. The improvisation classes made the

students begin to experience the need for concentration and observation; they soon realized the importance of emotional memory; they became aware of the use of space, of rhythm, of the continuity of action. Huang has obviously been convinced of the usefulness of improvisation in actor training since he uses it in his own practice.

Later, the emphasis would shift to training in interpretation. The students had to master form and style, and for this work, whole plays or acts rather than isolated scenes were used. Students like Huang and Jin were shown how to extract the meaning of a play, the meaning of the different parts of the play, the meaning of his or her own role in relation to the others. The young actors were trained to understand and take into account the views of the director of the play, "for it is on those views and on the kind of relationship established between the actor and his director, that the unity of the show will depend" (Saint-Denis 107). It was then that the young performer, recalling his or her experiences in improvisation, had to attack the last phase of rehearsals, and finally, bring the character to life, both mentally and physically.

Huang remembers that, to avoid conceit and extravagance in acting, Saint-Denis maintained that the purpose of invention and imagination was to serve interpretation, and that in dealing with an important play it was healthy to consider the author as the only completely creative person: director, designer, and actor had to understand the author's

intention and submit to it. Saint-Denis was clearly as author-centric or texto-centric as his uncle Jacques Copeau. Huang, too, has been looking all his life for authors whose plays would best match his own artistic visions, so one can say he is just as author-centric or texto-centric.

The training at the London Theatre Studio was rigorous; the day's work beginning at nine a.m. and ending at five thirty or six p.m.. On Saturdays, work ended at one p.m. except for hectic rehearsal periods which continued into the evenings. Huang and Jin believed in hard work, and they thrived in this atmosphere. In addition, Huang was finishing his Master's thesis at Cambridge, and both he and Jin went to the theatre whenever they could and took extra classes whenever they could. For instance, during the summer break of 1936, they went to study modern dance with Kurt Jooss at Dartington Hall in Devonshire. When Chekhov's nephew was teaching Stanislavsky techniques in London, Huang was one of the eager students. The same year in which Huang avidly read Stanislavsky's My Life in Art, he, with surprise and exhilaration, came upon Brecht's essay "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting." Before that, Pirandello was also Huang's passion for some time. All this would play an enormously important role later in his career as a theatre director.

In the summer of 1937 the Sino-Japanese war reached Beijing, and the Chinese army fought back against the Japanese. Around the same time Huang and Jin finished their studies and decided to return to China to begin their

professional theatre careers. Before taking off for home, Huang visited Shaw again. Shaw said he would give him a farewell gift--a photo album for him to put production pictures in. Shaw had asked Huang to write the name Shaw in Chinese character and took Huang to a printing shop to mount it on the album. Then he wrote the following parting words to Huang:

Up, China!

The future of the Eastern world is yours if you have the energy and courage to grasp it.

The ritual of that future will be the Chinese drama.

Not my plays; but your own (qtd. in Chen Daming 21).

At the time Huang knew that he himself was not to be a playwright but a director. He was then the only Chinese to have studied directing professionally in the West¹³ (and Jin the first to have studied acting), and most of the plays familiar to him were Western ones. How could he find appropriate Chinese plays to direct that would be meaningful in China? Looking for Chinese plays to match his vision was the first task he had to tackle, and it has proved to be a long and tedious journey since his return to China in 1937.

CHAPTER 2

HUANG'S THEATRE DURING THE WAR YEARS

Huang Zuolin is well-known in China as an advocate of Brecht, but very few people know that he was once very passionate about Pirandello.¹ Although Huang has abandoned Pirandello's skepticism, he is still intrigued by the paradoxical relationship between life and art, between truth and mask explored by Pirandello in his plays. Huang may not realize that the biggest coincidence between his life in theatre and the Pirandellian drama is that, as depicted in Pirandello's masterpiece Six Characters in Search of an Author, he has continually searched for authors to help realize his life on stage. The six characters in the play did not find their author; it was the stage director who let them realize their lives on stage. Huang, the director, has also found it difficult to find his author.

Many Chinese directors of Huang's age group, such as, Hong Shen, Ouyang Yuqian, Tian Han and Xiong Foxi were both directors and playwrights. Huang, on the other hand, has adapted but never written any full-length plays. Unlike some contemporary avant-garde Western directors, who have little use for the text, and prefer to improvise scenarios, Huang believes in the fundamental importance of a written script. His famous 1962 speech On Conceptions of Theatre

(mantan xijuguan), in which he called upon theatre artists to expand their perspectives and broaden their horizons, is the urgent plea of a director still in search of his ideal author. Until then, he had not found a Chinese author who could provide him with a script he deemed completely satisfactory; and the several plays he helped to create were short-lived for political reasons. As stated earlier, among the over one hundred productions Huang directed, only a few could be revived. What kind of plays is he looking for to match his vision and temperament? What about the world masterpieces he has selected?

Only three playwrights have had plays selected by Huang for production twice, and each of the two productions were decades apart. The plays are by Shakespeare, Brecht and Cao Yu: Macbeth (1945) and Romeo and Juliet (1980); Mother Courage and Her Children (1959) and Life of Galileo (1979); Metamorphosis (1941) and Family (1985).

Huang admires these masters of the theatre, but he feels they are not exactly what he wants for his audience.

Huang appreciates the epic scope and poetic structure of a Shakespeare and a Brecht, but the plays are by foreign authors and present certain cultural barriers. The plays by Cao Yu (and some other Chinese playwrights) closely reflect Chinese social reality and reveal a strong sense of social responsibility, but Huang finds them lacking in transcendental quality. Huang is a socially engaged artist, but he wants his work to appear detached so that his unique

sense of humour and optimism can come through. He wants serious drama that is comic, and comedy that is serious. Then what about the plays of Bernard Shaw, who he suggests had such a formative influence on him?

George Bernard Shaw is best known in China for his realistic drama Mrs. Warren's Profession, but Huang admires Shaw not as the usual realistic dramatist. Shaw had hailed Ibsen not simply because of the realistic structure of his plays but because he was the father of discussion drama or the "play of ideas". In his The Quintessence of Ibsenism, Shaw explains: "This new technique is discussion. In the theatre of ideas, rational discussion takes precedence over emotional entanglement." In this respect, Ibsen, Shaw and Brecht have a degree of similarity. Ibsen is the one who brought discussion into the "four walls" of realism, and Shaw (like Brecht) sometimes broke the fourth wall for the sake of discussion. For instance, at the end of the first act of Too True to be Good, the actor who plays the Monster says to the audience: "The play is now virtually over; but the characters will discuss it at great length for two acts more. The exit doors are all in order. Goodnight." At the conclusion of the two acts, Shaw's clergyman hero mouthpiece Aubrey continues to talk, and the stage direction says: "The audience disperses...."

Earlier, in his play Caesar and Cleopatra Shaw used a narrator. In the prologue, an ancient Egyptian god speaks

directly to his modern audience with great contempt:

Peace! Be silent and hearken unto me, ye quaint little islanders....I ask you not for worship, but for silence. Let not your men speak nor your women cough; for I am come to draw you back two thousand years over the graves of sixty generations....

Are ye impatient with me? Do you crave for a story of an unchaste woman? Hath the name of Cleopatra tempted ye hither? You foolish ones; Cleopatra is as yet a child whipped by her nurse. And what I am about to shew you for the good of your soul is how Caesar,...

As Gassner points out, Shaw seems "prepared to violate realistic structure and verisimilitude, to turn somersaults of the most farcical kind, and to be arbitrary with his plot or to discard plot altogether" (296).

When Huang in his famous 1962 speech urged his fellow artists to break the fourth wall and to let true realism reign, the influence of Shaw, whom he calls "the teacher of my enlightenment," is clearly present. Surprisingly, however, Huang has never staged any major production of Shaw's plays. (He did direct a segment of Arms and the Man for two performances in 1956.)

It is generally believed in China that Shaw's plays have not been widely popular there because of a lack of good translations. Chinese translations often retain Shaw's ideas but not his humor because the ironic turn of words characteristic of Shaw are lost in translation. Huang has not attempted to translate Shaw himself because, perhaps, he can not stand to lose the subtlety and nuance. Perhaps Huang accepted literally Shaw's words not to use his plays. As early as 1927, Shaw wrote "If Huang desires to be a

master not a disciple, he must create Huangites by being himself." And ten years later, he told Huang: "Not my plays; but your own." Shaw believed he knew how different his own country was from Huang's and most especially after his 1930 visit to China. In a poor, totalitarian country, major social problems are more often resolved through bloodshed than discussion.

Shortly after the whole-scale Japanese invasion of China in 1937, Huang and Jin decided to go home. Huang wanted to proceed to Wuhan, an unoccupied interior city where many patriotic Chinese theatre artists had gathered, dedicating themselves to the war effort against the Japanese, but he had no connection with any existing organization there, so he and Jin went back to their hometown Tianjin. In Tianjin, he translated several Chinese plays into English, studied Kun opera and Beijing opera in depth, and directed plays at local schools and the YWCA.

In 1938, the well-known playwright Cao Yu recommended Huang for a teaching position at the National Theatre Academy in Chongqing, the Chinese capital during the War of Resistance Against Japan (1937-1945). There, Huang taught Directing, Western Theatre History, and Rehearsal. He and Jin formally introduced Stanislavsky techniques to the Chinese theatre students for the first time.

Huang enjoyed teaching, but what he loved more was directing. In Chongqing, the wartime capital, Huang was

witness to the political corruption of the Nationalist government and fully realized the seriousness of China's social problems. It was neither the time or place to do the kind of Shavian witty comedy he so loved. The first play he selected to direct at the National Theatre Academy was Xia Yan's Under Eaves of Shanghai (shanghai wuyanxia), a naturalistic play depicting the miseries of common people's daily life. Neither the style nor the content of the play matched Huang's personal artistic leaning, but a sense of social responsibility prompted him to make this choice. The play, however, was too "realistic" to pass the government censor.

The next play Huang chose as his debut production at the National Theatre Academy was Tian Han's The True Story of Ah Q (ah Q zhengzhuan), adapted from Lu Xun's famous novella of the same title. In the story Lu Xun creates a hired hand at the very bottom of China's rural society. Ah Q's most characteristic trait is his belief in moral victory. Conceited, yet lacking self-respect, he dares not face reality, consoling himself with a self-deceiving moral victory whenever he is defeated. Beaten by someone, he comforts himself by saying that a son had become impudent enough to beat his father. In this way he deceives himself, ignores the insult and is indeed intoxicated with self-satisfaction. These fatal weaknesses prevent him from marching on the road to revolution, and prevent him from realizing why he is wrongly beheaded by

the soldiers.

Ah Q's story revealed the mental state of the Chinese peasantry and prompted people to face their own weaknesses and to make a drastic change in the national spirit in China. Ah Q's fate was tragic, but his story was nevertheless humorous, sarcastic and comic. Tian Han's dramatic adaptation provided Huang with exactly what he was looking for. Huang liked the play so much that he directed it again the following year in Shanghai, and once again in 1956. It is a pity that Lu Xun did not write more novellas like The True Story of Ah Q which might be adapted into plays. Perhaps, Huang's search for his ideal author would have been less frustrating.

Modern Chinese drama, or spoken drama, went through a unique flowering in Shanghai during the War of Resistance Against Japan (1937-1945).² Although the city was under Japanese domination, the foreign concessions remained for several years free of direct Japanese authority--hence their designation as the "Orphan Island", "neutral" outposts of Western commerce surrounded by the Japanese "New Order." It was within these enclaves that spoken drama in Shanghai reached an unprecedented peak of popularity as a professional, commercial enterprise. Huang Zuolin and his wife arrived in Shanghai in 1940 in the heyday of the "Orphan Island" theatre movement and quickly became leading

figures.

To backtrack a bit, when Huang Zuolin and his wife were beginning their professional theatre training in England in 1935, major Chinese cities like Shanghai saw the beginning of critical acceptance of Chinese productions of foreign plays in translation. In June of that same year a production opened of Ibsen's A Doll's House (Nala) starring Lan Ping (Madam Mao Jiang Qing) and Zhao Dan; in November Gogol's Inspector General (xun'an) directed by Ouyang Yuqian, and in December an adaptation of Molière's L'Avare (caikuang) starring Wan Jiabao (Cao Yu). All three had an unusually appreciative reception (McDougall 37).

The three plays, intellectually serious in theme, had a certain topicality for Chinese society: Gogol's and Molière's works could be taken as expressions of the desire to *épater la bourgeoisie*, while Ibsen's play spoke to women's liberation and also to the rapid increase--assisted by a new marriage law--in the divorce rate among China's middle class.

Granted that audiences were ready for the presentation of problems they saw as pertinent, in 1935 the productions of these plays evidenced both new developments in the quality of acting and production and the limitation of such achievements. Productions ran for a few days at most, and modern drama still remained the preserve of amateur and semi-professional enthusiasts, its audience confined for

the most part to a relatively small number of students and intellectuals (McDougall 37).

In 1936 and 1937 there was renewed emphasis on popularizing modern drama, especially among those committed to theatre as a vehicle to propagandize anti-Western-Imperialism and resistance to Japanese aggression among the widest audience possible. Since the Manchurian Incident of 1931-1932, the Japanese had penetrated deeper into Northern China and had tightened their hold both politically and economically. Chinese dramatists responded, as part of the program for a "literature of national defense," with such works as Smuggling (zuosi), exposing large-scale Japanese smuggling activities in Northern China; Xia Yan's Sai Jinhua, portraying the humiliation of China after the Boxer Revolt and satirizing by implication the ineffectualness of the Nationalist government in dealing with the Japanese; and Cui Wei's Lay Down Your Whip (fangxia nide bianzi), street theatre revealing the misery of the Chinese under Japanese rule and implying the impending threat for all China (Cao Shujun 109-111). However, as agit-prop these plays were part of an organized political machine which, once subdued by Japanese force of arms, could ill afford to continue such open expression. Moreover, these plays drew audience attention to theatre through a topical issue of widespread social concern rather than through a true developing taste for modern drama. There was, however, a renewed interest in costume drama in

plays, such as Sai Jinhua, that recalled the historical past, revised old operas, and old legends and stories.

Another important development in modern drama also occurred prior to the war, which seemed to overshadow the contributions of the largely amateur and semi-professional movement in foreign and national defense drama. This development was the related rise of the playwright Cao Yu (Wan Jiabao) and the Chinese Traveling Dramatic Company, or CTDC (zhongguo luixin jutuan).

The CTDC was founded in November 1933 by Tang Huaiqui, a seasoned performer in amateur and semi-professional modern drama companies. Tang was determined to raise modern drama production to a professional and self-sustaining level. The company's repertoire was unexceptional until it produced Cao Yu's masterpiece Thunderstorm (leiyu) at Shanghai's Carlton Theatre in 1936. Thunderstorm, written in 1933 was Cao Yu's first play. The production was a great success and enjoyed an unprecedented run of nineteen days. Even newspapers not noted for their sympathetic attention to the modern drama recognized the success of CTDC and Thunderstorm.

Cao Yu's Thunderstorm was the first realistic Chinese family drama with a well-made structure. It deals with the conflict between the older and younger generation and the tension between husband and wife, with illicit sex, self-destructive acts and revenge added. While these elements were not new to the Chinese stage, Cao Yu's

meticulous concern with dramatic structure and his careful manipulation of passions were new in a modern Chinese playwright. What had been limited to playwriting handbooks was now in an actual playscript. Linked with this breakthrough was the timely development of the CTDC, which, relative to other groups, deserved the title of "professional" for its mastery of staging techniques.

Thunderstorm and CTDC aroused broader enthusiasm for spoken drama among the public, encouraging other writers to take up playwriting with the hope of a successful realization of their work. As the war approached, more amateur and semi-professional troupes followed the lead of CTDC, attempting to become professional.

Following the Battle for Shanghai that opened on August 13, 1937, the city lost part of its modern drama audience and many of its writers and artists to Hong Kong and the interior, due to the retreat of Chinese forces. Cao Yu went to Chongqing and CTDC, which was still successfully touring Cao Yu's second play Sunrise (richu), when the war broke out, eventually settled in Hong Kong. The theatre artists and writers who remained gradually resumed their activities in the enclaves of foreign concessions.

The Japanese took over the film industry in Shanghai and banned foreign films, especially American films, thus increasing the number of artists developing stage productions. The Carlton, the Lyceum, the Lafayette Garden, the Paris, the Crown, and other foreign-built theatres were

converted from cinema houses to accommodate modern drama. In other words, the Japanese action spawned further a theatre movement that had begun to build momentum. At its height, drama companies occupied thirteen theatres, producing foreign plays in adaptation or translation, history plays and contemporary Chinese plays. Many semi-professional acting schools were established, providing the modern drama movement with fresh blood.

When Huang Zuolin and his wife arrived in Shanghai in 1940, they became caught up in the theatre movement. In addition to teaching Shakespeare and theatre theories at St. John's and Jinan and Hujiang Universities and teaching acting at Golden Star Actor Training School, Huang also became part of the debate on acting that was going on in Shanghai. He tried to reconcile the Stanislavsky advocates and Coquelin believers by pointing out in his essay "How to Judge Good Acting and Bad Acting" that good acting consists of both rich internal emotional experience and trained external acting skills. "What is good acting?" he asked, "Good acting is when a gifted actor--a good mimic who combines sensitivity, adaptability, imagination and charisma--by using his tools (his trained body and voice), conveys the raw material of his acting--the emotions he is born with, the emotions he derives from personal experience, and the emotions his character has--vividly and gracefully to his audience, who gains a great deal of pleasure." Huang quoted what Shakespeare said about acting

in Hamlet to conclude his essay.³

Shortly after arriving in Shanghai, Huang directed three plays at Shanghai Theatre Art Society (shanghai juyishe), the first semi-professional theatre company established during the "Orphan Island" period. Even though he himself was not entirely satisfied with his work, he had begun to gain recognition as a director (Bai 1983, 247). Still mindful about searching for authors for his own theatre, and dissatisfied with the lack of professionalism in most existing theatre companies, in the early fall of 1941 Huang left Shanghai Theatre Art Society along with some like minded actors and technicians, and founded Shanghai Professional Theatre Troupe (shanghai zhiyie jutuan).

Soon, however, came Pearl Harbor and the escalation of World War II. As a gesture of protest against Japanese aggression, on the day of the Japanese military occupation of the International Settlement, Huang's Shanghai Professional Theatre Troupe, together with some other theatre organizations, simultaneously declared their disbandment. Huang and his troupe, however, never truly ceased working, and soon came together under another name, Bitter Toilers' Troupe, which became one of the best-known modern drama groups of the time (Cao Shujun 189).

When Huang Zuolin founded the Shanghai Professional Theatre Troupe in the fall of 1941, the opening production he directed was Cao Yu's Metamorphosis (tuibian). The

play is about the transformation of a corrupt private hospital for wounded soldiers into a fine, efficient institution through the courage, dedication and integrity of a female doctor. The story occurs over three years, and there are over thirty named characters. Among all the plays Cao Yu wrote before 1949, Metamorphosis is the most directly related to current affairs, and its literary level is generally considered to be lower than such masterpieces as Thunderstorm, Sunrise and Peking Men (Beijing ren). It is the only Cao Yu play, however, that Huang directed before 1985. Does Huang consider Metamorphosis better than Cao Yu's other plays? Huang has his own unique considerations.

Cao Yu is Huang's oldest friend in Chinese theatre circles. About Cao's Thunderstorm, Sunrise and Peking Men, Huang has the following to say: "I like them very much. And from the bottom of my heart I admit that they are outstanding works. The reason I don't choose to direct them is that they are not in sync with my conception of theatre, and I don't feel at ease directing them" (1985, 12: 2). How is Metamorphosis different from these three plays? They are all realistic plays about contemporary people and their lives, but the political significance of Metamorphosis is more pronounced, while the structure of Thunderstorm and the other two realistic plays is more "well-made". A well-made realistic play at the time was a rarity in China, and naturally it was very highly

valued. That is why Thunderstorm and the other two plays are generally labeled the "peak" of Chinese spoken drama (Cao Shujun 127). Huang was not impressed by realistic play construction. It was the provocativeness of Metamorphosis that he found attractive, and especially after the government interfered with the play's premier in Chongqin in 1939.

Metamorphosis opened on October 10th, 1941 at the Carlton Theatre. It was a tremendous success. Everyday newspapers carried reviews and/or reports on the production. About Huang's direction, critic Yiren wrote in Shengzhou Daily News (shengzhou ribao) on October 16th:

The director obviously has his heart in the production. The overall mood, the emotional climax of each act and the characters' individual personalities are all handled with vigor and flexibility.

Shiwei said in The Monitor (zhengyan bao) on the same day:

Zuolin is good at revealing a sense of comedy through details, it is no exception with this production. In addition, his positioning of the actors are very harmonious.

And H.Y.C. observed in the English paper Literary News on October the 19th: "Under the able direction of Mr. Jolin [Zuolin] Huang, the play is full of touches of humour and patriotism...." Word spread, and many people came to Shanghai just to see the production. The theatre was always packed with enthusiastic audiences, who applauded and cheered (Zhu Tingjun 8). On October 19th, the fifth

anniversary of Lu Xiun's death, the audience stood up in silence during Act II when Doctor Ding (played by Jin, who by now had assumed her stage name Danni in honor of her teacher Saint-Denis) was operating on a wounded young soldier, thus saluting the soldiers engaged in the War of Resistance Against the Japanese. On November 12, the birthday of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of the Republic, the audience's patriotic enthusiasm reached its zenith.

At the end of the performance, when Doctor Ding said "China, you should be strong!" during her speech to a group of Resistance soldiers, members of the audience stood up shouting patriotic slogans and applauding long after the curtain (Chen Daming 22). This truly excited Huang, who felt he had "metamorphosized," too, from a Shavian reformist to a soldier with theatre as his weapon. He now realized how powerful the theatre's socio-political function could be. Metamorphosis ran two performances a day for thirty-five days to packed houses until it was forced to close under Japanese pressure, which action made the play a rallying point for popular frustration and indignation.

There is yet another reason why Huang preferred Metamorphosis to Cao Yu's other plays. Compared with Metamorphosis, Thunderstorm and the other two plays are loaded emotionally. Clearly Cao Yu was deeply involved in the life portrayed in these three plays. Cao Yu tends to

feel suffocated and miserable in the face of injustice while Huang rises above life's miseries. He remains always optimistic, even to the point of naïveté at times. His invention of the expensive tricycle, mentioned earlier, to relieve the pain of rickshawmen illustrates this. The failure of this Shavian social reform made him realize the extent of many deeply-rooted social problems, but his humorous and comic vision remained intact. Unlike Cao Yu who descends to the bottom of the abyss, personally experiencing and voicing the misery of society, Huang prefers laughter, irony, sarcasm as his weapons in his detached manner. For instance, in order to truthfully portray the characters at the bottom of the society in Sunrise, Cao Yu explored brothels, discovering for himself the depth of suffering, and enduring numerous insults and indignities himself in the process. In this way he created a most devastating and terrifying third act, which he himself treasured.

Like Cao Yu, Huang was not familiar with life at the depth of society. In 1945 when he started rehearsing The Night Inn (yiedian by Shi Tuo and Ke Ling, an adaptation of Gorky's The Lower Depths), he was influenced by the fact that Stanislavsky and his actors went on an "expedition" to the slums. During rehearsals Huang and his actors also went out "together in a group to observe life in hidden corners and back alleys, to absorb some true life" (Huang 1979, 31). The results, however, were very

different from Cao Yu's individual penetration. Cao recalls: "I actually mingled with those people, face to face. And everyone, being equal as fellow human beings, tears pouring, digging deep into his heart of hearts, told about his personal history. There are countless sad stories" (Cao Yu 1985, 255). In those places where Cao Yu "endured so much torture, hurt and even humiliation" that the impressions gained could not be erased, Huang and his actors "still could not get it at all after several tours." While Cao Yu often cried his heart out at the sight of poverty and deprivation, Huang saw that "these dying men have such powerful life force that we could hardly get near them" (Huang 1979, 32). This somewhat echoes Stanislavsky's observation after he and the actors went by night to the Khitrov Market which housed tramps exclusively: "Their religion was freedom, their sphere--danger, burglary, adventure, theft, murder. All this created around them an atmosphere of romanticism and peculiar savage beauty" (Stanislavsky 1938, 395-386).

