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Between Villain and Victim: Jiang Qing and Women's Roles in Revolutionary Model Opera During the Cultural Revolution

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Between Villain and Victim: Jiang Qing and Women's Roles in Revolutionary Model
Opera During the Cultural Revolution

“Submitted in partial completion of the Master of Arts Degree at Sarah Lawrence
College, May 2018”

Cherie Gu

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Note on translation and Chinese Terminology:

Interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese and have been transcribed and translated into English by myself in the most direct translation in order to stay faithful to the subjects' word choices. Certain Chinese phrases have been kept in the transcription of the interviews with more elaborate explanations provided.

There is also a glossary (see appendix two) of key Chinese terms that are used throughout this paper. As a rule, I use only Standard Chinese Romanization *pinyin* which is transliterated Chinese using the Latin alphabet. In the cases where another author has decided to use another transliteration, I respect their choice and keep whatever spelling they have chosen for my citations. I have chosen not to include the tonal accent marks. For example, I use Mao Zedong instead of “Mao Tse-Tung”, “Máo Zédōng”, or “毛泽东”.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Xinyi Gu. Born in 1949, his lifetime spans through the entire history of Communist China. His support both in my education and specifically this thesis has led me to find a new understanding of my Chinese heritage. My mother has been an academic inspiration who has fully invested herself in my appreciation for learning. I would also like to thank my entire family for their support in my research. To my cousin, Nancy Zhou, our love for learning comes from a family legacy of academia that has been instilled in us since our childhood. She has been a constant inspiration in my academic career as a model to follow.

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I am grateful for the entire community at the Sarah Lawrence Women's History Program, led fearlessly by our director, Mary Dillard. She has been a huge part of my growth throughout this process and her understanding of the *East versus West* dynamic has helped me greatly in situating my work. My professors at Sarah Lawrence, specifically Mary Porter and Kevin Landdeck have helped me in developing this project.

My cohort at Sarah Lawrence has also been a support system that I am greatly appreciative for. Lauri Schulman has been my comrade in this process and my partner in developing ideas on how women should be remembered in history. Her constant support has been a reminder of the worth of this project as well as the worth of women historians in this world.



Figure 1: “Jiang Qing with the Little Red Book” Stefan R. Landsberger, International Museum of Women, Global Fund for Women, 1969.

In the image above, Jiang Qing, Mao’s wife, is seen wearing the classic green uniform, happily holding up a copy of Mao’s *Little Red Book*. Mao is in the background, his face shining through on the sun, almost as if he is a god-like figure looking down on Jiang Qing, making her the earthly leader. This poster is an example of Jiang Qing’s rise in power, how the use of political propaganda helped recreate her image for the Chinese people, and how she wished to re-shape China.

Communist political propaganda was considered a crucial mechanism in the Mao regime from 1949 to his death in 1976. Mao started to produce Communist political propaganda starting as early as 1942, before he gained national power. Copies of speeches and newspaper articles praised Mao’s work and eventually, as Mao gained

more power, the propaganda became more sophisticated. David Shambaugh observes that propaganda and indoctrination are considered to have been a hallmark of the Maoist China the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) employed a variety of "thought control" techniques, including:

Incarceration for 'thought reform,' construction of role models to be emulated, mass mobilization campaigns, the creation of ideological monitors and propaganda teams for indoctrination purposes, enactment of articles to be memorized, control of the educational system and media, a nationwide system of loudspeakers, among other methods...¹

Lasting from 1966 to 1976, the Cultural Revolution was a resurgence of revolutionary tactics that sought to eliminate all anti-Mao and bourgeois components of the country. Mao also took down political opponents that sought to assume power after his death. During the Cultural Revolution, everyone from high ranking political ministers to students, to everyday citizens were targeted based on their allegiances to Mao.² The elimination of the so-called remaining bourgeois included many tactics such as: mass incarcerations; re-education projects that sent down youths to work on labor camps and farms; other times political dissidents would simply go missing, assumed dead.