If the success of Act III of Cao Yu's Sunrise lies in the depth of life the author has experienced, the success of Huang's The Night Inn may be partly due to the fact there is a certain detachment between this group of artists and the characters they tried to portray. Based on "bits and pieces of vague impressions," giving free rein to their imagination, they created a group of vigorous people who are so poor that they fear nothing. Huang was not

completely satisfied with the production, but not because the actors did not plunge deep into the misery, but because they "did not give full play to the life force embedded in the play" (1979, 32). Huang makes another interesting observation about the characters in The Night Inn:

Under present circumstance, we may say it self-congratulatorily that our life is too far away from the characters in The Night Inn. But under another circumstance, under a better social system, we ourselves may be considered by the people there as characters in The Night Inn--maybe the distance between them and us is even wider, we the human waste (1979, 32).

Pirandello's relativism is at play here, but unlike Pirandello's pessimism, Huang uses self-mockery, thus placing the people at the bottom of society in a more optimistic light.

A director like Huang, who looks at the world in an optimistic, progressive and macrocosmic manner is not ready to be dragged into that death-like Zhou Manor ruled by fate in Thunderstorm, or that hell-on-earth in Sunrise--that is, unless he might alter the substance. Cao Yu, however, is China's foremost playwright and a respected old friend, and Huang can not adapt his plays in the way he treats other plays. Furthermore, the structure of Cao Yu's well-made realistic plays is so tight that it would be very hard to change anything. Therefore, it is quite natural that Huang does not direct Cao Yu's better-known representative works. Among the plays Cao Yu wrote before 1949, Metamorphosis is the only one that has

an optimistic, up-beat ending, the only one that positively presents the power of the life force--the force behind the metamorphosis, and thus attracted Huang.

Forty-four years later in 1985, Huang again directed a play by Cao Yu, the stage version of a modern Chinese classic novel Family (jia) by Bajin, the great modern novelist. Huang was invited by his Japanese fans to bring a famous Chinese play to Japan. Huang decided on Family, a work by two literary giants of modern China. In Huang's opinion, Family is another uncharacteristic play by Cao Yu. Because of this perception, he emphasized again and again to his actors not to perform in the by now well-established and so-called Cao Yu style.

Family is different from Cao Yu's other plays not only because it is an adaptation of a well-known novel but also because its structure is more expansive and loose. Further more, it was written immediately after Cao Yu had translated Romeo and Juliet in verse form. According to Huang, Shakespeare's style rubbed off somewhat on him (1985, 3).

Even so, Huang's interpretation and treatment of the script was still quite different from Cao Yu's. In the original novel, the hero is Juiehui, the youngest son who leaves his oppressive family in search of freedom. In the stage version, however, Cao Yu made Reijue, the young daughter-in-law who is a victim of arranged marriage and superstition, the central character, thus creating another

tear-jerking tragedy. Huang not only restored the most independent-minded and strong-willed Juiehui to his hero's position, but also put all the young people in the play on his side. Huang's own explanation was that "the young people are the hope of Four Modernizations" (1985, 7). It may sound like a ready-made slogan, but, in fact, it reflects the philosophy of life that Huang, now a man in his 80's, has believed in all his life. Huang found a line in his old friend Bajin's novel which helped him to alter Cao Yu's tragic theme: "All around me the darkness is boundless. But I'm not alone and without hope. No matter where I am, I can always see a powerful current of life surging forward, creating its own path...."

If directing Family in the 1980s reflects Huang's youthful idealism, then staging Metamorphosis in the 1940s demonstrated his hope to change the world. Under the yoke of dictators and foreign aggressors, however, a production like Metamorphosis which directly exposed corruption and called for people to rise against their enemies internal or external, could not be tolerated.

Huang was not daunted by the authorities, but he could not risk his theatre and crew in the face of censorship. Three days after the closing down of Metamorphosis, he opened at the Carlton with The True Story of Ah Q which he had rehearsed earlier, thus saving his theatre company from going out of existence.

Under Huang Zuolin's leadership, the Bitter Toilers' Troupe (1942-1946) became the leading modern drama company in Shanghai. The troupe boasted many top-notch actors and actresses, such as Shihui and Danni, and had a steady following of 20,000 to 30,000 audience members (Cao Shujun 190). Huang Zuolin, the director, became a household name. Traditionally, the Chinese theatre is performer-oriented; one often says "Let's go see so-and-so (a famous performer)!" while the director and even the author seem anonymous. With Huang, however, the audience started to say "Let's go see Huang Zuolin," too (Bai 1983, 251). It was partly because he enforced professionalism in his company; discipline, strict training and serious attitude towards every performance. He set an example in following the rules himself.

Huang attended every performance to catch any actor's tendency to show off at the expense of the unity of the whole show; and he gave his actors notes throughout the entire run, continuously trying to improve the quality of the performance. Huang has the reputation as a man of few words, which once earned him the nickname P.K. (initials for "close-mouthed" in Chinese), but what little he says to his actors always seems to bring out the best in them. Once when the actors Shi Hui and Shi Yuan were at a loss while rehearsing a scene in The Big Circus in which they were supposed to tease each other, Huang simply said "Do it like a cross-talk [a folk performing genre]." The actors

grasped the spirit of the scene and made it one of the most successful scenes of the production (Bai 1986, 254).

The repertoire of the Bitter Toilers' Troupe consisted mostly of adapted famous foreign plays, such as The Hero of an Desert Island (huangdao yingxiong by Huang Zuolin, based on Barrie's The Admirable Crichton), The Big Circus (da maxituan by Shi Tuo, based on Andreyev's He Who Gets Slapped), The Gentleman Thief (liangshang Junzi by Huang Zuolin, based on Molnár's A Doktor Ur), Jin Xiaoyu (by Li Jianwu, based on Sardou's Tosca), Hero of Chaos (luanshi yingxiong by Li Janwu, based on Shakespeare's Macbeth) and the fore-mentioned The Night Inn.

Worthwhile original Chinese plays written during the period generally had strong political tendencies and anti-Japanese sentiments; thus, choosing a repertoire of adapted foreign plays avoided direct confrontation with the censors, and also helped the company to survive at the box-office. These adaptations were "highly dramatic, had clear-cut characters, suspenseful story-line and tight structure," and they all had "some kind of social significance and were accessible to the general public" (Bai 1983, 250). Some of the adaptations, such as The Big Circus and The Night Inn, strike one as being quite remote from their original sources by their degree of sinification and simplification. This was a response to lessons learnt in the past when productions of foreign

plays in faithful translation had bored and confused audiences with their foreign names and too-difficult-to-understand dialogue. Huang admitted that sometimes a choice was made under the pressure of "commercial" theatre (1979, 2).

It was during this period of producing adaptations of foreign plays that Huang temporarily solved the problem of "author search" and developed his directorial aesthetics. He was able to select works by those foreign playwrights whose concept of theatre, sense of humor and comic vision he shared; and because they were adaptations of foreign works, he had the freedom to make whatever changes he saw fit for his Chinese audiences. By not choosing to do plays with explicit political messages, Huang had a rare chance in his lifetime to be thoroughly theatrical and to develop his comic and satiric style.

Huang directed his own adaptation of Barrie's The Admirable Crichton in May 1942. Unlike many of Barrie's works, The Admirable Crichton is a drama of ideas, with a theme reminiscent of Ibsen and a satiric touch somewhat suggestive of Shaw. In both Barrie's original and Huang's adaptation, the aristocrats are presented from the first act as shallow, useless, even absurd characters, whereas the sterling qualities of the servant Crichton/Wang are never in doubt. If Crichton/Wang triumphs naturally on the island because of his ability and integrity, one wonders what can justify the superior status of those arrogant

idlers in London/Shanghai. In the last act they sink even lower in our esteem when they become liars and cheats who deliberately appropriate to themselves the achievements of Crichton/Wang and ignore him as a grudging footnote. At the same time Crichton/Wang rises to his noblest stature as he loyally and tactfully covers up for his "betters," but astutely finds a way to do so without sacrificing his own honesty.

Barrie wrote two endings for the play (Warnock 28). In the first, Crichton abandons his career as a butler upon his return from the island, marries the faithful servant girl Tweeny and opens a public house in the Harrow Road, "at the more fashionable end." In the second version, written thirteen years later, Crichton plans to leave service and Tweeney. Dialogue at the end between Crichton and Lady Mary, who had once happily accepted the former's marriage proposal while on the island, goes:

LADY MARY. Do you despise me, Crichton? [The man who could never tell a lie makes no answer.] You are the best man among us.

CRICHTON. On an island, my lady, perhaps; but in England, no.

LADY MARY. Then there's something wrong with England.

CRICHTON. My lady, not even from you can I listen to a word against England.

LADY MARY. Tell me one thing: you have not lost your courage?

CRICHTON. No, my lady.

The English audience would certainly appreciate the subtle, or not so subtle, irony of the situation. Huang, knowing his Chinese audience's taste, decided to give his

adaptation a more straightforward and clear-cut ending: Wang and his servant girlfriend are returning to the island where they can be their own masters. Barrie's plays always use courage as their driving force, and Huang's ending gives an unmitigated illustration of Wang's courage. Going back to the island, going back to nature, is also consistent with Barrie's lifelong obsession as found in his other major works. Huang's adapted ending apparently encouraged many young people who abhorred the Japanese occupation and were willing to leave Shanghai and join the army of resistance to fight for freedom (Bai 1986, 30-31).

Huang Zuolin had two goals in adapting and directing Barrie's The Admirable Crichton. By satirizing Lord Loam's empty talk about "class equality" and "social justice," Huang gently criticized that class of "superior Chinese," his family included, who resided in the International Settlement. He wanted them to forego lip service and actually do something for their poor working-class countrymen.

The second thing that attracted Huang to Barrie's play is that it combined realism with romanticism. Whimsy, fantasy, and sentimentality are the earmarks of Barrie. Even The Admirable Crichton, one of the most realistic of Barrie's works, reveals his bond to the romantic, which led him all the way to fairyland in Peter Pan and into a dreamy supernaturalism in Dear Brutus and Mary Rose. In his plays, Barrie likes using island settings; there is

usually no rigid social structure. One is free to be oneself, and unusual things can happen most unexpectedly. If one may use Huang's terminology, there is not a single wall on the island, one can use one's imagination to the fullest.

The island scenes in The Admirable Crichton, however, are directly related to real social issues. The first and fourth acts take place in Lord Loam's grand London home; the setting is extremely realistic. When the play premiered in 1902 in London, Barrie and director Boucicault were so fastidious about the authenticity of setting and lighting that the stage-hands went on strike (Mackail 333-335). The second and third acts take place on the island after the shipwreck; here, the setting is imaginative and romantic. On the island, the former servants with their survival skills and ingenuity become masters, and the former masters take orders and work for their keep. Everyone is happy. When the group is rescued, the former master-servant order is restored, and the sharp scenic and atmospheric contrast helps to deepen the irony. The hypocrisy and conservatism of the realistic drawing-room scenes foil the powerful life force and natural order of the romantic island scenes.

Huang emphasized the contrast in his stage directions. For example, in the realistic first act when Lord Loam was doing his once-a-week (once-a-month in Barrie's original) ritual of having his family serving tea to the servants, Huang used backstage helpers, such as the carpenter, the

woman in charge of the costumes and the cleaning lady to play the servants. Without any make-up or special costume, these "actors" not only looked the parts but were also genuinely uncomfortable about being fussed over.

Huang also embroidered the fantastic island scenes, e.g., adding a segment of the group doing a number of happy Hawaiian dances in grass-skirts accompanied by a jubilant live band. Sometimes he used a kind of instant recall of events of earlier scenes effectively. For instance, on the island just when Wang was telling everyone that whoever indulged in idle talk instead of useful work would have a bucket of cold water dumped on his head, cousin Wu/Earnest made a wisecrack and got a bucket of cold water on his head. (In the original, the offender had his head ducked in a pail of water.) After they all returned to London, one day when Wu was making his usual wisecracks again, Wang happened to pass by with a bucket of water in hand. Wu automatically bent over and waited for the water to fall.

In 1942, Huang adapted and directed Hungarian playwright Ferenc Molnár's farce A Docktor Ur (The Gentleman Thief in Chinese). Molnár (1878-1952) had an international reputation, and in the 20s and 30s plays of his were often running simultaneously in many European and American cities. Demonstrating the relativity of truth and the barely discernible difference between illusion and reality became Molnár's major dramatic signature. Some critics believe that he preceded and, perhaps, even

partially inspired Pirandello (Gyorgyey 85).

A Docktor Ur is Molnár's first play, a hilarious farce in which the central character is a thief who, in order to help a lawyer friend make a name for himself, repeatedly commits burglaries. Now, they plan to exchange clothes and identities: the thief will pose as the lawyer at his school reunion where he will steal watches from his old classmates and teachers; in the meanwhile, his lawyer partner will penetrate the world of petty criminals in disguise and get arrested in a possible police raid so that he can later become a sensational media figure by exposing police brutality to the public. Things go awry when the thief decides to rob the lawyer's home that same night and the lawyer returns unexpectedly for the wallet he left behind. To further complicate matters, everyone in the household is engaged at that moment in some kind of clandestine and illicit activity: the lawyer's wife is having a rendezvous with the police lieutenant; the lawyer's sister-in-law is planning to elope with his male secretary; the prudish governess is plotting against everyone. As one can see, Molnár was using the comic devices of farce: mistaken identities, misunderstanding, deception, confusion, and coincidence.

Huang chose the play because he thought it was a poignant satire on dishonesty in the legal profession, and also because the play provided him and his actors with many opportunities to sharpen their comic skills. To turn a

farce "in the French manner" into one that can be thoroughly enjoyed by a Chinese audience, Huang attempted to sinify the play. Like his other adaptations, the play has a Chinese title, the story is set in China, the characters are all Chinese, and they talk and act like Chinese. He also pays a great deal of attention to details of comic stage business. For instance, the thief, out of habit, constantly steals things as he goes, and the lawyer is always on guard. One time, the thief tries to steal the lawyer's pocket-watch but it is pulled back on a chain attached to its owner. When he tries to swipe an alarm clock, he finds that it is chained to the desk. The audience was further amused by the fact that the two of them would carry on their conversation as usual as if none of the above was happening at all. As an eye-witness recalls "the spectators were stamping their feet as they laughed, and they were laughing so hard that their ribs must hurt" (Bai 1986, 31).

Unlike his adaptation of The Admirable Crichton, Huang's Gentleman Thief did not have any elaborate outdoor scenes. To reduce cost, he used only one set for the interior. It was unlike a traditional realistic drawing-room set. Two staircases led toward a central platform somewhat resembling Meyerhold's constructivist ramps and platform. Much of the action took place on the stairs. When the prudish fat governess, raving, and with rollers in her hair, runs up one staircase and down the

other, the ridiculous image made the audience howl with laughter. Huang tried to anticipate such audience responses and, sitting among them during each performance, he observed their reactions, and adjusted his directions accordingly.

The successful adaptations of The Admirable Crichton and The Gentleman Thief established Huang's position as a master of comedy for the Shanghai audience, and encouraged him to work more on his comic technique. In later years, Huang directed an adaptation of Gogol's The Inspector General (shichazhunyuan, 1943) and Chen Baichen's The Road to Higher Officialdom (shengguan tu 1946), both comedies satirizing corrupt government officials.

In addition to comedies, Huang directed serious dramas during the "Bitter Toilers" period, but he consistently "added comic elements to tragedies" (Bai 1983, 257). During this period, Li Jianwu and Shi Tuo, two leading Chinese literary figures, each provided Huang with two adaptations of famous foreign plays. Li is China's authority on Moliere and 19th century French drama, and he is also the author of the well-known comedy Youth (qingchun). For Huang he adapted Shakespeare's tragedy Macbeth and Sardou's Tosca.

Shi Tuo's The Big Circus is based on Andreyev's He Who Gets Slapped. The Russian play depicts the futility of trying to escape into a world of illusion. Recurrent images

of illusion and reality, innocence and corruption, gods and mortals, men and beasts imbue the drama with allegorical significance. Shi Tuo's adaptation is both sinified and simplified when compared to the original. The Big Circus is less intellectual and focuses on the greed, jealousy and love-triangle: the circus girl is being forced by her greedy father to marry a rich older man; she is in love with her young partner who, in turn, is loved by the circus owner's tiger-tamer wife. The ending is tragic. On the night of the young girl's engagement, the young man poisons her and then takes his own life. In desperation, the tiger-tamer sets the circus tent on fire.

To offset the bleak ending, Huang emphasized the magic, the color, the courage, the tension and laughter of life in the circus, turning the play into a tragicomedy. A large part of the allure of The Big Circus lay in the spectacle and ebullient comedy brought to it by Huang. He did not use elaborate sets or costumes, but living up to his nickname at the time "Huang Yijing" (Huang One Set), he used one simple set representing the not-at-all-glamorous backstage: a platform, a trapeze, a wooden horse, a table and several stools. The backdrop was the flip side of old scenic painted canvas. He did, however, bring a real horse onto the stage at one point. What truly brought life and energy to the production, however, was Huang's "mise-en-scene" and top quality acting he fostered in his actors.

Huang's "mise-en-scene" developed during rehearsals of

The Big Circus and other productions and provided his unique directorial signature. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Huang made active use of his stage set and properties, encouraging his actors to regroup, making them take new positions and new postures frequently. The end result was a sense of constant motion and lively stage images. Bai Weng wrote in his recollections:

The picture of Zuolin's Big Circus was changing every moment, and every change results in a new picture. When this writer saw that, it became very clear that it was important to create a beautiful "picture," but it was even better to create a beautiful "moving picture." Towards the end of one act in Big Circus, characters were all moving around as dictated by the necessity of their daily routine, climbing the platform or circling the wooden horse; while they were all still "moving", the curtain came down, followed by thundering applause (1983, 255).

Huang's mise-en-scene often helps his actors to understand their roles and the dramatic situation. Actor Zhang Fa once commented: "Mr. Huang's mise-en-scene is magic. If you move as he asks you to, right away the scene starts to make sense and come alive" (qtd. in Bai 1986, 32).

Good acting contributed greatly to the success of The Big Circus and other productions Huang directed. He has always demanded that the director have the ultimate right to cast his own production because he firmly believes that a good cast is half the battle. Huang wants his actors to create distinctive characters; he tells them: "You must create characters, you should do so that when the audience sees your new character they can't tell you are the same actor who played another character before" (qtd. in Bai

1983, 253). It may seem paradoxical, but he also wants his actors to be themselves, that is to say to create characters with their personal imprint. Once when he was talking about why Shi Hui was his favorite actor, Huang said: "[He] was the character but also Shi Hui" (Bai 1983, 253). His troupe was known for the quality of its ensemble acting. The actors were also encouraged to learn the skills of indigenous performing genres, such as xiangsheng (cross-talk) and huaji (farce), in order to make themselves more versatile as performers (Bai 1986, 32). Under his consistent, patient and strict direction, Huang's Bitter Toilers' Troupe produced a group of remarkable actors, e.g., like Shi Hui, Danni, Huang Zhongjiang, Shi Yuan, Yan Jun and Zhang Fa among many others.

Together with his talented actors, Huang directed yet another major production during the "Bitter Toilers" period, The Night Inn, based on Gorky's The Lower Depths in 1946. Like The Big Circus, this adaptation, too, is both sinified and intellectually simplified when compared to the original. Gorky's powerful play is set in a flophouse and features a collection of characters defeated by life; it consists of a series of seemingly disconnected monologues held together by a loosely organized framework. The Lower Depths was made into a colorful melodrama by Shi Tuo and Ke Lin. The conflict between the landlord, his wife, her sister and the thief Peppel/Lui Qi becomes the focal point; the story of the dying woman is reduced to a

sub-plot. Some characters simply disappear from the adaptation because they seemed to distract from the central story.

Huang, in his direction, paid special attention to the mixture of ironic comedy and deep tragedy. As mentioned earlier, Huang believes that underneath the rags and wounds of people at the bottom of society they have a strong "life force," they are fearless and ready to ridicule the rich and powerful because things cannot get worse. In this vein, Huang executed The Night Inn as a melodramatic tragicomedy.

Whatever the limitations of the Chinese The Night Inn, it was regarded as a breakthrough in commercial theatre because it focused attention on the lower class. Despite attempts in the 1920s and 30s to stage proletarian drama, the literary left had had better luck with women as figures of oppression--hence the Noras and women warriors. An earlier attempt to stage a translation of The Lower Depths had failed in the 1930s. The success of The Night Inn was a moment of proud achievement that fulfilled the vision of life and technique shared by so many artists.*

The Night Inn was Huang's last major production during the "Bitter Toilers" period. The Japanese were defeated in 1945, but China was plunged into yet another war, the civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists. Shanghai was ruled by the American-backed Nationalists. Movie theatres started to show American films

once again, posing stiff competition to the modern drama movement. The new entertainment tax was so high (60% higher than before) that it was impossible for theatre companies like the Bitter Toilers' Troupe, which was already operating on a tight budget, to survive. (Earlier, Huang had opened a theatre studio to train new talents and also to bring in more revenue.) In the spring of 1946, four years and twenty-seven productions later, Huang's Bitter Toilers' Troupe was forced to disband. Huang, himself, was approached by the newly founded Wenhua Film Company to be a film director. One of the films he directed was a film version of The Night Inn.

Huang calls the years between 1939 and 1949 his "apprenticeship" in the theatre (1979, Preface 2). From the number of successful productions he directed, the number of remarkable actors he trained and the audience he attracted, it was a very impressive period for him, no matter what he calls it. These were productive years during which he sharpened his skills as a director of comedy and melodrama and formed the basis of his own conception of theatre. In his now famous 1962 speech "On Conceptions of Theatre," Huang listed ten criteria for a good play. (Further discussion of the speech takes place in Chapter 3.) Among them, he mentions "prominent subject matter", "clear characterization", "sharp conflict", "tight structure", "strong dramatic sense", "vivid language", "rich sub-text" and "unified artistic conception,"--all suited for comedy

and melodrama, especially the latter. "Deep philosophical sense" is not a characteristic of the plays Huang directed before 1949, and together with "broad conception of theatre", they actually point to a new path quite different from melodrama (Huang 1979, 173). The path Huang took after the success of the Communist revolution in 1949 had many new turns.

CHAPTER 3

FOLLOWING MAO: HUANG'S THEATRE BETWEEN 1949-1966

When asked how he would characterize his career as a theatre director between the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and the beginning of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1966, Huang answered, not without a sense of self-mockery and humor, "like the titles of two plays I once directed, Following Chairman Mao Every Step of the Way, and Dedicating My Life to the Party" (bubu jinggeng mao zhuxi and ba yishenh jaogei dang).¹ It did not seem like a terrible idea when the People's Liberation Army drove out the corrupt Nationalist government to the island of Taiwan and Mao proclaimed to the world "the people of China are now standing up!"

Intellectuals and artists were mobilized to support the new state in China even before the formal promulgation of the People's Republic on October 1, 1949. Like other distinguished artists, Huang was approached by the Communist Party and was given assurance of an honored place in the new society. The new society was to be unlike the old one, without war, corruption, inflation, unemployment, poverty, social injustice, and "white terror" against freedom of thought and expression. What more could an artist like Huang ask for? On the day Shanghai was liberated in May 1949, Huang met with some artists of

theatre and film to celebrate. They talked excitedly about future plans. In June, Huang was elected to the executive committee of the newly formed Association for Theatre and Film Artists. Shortly afterwards, he was invited to Beijing to attend the First National Congress of Literature and Arts where he met with Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai and other high-ranking leaders of the Communist Party. Huang was genuinely impressed by the lofty goals expressed by the Communist Party and excited about the great changes about to take place. He decided to embrace the revolution and devote his life and art to the new state, the People's Republic of China under the leadership of the Communist Party (Chen Daming 27).

In August 1950, the Shanghai People's Art Theatre, later to become one of the leading national theatres in China, was established. Huang Zuolin, who helped to found the theatre, became deputy president, and ten years later president/artistic director. The theatre has expanded greatly since then, but even when it was first established in 1950 it boasted over one hundred and fifty members, all on the state payroll. The theatre had an administrative section, an experimental performing troupe, a creative workshop and a theatre studio for training new talent. It was given its own permanent building and pre-production working spaces, and its productions were mounted at Shanghai Art Theatre (formerly Lyceum) and Changjiang Theatre (formerly Carlton). When Huang became

president/artistic director in 1960, the Shanghai People's Art Theatre was the only professional spoken drama company in Shanghai with over three hundred state-employed members and four performing troupes. Between 1950 and 1966, the theatre produced more than eighty full-length plays and ninety one act plays.² It was a great change from Huang's Bitter Toilers' days when he had only a dozen or so actors who often had to rehearse at his house. All had relied on box-office receipts for their livelihood. New theatre, new state, new era, Huang was driven by a new found sense of mission to create a kind of theatre that would most "movingly and vividly reflects the richness of life in our great motherland" (qtd. in Chen Daming 27).

Throughout these years, he believed in what the Party and Mao proposed. The new spoken drama should 1) serve the working people and the socialist cause; 2) follow the policy of "letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend;" 3) combine "revolutionary realism" and "revolutionary romanticism;" and 4) cultivate distinct Chinese features and popular appeal (Huang 1979, 195). It all sounded attractive to Huang in theory, but in practice he discovered there were discrepancies between the Party's words and deeds. Huang was caught between what the Party said and what it practiced, and between his sense of obligation to the state and his own sense of artistic integrity. His desire for artistic excellence and his search for ideal plays and presentational styles was

complicated by the policies of the Communist state whose cause he had set out to serve.

The Communist government believes in the power of theatre--in the history of the Chinese Communist revolution; theatre activities had been integrated with political and military actions. Since a theatre of propaganda, agitation, and ideological indoctrination had helped the Party to win both war and power, the Party wanted to use theatre again to help maintain it in power. In the "Resolution on the Execution of the Party's Policies on Literature and Art," issued by the Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee on November 7, 1949, the Party directed that among literary and art forms, drama and news communication were to be developed first (qtd. in Tung 2). The Party's attitude towards theatre, especially spoken drama, was utilitarian. Drama was a tool to be used to help educate and mobilize the masses and carry out the Party's various policies.

The belief in the power and usefulness of spoken drama also led the Communist Party to seek complete control of all aspects of this performing genre. Soviet-style socialist realism was established as the norm. In the 1950s, Soviet theatre experts were brought to China to teach the techniques of Stanislavsky and the form of socialist realism. Until the late 70s, socialist realism and the teachings of Stanislavsky were firmly established as the theatrical mainstream in China. Playwrights were

expected to write plays in the style of socialist realism and to represent the Party's policies on major political, social, international and economic issues. The system and the Party were to be shown only in a positive light. Actors and directors had to follow Stanislavsky's techniques as taught by the Soviet teachers.

To make sure that intellectuals and artists fell into line behind the Party's policy, there were three important control mechanisms at work, according to Bonnie S. McDougall (272-273). One important control mechanism was the recruitment of writers and artists into the state's cultural apparatus and the supervision of their activities through professional associations. A second was to make writers and artists members of the Party. A third was a public campaign, which usually involved an attack, organized by Party authorities, on a specially targeted scapegoat. Huang has been personally affected by all these three control mechanisms. The pressure to conform is great, but his conscience as an artist has often told him otherwise.

Huang had no problem with the concept that his theatre was to be used to help educate and mobilize the masses in the building of a new socialist country. Spoken drama was brought into China as an effective tool for modernization in the first place. Huang believes in the socio-political function of his work. Most of the plays he directed since 1949 are new contemporary plays addressing current social

and political issues. Huang also had no problem with the teachings of Stanislavsky. As a matter of fact, he and his wife were the first to teach formally Stanislavsky's techniques to Chinese theatre students back in 1938 because he believed there was something to be learned from them. Later after publishing a lengthy essay on Stanislavsky and his system in 1953, Huang applied the theory in his direction of two Soviet plays The Sun Shines Over Moscow (shuguang zhaoyao mosike) in 1953 and Solemn Ode (beizhuang de songge) in 1960. Huang's problem stemmed from the fact that only one type of writing and one style of staging and acting were permitted. It seemed ludicrous to Huang, a practical man of the theatre, that other ways, which might have made spoken drama a more effective tool for the new state, were excluded. As a director, who relied first on text, Huang was frustrated by the narrowness and artificiality of the socialist realistic plays he had to deal with. His 1962 speech On Conceptions of Theatre clearly reflected his frustration. While he was dedicated to producing new contemporary plays, Huang did not have control over the content or the style of the plays written by others. While urging playwrights (without much hope) to create plays like Faust and Peer Gynt, Huang concentrated his efforts on developing presentational stage techniques within the limits of officially acceptable ideology. Both the work of Bertolt Brecht and Chinese traditional theatre inspired him.

Bertolt Brecht was interested in Chinese literature, art and philosophy, which had an influence on his artistic endeavors. Brecht's interest in Chinese theatre, mainly the style of acting in traditional Beijing opera, began in 1935 in Moscow when he saw the performance of Mei Lanfang, the renowned female impersonator, who demonstrated his art by acting scenes from the Chinese dramatic repertory. The performance impressed Brecht. He believed that the acting in Chinese opera coincided with and thus helped to confirm his theory of acting. Two essays, written respectively in 1936 and 1940, the first titled "Alienation Effect in Chinese Acting," in which he used the term V-effect, and the second, "On the Theatre of the Chinese," became landmark documents in Brecht's canon of theatre theory, even though some consider them flawed.³

Huang read an English translation of Brecht's first essay in 1936 while he was studying in London. He was very pleased that a German dramatist spoke so highly of an art form of China. "Patriotic" feelings aside, Huang shares a lot of Brecht's artistic tendencies. Many of Brecht's dramas are comedies or melodramas, such as Three Penny Opera, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, The Good Person of Szechwan and Herr Puntila and His Man Matti. Even the production of Mother Courage and Her Children, which "alienated" the Shanghai audience out of the theatre in 1959, was a spirited melodrama, except for the ending, in

its original German versions.

In some ways Brecht was also kin to Bernard Shaw, as he states in an "Ovation for Shaw", a homage he extended to the Irish author on his seventieth birthday.⁴ Brecht admires the "terrorism" of Shaw's humor, and his joy in "disconcerting our customary associations," perhaps anticipating Brecht's own theory of "estrangement." He delights in the "opinions" of Shaw's world. "The fate of his characters is their opinions." He admires Shaw's razor-edged reasoning, which cuts through mystifications, to the core of social realities. For Huang Zuolin, who is well-versed in the traditions and trends of Western theatre and who is particularly partial to Bernard Shaw, Brecht certainly does not pose any "estrangement" or "alienation effect."

At the time of the founding of the People's Republic of China, Huang was beginning to take an interest in Marxism and trying to look at the new world with a fresh outlook. Brecht's theory and plays provided him much food for thought. Brechtian theatre has benefited Huang, and through him, the Chinese spoken drama, in two major ways. First, it has helped him to overcome the spatial, temporal and representational limitations of realistic theatre and to break the "fourth wall" of the modern Chinese stage. Second, it has prompted Huang to re-examine the traditional forms of Chinese performing arts, including Beijing opera, and to integrate some of the traditional techniques into

the making of a new modern spoken drama with distinct Chinese features. As early as January 1951, Huang gave a six-hour marathon lecture on Brecht and epic theatre to the members of the Shanghai People's Art Theatre. The response was cool. Chinese modern drama had been following the European realistic tradition, and most people were not prepared for Brecht. The purpose of the lecture was partly to help stage Resisting USA and Assisting Korea: A Great Live Report (kangmei yuanchao da huobao), a thrice revised new play collectively written by a group of playwrights of the theatre. The play had been deemed unstageable because it consisted of eight unconnected acts about America's military, economic and cultural aggressions against China during half a century. Realism certainly would not do; a theatre of epic dimension was needed to overcome the limitations of time and space. After listening to Huang's lecture on Brecht, the writers revised the play several times according to their understanding of epic theatre. Huang directed the play, which had 58 performances and was seen by more than 42,000 people.⁵ In addition to a prologue and an epilogue, there were fifty scenes in four different countries with more than one hundred and eighty performers, the scenes held together by a narrator who recounted the events. It is apparent that Huang was very much aware of the narrative nature of epic theatre, though he has rejected the suggestion that he change the Chinese translation of Brecht's term ehishi ju, literally

"historical poetic drama," to xushi ju, "narrative drama," which might be more appropriate for Brecht's conception of epic theatre.

Huang is called China's Brecht today by many people, but he has never been a Brechtian purist. He recognized that Chinese writers took epic theatre to mean dramatizing epics like those written by Homer. This was acceptable to Huang because, as a practical man of the theatre, he had introduced epic theatre not for its own sake but as a device to help remove the spatial and temporal limitations of realism. The structure of Resisting USA and Assiting Korea: A Great Live Report is modeled after Brecht's Terror and Misery of the Third Reich, an atypical Brechtian play. On stage, Huang employed several expressionistic sets, making use of ramps and two moving platforms which reminds one of Meyerhold. His use of a few simple props to suggest different locales was seemingly borrowed from traditional Chinese opera. The acting style was a mixture of realism and agit-prop. Huang was eclectic and used whatever appealed to him. He was, however, not pleased with the production because the script was mainly a propaganda piece that had no clearly-drawn characters, no tight structure, no dramatic action, no rich sub-text or vivid language, elements Huang considered essential as a director known for comedy and melodrama.

A Great Live Report is generally considered the first Chinese spoken drama to use Brecht's epic theatre

techniques, but its only real affinity with epic theatre appears to be the breaking of the "fourth wall" with the resultant temporal and spatial freedom. It was this very freedom, however, that made some government functionaries in charge of cultural affairs uneasy. They criticized the production as being "cosmopolitanistic" (shijiezhuyi), a bad word in their vocabulary (Chen Daming 1986, 28). Some critics accused Huang of being a "formalist" (xingshizhuyi), another unfavorable term, because, according to them, he had paid too much attention to the form and thus overpowered the content (Zhang Lide 1951).

For several years, after A Great Live Report, Huang directed fewer plays than usual, none of them Brechtian. There were three reasons. First, Huang had many administrative responsibilities in the newly established theatre. Second, the government was urging the artists of spoken drama to learn from the Soviet experts in China who were teaching Stanislavsky techniques and Soviet style realism. Huang did direct successfully several Soviet plays, applying Stanislavsky theory, but more out of a sense of duty--to set an example for his colleagues--than from his own artistic impulses. Third, he continued to grope with ideas of Brechtian theatre. Huang at the time was more familiar with Brecht's theories than his plays, especially his later plays. Plays like Terror and Misery in the Third Reich, were not among his favorites, and as yet he had not had access to plays such as The Good

Person of Setzuan or The Caucasian Chalk Circle. Those two plays might have struck a perfect balance between Huang's understanding of Brechtian theory and his gift as a director of comedy and melodrama.

Huang truly could not find suitable plays to do himself because the government took spoken drama so seriously that humor, comedy or romance or anything slightly frivolous had all but disappeared. For his own "comic relief", Huang directed Chekhov's monologue On the Injurious Effects of Tobacco in 1954, segments of Shaw's Arms and the Man and a new Ah Q's Happy Ending (ah Q da tuanyuan) in 1956. The three had a limited number of performances since they were not really "serious" by official standards. Huang directed Xia Yan's Test (kaoyan), a serious realistic drama that asserted that some Party cadres (ganbu)⁷, who were wartime heroes, need to acquire the expertise to run peacetime industry. The production, however, was banned by the Shanghai municipal government because some believed it cast doubt on the Party's ability to lead (Chen Gongming 15).

In late 1956 and early 1957, there was a temporary thaw on the ideological and cultural scene in China when Chairman Mao promulgated the policy to "let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend" (baihua jifang baijia zhengming) as a response to intellectuals, artists and scientists' growing disenchantment with government bureaucracy and working

conditions. The so-called Hundred Flowers campaign was designed to permit greater cultural variety and enjoyment, as an encouragement to writers, performers and their audiences. Even more surprisingly, Mao, at the Eighth Communist Party Congress in September 1956, encouraged non-Party intellectuals and artists to criticize Party members. Even though Mao's liberal line met opposition within the Party leadership, the new "rectification campaign" officially was under way by May 1957, aiming to correct bureaucratic, sectarian, and subjective work styles among Party cadres (McDougall 276-277).

This gesture of openness and sincerity did more than restore Huang's faith in the Party. He became a member of the Chinese Communist Party the very same year, and he engaged himself in one of the most satisfying and successful productions of his career. The Cuckoo Sings Again (buguniao you jiaole) was a romantic comedy, which showed that people's happiness was more important than production quotas. The play gently poked fun at some Party cadres' obsession with increasing production. With the play Huang added to his repertoire a new style of comedy which he calls "lyrical comedy" as opposed to satirical comedy. (Further discussion of his lyrical comedy will take place later on in the chapter.)

As happens so often in the history of the People's Republic of China, however, the political pendulum swings abruptly from relaxation and then back again to suppression

in a matter of months. The "rectification campaign" designed by Mao to promote criticism of the Party stirred up so much criticism and outright opposition to the Party and its policies, that the Party officials who had been opposed to it from the beginning were able to redirect it into the now notorious "anti-rightist" attack on the people who had spoken out in the "blossoming and contending" of May and June of 1957. The number of officially designated "rightists" among students and intellectuals was estimated at about 300,000 (MacFarquhar 261-314). They were publically humiliated, demoted from their positions, expelled from the Party, the Youth League and schools, and many were sent to hard labor on state farms.

Under such harsh socio-political conditions, no play of real substance could be staged. Huang, however, continued to take every opportunity available to stage plays in a way that was fruitful for him artistically. In 1957 he directed Ten Thousand Rivers and One Thousand Mountains (wanshui qianshan), chronicling the heroic deeds of the Red Army during the Long March. In 1958 he directed Eight Red Flags Fluttering in the Wind (bamian hongqi yingfengpiao), eight independent stories strung together to propagate the "Great Leap Forward." With these productions, Huang continued his experiments with what had started with A Great Live Report. With the impetus he received from Brecht, he realized at least one aspect of epic theatre by breaking down the fourth wall. The spectators knew they

were watching plays without realistic illusion. The content of the plays did not provide the spectators with anything new or different to think about, but the form of the productions was spectacular. Ten Thousand Rivers and One Thousand Mountains involved over two hundred performers, some of whom were real soldiers. In addition, there were frequent changes of costume and scenery, indicating different regions and different minority nationalities on the route of the Long March. The production was staged in Cultural Square (wenhua guangchang), the biggest indoor performing space in Shanghai which seats over ten thousand people and has a stage the size of a basketball court. Based on Huang's reputation, the first 21 performances were sold out before the production officially opened.⁸

Directing productions of such epic scope increased Huang's ability for overall planning and effective execution. Starting with these two large productions, Huang has often assumed the role of "director-in-chief" (zhong daoyan) with major productions, sometimes assigning parts of a production to assistants. This has given younger directors not only an opportunity to practice what they have learned by observing Huang but also an opportunity to provide their own input. Second, it has allowed Huang to keep in mind the whole picture without becoming bogged down in detail.

In 1959, Huang, still frustrated by the fact that Chinese playwrights were not writing the kind of plays he

liked, was offered the opportunity to direct Brecht's Mother Courage and Her Children. October 1959 was the 10th anniversary of both the People's Republic of China and the Democratic Republic of Germany. As part of a cultural exchange, China and East Germany agreed to stage two plays from each other's country. Two German plays were recommended to the Chinese, Friedrich Schiller's Intrigue and Love to be staged in Beijing and Bertolt Brecht's Mother Courage and Her Children to be staged in Shanghai. Huang received from the East German Embassy background material which included Brecht's own promptbook concerning the direction of Mother Courage and a documentary film of the Berliner Ensemble's production of the play. There were three months before the opening of the show, but the Chinese translation of the play only became available to Huang and his crew one month prior to the opening date. Before the rehearsal could really get underway, Huang had to turn the literary Chinese translation by a non-theatre scholar into a stage version. He tried again to acquaint colleagues with Brecht's drama and theory since the German dramatist and his ideas were still virtually unknown. Using the Shanghai People's Art Theatre's best actors, with Danni herself playing the part of Mother Courage, Huang attempted to render a faithful reproduction of the Berliner Ensemble production in Chinese. The show opened on October 5, 1959, the 10th anniversary of East Germany. It was Huang's 88th production, but for the first time he "alienated" his

audience. There were only fourteen performances, including three for invited guests. The audience ignored the play: the house was never more than 40% full, and those who did come left early. The critics neglected it: there was only one short review published in a paper.⁹

Why did Huang's 1959 production of Mother Courage and Her Children "alienate" the audience right out of the theatre? There are many reasons, but we may presume the following. First, there is the subject matter. The Chinese people had just gone through the War of Resistance Against Japan, the Civil War and the Korean War; they had had their fill of wars. Most of the audience had neither knowledge about nor interest in a religious war that happened in remote 17th-century Europe. Second, if the setting had been exotic and the costumes colorful, it might have aroused a degree of curiosity. The bare stage and ragged clothes, however, did not sit well with an audience still used to the elegant, colorful and exquisite stage attire of traditional Chinese theatre. Third, Brecht's dramaturgy was not what the people were accustomed to. Chinese theatre-goers had been conditioned by traditional theatre and realistic spoken drama, which always gave them definite indications of good or bad, right or wrong, and it appears they had forsaken, at least in the theatre, the pleasure of thinking for themselves and drawing their own conclusions. This habit is exactly what Brechtian theatre aims to overcome. But the circumstances surrounding Huang's 1959

production of Mother Courage were not right for it.

There were other internal reasons as well. Mother Courage was recommended by the East German government and was not Huang's own choice. Among the plays he directed, it may be the one least Chinese. Because it was assigned to him by the Ministry of Culture as part of an official exchange agreement and because the East Germans provided Brecht's own directorial notes and a film of his production, Huang did not have the kind of freedom and flexibility he had once had with Barrie's and Molnar's plays, that is, he could not adapt the play and make it more accessible to the Chinese audience. The only Chinese translation available to him failed to convey much of the humor and energy of the original play. His actors, competent as they were, deeply influenced by Stanislavsky techniques, had a particularly difficult time fully grasping what Huang had said about the unfamiliar Brechtian concepts of "estrangement," "distance," "non-illusionistic," and "alienation effect." Many of them experienced "resistance" (dikangxing) toward Brecht's dramaturgy. For instance, while rehearsing the very first scene, the two actors, playing the Recruiting Officer and Sergeant, simply did not know how to start when they were asked to speak alternately to each other, to the audience and to themselves on a bare stage (Yao Mingron 3-6).

There were three basic attitudes towards epic theatre among those who had access to Brecht's ideas in Chinese

literature and art circles. Some considered it heresy, some simply had no interest, some had a burning desire to know more (Hsia 1983, 12). The failure of Huang's 1959 Mother Courage production set back his efforts to bring Brecht to China. Even those who had had a "budding" interest in epic theatre turned away from it. Yao Wenyuan, a member of the "Gang of Four"¹⁰ during the Cultural Revolution, stated that the production spread the "venom of pacifism," and later published an attack on all those followers of "a foreign petty-bourgeois theatre authority" who wanted to bring in the "hateful techniques of alienation so as to separate Chinese theatre from the people, i. e., the workers, peasants and soldiers" (Hsia 1983, 13). Under the circumstances, Huang did not have another opportunity either to incorporate the lessons learned from Mother Courage or to direct another Brechtian play until twenty years later. He continued, however, to adapt epic techniques to his productions of other types of plays, particularly lyrical comedy and modern versions of traditional opera during the following seven years.

In the pre-1949 period, Huang had cultivated his skills as a director of comedies through works such as, The True Story of Ah Q, The Gentleman Thief, The Portrait of Officialdom and The Inspector General, most generally satirical comedies, which ridiculed the ruling class, both

oppressors and exploiters and the system that supported them. After 1949, Huang's film version of Sanmao's Apprenticeship (sanmao xueshengyi, 1958), the chronicle of an "Oliver Twist" of pre-1949 Shanghai, was still another satirical comedy. When Huang tried, however, to use comedy to reflect contemporary life in the "new society", he ran into serious trouble. His 1957 production of The Cuckoo Sings Again was attacked for "vilifying the Party leadership" and almost got him labeled a "rightist" (Chen Gongming 15).

The Cuckoo Sings Again, written by Yang Lufang and produced during the temporary relaxation of 1956 and early 1957, was in fact one of the most successful productions of Huang's career. The play is a romantic comedy with music, set in a small village in a People's Commune. The heroine of the play is a free-spirited young girl of twenty-one who loves to sing and dance (thus the nickname Cuckoo), loves to work and play, and who generally loves life. She is also part of a love triangle: on one side, a man wants to help her realize her full potential, on the other side, a man wants to make her his private property. The clear-cut two-sidedness in the play does not stop here. On one side, there is a marriage based on love and mutual respect, on the other, there is an arranged marriage in which the wife is abused. On one side, there is a cadre who cares deeply about people's happiness, on the other, there is a cadre whose only concern is to increase production. On one side,

there is a group of young people looking for love on their own terms, on the other, there is a village match-maker trying to profit by arranging people's marriages. The ending is predictable: the people on the "right side" prevail, and the people on the "wrong side" become either a laughing stock or start to mend their ways. Not a profound play, it was a breath of fresh air on the spoken drama scene, and Huang Zuolin made a delightful production of it.

Huang intentionally chose for the production a group of inexperienced young actors who did not have many preconceived notions about acting but who did have much zest for a better life. He explained to the actors the super objective of the play:

Today, when we are competing in the Socialist construction, some people have a wrong tendency: they care only about production and have forgotten the purpose of production. This play is to correct this wrong tendency. It should be all production for people, but not all people for production. Happiness has to be earned by oneself, we have to fight those who do not care for people. Thus, the super objective of this production is to work for, to sing for people's happiness (qtd. in Xie Dehui 23).

It was a demanding production; actors had to sing, dance and create comic yet convincing characters. Older comic actors like Shi Hui, Han Fei and Shi Yuan were either dead or no longer active on stage and it was necessary to train these young talents. Many people worried that Huang's reputation might be at stake because of these young inexperienced actors, but after several months' hard

training and rehearsing, the show was a huge success, breaking box-office records (Xie Dehui 22). Many of the actors, such as, Xie Dehui who played Cuckoo and Liu Tongbiao who played her tractor-driver boyfriend, went on to very successful acting careers.

Huang used his wife Danni as acting coach. Together, they trained the actors by employing techniques they had always used to train new performers--mime, improvisation and interpretation. The young actors followed the prescribed three step course: "act as myself", "act as you (the familiar other)" and "act as him/her (the unfamiliar other)" (Huang 1979, 287). For the last step, Huang had his actors live among farmers in a People's Commune for a while.

Some of the improvisations they created were incorporated into the production. For example, in one piece, the Party secretary was informed that a sow in the Commune's pigsty was sick and that his wife, who was pregnant, had fainted while working in the fields; he hesitated for a moment and then decided to look in on the pig first. In a contrasting piece, the Party secretary was informed concurrently that the sow had just given birth to a litter of piglets and that his wife had just given birth to a son. He hesitated once again, but this time he went to his wife. These two contrasting pieces were used in the production to demonstrate the transformation of the Party secretary who had finally learned to value human beings.

The audience found the pieces hilarious, but they were used by those critical of the production as hard evidence against the Party (Xie Dehui 23-24).

Huang as usual spent much time on characterization, meaningful comic repetition and contrast. He tried to emphasize the optimistic and uplifting aspect of the play by using lively music and songs at the beginning, throughout, and at the end of the production (Xie Dehui 22-23). With this production, Huang developed a style that he terms "lyrical comedy" as opposed to "satirical comedy:"

Satirical comedy puts people's weakness under a magnifying glass for the sole purpose of criticism. Lyrical comedy, on the other hand, epitomizes people's weakness as well as strength through extraction and condensation, and presents all this in a poetic manner (qtd. in Xie Dehui 24).

He assumes that people desire socialism, but in the new and rapidly changing social order they have to adopt a new way of thinking. Lyrical comedy, he believes, serves the goal better because laughter is used in positive ways. Comedies express a given society's ideals by laughing at those who deviate from them. Huang's concept of lyrical comedy tries to do that and more. In The Cuckoo Sings Again, he creates three kinds of characters who make people laugh: a group of characters who uphold the correct new ideas and are bright and witty, such as, the young girl; a second group of characters who hold fast to the erroneous old ideas and who try to obstruct the new ones, such as, the

match-maker; and the last group who try to do good but have their priorities mixed up, such as the Party secretary who cares more about pigs than people. By laughing with the first group and at the other two, the audience learns what to follow, what to despise, and what to avoid. This bears out Huang's idea that comedy today should educate people through pleasure (Chen Gongming 16), or to use a line of Karl Marx which Huang likes to quote, "to say good-bye to one's past with laughter" (Xie Dehui 23).

Ironically, The Cuckoo Sings Again became a target during the "anti-rightist campaign". Yang Lufang, the author of the play, was labeled a "rightist" and banished from his post in the military for over twenty years. He has not written another play. As the play's director, Huang Zuolin was publically criticized for producing a "big poisonous weed," "distorting socialist reality," "vilifying Party leadership" and "promoting extreme individualism" (Tan Ke 27-34). Critics who praised the production were not spared from the attack (Zhu Qing 125-130).