Eventually, during the Cultural Revolution, propaganda saw itself transformed into an artform. Jiang Qing, Mao's wife and the "first lady" of China was the creator of a new form of theater that she called, Modern Revolutionary Peking Operas, also known as Model Operas. Upon Mao's death in 1976, Jiang Qing was arrested and accused for perpetrating all of the atrocities that occurred during the years of the Cultural

¹ David Shambaugh, (Jan 2007). "China's Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficacy". *China Journal* (57): 25–58.

² Frank Dikotter, *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962–1976*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2016.

Revolution. Her legacy has thus been tied with the political failures of the Cultural Revolution and as the Chinese Communist Party declared, that Jiang Qing was the one to blame. As a way to protect Mao's legacy after his death, Jiang Qing was painted as the political instigator and power grabber. Thus calling to question if it is possible to see Jiang Qing's influence in Communist China as more than a mere victim of Chinese patriarchy and more than a villainous woman filled with political ambition, plotting behind Mao's back.

My project is to introduce a more complicated study of Communist political propaganda, specifically in Revolutionary Model Operas, in relation to its connection with women's roles in Chinese society during the Cultural Revolution. It centers on the Modern Revolutionary Peking Operas that were created by Mao Zedong's fourth wife, Jiang Qing and how their creation changed the depiction of women as the heroine and pushed for the Communist ideal of a woman comrade.

The core questions in my research ask of myself and other scholars why a gendered study of political propaganda is necessary and questions if Jiang Qing deserves more attention as more than a power hungry first lady figure behind Mao Zedong and whether the study of the Revolutionary Model Operas can reveal more about the shifts in women's roles in Communist China in comparison to traditional portrayals of women in Peking Opera. My comparison is threefold: First, contrasting the traditional tropes of female characters on stage with the revolutionary model; second, denoting the differences between theater tropes versus real life practice; and third, an examination of Jiang Qing's version of Maoist female liberation.

“The First Lady of the Cultural Revolution,” “The White Boned Demon,” “Madame Mao,” “Mao Zedong’s dog,” these are all of the monikers given to the fourth wife of Chairman Mao Zedong. Was she just a dog that acted upon the whims of her master? Or was she motivated by something more than blind political ambition?

Historiography

Discussions of Cultural Revolution China immediately after the revolution consisted of memoirs and first person accounts from those who fled China after the Cultural Revolution.³ Very few western scholars were granted entry into China up until 1978 under the new reformed People’s Republic of China under Deng Xiaoping. Furthermore, because of her consequent arrest under Deng Xiaoping, scholarship on Jiang Qing was more scarce.

Scholarship surrounding Jiang Qing and her hand in the production of Model Operas can be divided between Eastern and Western scholarship. But I would argue that more importantly, there is a clear split between pre and post Cold War writing in which the tone of the scholarship specifically on Jiang Qing changes. In shaping the history of Jiang Qing with the portrayal of Women in the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing should exist in a space that defines her more than as a villain or a victim. Historians both in China and in the West have discussed Jiang Qing with this bifurcated notion that Qing’s

³ Memoirs of this type include auto-biographies written by former Red Guards and members of the Communist Party who fled China after the Cultural Revolution, see Jung Chang *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*, New York: Harper Collins, 1991, Anchee Min, *Red Azalea*, New York: Anchor Books, 1994, Rae Young, *Spider Eaters*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, Ji-Li Jiang, *Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution*, New York: Harper Collins, 1997.

motivations either came from a place a malice or as a defense mechanism to protect herself from abuses.

The first full biography of Jiang Qing was written and published before her prosecution and eventual sentencing as a traitor against the Chinese Communist Party. Roxane Witke published *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing* in 1977, a year after the death of Mao. Yet her over five-hundred page tome on Madame Mao does not focus on Jiang Qing as the wife of the leader of China. She rather introduces Jiang Qing the way that she supposedly wanted to be presented, as a true revolutionary. "... she spoke much less of being Mao Tse-tung's wife than of her thirty-year struggle to become a leader in her own right."⁴ Witke is one of the few Western scholars who had the opportunity to interview Jiang Qing personally and interact with Madame Mao. Witke was granted a weeklong session of interviews with Jiang Qing in the summer of 1972.⁵

The historical analysis of Jiang Qing's life is partly based on these series of interviews conducted between Witke and Qing. But by granting Jiang Qing her rightful voice in her own biography, there are moments when Witke chooses to apologetically frame Jiang Qing as a vulnerable woman in an all male political arena.