One of the painful lessons Huang learned from all this is that he was not supposed to make a Party secretary the object of laughter. Once he confessed in a public speech:

Among all the plays I directed, the image of Fang Baoshan [the fore-mentioned Party secretary] was the most problematic. I thoroughly ridiculed him, the director of an agricultural collective and the Party branch secretary. I made "people are less than pigs" his main-line of thinking. For a strong visual image, I even played a little trick with the "cadre" hat he was wearing to keep out the wind; I let the flaps

droop on both sides, just like the ears of Piggy Monk! I really believed it was to show the adorable side of the old cadre. Now you can see how huge the distance is between one's not-yet-remodeled subjective intention and the objective effect. It was a serious offence and a painful lesson (Huang 1979, 222).

The Party may not have liked what Huang did to Mr. Fang, but from Huang's description of his comic characterization, it is clear that Huang was very good at what he was doing.

After The Cuckoo Sings Again, Huang decided not to ridicule Party cadres in his productions, but he did not make them great heroes either. He admits that the Party cadres, often chief characters in his productions, often lack depth of characterization in comparison to the secondary characters.

For instance, in One Thousand and One Days, the character of old Wang [Party secretary] was not as distinct as that of young Wang; in The Second Spring, Feng Tao [Party leader] had less depth than the old expert. The most obvious example is that of A Solemn Ode, in which I made the Capitalist Govosky a substantial character with flesh and blood, but I depicted the revolutionary leader Lenin in a quite superficial and general manner....I repeatedly and tirelessly rehearsed the part of the Capitalist Govosky; but I spent very little time on rehearsing Lenin's part, mistakenly thinking that since this great revolutionary leader's every word and every action is correct, what's the point in rehearsing it? (Huang 1979, 222)

Does this sound suspiciously tongue-in-cheek?

Huang's next major success with lyrical comedy was his 1965 production of One Thousand and One Days (yiqian linyitian). This time the Party cadres were not treated as a laughing-stock. The play, written collaboratively, is

based on a true story. A model team of letter-carriers have kept a record of no-fault delivery for over three years. The new letter-carrier, Young Wang, is proud to be a member of the model team, but he thinks the job is too easy and insignificant. He is also influenced by a lazy bourgeois "bad element" who craves pleasure and despises work. When Young Wang makes some mistakes, first, he does not think they really matter, and then for the sake of a perfect no-fault record he tries to cover them up. Old Wang, the model Party member, not only helps Young Wang correct his mistakes but also helps him realize the importance of his work to people. In the end Young Wang realizes that serving people well is most important, more so than establishing a perfect record. It is a simple idealistic play.

Huang chose One Thousand and One Days as the name of the play instead of the original The Letter-carriers, because he wanted to make "one thousand days" a record of the past, and the "one-thousand-and-first day," the day of the play's action, a new beginning for better work. Huang quoted Mao's words as the play's central theme:

The Chinese revolution is great, but the road after the revolution will be longer, the work greater and more arduous. This must be made clear now in the Party. The comrades must be helped to remain modest, prudent and free from arrogance and rashness in their style of work. The comrades must be helped to preserve the style of plain living and hard struggle (1979, 199).

What really made the play work, in addition to the successful comic characterizations of Young Wang and

several residents on the mail route, were Huang's scenic effects and the stage movement. One of the most talked about scenic effects was the use of two revolving triangular scenery pieces with "up and down" mechanisms. The scenery changes as Young Wang whistles and rides by on his delivery bike. Lively background music, Young Wang's zigzagging and the moving scenery not only create a light and comic atmosphere but also poetically capture the characteristic sight of letter-carriers riding through the narrow backlanes of Shanghai. At the climactic "Chasing the Letter" scene, five bikes are on stage at the same time spinning around the revolving "periaktoi-like" machinery. The spectators excitedly called it "havoc of scenery" (Du Shixiang 38). Huang himself says:

The revolving set in One Thousand and One Days has another characteristic; we have not only borrowed from the theatre art of the Greeks, we have also inherited the legacy of "circling" from traditional opera. Only here we have taken a step forward, letting the people and the scenery "circling" together. One may say it is an example of making foreign things serve China and making ancient things serve the present (Huang 1979, 215).

This statement expresses Huang's long standing enjoyment of traditional Chinese theatre and other related performing arts.

Huang's interest in Brecht stemmed from Brecht's study of Chinese traditional theatre, primarily Beijing opera. Huang wanted to fuse European drama and Chinese opera, thus creating a form that would be both modern and Chinese. This fusion would be in keeping with changes over the years and

the special circumstances of China. Huang experimented, directing and supervising several traditional operas as spoken dramas. He used the stories, costumes, scenic conventions and stage movements of traditional opera, but he dispensed with the singing and stylized delivery. One of the better known of his comic productions is the 1961

Loaned Wife (jie qi). Huang writes as follows:

The story goes something like this. Old fossil Zhang is an idler. He tricks his wife into letting him have a bolt of her cloth. He tries to sell the cloth in the street, where he meets his sworn brother, Li Tianlong, whose wife has recently died. Li is in need of money in order to make the journey to Peking to take the examination that would make him an official if he passes it, but his father-in-law refuses to give him the promised fortune until he finds himself a new wife. Zhang, in a wild fantasy, decides to lend his wife to Li, on the condition that the fortune should be shared between them equally. But the manoeuvre backfires. Zhang's wife spends the night with Li at the latter's father-in-law's home. Zhang sues Li before the magistrate, who feels he would make the best of the tangle by marrying Zhang's wife to Li. So Zhang is left with neither wife nor fortune. At one point in the story, Zhang's wife is staying overnight with Li while Zhang is held up after curfew. What follows occurs in two different places, but the actors are acting on the same stage and to the same rhythm, which is contrary to the "illusion of life within the four walls" in the Western theatre. While Li and Zhang's wife worry about their disgrace upon the inevitable disclosure, Zhang regrets his misplaced trust in a false friend; while Zhang's wife blames Zhang for lending her out, Zhang complains to himself of his wife's seizing the opportunity; while Zhang's wife takes a fancy to Li because of his fair complexion, Zhang wakes up from a dream imagining the sky is aglow and there must be a fire somewhere. This amusing scene is not likely to be seen in Western theatre (qtd. in Hsia 1987, 153).

As Adrian Hsia points out, although the staging of Loaned Wife and other spoken-drama/traditional-operas did not seem to have aroused much of a response in Chinese theatre

circles, it had importance concerning the formulation of Huang's theory of combining the spoken drama with traditional opera. "By now Huang had added the acting of the Peking opera to the epic dimensions of a new Chinese national drama which he was helping to form" (1987, 153).

For Huang, doing such comedies and/or experimenting with traditional operas had the purpose of expanding Chinese spoken drama's means of expression and challenging the monopoly of realism. All this came to a head at the "All China Forum on the Writing of Spoken Drama, Opera and Children's Plays" (quanguo huaju, geju, ertonju chuangzuo zuotanhui), held in Guangzhou (Canton) in the spring of 1962. At the forum, two speeches became famous, the one by General Chen Yi, a cultured, moderate and colorful leader of the country, and the one by Huang Zuolin.

General Chen Yi's speech was openly critical of the current Chinese artistic and literary conditions. Chen cited restrictions on writers' individuality and the prohibition to write about today's negative aspects of life as the two main causes that prevented writers from telling the truth.¹² Encouraged by the openness of Chen Yi's speech, and using Mao's slogan "integrating revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism" as endorsement, Huang delivered the speech "On Conceptions of Theatre" (mantan xijuguan 1979, 173-187).

In his opening statement, Huang said his original topic had been "Ten Requirements for a Play", concerning what

Huang as a director considered an ideal play. He lamented the fact that "a great time like ours" had not produced works of comparable scope and depth to "Shakespeare's Hamlet, Goethe's Faust or Ibsen's Peer Gynt." His speech now, however, would be on "the issue of conceptions of theatre."

Huang began by giving a sweeping overview of the "two-thousand-and-five-hundred-year history of spoken drama" starting with the Greeks, pointing out "in each and every historical period, people in their theatre practice have been searching for the best forms possible to convey a definite ideological and political content" (1979, 174). He said he would like to discuss three "systems": Mei Lanfang, Stanislavsky and Brecht, "trying to find out what they have in common, what their basic differences are, and to explore their mutual influence and reference, thus weeding through the old to bring forth the new." Apparently, he was drawing on history to fight against the narrow-mindedness of spoken-drama "that allows only one form" (1979, 175). Most of his speech, however, was devoted to a discussion of Brechtian theatre and the value of traditional Chinese theatrical techniques.

Few people in Chinese theatre at that time, however, either realized or understood the significance of Huang's remarks, which were not rediscovered or taken seriously until the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. It must be pointed out though, that while Huang stressed how

crucial it was for Chinese spoken drama artists to recognize Brechtian theatre, Chinese traditional theatre, and the Stanislavsky technique as equally important sources of artistic form, he by no means advocated deviation from officially acceptable dramatic content. Quite awkwardly, he characterized the three modes as belonging to the realm of realism, if only different types. He truly wanted the freedom to "experiment with various theatrical techniques" and to go beyond the type of realism prevalent then on the Chinese stage because according to Mao, "life as reflected in artistic and literary works can and ought to be on a higher level and of a greater intensity than real life, in sharper focus and more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal" (Huang 1979, 183). This "red" protective coat made the plea against monopoly and for variety, which was then potentially dangerous, escape political attack by the Party watch-dogs.

It could not have been pure coincidence that, following Huang's talk, some more of Brecht's plays and essays were translated into Chinese, such as, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, The Exception and the Rule, The Days of the Commune, Alienation Effect In Chinese Acting, Street Scene, and Short Organum. There were also some articles discussing Brecht's drama and theory (Hsia 1983, 13). That Huang's talk, however, had little immediate impact on spoken drama can be seen in the ensuing activities after the Canton forum. Most of the plays that were developed in

the following years remained in the style of "pseudo-realism." The Young Generation (nianqingde yidai by Chen Yun) and Never Forget (qianwen boyao wangji by Cong Shen), two plays promoted by the government, were produced nationwide in hundreds of theatres for millions of people, and are the typical combination of artistic conservatism in form and political radicalism in content. The former promoted the Communist Party's policy of sending urban young people to the countryside "for the revolutionary cause." The latter illustrated Mao's teaching of the class struggle with the story of a bourgeois mother-in-law encouraging her son-in-law "to moonlight" for extra money and thereby jeopardizing his work at the factory. These propagandist plays are both presented in a family setting in four acts--proletarian livingroom dramas, even though most Chinese families had no livingrooms at that time. Young Generation was presented at the East China Spoken Drama Learning Festival in Shanghai from December 1963 to January 1964 as a "model"--an example for all to follow. At this festival thirteen full-length plays and seven one-act plays, all written in 1963 on contemporary subjects in the similar mode, were staged by nineteen spoken drama companies from various provinces, cities, and units of the armed forces in the East China region (Tung 8). Of all the productions only Huang's Surging Ahead (jiliou yongjing) achieved any significant breakthrough in staging.

Surging Ahead struck people at the Festival as a type of spoken drama different from Young Generation (and other pseudo-realistic plays). This play in three acts and fourteen scenes is centered on the conflict between leaders of a steel plant over how to produce better steel. The protagonist, Wang Gang, a deputy director of the plant, supports new experiments and is opposed by the conservative director. The confrontations do not take place in office settings all the time--as do many such Chinese plays--but move in and out of the plant at eight different locales. The outdoor scenes need no walls, yet Huang also managed to stage a few indoor scenes without walls. Continuing with his experiments on breaking the fourth wall, Huang made clear to his designer Cui Kedi that in this production the one remaining wall used to suggest a room, which had been utilized in his previous productions, should also be eliminated (Cui Kedi 27). When Cui carried out Huang's idea, the result surprised as well as pleased the designer himself. Once again, his understanding of Brechtian techniques helped Huang achieve his goal. In an office scene, while the Party Secretary Fang Hua contemplates the projected experiments, Huang used a slide projection of a huge painting by Wang Gang on a screen. It not only replaced the last wall, but highlighted the mood and the theme--there were rafters braving ahead in surging torrents in the painting.

To hold all the scattered scenes together, to avoid

laborious transitions and to focus the audience's attention on specific events, Huang used a narrator who stood beyond the proscenium to talk directly to the audience. A scrim at the proscenium arch drew the line between the narrator and the story even more clearly. The use of the narrator differed from Beijing opera's way of addressing the audience--usually executed by the characters themselves. Huang's narrator was dressed as a traditional storyteller and distanced from all the characters. Later Huang accepted some colleagues' suggestions and made the narrator a retired worker telling the story of the steel plant where he used to work, but it was still just a detached chorus role as Brecht had employed it in Caucasian Chalk Circle. Huang gave this narrator multiple functions: not only did he connect scenes, but he introduced characters and told off-stage stories. He also performed internal monologues for the characters and gave objective analyses and comments about the events and characters (Cui Kedi 28).

Generally speaking, Huang used Brechtian techniques only as he saw fit. One characteristic of Brechtian epic theatre is frequent interruption of the dramatic action for alienation effect, but the aesthetic principle adopted by Huang in this production was fluidity--scenes had to move smoothly from one to the next. Having chosen fourteen scenes and eight locales (Huang was a co-author of the script), he did not want any interruption between scenes or any gap between locales during the action. Fluidity is the

first of the four most important characteristics of Chinese traditional theatre that Huang wants to adopt. (The other three are plasticity, sculpturality and conventionality.) He was determined to apply this principle to Surging Ahead. Yet he used spoken drama's more elaborate stage mechanisms to realize this. For example, after a scene of dealing with a production accident in the plant when there needed to be a scenery change, he used the scrim. What the audience saw was one worker blowing his whistle and conducting emergency traffic while a group of firefighters rushed on and off-stage, but, in fact, they were stagehands busily changing the set. When the scrim lifted, the new scene was already in place. Huang also allowed simultaneous actions to take place in two or three locales on-stage. For example, on one side, a committee is waiting for Wang to attend an important meeting: on the other side of the stage, Wang is working with the workers in front of a burning furnace. Wang has to go through a rainstorm to come to the meeting. This is accomplished by Wang's "circling" across to the other side of the stage while the slide projection shows a few shiny raindrops falling. He gives an explosive sneeze as he comes into the office.

To allow quick and smooth transitions, Huang used simple props to suggest locations, such as, the door of a burning furnace which stands for the steel plant, and a couple of drain pipes standing for a construction site. Designer Cui says all this was influenced by traditional

Chinese theatre and the Shakespearan stage (28). While Huang wanted the scenery and props to be simple and suggestive, he demanded that hand props and stage effects be realistic. When a character crosses the stage holding an umbrella, the sound of raindrops has to be heard; when the workers are doing emergency furnace repair, some have real fire on their clothes. Whatever Huang had borrowed or invented, the production was imaginative and spectacular, definitely a sharp contrast to the many dull pseudo-realistic productions. Zhou Enlai saw it more than once and praised its "lofty ambition, novel style" (qtd. in Chen Gongming 19).

The success of Surging Ahead established that Huang had finally found the fine line between his Western-influenced ideas and the Chinese reality. By breaking out of conventions on stage, he simply expanded the possibilities of spoken drama so that it could encompass the broad range of the lives of working people--the subject the Party and the government were urging artists to portray. This logical solution to the task given to theatre artists, however, was reached by few people in China other than Huang Zuolin in the 1950s and 60s. Most limited themselves to socialist realism and realistic settings even though they were trying to depict the vast world of workers, farmers, and soldiers, and therefore, Huang could not find an ideal playwright who would not only write about working people's lives as the

Party wanted, but in the kind of "ambitious" and "novel style" he preferred.

One significant fact in Surging Ahead's success was Huang's close involvement with the creation of the script. The story was based on Hu Wanchun's novella Internal Problems (neibu wenti). And before his co-author began writing the stage adaptation, Huang described specifically and vividly to him and the stage designers how he had visualized the production. Here are some notes of stage designer Cui Kedi taken at one of the meetings with Huang:

The story-teller should be outside the proscenium. Let him have a platform, a table and a chair, and do what a pinshu story-teller does.

Let there be action on the apron. Use a scrim. Use slide projector to enlarge and project the big-character-poster and the theme painting onto the screen.

We have broken down three walls, there is still another wall. I think we can get rid of it, too.

The entire play has to flow easily. Aside from intermissions, between acts and scenes, allow only pauses, commas, no full-stops.

The existing performing space is not enough. Move outward. Japanese Kabuki's hanamichi can be used as a reference. Build platforms on stage.

Starting with the concept of xieyi¹³ theatre: starting with breaking the four walls; starting with nationalizing spoken drama, [we will] find our production style (27).

While his co-author Tong Luo began to write the script based on Huang's concept, Huang took his designers and some actors to a steel plant to find appropriate visual images and character models. Here, Huang appeared to be using the Stanislavsky method of field trip and observation at the same time that he was developing non-realistic physical staging. Huang believed that he had finally found an

exciting and officially acceptable non-realistic staging mode that was in harmony with the required realistic content.

It was with Surging Ahead that Huang started to adapt the four salient features of traditional Chinese theatre to modern spoken drama; fluidity, plasticity, sculpturality and conventionality (Huang 1979, 218). Huang believes these four features (further discussion in Chapter 5) reveal the "xieyi" nature of traditional Chinese theatre. "Xieyi" literally means "depicting meaning," commonly used to describe Chinese traditional brush painting as opposed to Western-style realistic oil painting. It is often used in China nowadays in contrast to "xieshi," literally meaning "depicting fact." It is relatively accurate to term "xieyi" non-realistic and "xieshi" realistic.

Huang wants to create a modern spoken drama in China which is "xieyi" by nature. Only realism, however, is officially acceptable, and therefore it would not be wise for him to call his theatrical ideal "non-realistic," nor would it be completely accurate. His "xieyi" remains to this day somewhat ambiguous and controversial. Huang's "xieyi" concept and the reactions to it, especially since 1978 will be analysed in Chapter 5. For now it suffices to quote Huang:

Xieshi is not naturalism; xieyi is not abstractionism. Naturalism is purely objective; abstractionism is purely subjective--both can not correctly or accurately reflect the essence of things and truth. Only xieyi concept of theatre, guided by a world view based on dialectic materialism and a

proletarian concept of art, can effectively produce on the stage works that are "on a higher level and of a greater intensity than real life, in sharper focus and more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal," works that are revolutionary, popular and nationalistic, and works that integrate revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism (1979, 221).

Even before Surging Ahead opened, the political pendulum had swung again to violence and radicalism. In September 1962 at the 10th Plenum of the Central Committee of the 8th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, the battlecry was uttered by Mao himself: "Never forget class struggle!" The 1963 Spoken Drama Learning Festival, at which Surging Ahead was presented and was far outnumbered by plays in the manner of The Younger Generation and Never Forget, was the initial display of the force in theatre of the group whose members, including Mao's wife Jiang Qing, were later to be known as the "Gang of Four" of the Cultural Revolution. The struggle for control of the theatre that followed became a vital part of the ideological and political power struggle in the ruling Communist Party. Several years later, the People's Daily 1967 New Year's Day editorial claimed that the 1963 drama "reform" was "really the beginning of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" (qtd. in Tung 9). Huang's "xieyi" theatre concept which he had started to implement with the production of Surging Ahead did not have any chance of proceeding during that period. Since 1949, Huang had not been satisfied with nor had he had true control of the content of the plays he directed, but at least he had been

courageous and ingenious enough to gain some measure of control over the forms in which the plays were presented. When the decade-long Cultural Revolution began in 1966, however, Huang lost far more than his freedom to direct plays.

CHAPTER 4

POST CULTURAL REVOLUTION

The infamous Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was a result of the complex ideological and political struggle within the ruling Communist Party. Once again, theatre was advanced to the forefront of the power struggle. The chaotic decade began with violent attacks on an historical play Hairui's Dismissal from Office (hairui ba guan) by Wu Han, deputy mayor of Beijing and an historian of the Ming Dynasty. In contemporary Chinese politics, power struggles have often been disguised and justified in terms of ideological differences which in turn have focused on literary and artistic polemics. Writers and playwrights were frequently the initial targets and victims of a political purge. The Cultural Revolution was no exception.

As the Cultural Revolution progressed, political control increasingly shifted into the hands of the Gang of Four and their associates (backed by Mao) who were largely ideologues, literary critics and, like Madam Mao Jiang Qing herself, theatrical performers. Ironically, it was this group of "literary" and "artistic" people who, among other things, virtually destroyed the Chinese theatre. Their obsessive concern about the "power of theatre" led them to seek absolute control of it. During the ten years of the

Cultural Revolution, no other works in literature and theatre were better known than the "revolutionary model theatrical works" (geming yangban xi). Though some of the model works had won a certain measure of genuine popularity, they were forced on the population at large: there were no alternatives. The "Gang of Four" and their associates caused devastating damage to the theatre not mainly by means of their model theatrical works; the real damage was caused by the banning of all other plays deemed ideologically counter-revolutionary and by the ruthless persecution of playwrights, directors, performers and other theatre professionals.

Huang Zuolin's fate during the Cultural Revolution was not dissimilar to that of other artists. He was removed from his position as president/artistic director of the Shanghai People's Art Theatre and forbidden to stage any plays. He and his family were evicted from their own house. Because of his advocacy of Brecht, who was denounced by the "Gang of Four" and their associates in Beijing and Shanghai, Huang suffered additional humiliation and punishment. Mother Courage and Her Children directed by Huang in 1959 had been attacked for the spreading of the poison of "non-resistance," for weakening the "fighting spirit" of the Chinese people. This was construed as being part of the "imperialistic plot" against China. The criticism of Mother Courage was carried out through public meetings, big-character-posters and cartoons. Brecht

was a dead foreigner, but Huang was punished for these and other "wrongdoings." He was imprisoned for three years and served six and a half years at "labor reform" (Hsia 1983, 13).

The Cultural Revolution came to an end following the death of Mao on September 9, 1976 and the fall of the "Gang of Four" a month later on October 6, 1976. The people experienced a sense of liberation, but they still suffered from a "lingering fear in their hearts" during the first two years of the post-Cultural-Revolution era. People preferred not to be reminded of the nightmare they had just experienced and concentrated on the future. This is reflected in the first post-1976 play Huang directed, New Long March: A Symphonic Poem (xinchangzheng jiaoxiangqu).

Huang was overjoyed that he was allowed to work in the theatre again. After attending the First Plenum of the Fifth People's Congress in Beijing in March 1978, he was so hopeful about the future that he was impelled to stage a production that reflected the "pulse of the time--the nation of hundreds of millions of people embarking on a New Long March" (Huang 1979, 270). After working together with a group of scriptwriters and mobilizing over three hundred performers and artists, New Long March: A Symphonic Poem came into being. The play recounted Chinese history over the past one hundred years in eight selective episodes, demonstrating that if the Chinese people could withstand

the severe tests of the past, that now under the new leadership of "brilliant" Chairman Hua Guofeng, the new Long March towards Four Modernizations could only be victorious. The last two episodes, "Reverberation in Heaven" and "Great March" were pure fantastic projections. In the former, some well-known Chinese fairy-tale characters, who inhabit the moon look down from on high at the great changes taking place on earth. In the latter, Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and Zhu De, three founding fathers of the People's Republic, greet the New Long Marchers who have come with their great achievements of Four Modernizations. When questioned about why the play did not try to show the difficulties and obstacles that the New Long March would encounter, Huang gave the following reply:

We believe that the New Long March has just put forward a first step, in the long journey, there definitely will be new "snowy mountains" and "grasslands"; but since we can not foresee what kind of "snowy mountains" and "grasslands" there will be, we should not subjectively conjecture. Then, why do we make up scenes such as "Reverberation from Heaven" and "Great March"? Our answer is: the grand blueprint of the "New Long March" must be realized, which is the common wish of a nation of hundreds and millions of people. These two episodes reflect the people's burning aspiration, which has an extremely solid base, so they are not guess work (1979, 272).

The perpetual optimist and idealist was at work again.

In the staging, however, Huang continued the experiments he had started with A Great Live Report over a quarter of a century before. In addition to singing and dancing, the characters spoke in verse which, according to Huang, created the effect of alienation and helped to break

the fourth wall (Hsia 1987, 154). A yueqin, a harp-like instrument, was used as a thread linking the eight episodes: it was passed on from one generation to the next as a witness to history. The gestures and movements were choreographed stylistically, not realistically. In the episode "Scientific Spring," a group of scientists line up on the steps forming a human ladder, at the top of which is a young science prodigy. The scientists tell the young boy to "step on our shoulders and climb to the peak." Just then, the sound of a trumpet releases a rocket with "flying towards 2000" written on it. As glorified agit-prop, the production was well received, but Huang was quite aware of its limitations, particularly in structure and characterization (1979, 276).

Towards the end of 1978, the China Youth Art Theatre in Beijing invited Huang Zuolin to serve as guest director for a production of Brecht's The Life of Galileo. The choice of play was a timely one. It had been two years since the end of the Cultural Revolution, and China had come into a new age of enlightenment. Having had some time to look back on the unprecedented national tragedy they had just survived, the people of China, especially the intellectuals and artists, had become less gullible and more critical. The nation wanted to know why the tragedy of the Cultural Revolution had happened and how the people could prevent it from happening again. Many realized that what had made the mass hysteria possible was their own unthinking blind faith

in one man and certain doctrines, and now they resented any form of indoctrination. Spoken drama artists started to question existing dramatic conventions; they found the well-established theatre of socialist realism restrictive of their creativity and not flexible enough for their artistic imagination. It was time to find alternate forms of dramatic expression and offer the audience a new theatre that would meet the need for independent active thinking. As some critics put it, China was ready for a theatre of philosophical dimensions, and Brecht became the chief source of inspiration.

The Life of Galileo was the second play by Brecht staged in China since Mother Courage. It is important to point out certain ironies related to Brecht, Huang, and about the play itself. Brecht had spent the greater part of his life in turmoil. From Germany, the birthplace of two World Wars, to his exile in the United States, he wrote many plays exposing the defects of capitalism. After he returned to East Germany to head the Berliner Ensemble, mainly subsidized by the Communist government, Brecht concentrated on directing his old plays and adapting classic plays. He did not write any plays promoting socialism or the leadership of the Communist Party under which he lived his last years. Huang Zuolin, who had started paying real attention to Brecht after 1949, really found himself in a dilemma. He wanted his theatre to show the new age in a positive light, but all of Brecht's plays

were either about oppression and exploitation or upheaval and turmoil. Especially after the painful failure of Mother Courage, all he could do was to borrow some Brechtian techniques. Ironically, however, the Cultural Revolution, which had deprived Huang of ten years of his artistic creative life, now provided him with this opportunity to direct The Life of Galileo, the time of the Cultural Revolution not being dissimilar to the time of Galileo. The Life of Galileo has its own ironic relationship with the Cultural Revolution. Adrian Hsia has an amusing account of the play's fate:

While Brecht was being attacked in big-character-posters and at "struggle" meetings during the Cultural Revolution, The Life of Galileo was in particular trouble. The unfortunate Brecht and Galileo had not known that the sun would be used by the radicals as an exclusive symbol for Mao. How dare Brecht let Galileo aim at the sun with his telescope like a cannon. Does Brecht's Galileo want to shoot the sun down? How dare he discover that the sun has black spots with his telescope? He is black-washing the sun, insinuating that the sun has defects,...and so on and so forth....And what is more, Brecht created an anti-hero. During the "Cultural Revolution", a hero was not allowed to have any short-comings.¹

Ding Yangzhong, a theatre professor and director who once trained at the Berliner Ensemble under Helene Weigel, translated The Life of Galileo in 1972 while doing "labor reform". He used the paper provided for his "self-criticism" to translate the play which gave him "consolation and encouragement" (Hsia 1983, 14).

When the play was staged by the China Youth Art Theatre in Beijing in 1979 under the direction of Huang Zuolin and

Chen Yong, it was a great success. The trauma of the Cultural Revolution was still fresh in people's minds and they could easily identify with the fate of the great scientist. Yet Galileo was not the kind of hero the Chinese audience had been used to seeing on stage; he was courage, cowardice, dedication, cunning and treachery all rolled into one. To use Huang's own words, Galileo in the play was at the same time "a great scientist in search of truth and the death-fearing 'haggler' in search of comfort."² The portrayal of a dialectic hero did not allow the audience to be completely sentimental, but forced them to see in his life the injustice of the world and the weakness of man.

When Huang was invited to go to Beijing to direct The Life of Galileo, people were more than a little concerned, remembering what had happened to Mother Courage. Even his own children said apprehensively: "Our 'Father Courage' is going to tackle Brecht again" (Li Jiayao 31). The Shanghai Youth Spoken Drama Troupe sent its top performer Li Jiayao to Beijing to observe the creative process employed for the production. At the beginning, faced with the unusually long and difficult translation of The Life of Galileo, Li could not understand why a director of Huang's stature and reputation would risk the possibility of repeating the most painful production failure of his career. Huang did not answer his question directly, but simply said to Li, using a line from The Life of Galileo: "My task is not to prove that I have always been right, but to find out for myself

if I am right or not" (Li Jiayao 31).

Learning from the lessons of Mother Courage, Huang did not want to be rushed with the production of The Life of Galileo. He and co-director Chen Yong took four months to get the production ready. First they helped the crew and the cast to understand Galileo's life and times, and to familiarize themselves with the status of science and the power of the Church. In addition to attending scholarly lectures, the whole theatre visited the Beijing Planetarium to learn about Aristotelian theory and the Copernican system. They even attended a Catholic mass at a local cathedral that had just re-opened. They viewed films available in Beijing about Medieval and Renaissance Europe and studied copies of books and magazines that contained reproductions of European architecture, painting, sculpture and costume.

Huang and Chen spent much time on the script itself. To make sure that the Chinese translation of the play was accurate, Huang himself checked it against an English version; he had Chen check it against a Russian version and had a German teacher check it against the German original. Next, he cut the script, the cutting based on two practical concerns. First, most people in Beijing simply do not come to a show if it does not conclude before they can catch their last bus home. (In Beijing in 1979, the buses stopped running at around 11 at night.) Second, to ensure that the audience understood and enjoyed the play it was necessary

to eliminate unfamiliar terms and obscure references concerning astronomy, mathematics, physics, theology, philosophy and customs of the 17th century Italian court and religious life. Numerous minor cuts were made throughout the play and scenes 5, 8 and 15 of the original version were completely omitted. The final stage version lasted three hours, still longer than what the audience was used to, but there was time left to catch the last bus (Hsia 1983, 15). Huang also worked with the actors on the language of the script, choosing idioms and sentence patterns that would sound natural to the Chinese ear and would be easy to follow.

While the script was shortened, two scenes were actually lengthened in performance. The ballroom dance in Scene Six and the street carnival in Scene Eight were played much more extravagantly than Brecht had originally intended. This was done to make the production more appealing and attractive to the audience. Chen saw the Berliner Ensemble's production of The Life of Galileo in Moscow while she was a student there in the 1950s; she remembered it as being "quite depressing."³ Dancing and singing represented something exotic and out-of-the-ordinary for the audience whose daily life was mostly colorless and boring. The actors themselves also expressed the desire to expand the dance sequences. Another major change was the expansion of the roles of the ballad singer and his wife. The couple appears only in the

carnival scene in the original script, but Huang turned them into singing narrators throughout the play, replacing the children's choir that Brecht always used. They appear before each scene, sometimes remaining on the stage as objective observers, sometimes taking an active part in the action. About this change, Huang explains:

Using church children's choir throughout the play, a form commonly used in praise of the divinity, to express the anti-divinity content is shocking and provocative in the West where people are familiar with church life. This can create an "alienation effect." Brecht himself used this method. In today's China, however, the audience does not know what a church choir is, even though we have recently restored church activities, but only a very small number of people go to church on Sundays. That is why we forego the traditional treatment, instead using the people's representatives--the ballad singers to thread the entire play (qtd. in Li Jiayao 33).

Huang has always worked closely with his stage designers. With The Life of Galileo, he and the stage designer Xue Dianjie collaborated very successfully. Xue studied in Dresden in the 1950s, and he was familiar with Brecht's ideas and Brecht's interest in Chinese traditional theatre. With The Life of Galileo, Xue consciously applied traditional Chinese scenic techniques. On both sides of the stage two walls were painted on cloth and supported by bamboo poles. Holes were cut on the cloth-walls to represent doors and windows. Another cloth-wall ran across the back of the stage with the galaxy roughly sketched onto it. All these three walls remained on stage throughout the entire play. On the back wall, however, hung a smaller cloth, the painting on which

changed according to the theme of each new scene. For instance, in Scene One the painting showed the Copernican solar system; in Scene Two Galileo passed off the new Dutch telescope to the Senate as his invention, the painting showing warships and cannons; in Scene Three, the painting showed a valley on the moon and the four new stars around the Jupiter that Galileo had just discovered. The mode of lighting was another element borrowed from Chinese traditional theatre. Only plain lighting was used for day or night, for a brightly lit palace hall or a dimly lit small room. This was done to break any realistic illusion and to create a sense of "alienation" (Hsia 1983, 15).

The "alienation effect" was also apparent at several other points in the production. Before the ballroom dance scene, the half-curtain came down following the previous scene. The audience saw projected subtitles forecasting the next scene, and their attention was also caught by performers dressed as 17th-century Italian aristocrats busily changing the set. Then the anachronistic minuet music chosen by Huang started, and as the half curtain was lifted the performers jumped right into their roles as aristocrats doing their stately dance.

The scene in which the Pope was being robed for the conclave he was about to attend was also very effective. Huang had the Pope enter the stage in his shorts; he feels an itch when bitten by a mosquito, and he asks a monk to scratch it for him. But as one piece of grandiose vestment

after another is put on him, he changes from a plain sympathetic human being who refuses to subject Galileo to brutality to a cruel demi-god who will show Galileo the instruments of torture.

In the last scene Galileo condemns his own betrayal even though his student Andrea has forgiven him. During rehearsals, Du Peng who played Galileo at first played this section very solemnly. It was moving, but Huang wanted something more. He suggested to Du that after confessing to Andrea: "I recanted because I was afraid of physical pain" and saying with self reproach "...Do you eat fish? I've got fish. What stinks is not fish but me", that he first try to suppress his sob, then burst into uncontrollable crying, then turn tears into a little mocking chuckle, finally end with a big belly laugh. Huang showed Du how all this was to be done, and Du, a very experienced actor, delivered one of the best performances of his life--"subtly and movingly expressing the complicated emotions of the characters." Du calls it "half Stanislavsky, half Brecht" (Li Jiayao 35).

"Half Stanislavsky, half Brecht" was precisely the acting style Huang wanted to achieve with the production. According to Huang, what really makes Brechtian theatre different from conventional realistic theatre is the dramatic structure and stage design; "as far as acting goes, there is not that big a difference between his method and what we are familiar with" (qtd. in Li Jiayao 32). Huang supported his opinion by citing the fact that

Brecht's own wife Helene Weigel's acting style was not that much different from Stanislavsky's, that Brecht never had his own acting school and used actors from diverse backgrounds, and that in his later years Brecht hardly used the term "alienation effect" while directing rehearsals. All this was to dispell the myth that Brechtian acting was "bizarre" and to reduce the actors' nervousness. The episodic structure of Brechtian drama, however, does affect the actors' acting style. Huang used Brecht's "street scene" example to help the actors understand their role as witness-narrator- character of an historical event.⁴ Huang called an earlier stage of rehearsals "telling stories."

His co-director Chen explained:

Why do we need to do story-telling? Because the preparatory work around the table for this play is different from that is required by Stanislavsky system. According to Brecht, [we should] first study the lines, study the play's social significance and understand the author's intention. Brecht's epic drama requires that we understand how many stages there are in each scene, what story each stage tries to tell, what the characters we play do in each stage of the story, what [our] positions are. Unlike in the past that [we always] started with understanding the characters, we require ourselves to know what we should do; it is through the events to understand the characters.⁵

Huang narrated the story to the cast in easy to remember succinct couplets while Chen told the same story in simple and clear narratives. Here are some examples:

Huang (I,i):
Humanism and astronomy complement one another;
The young of new age listen to the manifesto.

Chen (I,i):
In 1609, Galileo explains to young Andrea, who later
becomes his assistant, the Copernican theory. He predicts

its great historic significance in astronomy.

Huang (VII):

Galileo expells worries and doubts;
Little Monk joins the rank of new science.

Chen (VII):

1. Little Monk comes to visit Galileo after the Church decree. He pours out the conflicts he experienced inside, and decides to give up astrophysics. 2. Galileo discusses the social causes that force astrophysicists to abandon their studies, pointing out that keeping the truth from the people is a crime. 3. Galileo shows and explains to the Little Monk a manuscript about the reasons behind the ocean's ebbs and flows, getting him interested to continue scientific research.⁶

It was hoped that the above procedure would help the actors adjust to the narrative nature of Brechtian drama and strike a balance between emotion and objectivity in acting. A "through line of thought" as opposed to a "through line of action" was sought: "breaking the authority of divinity, establishing the dignity of humanity" (Li Jiayao 33). Huang was aware that when Brecht had revised the play in the mid-1940s, he had been influenced by the fact that the atomic age had made its debut at Hiroshima. Huang commented to an American graduate student in an interview:

When The Life of Galileo was produced in the U.S. in 1946, they emphasized the anti-nuclear-war theme. It was because the atom bomb had just been dropped in Hiroshima, and the people were terrified by it psychologically. Their theme was against scientific development, and calling for scientists' conscience. Our production's theme is not as such. Our Four Modernizations need scientific development. We are not against science, we are against feudalistic rule. Our production emphasizes the opposition against the rule of feudalism, religion and church. Religious Inquisition persecuted and imprisoned scientists; it is just the same as our reality a few years back when the "Gang of Four" locked up our scientists and intellectuals.⁷

Strictly speaking, Huang's The Life of Galileo was

not a pure Brechtian production. A number of concessions and modifications were made, because the actors needed more familiarity with Brechtian drama, and also because the audience of Chinese spoken drama, like any audience of a popular art form, needed time to get used to Brecht's didactic theatre. A pure Brechtian production would be too drastic a change for most people and was not the intention of the directors anyway. Huang later said humorously:

My direction, in 1959, of Mother Courage and Her Children slavishly followed Brecht's handbook of direction to let Chinese audiences see authentic Brechtian drama. Strangely enough, that formidable woman did not demand a direction fee! Perhaps she had heard there were only a few stray cats making up the audience, scant profit to skim the cream from! In my 1979 direction of The Life of Galileo I successfully pursued my own method, winning appreciation from a diverse audience. The Berliner Ensemble, for example, consistently uses darkness and drabness in its performance of Galileo, while I prefer rich, sumptuous colors--this is after all the key to the Italian Renaissance. Similarly for the chorus Brecht used a children's choir, while we in contrast have a husband and a wife duet, simultaneously singing and dancing, sometimes on the stage apron, sometimes amongst action, to represent the attitude of the people of that time towards scientists. Four years ago at a conference, experts watching a video tape of my play criticized it as not Brechtian! For a while I was dispirited, but now I understand that those critics belonged to the "orthodox" faction, while I am of the heterodox (1988, 163).

The response to The Life Of Galileo was very enthusiastic. All the major newspapers in Beijing and Shanghai reported on the production. Huang was very pleased with the way the production was received. In an article he wrote in 1979 for a Hong Kong based publication Eastern Horizon, he commented that "the Chinese audience received

the play full-heartedly, attentively and intelligently." After having played 80 performances to full houses in a theatre with a 1,000 seating capacity, The Life of Galileo is still listed in the repertoire of the China Youth Art Theatre.⁸

The significance of the successful production of The Life of Galileo is not that a play by Brecht was performed in China, but that it shook the foundations of socialist realism and served as a forerunner for a new Chinese spoken drama. Since the production of The Life of Galileo, interest in Brecht has continued to grow. Scholars have written in-depth studies of Brecht's dramatic and theoretical works; translators have translated more works by and about Brecht; playwrights have written plays that distinctly bear Brechtian characteristics; directors, actors, and the audiences of spoken drama have become more and more receptive towards the concept of epic theatre, though still in a special Chinese sense. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Since The Life of Galileo Huang has not directed any other play by Brecht. For him as well as for a whole generation of Chinese theatre artists inspired by him, doing Brechtian drama is never the end; what he wants is "to combine the strength of Brechtian drama and the strength of Chinese traditional performing arts, thus creating a new drama that both reflect the spirit of our time and the characteristics of our nation" (Limu 31). With

the success of Galileo behind him, Huang turned to direct and help develop new plays and productions using some of the Brechtian ideas as well as other approaches and techniques.

1983 saw another landmark production by Huang, Life, Love, Liberty (shengming, aiqing, ziyou by Luo Guoxian).

The play

is based on the life and death of Yingfu, a young revolutionary poet killed in the 1930s by the Nationalist Government. The title of the play was chosen because Yingfu had translated and made very famous in China a Hungarian poem that reads:

Life is precious,
More valuable is love;
But for liberty,
I will let go both of the above.

When the playwright told him about his intention to write a play about Yingfu, Huang gave his support and expressed the belief that the play should integrate realism and romanticism. Huang believed that a play about an historical figure who was also a poet, was a very good opportunity to experiment with shishi ju, literally, history and poetry play, his new "epic drama", since "history is realistic and poetry romantic" (1984a, 18). He suggested that the playwright create a poetic milieu and incorporate as much Yingfu's poetry into the script as possible (1984b, 53-54). Some critics call Life, Love, Liberty a new development from Brecht's epic theatre and a successful experiment of

"Chinese style epic drama," saying it offered a more concrete example of the kind of new spoken drama Huang had been trying to create (Limu 31).

Unlike conventional drama which relies on an intriguing story, Brechtian epic drama has greater spatial and temporal flexibility, similar to the kind of narrative found in epic poems, or even history. The overall structure of Life, Love, Liberty follows such a pattern: the time extends from when Yingfu was seventeen till his death four years later; the locations range from his hometown in Zhejiang to his prison cell in Shanghai. The play follows the chronology of events, hardly using any of the lengthy exposition sometimes found in conventional drama.

Information on historical background is provided by footage of documentary films. The "producer" who appears in the prologue stresses to the audience the narrative nature of the play. Aside from these similarities to Brechtian epic drama, however, the most important characteristic of Life, Love, Liberty is the prominence of poetry. In other words, in the framework of history, poetry plays an essential role. If Brechtian epic drama leans towards manifesting disturbing grim facts, this "Chinese style epic drama" leans towards expressing poetic passion; while the main characters in the former often refract the intellect of a philosopher, the main character in the latter is himself a poet.

Throughout the play, many of Yingfu's lines are his own

poems, establishing the poetic tone of the production. The poems were not written according to the strict rules of Chinese classic poetry, they employed the then new-born vernacular form--"the pulse of the time, the breath of people's life; straightforward with no superficial contrivances; powerful rhythms and natural sounds" When the poems are rendered appropriately in the production, they help to "create a beautiful poetic milieu soaring above the darkness, which people do not find at all abrupt but only natural to the situation" (Limu 32). Here are two examples. In Scene Five, "Wanderer's Short Song", Yingfu holds an abandoned orphan in his arms and starts to compose a poem: "Who is it makes my heart tremble? Around us is silence, like iron. Who is it makes my heart weep?...With fire and force, I'll ignite the light of life...." As Yingfu recites the poem, the audience is caught up in the natural rhythm and emotion.⁹ Another poetic and moving instance occurs in the last scene where Yingfu is to be executed by a firing squad. His elder brother, a high-ranking officer in the Nationalist government who has previously had Yingfu released on bail, attempts to make him recant using brotherly persuasion one last time. Recognizing the complexity and density of emotion at the moment, Huang, instead of trying to create a pseudo-realistic scene between two brothers who love each other dearly but who are enemies committed to different camps, allows Yingfu to speak to his brother by means of his famous long poem "Good-bye,

Brother." The poem stating Yingfu's longings and ideals appears to be far more fitting for the moment before he dies as a martyr than prosaic realistic dialogue between the two brothers might be.

Language is only one poetic aspect of Life, Love, Liberty. Poetic gesture and poetic structure are also characteristic of the production. Many details are exaggerated, more intense than in real life; in other words, more poetic. For instance, the few scenes between Yingfu and his childhood sweetheart Mei impress the audience deeply not because of realistic plot development but because of poetic emotional highlight: Yingfu presents a green leaf to Mei to show his affection; they share a long embrace in public to divert the polices' suspicion that they are the ones responsible for distributing revolutionary leaflets in the vicinity; Yingfu now carries Mei's corpse covered by a red flag while slowly crossing the stage. Yingfu's relationship with the romantic young student Angel is also depicted in a poetic rather than a realistic manner.

According to Huang's overall artistic conception, the entire production was to achieve a harmonious unity between historical narrative and poetic lyricism (1984b, 54). This was achieved in two ways. First, the poems by Yingfu provide not only true historical documents but also a lyrical motif. Second, documentary footage shown between scenes not only present objective historical background

but sometimes help to reflect the main characters' subjective state of mind. A good example of where realistic documentary and poetic gesture are united is in Scene Six, "Romantic Age": at the famous Shanghai waterfront, Yingfu is reciting his own poetry and throwing leaflets, while on the screen behind him the documentary is showing thousands of leaflets descending from the sky like snowflakes. Here, history and poetry blend. Without intriguing plot complications at this point, nevertheless, a dramatic/poetic climax is reached. One critic asked:

Is it the power of history or power of poetry? Some people may say it is the effect of film. It is partially true, but it is more due to the enchantment of Comrade Zuolin's theatrical ideal--integrating history and poetry. Film as a theatrical device in Brecht's hands is initially used to create the alienation effect by interrupting dramatic action, which is very difficult for the audience of this country to adjust to. What we are more interested is harmony and unity, "together" not "apart". Comrade Zuolin's conception is based on our nation's special interest, and it is successful. What makes us feel not completely satisfied is that there are not enough scenes like Scene Six. Some segments of film are not as closely related to the dramatic situation, sometimes they create a feeling of alienation. That is to say, Comrade Zuolin's fascinating overall conception has not yet been completely realized (Limu 33).

This critic's view represents the overall response from theatre people as well as the audience. Huang's following statement also indicates that harmony, not discord, is significant in his theatre aesthetics:

This play about Yingfu, as some audience members say, has Brecht, Stanislavsky, traditional opera, film... is a big mixed dish. That's precisely right, it's a mixed dish. As the director-in-chief, my responsibility is to harmonize diverse ingredients into a unified "dish" and present it to the audience.

We cream the top of various -isms (1984b, 53).

While directing Life, Love, Liberty, Huang indicated that it would be his last directorial project. His age and health were making it increasingly hard for him to maintain the active life of a director. As a matter of fact, during the rehearsals of an earlier production, Towering Mount Kunlun (weiwei kunlun, 1981), most of his directorial work was conducted from a hospital bed (Yao 1982). He wanted to devote more time to reading and writing, and to serve as an artistic advisor from time to time. Aside from directing Cao Yu's stage version of Family in 1985 and bringing it to Japan on a good-will cultural tour, a request he could not very well decline, Huang refrained from directing for four years. In 1985, Huang relinquished his position as president of the Shanghai People's Art Theatre to Sha Yexin, a controversial playwright. That is why people were pleasantly surprised when on July 1, 1987 China Dream, co-directed by Huang and two younger directors, opened at Shanghai Art Theatre.

China Dream was written by Sun Huizu and Fei Chunfang¹⁰, two young Chinese playwrights studying in New York. It tells the simple love story of Mingming, a Chinese actress turned restaurant owner in America, and John Hodges, an American lawyer with a doctorate in Chinese philosophy. It is a Pirandellian play-within-a-play. In the prologue the audience is told that the entire performance has been arranged by John to convince Mingming to return

to acting. The following eight scenes, linked by Brechtian-style narrative, are supposed to be improvised by herself and John who plays various male characters in her life, all based on Mingming's experience and dreams. Mingming is a modern heroine: independent, determined, and sexy. In China, this beautiful mixed-blood daughter of high-level scientists suffers a mandatory relocation to a military farm where she meets a raftsmen, Chiang, her first love, before rising to fame as an actress and singer after the Cultural Revolution. In America, she is disheartened about her future as an actress, and turns to success in business. Mingming is both the here-and-now Chinese-American woman who refuses to accept stereotypical roles in American movies and the woman who cannot stop dreaming about her life in China. John dreams of an ancient China and the sages, describing himself best through the poetic language of Chuang's Tzu's butterfly dream: is it the lawyer dreaming of becoming a carefree butterfly or the butterfly dreaming that he is John Hodges. The third leg of the "love-triangle" is Zhiqiang [Chiang], whose drowning haunts Mingming's dreams. He becomes symbolic of both a past in China to which she can never return and the present struggle in China, as it develops from an agricultural nation to an industrial one. The play does not follow a linear structure: the first and the last scenes are set in John's canoe club where he and Mingming spend many of their weekends. The second and seventh scenes are set in China,

one flashback, one dream. The four middle scenes capture the four stages of Mingming's American experience. The script calls for a bare stage, indicates the need for mime and dance-like movements, and provides freedom and challenge to the director and actors.

Huang was given the play to read in its original English version by Sha Yexin, the new president of Shanghai People's Art Theatre, who had just returned from his visit to the United States in January 1987. Huang enjoyed the play so much that he called Sha immediately and expressed his desire to come out of "retirement" to direct it himself. Huang's enthusiasm was contagious; before they had a chance to read a Chinese translation of the script, the leading members of the Shanghai People's Art Theatre agreed to mount China Dream right away with Huang at the helm.

China Dream fascinated Huang for several reasons. First, the subject concerns delicate interactions between Chinese and western cultures which have been a life-long interest. His very first theatre piece was a short one-act play entitled West-East (see Chapter 1), but Huang had not directed a play with such subject matter again until China Dream, and this mainly because of political sensitivity. Yet Huang's concern with this issue had grown stronger in the 1980s because of the increasing contact the Chinese had had with the west and the rest of the world. He also felt the urge to say something as "cultural shock becomes the hottest issue in the intellectual circles of

our country"¹¹. The production of China Dream provided just such an opportunity. Second, as regards the first issue, a scene in the play dealing with nostalgic feelings towards an old China in a time of modernization particularly touched him. Huang recalled a real life event 37 years earlier:

There was a debate soon after the Liberation over the three gates in front of the Tien'anmen. Because they cause traffic congestion, Premier Zhou proposed to tear them down; but architects Liang Sichen and Lin Huiying thought it would be a shame because tearing the gates down would destroy the overall artistic design. At the end Premier Zhou tried to persuade Liang and Lin with the fact that when the parade goes through these gates, the national flag had to be lowered in order to pass (how could the dignified five-star-national flag lower her head!), only then the couple consented with tears in their eyes.¹²

Third, the play's protagonist is an actress trained in traditional theatre and it calls for a mise-en-scene akin to traditional song-dance drama. This intrigued Huang. He wanted to experiment with spoken drama along with song-dance drama techniques, even song-dance drama performers. As soon as he had decided to direct China Dream, his first thought was to invite a well-known Beijing opera actress, Hu Zhifeng, to play Mingming.

The translation/adaptation of the play for the Chinese stage was completed by the playwrights in two weeks at the urgent request of both Huang and Sha. Knowing Huang's preference for poetic language, the playwrights versified the flashback and dream scenes as much as they could. They suggested to Huang the addition of another actor to reduce

the load of the one actor who had to play all six male roles. Huang, however, insisted on the original two-member cast. It seemed to him that this was more theatrically exciting. Earlier, in his acting studios in the 50s and 60s, Huang had experimented having two or three actors create multi-character plays, but Soviet experts did not like the idea, and then the Cultural Revolution ended the project (Huang 1989, 5).

Huang knew this was a difficult production to mount--two performers in seven roles doing a full length play with song, dance and dialogue on a basic bare stage--almost unprecedented in Chinese spoken drama. From the planning stage to the opening night, the project took almost six months to prepare, longer than Huang had initially expected. There were problems in casting this abnormal spoken drama. His idea to cast the famous Beijing Opera actress fell through due to her age and busy schedule. Two other female candidates also became unavailable at the last minute. Finally, the casting was completed. Xi Meijuan and Zhou Yemang were good performers, but neither seemed ideal to Huang for this production. He had to retrain them and bring out their potential in order to meet the demands of the play.

Soon, a unique team was formed. As several newspapers reported in a half-joking way, the production team consisted of two actors, but five "directors." Among the five "directors," Huang was undoubtedly the chief; Chen

Tijiang, a middle-aged resident director and Public Relations person, mainly functioned as a coordinator of the production, also coping with government relations and news media; Hu Xuehua, a 25-year-old young director, spent most of his time coaching the actors and executing Huang's mise-en-scene. Huang and Hu differ in age by more than half a century, but they managed to complement each other artistically. During a newspaper interview, Hu told the reporter that his was a golden opportunity to work on the first Chinese play subtitled xieyi drama under Huang's supervision (qtd. in Li Kuinan 2). The other two directors were movement coach/choreographers (in Chinese their titles were "eukinetic directors"). Eukinetics, or youdong, meaning beautified movements in Chinese, is an applied system of controlled body movement developed by the German dancer Kurt Jooss to enlarge a dancer's potential for expression. Huang studied it with Kurt Jooss in England in 1936 but had never used the term to describe any of his previous work until he took on China Dream (Huang 1990, 182). Huang's eukinetics, however, mainly inspired by Chinese song-dance drama's conventional stage codes, is a codified movement system bearing certain resemblance to Grotowski's acting training techniques, which Huang and his wife Danni had adapted in a special acting workshop in 1980. One of the two eukinetic directors, Ding Zhengyi, was trained in that workshop, the other, Yuan Guoying, was a renowned choreographer and the head of the Shanghai Ballet

Troupe. As Huang had wished, the playwrights used more verse in the Chinese version, especially in the two flashback and dream scenes. He also wanted to see more poetic movement on stage.

While the two eukinetics directors were coaching the actors on poetic movements, Huang, his two co-directors, and the stage designer, Mo Shaojinag, concentrated on a directorial concept for the set. They decided that the concept must be simple--not literally a bare stage, but rather some archetypal Chinese symbol, having the potential to indicate different places in China and America, and flowing without abrupt changes of set, and providing a flexible platform for the two actors' eukinetic stage movements.

Inspired by Huang's desire for Chinese style xieyi imagery (see discussion in Chapter 5) and for philosophical depth in theatre, Mo dug deeply into the play and traditional Chinese philosophy in search of a unique image to unite the eight diverse scenes. He wrote:

Although on the surface level the play is framed as a love story and personal experiences of two young people from different societies, on a deeper level it implies some profound criticism of the alienating reality and ardent longing for a beautiful life..., mankind transcending itself, regaining spiritual freedom... Therefore the stage design should present a vast and ethereal space that flows boundlessly (13).

For this seemingly abstract idea, Mo used a geometrical shape, the circle, which ancient Chinese philosophers often infused with profound meanings. Mo Shaojiang explained:

In I Ching the circle symbolizes endless movement. [The two Chinese words expanded from the word "circle"] "reunion" and "perfect" are almost synonyms of "beauty." Chuang Tzu says: "The axle gets into the circle, so that it can deal with endless changes." This idea just fits into the play's philosophical theme on Taoism. After we found the circle to be our stage's central image, the concrete set was gradually visualised: a circular platform slightly raked towards the audience at center stage and an identical circular hole in the middle of [the dark] cyclorama (14).

If Mo found beauty, simplicity, and philosophical profundity in this basic set, Huang as director gave it more tangible meaning, bringing together the abstract set and the two flesh-and-blood young people's personal stories. The first and last scenes are set in a canoe club: the circular platform, covered by some semi-glossy material, becomes the lake while the background circle resembles a huge sun. In Scenes 2 and 7, the platform is either the river on which rafting is presented in dance-like movement or the river bank. In the night scene the circle on the cyclorama becomes a full moon: Mingming sings a folk song referring to her late lover as "like the moon walking in the sky." In a bar scene, it becomes a window and the platform a table, Mingming and John sitting face-to-face across the platform. Throughout the play, it is also a screen for the projected dreams of Mingming who is below on the more earthly platform.

Using these twin circles on stage, Huang and Mo added other things in different scenes, the most important, the versatile white elastic strings and ropes. In the carefree Scene 1, two ropes fall from the flies forming a swing for

Mingming and John. "The swing" is also used as car seats in a transitional driving scene added by the directors. In Scene 6 where Mingming and John are having a long heart to heart talk in a bar, six white elastic cords are positioned on each side of the stage. The actors stretch and manipulate these cords in different ways composing various tableaux while talking, thus avoiding a naturalistic conversation. The two groups of cords are symmetrically tilted towards the center, thick strokes forming the Chinese word Man or Humanity. As Mo pointed out, the "net of ropes" makes the overall picture suggest a "bewildering atmosphere" (15), very appropriate to the scene.

The sets offered opportunities for the actors to utilize the eukinetics. Eukinetics were used not just for the sake of beauty, but offered a vigorous and effective way of showing the characters' feelings and the play's meanings. Huang said:

In order to express these subtle feelings we had to resort to the Stanislavsky system and his belief in empathy and introspection. But the inner world must not be "pocketed," it has to be externalized, so at the same time we turned to Brecht's Verfremdungseffekt, so that the audience may keep the presence of mind to make out what the play is about. There is another way, however, far more expressive than either of the methods prescribed by these two masters, and that is the traditional Chinese theatre technique... (1990, 182).

In China Dream Huang did not use traditional Chinese stage convention which he says "consists of an extremely rigid set of clichés if poorly acted." Another reason Huang did not copy the old convention was that "traditional

Chinese actors are trained from a very young age--at ten--and undergo eight years of austere discipline, while our spoken drama actors are not trained until after secondary school at the age of eighteen, and then for only four years. In China Dream, therefore, I adopted another technique - eukinetics [sic].... In eukinetics, every part of the human body is to speak, not merely the tongue. The movement should be central, from the heart, rather than from the limbs, from the periphery" (1990, 182).

The idea of eukinetics had been tried incidentally by Huang in some of his previous work, but he had never formally used this term in any early productions nor attempted to apply it in an entire production. There was no set of conventions as in Beijing opera, and every movement had to be choreographed originally. Choreographers and directors had to analyze the script, visualize the scene, and work with the actors throughout the rehearsal period. In order to save time and energy, Huang started his rehearsals in the living-room of his own house--an old custom he and his Bitter Toilers' colleagues had established when they did not have adequate rehearsal space. This time, however, Huang's living-room, in which casts of ten had rehearsed, was inadequate for the cast of two. This was not just because there were "five directors" working with two actors, but, more importantly, the play was not set in a living-room. The mise-en-scene was envisioned around the uniquely raked platform set, and most

scenes could not be rehearsed on the living-room floor without creating serious problems for future transfer to the actual set. Soon, they conducted rehearsals on the set in the theatre.

After more than three months of rehearsals, for the very first time, on July 1, 1987, the curious audience at the Shanghai Art Theatre saw the words xieyi and eukinetics printed on the program and, starting a few minutes later, they saw a performance that illustrated the meaning of these exciting yet often enigmatic words.

The opening scene was generally realistically acted, even though the fourth wall was broken by having the performers talking to the audience. Ironically, the first and the last scenes, which involved actors addressing the audience, were the only two truly realistic scenes. Mingming and John argued naturally in front of a supposed audience of invited guests who hopefully might help to settle the argument--should Mingming return to acting or continue to run the restaurant. Once the make-believe play-within-a-play began, Mingming and John changed their behavior mode almost entirely. In Scene 1, the mimicking of paddling in a model canoe was not presented as mechanical imitation but became a stylized mockery of John's lifestyle as an "unnatural" naturalist. The actors used many additional broad movements not anticipated by the playwrights. While telling Chuang Tzu's two stories, John's player, Zhou deftly used his body on the raked platform to

illustrate the stories about a man running to his death in the hope of escaping his own shadow, and another man dreaming of becoming a butterfly. This not only enhanced the visual pleasure to be derived from the simple philosophical stories, but helped to establish John's character as an ardent if somewhat shallow and showy follower of ancient Chinese philosophy.

Without curtain or set change but with a change of music tone, Scene 2 took the audience back to China during the Cultural Revolution. An army uniform, which was extremely popular then, was worn by Mingming. The three costumers helped to change Mingming's costume in a few seconds, and Scene 1, set on a calm pond in America, moved to Mingming's dream placed on a swift river in China just as Mingming said "All waters are connected." Huang described this smooth transition with a Chinese proverb, "cloud floating and water flowing." This scene was literally about water flowing and rafts floating on the water. The rafting might have been a real dance, but Huang used eukinetic movements somewhat between dance and naturalistic action. The most striking eukinetic movement was of Zhiqiang's rafting silhouette as seen through the moon like circle. This very simple but moving image occurred several times in the play, becoming a symbol of Mingming's China dream. This was most vivid, after she sang her favorite song about a lover "like the moon walking in the sky" in memory of Zhiqiang who was drowned while

helping her in the storm.

In the following American scenes Huang's eukinetics again made several difficult scenes particularly fascinating. In the house of Mingming's grandfather, who had just brought her to America, Mingming was to meet many guests. In the English script it was suggested that the actress greet the real audience as the guests. Huang had a 730-seat theatre--the smallest he could find in Shanghai at the time. The proscenium stage and the audience were separated by an orchestre pit. Grandfather's address to the audience/party guests was followed by the introduction of Mingming to each of the invisible guests. Handshaking and hugging were mimed, going faster and faster, becoming more and more exaggerated, and ending finally with Mingming's back to the audience, her own arms and hands over her shoulders looking as if the guests were hugging and caressing her. This comic business made the audience burst into laughter. In the script, a young guest, Mark, invites Mingming to see a movie, and requests a screen on which to show parts of the Tarzan story. Huang, however, believed that a real movie would be stylistically incongruous, and decided to use mime--eukinetics again--to create the scene. Mark's ape-like mimicking of Tarzan when he is brought back to civilization by his grandfather not only helps to convey the story to the audience but so irritates Mingming that she leaves. The restaurant scene became Mingming's dynamic one-woman show. This scene and

the following bar scene contained the twelve elastic cords. By twisting the cords and twisting themselves within them, the two actors created images both visually impressive and thematically telling. For instance when John expresses his longings to live in a world free of "war-mongers" and "dirty politicians", he thrusts his hands into the elastic cords and winds them about several times; he then struggles to free himself, as though trying to shake off handcuffs (Huang 1990, 183).

Critics generally considered the two scenes set in China the best ones. Beijing's Tong Daoming commented:

Particularly, the scenes in the [Chinese] mountain almost reach artistic perfection. Integrated are strong dance movement and various lighting, succinct lines and striking tableaux, suggesting that painful period [the Cultural Revolution]. Here tragedy and beauty are intertwined, thus indicating the philosophical and artistic high level xieyi drama could reach.¹³

Of the two Chinese mountain scenes, the latter, because of the symbolic dispute that Mingming and the "ressurrected" Zhiqiang have over whether the little river should be replaced by a big dam and steamship touched the heart of the problem confronting the modernization of China, and pointed up Huang's long struggle between preserving tradition and promoting modernization. In this scene the two characters' movements resembled those in Scene 2, yet under more "dreamlike" shadowy lighting and stylized movement the two seemed somehow mysteriously separated from each other. Several times they did not touch each other

when they seemed to be talking and walking towards each other. Zhiqiang's white western style jacket worn over his bare chest together with his pants rolled up in typical Chinese peasant fashion mocked China's "western" jacket fever in the 80s and won much laughter from the audience; yet when Huang had Mingming remove Zhiqiang's jacket almost by force, the house suddenly became deadly quiet. This clearly annoyed the audience, many of whom were wearing western jackets. Mingming's objection to dams and steamships, the nostalgic reasoning of an expatriate, made many in the audience frown. An angry Zhiqiang, asking her twice to "send us dollars, no lectures!" resulted in audience laughter. That Huang gave both persons equally supportive direction made Scene 7 the most ambiguous scene and the most powerful and most talked-about one.

On the other hand, where a didactic message was deliberately added to the play, the scene was weakened. This happened especially in Scene 8, the last scene that often seemed to Chinese artists and officials to be most important because of the obligatory political message. While Huang could not impose a simple choice between modernization and the preserving of tradition within China, he seemed to have a clear preference to promote Chinese culture and to emulate American values. As a result, the script's ending was changed. In the original, Mingming counter-proposes that John give up being a lawyer, a job which he can barely endure, and devote himself to Taoism, a

philosophy which he loves. He can live on the proceeds from her restaurant. John's shock and negative response finally expose the impracticality of his so-called Chinese Taoism and lead to a new breach between the two young lovers. In Huang's revised ending, John's philosophizing on Taoism is grandiosely magnified as if he were an authentic Taoist master, the conclusion changed, however, by the added lines suggesting the two's bonding together. Huang, in an English synopsis written for the benefit of foreign audiences, thus concludes the play: " Both of them enjoy a water-ski ride, arriving at the Great Void, feeling entirely free and heavenly." Meanwhile the lighting and music make the double circles look like the sun is shining on the earth over a Chinese and a westerner standing hand in hand, symbolizing harmony. This final image was printed on the cover page of the program, the logo for a play that was to become known in many cities of the country within a few months.

Huang's simplistic happy ending was a political one. After the suppression of China's early student demonstrations in late 1986 and the dismissal of the reformist Party Secretary Hu Yaobang, the government launched a campaign of anti-bourgeois-liberalization. In the first half of 1987, Beijing and Shanghai, the two centers of spoken drama, had no Chinese spoken drama productions. While Huang was rehearsing China Dream, the censors had suspicions about the play. Although the theatre had submitted a copy of the play to the Propaganda

Department of Shanghai's Communist Party Committee, no response had been given to the theatre up to the opening night. With such an impending and ominous sign, the directors had to prepare for the worst--a ban. To avoid a ban, they tried to make the play politically safe. Thus making the play conclude with promoting Chinese culture, especially by an American, seemed a reasonable choice, and this strategy did work. There was also another possible reason--the relaxing of political tension in mid 1987. The revised China Dream only suffered a little questioning about the theme and a "suggested" rewriting of the program note. At the opening, two officials from the Propaganda Department nodded their heads, making known their cautious acquiescence. High-ranking officials on following nights all seemed to accept the play and even like it. Huang was more than a little pleasantly surprised:

In my long years of work in the theatre, I have seldom experienced a production that so unanimously pleased the audience, the critics and the authorities (1990, 185).

While this is largely true, there was some criticism of the play and its production. For example, Yu Qiuyu, one of China's leading theatre scholars, wrote:

Mingming's understanding of American culture is only on a surface level, so is the young doctor of philosophy's understanding of Taoism... [the play] offers some comic as well as some tragic insight into this hurried superficial encounter of the two cultures in the late twentieth century... The production of Shanghai People's Art Theatre is full of poetry but lacks some humor. Its handling of the playwrights' frequent little laughs seems too heavy and serious (8).

About the same time that China Dream was selected to take part in the nation's First Art Festival in Beijing in September 1987, another theatre work of east-meets-west initiated by Huang was enjoying success at the Edinburgh Theatre Festival. The play was Story of Bloody Hands (xueshou ji), a Chinese kunqu, or Kun opera, version of Shakespeare's Macbeth.

To stage Shakespeare in the form of Chinese traditional opera had been in Huang's mind for a very long time. His interest in theatre from the beginning had been closely associated with Shakespeare. In his first acting role he played Lorenzo in The Merchant of Venice; he met his wife Danni when she appeared in a production of As You Like It; he took frequent theatre trips to Shakespeare's birthplace of Stratford-on-Avon when in London; his Master's thesis at Cambridge was on the production history of Shakespearian plays in England; and, one of his best productions during the Bitter Toilers' period was Hero of Chaos, a Chinese adaptation of Macbeth.

Knowing Shakespearian and other production styles so well, Huang believes that Chinese theatre, especially traditional opera, can make a unique contribution to the presentation of Shakespeare. In his 1986 long speech at China's First Shakespeare Theatre Festival in Shanghai, Huang emphasized the feasibility of using traditional Chinese theatre forms to stage Shakespeare. He pointed out some similarities in staging between Chinese traditional

theatre and the Elizabethan theatre and how some Chinese traditional stage techniques would serve Shakespeare even better than his own theatre, e.g., special effects to create fire, thunder, and supernatural figures. Huang explained:

All I want to say is this, Shakespearian drama and Chinese traditional theatre share many common features, they also have a lot to complement each other; when introducing to the Chinese audience the works of this poet dramatist, if we can adopt some Chinese stage techniques, it undoubtedly will contribute to the world theatre. At the same time, through Chinese-style Shakespearian productions, we can make the world appreciate the splendid tradition and exquisite techniques of our theatre (?).

Prodded by Huang, Zhen Shifeng, a well-known scriptwriter of Kun opera, took on the task of adapting Macbeth (Zhen ?). Huang was the artistic advisor for this long evolving project and he recommended that his student Li Jiayao be the director of the production. Unlike Hero of Chaos which Huang directed in 1945, and which only sinicized Shakespeare's story, characters' names and costumes, Bloody Hands was an authentic Kun opera production. Not only the make-up and costumes, but also the staging techniques and acting styles are Kun opera's.

What is really significant about the Kun opera version of Macbeth is that it has helped to further Huang's concept that Shakespeare's plays and traditional Chinese theatre techniques can both complement and enrich each other. Bloody Hands not only presents the memorable and powerful scenes of Shakespeare's original, but also tries

to enhance them with some of the Kun opera's unique elements. For instance, the original scene in which Lady Macbeth walks and talks in her sleep becomes twenty-minutes of elaborate singing and acting. The profundity and complexity of Shakespeare's characters also call for changes and innovations on the part of Kun opera. Ji Zhenghua, called by some famous British director at Edinburgh the "best Macbeth"¹⁴, said:

Kun opera stage has never seen before a character as complex as Macbeth. For me it is a difficult subject, but it also gives me new horizon for artistic innovation and exploration (qtd. in Zhen ?).

Ji was forced to go beyond his customary lao sheng (elderly male) role and learn the postures, movements and singing styles normally designated for wu sheng (military male), hong sheng (red-faced male) and hua lian (painted face), in order to create his Macbeth. The same is true of the actress who played Lady Macbeth. Zhang Jingyi was trained to play lao dan (elderly female) and qingyi (proper female). To portray Lady Macbeth, she had to acquire certain of the acrobatic skills of chisha dan (militant female). The three witches became figments of Macbeth's mind, hovering over the entire play. They followed the role of chou (clown), but their make-up and vocal pitch were changed according to their "witchness" (Zhen ?).

Huang was invited to go to Edinburgh with the Kun opera Macbeth, but his health prevented this. After China

Dream, Huang's doctors ordered him to spend three months in a convalescent center for treatment and rest. Since then, he spends a portion of each year in a hospital for medical reasons, but none of this has stopped his involvement in theatre. He has established since China Dream a noticeable pattern of theatrical activity, i.e., whenever the Chinese theatre, especially spoken drama, is at an "ebb" or in a "crisis" caused by either political and/or economic change, Huang appears with a new work to help keep the theatre lights burning.

Under the Chinese policy of economic reform, spoken drama companies today receive less and less subsidy from the government. In addition, they compete with movies, television, and popular music for audience. As a result, many theatre companies are forced to do whatever they can to survive financially. Even Huang, normally a very calm person, expressed deeply felt distress and anxiety in a letter:

Nowadays, it is very difficult to do theatre. Everyone is saying "wish you make a lot of money", where could there be any interest in making art!....I'm doing a little play, with only one actor; even this is hard to accomplish, what would happen to a production with a bigger cast?

.... It took my company quite a lot of trouble to have finally built a small theatre (350 seats), but part of the space has already been rented out for commercial use. There is even a Cala OK in the building, which has so much noise, how could a show be put in there. Electricity has not been connected to the small theatre yet, so the problem is not with the theatre alone, it's a total mess! Now all the more reason for me to quit!15

Only one month after writing this, however, Huang

personally brought three one-act plays to the first "Little Theatre Festival" held in Nanjing in April 1989. As an alternative to big production, big house and big budget, Huang joined forces with other spoken drama artists to promote a "little theatre movement" to produce high quality work on low budget and to reach out to a smaller audience. He wants to do his best to revive the theatre.

Less than two months after the "Little Theatre Festival", on June 4, 1989 the "Tien'nanmen Square Massacre" took place, and at this writing, spoken drama in China has experienced an all-time low. Many theatre artists have been on a virtual strike as a form of protest.¹⁶ Many people have chosen to stay home at night. Most of the plays seen on stage are either revivals of classics or those in compliance with the Party line, nicknamed "central theme" (zhuxuenu). Huang is not in favor of passive protest. He calls the two plays he directed in late 1990, Disappearing Raindrop (xiaoshide yudian, an adaptation of a Bulgarian novel, Love's Obstacle) and Love Letters (adaptation of A.R. Gurney's play), non-political "literature and art works" (wenyiju) as opposed to the Party-line "central theme" works.¹⁷ The fact that Huang is doing adaptations of foreign works again certainly reminds one of an earlier time in his career--the Bitter Toilers' on the "orphan island."

In a short article he wrote in the January 1990 issue of Shanghai Theatre, Huang said:

What I feel now is not just the urgency to save spoken drama, but also the confidence that it has a future for development. I don't feel like sobbing in distress.... I believe that the problem spoken drama is facing is not financial difficulty, it's the people's heart. Nowadays people in most theatres are disheartened, scattered....The key problem now is how to pull people's hearts back together....

Huang Zuolin, China's man of the theatre, at age 85, is still trying to keep the theatre going, and the theatre in its turn seems to be what keeps him going. He is certainly not talking about "retiring".

CHAPTER 5

HUANG'S IMPACT ON CONTEMPORARY CHINESE THEATRE

In the 1980s, in Chinese theatre, especially spoken drama, Huang Zuolin was the most influential figure. His unique "concept of theatre" had even more wide-spread impact than his productions. To Westerners, Huang's eclectic conceptions of theatre may not seem to be a significant breakthrough. In the People's Republic of China, however, Huang was the only individual in the theatre whose concept was somewhat different from official doctrine and who still maintained respect nation-wide. This was the result of Huang's social and artistic stature and his indefatigable creativity, especially in the post-Cultural Revolution period. He was the only Western educated theatre director and one of the few among the most admired spoken drama veterans to have survived the Cultural Revolution, the others including playwrights Cao Yu and Chen Baichen. Yet, while Cao and Chen each wrote only one original play in the late 70s and then stopped producing significant work in the 80s, Huang continued to receive recognition for his work in both theory and practice. Among theatre practitioners in the 80s, Huang was truly the only one whose comprehensive theatre education had given him a global and historical perspective on Western and Chinese theatre. Through him many younger theatre artists, who had

had only the official Chinese education, began to understand certain aspects of Western theatre and even traditional Chinese theatre. To them, Huang was not only a pioneer but an enlightened teacher.

(1) Theory of the New Concept of Theatre: Xieyi

Huang was not the sole person who brought to China in the 80s some kind of Western theatre not previously introduced. Most important, however, he seemed not only to be aware of what would be acceptable to the authorities but also to have the know-how to put his theatrical innovations on stage.

China's new open door policy, after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, saw the introduction of several Western theatre movements unknown to the Chinese before. They were analyzed in newly founded and/or resumed Chinese journals such as Foreign Literature (waiguo wenxue), Foreign Theatre (waiguo xiju), and Foreign Arts and Literature (waiguo wenyi). Analyses included: Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter, and Albee's theatre of the absurd, Sartre and Camus' existentialist theatre, Cocteau's surrealist theatre, Dürrenmatt's grotesque theatre, and Grotowski's poor theatre. When the long-closed door to the West was opened, official censors were not able to decide what to ban and what to criticize. These new theatre ideas created great excitement and confusion among theatre people

who wanted to expand their horizons. Articles and translations of "modernist theatre" were almost always written by literary scholars who had rarely seen these theatrical concepts as practised abroad and who had little or no theatre expertise. Their emphasis was usually on literary aspects. While many theatre practitioners were fascinated by this whole new world of theatre, they were often puzzled as to how these plays might be staged. Therefore, plays with conventional plots were produced first, e.g., Sartre's Dirty Hands (directed by Hu Weimin at the Shanghai Youth Spoken Drama Troupe, 1980), Dürrenmatt's The Physicists (directed by Zhang Yingxiang at the Shanghai Theatre Academy, 1981) and The Visit (directed by Lan Tianye at the Beijing People's Art Theatre, 1982). Beckett's Waiting for Godot was not produced until 1987 (directed by Chen Jialin at the Shanghai Theatre Academy). An American graduate student, Elizabeth J. Bernard, directed the first absurdist play, Albee's The Zoo Story, on a Chinese stage in 1980 with two of Shanghai's best spoken drama actors, Lou Jicheng and Li Jiayao, but it was allowed only one performance and for faculty members only at the Shanghai Theatre Academy. Xiong Yuanwei's experimental production of Orphée by Cocteau at Beijing's Central Theatre Academy in 1982 also had only one performance and aroused heated debate over the strange style and content. Few people, however, were clear about what kind of style they themselves wanted to pursue or

create. It was a time of exploration for theatre innovators who, after two decades of cultural isolation from the rest of the world, were hungry for new theatrical forms but had real problems digesting them. Then in 1983, the 1980 production of Dirty Hands was attacked by the authorities as an anti-Communist play. Bus Stop (chezhan by Gao Xingjian, 1983), a Chinese version of Waiting for Godot, about a group of passengers waiting endlessly for a bus that never comes, was harshly criticised and banned after only a few performances at the Beijing People's Art Theatre. Now, the innovative theatre artists' struggle to explore new styles became even more difficult because of such political interventions.

At that time Huang was having few problems with the authorities. Not only had he become more cautious politically, but his mind was much clearer artistically than the minds of his younger colleagues. On the one hand, he was not completely infatuated with any of the new schools of Western theatre, about most of which he had had some previous knowledge. On the other hand, he had a much better understanding of various Western staging styles in relation to the kind of Chinese staging style he wanted to create. Huang, unlike most of his colleagues who were more attracted to plays of different "isms" at the time, became particularly interested in Grotowski's poor theatre. Like Brecht, Grotowski was also fascinated by aspects of traditional Chinese theatre, some of whose actor-training

techniques he applied. Grotowski had visited Shanghai and other Chinese cities in the early 1960s. Huang's new interest in Grotowski, together with his continued interest in Brechtian theatre, reinforced his hope to integrate Chinese traditional theatre aesthetics with modern Western nonrealistic theatre. He calls this eclectic aesthetics xieyi, literally "depicting meaning."

Xieyi is ostensibly a Chinese term, a guarantee of political immunity under the Communist regime. It is often used loosely to characterize traditional Chinese theatre. The term xieyi is originally derived from ancient theories of Chinese painting; its antithesis is gongbi, meaning "meticulous depiction." Two distinct styles, xieyi and gongbi may co-exist in the same painting. While gongbi appears better for detailed human portraits and the depiction of small animals like gold fish and shrimp, and xieyi is considered more appropriate for such large subjects as a mountain or a river. Both techniques are executed with traditional Chinese brushes on special white paper. When compared to traditional Western painting, xieyi is used to characterize Chinese painting. The term Chinese choose to characterize Western painting is xieshi, literally, "depicting fact," the Chinese translation of realism.

Huang was not the first Chinese to adopt this xieyi/xieshi dichotomy in comparing Chinese and Western theatre. In 1926, theatre scholar Yu Shangyuan, who had

studied in the U.S., used *xieshi* and *xieyi* to characterize Western and Chinese arts in general (150). He called *xieyi* elements lyrical and rhythmic or when applied to Chinese traditional theatre "pure art" (154). In 1933, the renowned Beijing opera performer Cheng Yanqiu wrote, after his half-year's study trip to Europe that Chinese theatre has "precious *xieyi* performing methods" (208).

Huang Zuolin also characterizes Chinese traditional theatre as *xieyi*--as opposed to Stanislavsky's *xieshi* theatre. Huang's main contribution to contemporary Chinese theatre, however, is his applying of *xieyi* aesthetics to modern spoken drama. The spoken drama that Huang wants to create is unlike the realistic Ibsenian and Stanislavskian drama and theatre that Chinese spoken drama people had adopted in the first place, but is closer to Brechtian theatre. Huang insists, however, that his *xieyi* spoken drama is not truly Brechtian but a Chinese form.

In order to incorporate Chinese traditional theatre into spoken drama, Huang analysed the *xieyi* style in traditional theatre in great detail. Continuing with his analyses of the "Systems" of Stanislavsky, Brecht, and Mei Lanfang as presented earlier in his famous 1962 speech, he wrote a long and scholarly essay in 1980 entitled "Mei Lanfang, Stanislavski and Brecht: A Study in Contrasts." Conspicuously, he placed Mei's name first. The essay was published and republished in different publications in the 80s, the first, the People's Daily, the official

newspaper of the Communist Party's Central Committee on August 12, 1981. In the same year Huang's own English version of the essay was published in Beijing in Peking Opera and Mei Lanfang, targeted for Western readers.

In his essay Huang asserts that there are four aspects of xieyi in Mei's theatre--the epitome of traditional Chinese theatre. 1) xieyi of life: "not life as it is, but life as extracted, concentrated and typified. Creative work should not only come out of life but be sublimated, that is, refined from life"; 2) xieyi of movement: "human movements eurythmicized [sic] to a higher plane;" 3) xieyi of language: "not plain vernacularism but a language elevated to lyrical height;" 4) xieyi of decor: "not the real environment but one designed to achieve a high artistic level" (29). Huang also describes four "outer features" (29) of traditional theatre in more concrete terms to illustrate the nature of xieyi:

1. Fluidity: there is no lowering and raising of curtain or change of scenery as is usual the case on the Western stage; instead, the scenes follow straight on one after another. It is an art that always has the appropriate tempo, rhythm and montage;

2. Plasticity: the Chinese stage is highly flexible, with no limitation either of time or space.

3. Sculpturality: whereas the characters on the Western stage are two-dimensional beings enclosed, as it were, in a picture frame, those on the traditional Chinese stage are three-dimensionally.

4. Conventionality: the adherence to an elaborate system of commonly recognized conventions is a basic characteristic of the Chinese theatre. We consider it impossible, if not distasteful, to present life, as it is, on the stage without any embellishments. A play is a play; it is frankly theatrical. For this, we have

created a set of conventions to break through the limitations of time and space so that life may appear more free and sublime on the stage. (16)

While these features exist in Beijing opera and other Chinese local opera, they are also part of the style that Huang wants to adopt for spoken drama. Huang's knowledge of Shakespearian and Brechtian theatre make him confident that spoken drama can be more fluid, plastic, and sculptural, and employ certain conventions. With the exception of conventionality, Huang's "features" match what many of China's younger theatre innovators appeared to be trying to adopt. They found these features, however, mainly in modernist Western theatre and wanted to utilize them to convey more defiant themes which questioned the political system. Huang's ideas differed from theirs in that he sees his as mainly derived from Chinese traditional theatre and his themes to be conveyed as basically moderate or aloof. Thus, his xieyi theory for a new spoken drama was perfectly acceptable to the authorities. Yet this is by no means propaganda to serve the official ideology. Instead, Huang's 1981 article, especially as compared to his 1962 speech, is essentially an elaboration of a concept of aesthetic form free of political doctrine.

Having suffered from the government's criticism and restrictions on Western influences, many theatre innovators turned to Huang's seemingly politically neutral theory on theatrical form and began applying it to suit their own needs. The focus of analysis, however, remains on the

definition of xieyi. As mentioned above, xieyi literally means "depicting meaning": xie is to write or depict, yi is meaning. Yet yi can also mean idea or spirit. When xieyi is used in painting as opposed to gongbi--meticulous depiction, it refers more to the technical style of high selectivity. When it is used in theatre, however, as opposed to xieshi--realism, it usually refers more to the overall style of high subjectivity. The previous statements of Huang concerning the xieyi quality of Chinese traditional theatre illustrate Huang's interest in technical aspects, whereas many followers of his xieyi theory in the 1980s were more interested in the subjectivity suggested in this "yi." Whatever, xieyi provided a theoretical basis for theatre innovators to be applied relatively safely and to develop as a possible guideline for a new spoken drama. Having acknowledged the value of Huang's xieyi theory to "new wave" theatre, Shanghai's Theatre Arts (xiju yishu) launched a far-reaching "Discussion of Conceptions of Theatre" in its fourth issue of 1983. The term was first used by Huang in his 1962 speech. In the following years the discussion continued in many other theatre journals in Shanghai, Beijing and other cities. The initial editorial of the discussion in Theatre Arts reads:

It has been over twenty years since famous director Huang Zuolin gave his talk "On Conceptions of Theatre." In order to commemorate this important document, we begin from this issue to open a special column for an academic discussion and debate. Huang, aiming to reform spoken drama into a socialist spoken

drama with Chinese national characteristics, put forth a systematic guideline. It was only a rough sketch to be developed and enriched by people with like aspirations and ideals in practice and theory. However, his sharp criticism of spoken drama's rigid form and naturalistic tendency, his advocacy for breaking classical theatre's three unities and bourgeois livingroom drama's fourth wall, and his calling for "profound philosophy and broad concepts" in drama, still have tremendous significance and can awaken many people (1).

This issue of Theatre Arts also published an interview with Huang by an American graduate student, Elizabeth Bernard in 1979. In the interview Huang summarizes his recent endeavor in theatre as "breaking the fourth wall": "I brought up this issue in 1962--to break the fourth wall, but it was rejected. Nobody formally argued with me, yet everybody was against it in his mind... I wasn't worried. I believed it would be broken--it's a historical eventuality. It must be broken" (1). He was right. When he talked to Bernard in late 1979, he had already seen that happening on China's stages. Like his ambiguous term *xieyi*, "breaking the fourth wall" also became a catch phrase. Under these two interrelated banners, theatre innovators and their academic companions found a safe forum for the discussion of conceptions of theatre on which they expounded various theories which broke away from traditional realistic doctrine and implicitly incorporated many modern Western movements such as expressionism, surrealism, existentialism, and theatre of the absurd. In 1986, proceedings of the now nation-wide discussion were published in a book entitled Selected

Essays from the Discussion on the Conceptions of Theatre
Volume I. (Vol. II has not come out to date.) The book begins with Huang's 1962 talk and includes nineteen articles by some of China's leading theatre theoreticians, directors, and actors.

Interesting in this discussion or debate are the few voices raised against Huang's theory from Chinese traditional theatre who believed that Huang, a spoken drama director, simplistically manipulated the aesthetics of their theatre just for the sake of spoken drama. On the other hand, some innovative spoken drama people truly manipulated Huang's concept of xieyi theatre to further their more radical causes. The book's concluding article, "The Debate on 'Conceptions of Theatre': Then and Now" by editor Du Qingyuan explicitly expands the definition of xieyi from Huang's original one to encompass the indefinite range of an artist's subjectivity. Nevertheless, Du, as well as many of his colleagues, clearly acknowledge Huang's inspiration and influence. Among the nineteen articles in this volume, six include the term "conceptions of theatre" in their titles, and focus on how to expand or break away from the old realistic format of spoken drama which continued to dominate China's stage for decades. Two of the articles are comparative studies of Chinese and Western theatre aiming to integrate their strong points. Three are studies of the performer-audience relationship when the fourth wall is broken. Five discuss recent

innovations in spoken drama in relation to the breakthrough of a new concept of theatre. This group of articles shows how a new concept of Chinese theatre can affect practice on stage. Tong Daoming's article "On Conceptions of Theatre, too" provides such an overview, giving credit to Huang:

The biggest assault on the monopoly of theatrical form, I believe, was Comrade [Huang] Zuolin's groundbreaking theoretical exploration on conceptions of theatre. Oh! Stanislavsky System is just one of them, but by no means the only one. Oh! There is a Brecht who advocates "breaking the fourth wall" and pursues "alienation effect." Furthermore, how come we forgot our own ancestors, not even realizing the significance of the aesthetics of Chinese traditional theatre which is represented in Mei Lanfang's art? Having read Zuolin's 1962 talk "On Conceptions of Theatre," we would all be contemplating on these questions. Thereafter our artistic horizons gradually broaden. Of course, because his is the groundbreaking study, we should not expect it to be perfect in wording, nor should it be the end of the study. However, it is doubtless that Huang's theoretical exploration has already produced abundant artistic fruits. Some people believe that a number of Shanghai playwrights' dramatic innovations breaking spoken drama's traditional format were inspired by Zuolin's illuminating concept of theatre. This is certainly true. But I do not think it has much to do with geography, as if there is a Shanghai school and a Beijing school in our spoken drama. The influence of Comrade Zuolin's theory of theatrical conceptions is nation-wide; it is a milestone on the path of emancipation of thoughts and ideas in Chinese theatre. (in Du 70-71)

(2) Practice of the New Concept of Theatre

A typical example of Huang's influence on theatre practitioners is to turn to the work of another Shanghai director, the late Hu Weimin. A former student of Huang's and a very prolific innovative director in Shanghai in the late 70s and 80s, Hu was a political exile--a "rightist"--laboring in Manchuria when Huang gave his famous 1962 talk.

When he returned to Shanghai after his rehabilitation in 1978, he embraced Huang's theatrical vision. Hu states that Huang Zuolin's concept of xieyi theatre is a "guiding light" in his artistic "exploration" (1988, 68). At a round table discussion of Huang's concept of xieyi theatre, Hu said: "[Huang] sowed seeds in the 1960s, they are reaching fruition in the 1980s" (1988, 66) Hu's article included in the Selected Essays is "The Essence of the Innovative Waves of Spoken Drama." He begins by pointing to the targets he wants to attack: "the traditional concept of theatre enshrined in Chinese spoken drama for over seventy years, the realistic style and methods we have been well versed in, such as the classical dramaturgy--the three unities--and its variations; the fourth wall theory in staging, and its derivation "solitude in public;" and the monopoly of the Stanislavsky System." Then he traces two causes of these problems. One is the strong influence of European realism when Chinese spoken drama first emerged and the reinforcement in the 50s when Soviet experts were invited to teach Stanislavsky techniques. The other is the neglect of national roots in Chinese traditional arts, especially in the folk sung drama. Like Huang, to rectify these two shortcomings of Chinese spoken drama, Hu found the same way out: break the illusion of the fourth wall and promote the xieyi style so that the world of spoken drama could be indefinitely expanded. Unlike Huang whose age and several illnesses prevented him from realizing all of his

ideals on stage, Hu, in his late forties and early fifties, indefatigably mounted about twenty productions in ten years. While each one presented a new mode of xieyi style, all of them broke the box set's fourth wall.

Many of Hu's productions smacked of Chinese folk tradition, yet he also adopted innovative Western techniques. In Goodbye, Paris (zaijianle, bali by Cheng Pulin, 1980), a bare stage plus a small raked platform suggested diverse locales from Shanghai to Paris, from livingroom to grassland. Resembling the Beijing opera's stage, scenes moved fluidly from one to another. While the front curtain was removed, for certain scenes Hu used a small Brechtian half-curtain to indicate the setting. But unlike Brecht, whose half-curtain was intended for the V-effect, Hu ingeniously integrated the half-curtain into the flow of plot. For example, in one scene the curtain resembled the political posters typical of the Cultural Revolution (Hu 1988, 9-11). In Emperor Li Shimin (qingwan Li Shimin by Yan Haiping, 1981), Hu added to the script six storytellers--an echo of Huang's storyteller in Surging Ahead. Acting as a bridge between the play and the audience, these storytellers are unique--six speaking terra-cotta statues. These statues, symbolic soldiers buried protecting the tomb of a deceased emperor, are well-known in China as they are exhibited in Xian's emperor's tomb museum. Now they were placed in front of the proscenium, mouths opened to tell their stories about the

emperor. In using these living statues, Hu had as sources both Sichuan opera's offstage-commentary-singing as well as the chorus in The Caucasian Chalk Circle with its comments on the characters' actions. In stage decor, he used eleven moving screens on four different levels à la Gordon Craig. By integrating these various nonrealistic devices, Hu made the production achieve what Huang calls fluidity, plasticity, and sculpturality while conveying a modern message. In A Girl and Her Pigeons (fanggezhi de shaoniu by Wang Ren, 1984), Hu further developed Huang's use of bicycles and moving periaktois to change scenes in One Thousand and One Days, with four actors playing traffic signs dancing on the stage, thus making the scene less realistic but even more fluid and more sculptural.

In Beijing another important director was exploring similar paths. Chen Yong, a Soviet trained director who had invited Huang to co-direct The Life of Galileo at Beijing's China Youth Art Theatre, continued to experiment with new styles after her successful collaboration with Huang. In Red Dresses Are in Fashion (jieshang liuxing hongqunzhi by Ma Zhongjun and Jia Hongyuan, 1984), a play about female textile workers, the central imagery became the "human stream of our time" (Chen 283), a flowing picture. Her presentation of this image on stage stunned the audience: during every scene change when usually there would be a lowered curtain or a blackout, the audience saw only light on the backdrop painted with simple ornaments.

In front of the backdrop, stagehands and actors, in choreographed formation, rushed around the stage changing the scenery, their moving silhouettes forming the picture of the "human stream of our time." This dynamic device was functional as well as esthetic, swift as well as memorable.

Younger innovators' practice of "breaking the fourth wall" went farther than what Huang had initiated. In 1982 Hu Weimin and the Beijing director Lin Zhaohua each mounted a theatre in the round production, the first professional productions moving entirely out of the proscenium theatre in China. In 1984, Chen Yong produced an experimental play which Huang wanted to do but could not cast at the time. This was The Old B Hanging on the Wall (guazai qiangshangde lao B by Sun Huizhu, 1984), a play which broke the fourth wall by involving audience participation (Sun and Fei 84-92).

Besides directors, playwrights have benefited from Huang's illumination on a variety of theatrical styles, especially the xieyi concept of theatre. Sha Yexin, Huang's long time colleague and successor as head of the Shanghai People's Art Theatre, is an important contemporary playwright in China. Reminiscing about Huang's early impact on him, Sha wrote: "I have worked under Venerable Huang for over twenty years, having benefited tremendously" (4). He also acknowledged that he chose an episodic structure without a linear plot for his successful play Mayor Chen.

Yi because he was affected by Huang's passion for epic structure, especially from his production of Galileo. Huang's work on breaking the fourth wall also propelled Sha to look for new possibilities in performer-audience relationship. In his anti-corruption play If I Were Real (jiaru wo shi zhengde, 1979) about the impostor of a high ranking official's son wooed by various bureaucrats, he had the theatre manager hold the curtain for "an important guest" after curtain time. The impostor was then arrested in the audience and brought on stage. The audience became instantly involved as the impostor started telling his story. In the last scene the audience became witnesses in the court. Huang's global perspective and comic vision so uncommon in Chinese theatre are reflected in Sha's latest play Jesus, Confucius and John Lennon, a Chinese anachronistic musical farce in which the three title characters return to earth to study the human condition.

A group of younger playwrights from the Shanghai Workers' Cultural Palace pursued a more distinctive style combining modernity and Chinese nationality, a goal that Huang was the first to set up. Although they did not appropriate any specific conventions, e.g., in voice or movement from traditional theatre for their plays, they incorporated some of China's traditional aesthetics such as fluidity of structure, emphasis on character's inner world, and use of symbolic images including supernatural ones. These helped to externalize artists' ethereal conceptions,

which in their plays often seem to coincide with some modern Western styles. For example, Ma Zhongjun and Jia Hongyuan's Hot Current Outside (wuwai you reliu, 1980), in which a martyr's ghost interacts with his philistine brother and sister who have been vying for his pension, echoes many traditional sung dramas which center on the conflict between a ghost or spirit and living characters such as Beauty Leaves Her Soul (qianniu lihun by Zhen Guangzu, 13th century) and Peony Pavilion, or Story of Returning Spirit (mudan ting huanhun ji, by Tang Xianzu, 1598).

The Road (lu, 1981) by the same authors is a more realistic play; its protagonist is a reformist manager of a road construction team. Yet the protagonist torn between many conflicting forces often converses with his alter ego--spirit--on stage. This concept is also indebted to the aforementioned ancient plays. Meanwhile these two plays also reflect the product of the playwrights' studies of Western form, e.g., stream of consciousness, as exemplified in such plays as Death of a Salesman. Zong Fuxian's Blood Is Always Hot (xue zhongshi rede, 1981) uses one traditional opera conventional stock character to represent different bureaucrats. The play is set in a courtroom, one common scene as seen on the traditional opera stage. The accused protagonist, however, often refers to past scenes and appeals to the theatre audience/court audience, reflecting some Brechtian techniques. By breaking the

general trend of realistic spoken drama, these plays achieved a fluidity and plasticity in form, and further depth to explore human psychology and social conditions. This was considered a great step forward in Chinese spoken drama's nationalization and modernization (Ding Luonan and Sun 112-114). Although the three playwrights were at the time worker/amateur playwrights and their troupe a part of a workers' cultural club when these plays were written and produced, they and their director Su Leci, who directed most of the troupe's plays, were nationally acclaimed. Not long afterwards they turned professional, Ma moving to Beijing to work with Chen Yong at one of the nation's largest theatres.

Still further evidence of Huang's influence on China's theatre were additional productions of Brecht's plays, which in turn further helped to disseminate Huang's theatrical conceptions. Huang had been committed to other projects after his, also China's, first two historic productions of Brechtian dramas in 1959 and 1979. Now, other aspiring theatre people--directors, actors, and translators, stimulated by Huang's ardent promotion and, especially the well-publicized successful Galileo production-- accumulated resources for more productions. In April 1985, there was a big combined event. Within one month, China's first international Brecht Conference and six premieres of Brecht plays took place. This involved major spoken drama companies and leading theatre people in

Beijing and Shanghai. This event opened people's eyes and minds, both in and beyond theatrical circles. Brecht now became a name known to almost all scholars and practitioners interested in spoken drama. The seeds that Huang had sowed for over thirty years had finally reached fruition.

All six productions, including Chen Yong's Caucasian Chalk Circle, borrowed, in one way or another, elements of China's traditional performing arts to help realize Chinese artists' visions of Brechtian theatre. An outstanding example was the Shanghai Youth Spoken Drama Troupe's Herr Puntila and His Man Matti directed by Li Jiayao, Huang's assistant during the Galileo production. Li made his Puntila a "trial marriage" between Brechtian drama and Chinese pingtan. Pingtan, literally "commenting and playing [accompanying music instrument]," is a unique performing art genre popular in some parts of southern China, which combines story-telling and ballad-singing, one of the embryonic forms of Chinese traditional theatre still preserved and alive today. During the performance a performer is at once a narrator and commentator of the story, a character or a number of characters in the story, and sometimes also a listener to the story who will ask questions about the story. A pingtan performance can be a solo or a duet, with performers sitting at a table, vividly relating the story, constantly alternating between his or her different roles; a performer also plays a string

instrument (pipa for women, sanxian for men) to accompany the occasional singing. Director Li believed, as Huang often suggested to him, that the narrative nature of pingtan was almost identical to that of Brecht's epic theatre (Huang 1979, 184).

Li did not only use pingtan to present Puntila since the medium he was working with was spoken drama. However, in his production, Shi Wenlei, a well-known pingtan actress was called upon to participate. When the show began, Shi was sitting before a Brechtian half-curtain, holding her pipa. As soon as she opened her mouth, the audience was suprised; it had not expected to hear suzhouhua, a southern Chinese dialect, and tunes of pingtan on a spoken drama stage where Mandarin is standard speech. Shi explained to the audience that the reason she was there was because of the similarities between pingtan and the epic theatre of Brecht whose play the audience was about to see. After she had sung her introductory remarks about the plot and the characters, the half-curtain was drawn aside; Shi immediately became a character, the cook Lenna who was hanging the pipa as a decorative wall piece in her master Puntila's house. During the show, she often stepped out of her role as Lenna to assume her role as the narrator and make analytical comments. In Shanghai, many in the audience were acquainted with pingtan's narrative techniques. To see them used in a spoken drama, however, was both refreshing--more or less "alienating"--and engaging. The play's most

acclaimed accomplishment is, according to Li, that it provided the audience a concrete Chinese annotation to Brecht's epic theatre and a more sophisticated and new understanding of one of China's old art forms and its significance in the modern world (qtd. in Fei 1987, 27-28).

Among the six productions there was a fine production of The Good Woman of Setzuan by the Central Academy of Theatre, yet it did not entirely satisfy its translator Ding Yangzhong, a Brecht expert who had studied in Berlin for years including taking a practicum at the Berliner Ensemble. He thought the production was too Brechtian and not sufficiently Chinese. Ding was seeking a more appropriate medium for the play. With Huang, two years later, he found an enthusiastic provincial opera troupe, the Sichuan Opera Theatre to mount a Sichuan opera of The Good Woman of Setzuan (Sichuan)--a project equal to Huang's Kun opera Macbeth. Although the Sichuan project did not need a conversion of the play into a Chinese story (it already seemed to be a Chinese one), the adaptors, Liu Shaozong and Wu Xiaofei, and director, Li Liuyi, still worked on its sinicization. The essence of Brecht's play was not diluted, but they cut many lines in order to accommodate the opera's extensive singing and dancing. The garrulous Christian gods became succinct, Taoist-like gods, and the story of Yang Sun and Shen Te/Shui Ta was given prominence. The singing and dancing enhanced the Chinese

version. When Shen Te happily joined her lover Yang Sun, there was a joyous dance. When the good Shen Te became the evil Shui Ta, "the 'throwing a black cloth dance' was used as a symbol of the strangulation of righteous human nature by the forces of dark society. The dance involved the chorus throwing a black cloth [sic] over the actress" (Ding Yangzhong 175). Sichuan opera's unique offstage singing, both supplementing and/or commenting on the onstage action or expression, was used in Brechtian fashion. On the other hand, the adaptors and director also expanded Sichuan opera's conventional vocabulary to accommodate the needs of the modern theme. The choreography seen in the court scene and the labor scene in the factory contained movement borrowed from Western pantomime and dance. Masks of variously distorted faces hung from the flies, and were changed in different scenes. Thus, the traditional use of masks in Chinese sung drama was remolded into a modern Western-style decor, indicating "the general message of the play: the distortion of mankind through capitalism". (Ding Yangzhong 174).

Ernst Schumacher, an East German Brecht expert, gave this Sichuan production a warm review:

An event I have searched for in my dreams: Brecht's The Good Person of Setzuan as Sichuan song-dance theatre. Excellently performed, the speciality of Sichuan song-dance theatre tied to the great idea of Brecht's play! The best performance of a Brecht play I have seen for more than ten years. Brecht lives--on the Chinese traditional Chinese opera stage. (quoted in Ding Yangzhong 176)

A leading Chinese scholar of traditional theatre, Guo Hancheng, impressed by the Sichuan opera production of Sitzuan, expressed a view complementary to Huang's about spoken drama: "This production offers the means to solve the problems in traditional theatre today" (quoted in Ding Yangzhong 176). He shared with Huang the concept that different theatrical forms, spoken drama and sung drama in China in particular, should and could enrich each other so that each might overcome some limitations--especially, the rigid representationalism of spoken drama and dated repertory and stage technology of traditional sung drama.

The aforementioned spoken drama director Hu Weimin also experimented with sung drama. He closely followed Huang's inspiration in Shanghai. While Huang was conceiving and supervising his long term project of Kun opera Macbeth, Hu directed three opera productions--a rare accomplishment because usually Chinese traditional theatre people were antagonistic to outsiders. Hu's first experiment, was Shakespeare's Twelfth Night in Shaoxing opera (1985), an opera genre well-known for its actresses impersonating male characters. Unlike Huang's Macbeth, Hu's Twelfth Night was not adapted into an ancient Chinese story. Hu wanted to test Shaoxing opera's ability to adjust to Renaissance thought, particularly the audacious pursuit of love and freedom, which he believed did not exist in ancient China. Using a group of young and flexible performers, Hu created a highly successful production which presented Shaoxing

opera's graceful and charming style while keeping the sharpness of Shakespeare's theme intact. Some critics and spectators said that because of the former, this production presented Shakespeare's theme better than it might be done in a spoken drama production (Hu 1988, 85-93).

Hu's other two opera productions were of Chinese history plays, yet in each one he infused contemporary Chinese people's reflections on their long and painful history. In the Guangxi opera Tears of the Terra-cotta Horse (nima lei, Liuzhou Guangxi Opera Company, 1986), a legendary story about an ambitious nobleman's ascent to the emperor's throne through superstition and sacrifice of people's lives, Hu added a subliminal ritual of worship alluding to the personality cult haunting the Chinese for centuries. Spoken drama's elaborate lighting and scenery plus opera's song and dance made this finale particularly powerful (Hu 1988, 107-110).

The Sichuan opera Shocking Dreams of Red Chamber (honglou jingmen by Xu Fen, 1987) was a recreation of China's most acclaimed classic novel The Dream of Red Chamber (honglou men) (somewhat like the Tom Stoppard rewriting of Hamlet as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead). Hu blended the opera's traditional devices with modern expressionism via a series of dreams and hallucinations. Thus he down-played the melodramatic family intrigues and highlighted the play's symbolic reflection of a grand old dynasty's decline (Hu 1988, 220-224).

Hu's work epitomized two trends in the 1980s in China's spoken drama and traditional opera. The spoken drama stage became more and more abstract while the traditional opera stage became more and more elaborate. Behind these changes forging a more modern Chinese theatre was Huang Zuolin.

In Huang's "Mei Lanfang, Stanislavsky and Brecht," his thesis was clearly stated: "I wish to explore the possibilities resulting from the influences one may exert on the other and see if anything new may or will emerge from the old" (1981, 15). When he commented on the reform of traditional theatre that had been underway for decades, especially after 1949, he pointed out: "Some of our theatre workers engaged in the reform of the traditional theatre have paid insufficient attention to different concepts of drama, with the result that they have tended to force Western dramatic techniques on to traditional drama [Stanislavsky realism in particular], producing something incongruous.... The world of actuality and the world of theatre are not the same thing" (23). Here he was referring to a trend that had begun in the 1950s and which culminated in some of the "model theatrical works" of the Cultural Revolution--sung drama set in a few bulky acts with illusionistic scenery. To Huang this putting together of the Stanislavsky System and Chinese traditional theatre was incongruous. Huang pointed out further that illusionistic theatre "has a history of only 93 years" whereas "twenty-five centuries have seen innumerable dramatic

methods" (24). To him, Brecht offered a much better model of drama containing modern themes that might harmonize with Chinese traditional theatre. About Shakespeare, he believed the same. This concept of Huang's benefited both contemporary Chinese spoken drama and traditional Chinese sung drama.

(3) Summary

A possible problem in almost all of Huang's writings and talks is his view of realism. At one point he observes that the history of theatre contains basically two types of theatre: "the theatre to create an illusion of life, and the theatre to dispel that illusion," and that "there may possibly be a third concept combining both modes of expression, realistic and conventional" (1981, 24). These three types apparently refer to the theatres of Stanislavsky, Mei Lanfang, and Brecht. At another point in the same article Huang calls Mei Lanfang, Stanislavsky, and Brecht "three great masters of realism," only "each has his own ways and methods of expression" (15). If realism means xianshi zhuyi, the standard Chinese translation of "realism," then realism is not only a style but is an issue of a particular ideology, a touchstone of whether an artist cares about, and engaged in the life of the people. In modern China, for a long time after the inception of spoken drama, realism was the voluntary choice of many Chinese

spoken drama artists whose intention was to engage their theatre with the social cause of improving the life of the people. After 1949 this view of realism became the official position of the Communist Party and the government. Thereafter any advocacy of other "-isms" was deemed both dissent and subversive. Even when Mao encouraged romanticism (he liked romanticism in some of his own poems) by raising a new slogan, "integrating revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism" (Hongqi 1958, Vol. 1), the foundation of realism was still indispensable. After the frantic fervor of the utopian "big leap forward" of 1958 ended, realism again was preferred to romanticism as well as any other isms. Huang, a realist in the beginning and an ardent experimenter of nonrealistic forms later, never explicitly challenged the official doctrine. Huang's way of bypassing China's enshrined sociopolitical realism was very Chinese. He used a euphemism, xieshi, a more archaic word differing from xieyi (see discussion earlier in the chapter) to imply a kind of politically less fundamental realism, a kind of technical realism. His argument was that politically one has to adhere to realism--xianshi zhuyi, the grand orthodox philosophy for all arts, while technically one should try different concepts of theatre--realistic or otherwise, xieshi or xieyi. In other words, between the words xieshi and xieyi, Huang definitely chooses xieyi; but if he is forced to choose between the big words Realism and non-Realism, he has to choose

Realism. The English word "realism" used in the above two quotations really means different things in the Chinese original. In the first Huang really uses "xieshi," the technical realism to describe Stanislavsky's theatre so that he may deviate from it. In the second when he talks seriously about the philosophy of art, he uses "xianshi zhuyi," the standard translation, so that his adherence to the sociopolitical Realism remains manifest.

Almost all of Huang's later productions illustrate the two sides of his concept of theatre: sociopolitically realistic while technically non-xieshi but xieyi. Now, since the word xieyi is so important, can it be translated into one or two words without adding endnotes every time it is used? People have tried, both in China and abroad, to find an appropriate equivalent in a Western language, but so far none of the words selected have satisfied Huang. Adrian Hsia, after long interviews with Huang, in his article used "imagistic" as a translation of xieyi (1983, 16). Huang, however, thought it wrong because this word derived from the kind of imagistic poetry Ezra Pound wrote which stressed the poet's subjectivity as opposed to the objectivity of his subject, whereas his xieyi was entirely different (Sun and Gong 1983, 8). Huang himself has also searched for an appropriate translation for over two decades, but with little success. Because he has insisted on the sociopolitical Realism as his xieyi's basis, he has objected to all terms that emphasize the artist's

subjectivity, such as, "imagistic" or "expressionistic". Instead, he chose a rare word, "intrinsicistic." In 1979 when Huang met Arthur Miller, he explained his idea of theatre with this word plus some examples, Miller was impressed, but his understanding was rather vague. He believed that this term is so Chinese that it goes beyond any known western theoretical framework (Miller 97). A year later, Huang turned to another tentative translation, "essentialism", for the English publication of his article "Mei, Stanislavsky and Brecht" (1981, 29). His "essentialism" means that art should present the essence, rather than the appearance, of life (a Brechtian thesis), still emphasizing that the life of the people is to be reflected, and not the creator's mind. Not until 1987 did Huang find another English word, "ideographic", which now seems to satisfy him. Huang thinks that ideographic, as opposed to photographic, does not sound like a term in a philosophy book and is similar to the word ideograph used to describe the unique Chinese writing symbols, images indicating meaning--xieyi.

Interestingly, while the right English words seemed too difficult to find to pin down Huang's philosophy in English, they did help to clarify Huang's ideas about xieyi to the Chinese. The 1983 article, "Huang Zuolin's Concept of Xieyi Theatre" by Sun Huizhu and Gong Boan in Theatre Arts traced Huang's idea through his use of English translations, and perhaps reveal his theatrical concept

more clearly:

Continue to adhere to the realistic principles that art must reflect life, but break the restriction that only allows imitation of life within the four walls; strive to absorb the strong points of traditional opera such as presenting meaning over appearance, to create a kind of new theatre, 'with rough and ambitious touch,' that can reflect a broader scale of life in a more profound way--xieyi theatre. (8)

This definition did not appear radical even to the Chinese in 1983 because it was still politically safe based on the official Realism. Some people who had been fascinated by Huang's xieyi concept and who had since explored more progressive styles were disappointed with this "definitive" definition of their mentor's concept. They argued that xieyi as a new concept should not be so limited but should encourage artists' self expression. Du Qingyuan's criticism of the article by Sun and Gong was representative:

The sentence from 'Huang Zuolin's Concept of Xieyi Theatre' that says: "'Yi' pertains to the object of art, not the artist's subjective expression" causes much confusion to the term xieyi. The "yi" in "xieyi" refers to, beyond doubt, the subjective aspects, although the subjective is derived from the hint of the objective or a feeling about the objective... The style of xieyi stresses the expression of the subjective feeling and ideas. Its medium and way of expression clearly differs from the forms of xieshi: liberated from facts, real situations, real objects, and natural language and actions, xieyi aims at a much higher realm transcending all of the real, an emotional and spiritual state that the objective reality cannot contain (275-276).

This statement, though not necessarily a faithful account of Huang's ideas, did reflect the many experiments on stage by younger innovators. Although it was Huang who produced and passed on the magic term xieyi to inspire

artists' imagination, once they took it over, it has become their domain, and without limitations. To the younger, more radical innovators, Huang's own original interpretation is not that important. Instead, xieyi is both an artistic inspiration and a "license" or label they can use for any non-realistic experiments. Under this magic umbrella, not only traditional Chinese aesthetics, but many contemporary Western avant-garde styles, might be explored.

The above statement may help to answer the initial question raised at the beginning of this study: why was Huang always not able to find his ideal author(s)? During the earlier part of his career, Huang was far ahead of his colleagues in concepts and experience, therefore few playwrights could provide him with the type of plays that his director's creativity required. However, in the later years of his long career, while he has continued to stimulate many of his younger colleagues with his philosophy of xieyi theatre constructed some twenty years before, they have developed their own artistic goals which go beyond Huang's initial conception. He is still productive and progressive into his middle 80s. In fact he has mounted at this late stage of his career some of his finest productions. He remains to this day, however, very selective in his choice of scripts.

Finally, Huang's concept of theatre has much to do with China's political restrictions. Huang's knowledgeable approach to a more open-minded and multi-styled theatre

drawn from his Western education, and his long experience in dealing with China's social problems and politics, has proved to be most effective and within the limits of possibility. While some younger artists' more flamboyant ideas sometimes overshadowed Huang's in the mid and late 1980s, they were mainly silenced in the repressive political atmosphere that followed. Only Huang's xieyi concept has remained influential, his generally propaganda free productions continuing to assert an artistic impact on Chinese people. In the ever precarious Chinese theatre, to have such an artist exist (directing and writing in his mid-80s) is nothing short of a miracle. China is very fortunate to have had and to have an artist like Huang Zuolin.

Notes

Chapter 1. THE BACKGROUND OF HUANG'S THEATRE

¹ Historical references in this dissertation reflect its author's knowledge of Chinese history and theatre accumulated over many years. While writing, books by Shujun Cao, Edmund Clubb, Luonan Ding, Israel Epstein, John King Fairbank, Huaibi Feng, Bonnie S. McDougall, Edwine Moise, and Constantine Tung as listed in the bibliography have been used to double-check the accuracy of information. The same applies to the following biographical notes.

² Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), professor and dean of the Faculty of Letters at Beijing University after studying in France, was founder of New Youth, the leading New Culture journal during the May Fourth period. He was elected the first secretary general when the Chinese Communist Party was established in 1921, but was expelled from the CCP later.

³ Hu Shi (1891-1962) was professor at Beijing University after returning from the U.S.. A pioneer of vernacular Chinese literature, he is generally acknowledged to be the first Chinese to have written a collection of modern poetry and a spoken drama. Later positions included president of Beijing University and ambassador to the U.S..

⁴ Li Dazhao (1888-1927), director of Beijing University's Library during the May Fourth period, was a major advocate of Marxism in China and a founding member of the CCP. He was arrested and hanged by warlord Zhang Zuolin.

⁵ Lu Xun (1881-1936), probably the greatest writer in modern China, influenced many young intellectuals with his relentless exposure of the evils of China's feudal system. He taught at several universities and worked in the Ministry of Education during the May Fourth period after returning from his studies in Japan.

⁶ Tian Han (1898-1968), one of the most important playwrights and theatre leaders in modern China, was founding chairman of the Chinese Theatre Association from 1949 till his suicide during the Cultural Revolution.

⁷ Guo Moruo (1892-1978), an important politician and prolific man of letters in modern China, was a leading figure in many fields, including poetry, drama, history, archeology, and intellectual history. His plays are all political romanticizations of historical subjects.

⁸ Ouyang Yuqian (1889-1961), pioneer playwright and

director of Chinese modern drama, was also well-known as a Beijing opera star (1916-1931). His reputation was even compared with that of Mei Lanfang in a popular saying: "Ou[yang] in the south and Mei in the North." After 1949 he was vice chairman of the Chinese Theatre Association and president of the Central Academy of Theatre in Beijing till his death.

⁹ Xiong Foxi (1900-1965), a leading playwright and theatre educator in modern China, wrote dozens of plays. They mostly lack lasting value but were often appealing to the audiences of the time. His most significant achievement was the five year peasants' theatre experiment 1932-1937 in Ding Xian County, Hebei, where he and the peasants created an unprecedented kind of modern environmental theatre with active performer-audience interaction.

¹⁰ Ding Xilin (1893-1974), was a full-time scientist and part-time playwright with equally significant accomplishments. He began writing plays when he was teaching physics at Beijing University after returning from studies in England. His short comedies are considered the beginning of modern Chinese comedy.

¹¹ In the original text it was "Beiping", another name for Beijing between 1928 and 1949.

¹² Among the theatre schools Saint-Denis founded or supervised are the London Theatre Studio and the Old Vic Theatre School in London (among his pupils were Michael Redgrave, Peggy Ashcroft, Alec Guinness and Peter Ustinov), Le Centre Nationale Dramatique del'Est in Strasbourg, drama division of the Julliard School in New York, and the bilingual Canadian National School of Dramatic Art in Montreal.

¹³ Hong Shen, the first professional director in China, studied in the U.S. first ceramics and then playwriting at Harvard's 47 Workshop with George P. Baker. He did not study directing as a specialty.

Chapter 2. HUANG'S THEATRE DURING THE WAR YEARS

¹ Told to this author during their interviews in July 1988. There is also a mention in Huang's "My Contact with the Authors of China Dream," Spoken Drama 7&8 (1987): 1.

² For the next few pages on Shanghai's "Orphan Island" theatre movement and its background I have relied heavily on Edward Gunn's "Shanghai's 'Orphan Island' and the Development of Modern Drama" in Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts ed. Bonnie S. McDougall (Berkeley:

University of California Press 1984). Cao Shujun's A History of Chinese Spoken Drama listed in the Bibliography also provides a great deal of information.

³Originally published in 1941 in Theatre Arts vol. 3: 1&2. Reprinted under the new title "A Director's Basic Requirements for His Actors" in Huang Zuolin's The Director's Words (Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Press, 1979) 12.

⁴ Wang Ying, "Several Unstageable Plays," Guangming zazhi 2.12 (May 1937): 1541-1542.

Chapter 3. FOLLOWING MAO: HUANG'S THEATRE 1949-1966

¹ During a recorded interview with this author in July 1988.

² Based on information from Shanghai People's Art Theatre: August 1950- August 1985, a retrospective published by Shanghai People's Art Theatre in 1985.

³ For more discussion on the subject of Brecht and Chinese modern theatre, please refer to an essay by this author published in the Spring 1987 issue of Theatre Three.

⁴ Spoken Drama published by Shanghai People's Art Theatre carried Huang's Chinese translation of Brecht's "Ovation for Shaw" in its special 1986: 9&10 issue "Celebrating Huang Zuolin's Fifty Years in Theatre."

⁵ Based on the information provided by 1951 "Production Records" in the archive of Shanghai People's Art Theatre.

⁶ Huang wrote a step-by-step account of his direction of The Sun Shines on Moscow as a work model for his colleagues. It was selected into his collection of essays, The Director's Words 1979, 61-111.

⁷ "Cadre" is a term commonly used in China to refer to a highly trained and active leading member of the Party or military force.

⁸ A descriptive report "Grand Scale Spoken Drama in Wenhua Guangchang" appeared in Xinming Evening News on July 31, 1957. According to the 1957 "production Records" in the archive of Shanghai People's Art Theatre, Ten Thousand Rivers had 53 performances and 278,002 people saw it.

⁹ Most of the facts about the production are based on Adrian Hsia's article "The Reception of Bertolt Brecht in China and His Impact on Chinese Drama," in Brecht and East Asian Theatre published by Hong Kong University Press in 1982. This author's Chinese translation of the essay appeared in Theatre Arts 4 (1983): 9-16.

¹⁰ "Gang of Four" refers to the four-member radical ultra-leftist clique which dominated China's political and cultural scene during the Cultural Revolution period. The four members were Jiang Qing (Madam Mao), Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan and Wang Hongwen. The four were all sentenced to life imprisonment in 1979.

¹¹ Piggy Monk (zhubajie) is one of the mythical characters who accompany their Buddhist master on the journey to India in the Chinese classic fantasy novel Westward Journey (xiyou ji) by Wu Cheng-en).

¹² The quote was cited by Adrian Hsia in his essay "Huang Zuolin's Ideal of Drama and Bertolt Brecht," Drama in the People's Republic of China (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987) 153.

¹³ Chen Yi's entire speech was published in Literary Gazette (wenyi bao) July 1979: 2-16 and August 1979: 40-48.

¹⁴ See more discussion of the concept in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4. POST CULTURAL REVOLUTION

¹ I translated into Chinese Adrian Hsia's essay "The Reception of Brecht in China and His impact on Chinese Theatre," whose English original appeared in Brecht and East Asian Theatre published by Hong Kong University in 1982. My translation was published in Theatre Arts 1983, 4: 9-16. I can no longer locate the original English version, so this account of The Life of Galileo's fate during the Cultural Revolution is based on my Chinese translation. The (Hsia 1983)s in this dissertation all refer to my published translation.

² Tsolin (old spelling for Zuolin) Huang, "Galileo in China" Eastern Horizon November 1979: 20. It is an English language journal based in Hong Kong.

³ Based on the transcript of a round-table discussion on May 5, 1979 about the production of Galileo by the China Youth Art Theatre in Beijing.

⁴ Based on the transcript of Huang's speech to the

cast of Galileo on December 18, 1978.

⁵ Ibid., January 5, 1979.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Huang's interview with Elizabeth Bernard on December 7, 1979 was later published in Shanghai Drama Institute's journal Theatre Arts 1983, 4: 1-6.

⁸ Same as note 2.

⁹ I saw the production myself in 1983. Some of the observations are my very own.

¹⁰ a.k.a. William H. Sun and Faye C. Fei.

¹¹ Huang Zuolin, letter to Sun Huizhu and Fei Chunfang during Chinese New Year 1987.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Tong Daoming, "China Dream and China's Xieyi Spoken Drama," Theatre and Cinema August 1987. It was a newspaper clipping sent by a friend from Beijing. The exact date and page number are missing.

¹⁴ Zhen Shifeng in his article "Towards Edinburgh," People's Daily 21 Aug. 1987: 7 did not specify who the British director was.

¹⁵ Huang Zuolin, letter to William Huizhu Sun and Faye Chunfang Fei on March 10, 1989.

¹⁶ Sources are personal letters from theatre friends in China.

¹⁷ Huang Zuolin, letter to William Huizhu Sun and Faye Chunfang Fei on January 9, 1991.

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