Although in her male-dominated society she had every reason to be a feminist, she was not one in the usual sense. Occasionally she remarked on difficulties faced by many Chinese women and on changes in their status (she made no comment on women's condition in the West). But she almost never complained, though it had often been true, that men in particular and in general had thwarted her right to an opinion and rise to power.⁶

⁴ Roxane Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing*, Boston, Little Brown and Company, 1977, 4.

⁵ Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing*, 3.

⁶ *Ibid*, 9.

In 1984, Ross Terrill wrote another biography on Jiang Qing. Hyperbolic at times, Terrill's *White Boned Demon* matches the American discourse of the 1980s. Jiang Qing as the titular "White Boned Demon" is painted as a master manipulator who sought to punish those who had wronged her in her life. Terrill's prose has a sense of drama that mirrors the operatic nature of Jiang Qing's life, although he attempts to psychoanalyze her motivations.

She was back in the arts again! And this time not as a doll, but as one of the bosses, doing what the men did! She had always hated the Confucian tradition whereby 'women rule in the family, while men rule outside it,' and now, with the single stone of power, she could knock down that philosophic bird as well as the particular crows and hawks that had pecked at her flesh in the past.⁷

As these two biographies demonstrate, the development of historical work on Model Operas lacks a depth of knowledge in women's roles both onstage and in society as well as a more elaborate understanding of Jiang Qing's motivations and involvement in the Communist Party.

Other discussions of Jiang Qing include highly politicized and skewed biographies such as, *Chiang Ching, Mao Tse-Tung's Wife*, published by the World anti-Communist League based out of Taiwan.⁸ This short pamphlet on Jiang Qing was published specifically for the purpose of denouncing the Chinese Communist Party more specifically, the Cultural Revolution.

⁷ Ross Terrill, *Madame Mao, The White Boned Demon: A Biography of Madame Mao Zedong*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1984, 255. Throughout his biography, Terrill's language ranges from dramatic and hyperbolic to blatantly orientalist with one example of his description of Mao, "In Chinese History, most peasant rebellion leaders had strong sex drives. Mao was in this tradition." (184).

⁸ *Chiang Ching, Mao Tse-Tung's Wife*, World anti-Communist League, Taipei, 1973.

Anchee Min's historical fiction account of *Becoming Madame Mao* follows Jiang Qing's life with references from both Witke and Terril's earlier biographies.⁹ Min's interpretation of Madame Mao's story takes on the abuses of Jiang Qing's childhood and cites these abuses as a continuous driving force throughout Jiang Qing's life. Switching between Jiang Qing's own voice in the first person, Min attempts to reinvent Jiang Qing's voice through taking on a first person narrative along with an omniscient background narrator.

Min is also the author of two memoirs, *Red Azalea*, published in 1994, and *The Cooked Seed*, published in 2013.¹⁰ These two works are considered memoirs with personal accounts from Min's life living under the Communist Regime. She remembers her career as an actress during the cultural revolution. While living in Communist China, Min was cast in Communist propaganda films and was introduced to Madame Mao. Her proximity to the propaganda production process in the last years of the Cultural Revolution is seen in her version of Jiang Qing's story in *Becoming Madame Mao*. Min references the works of Witke and Terril in her book and thus follows a similar narrative in her description of Jiang Qing's political motivations and takes even more liberties by assuming Qing's voice.

It is clear that Min's account is a piece of fiction, though her presence within the scholarship on Jiang Qing is an important bridge as a Chinese writer who personally

⁹ Anchee Min, *Becoming Madame Mao*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2000.

¹⁰ Anchee Min, *Red Azalea*, New York: Anchor Books, 1994

knew Jiang Qing.¹¹ In bridging this gap however, I have located a few major factual historical discrepancies between Chinese accounts of Jiang Qing's early life, and Western scholarship. Freudian at times, Terril, Witke, and even Min point towards Jiang's lack of parental figures as a part of her motivations for political power in her later life. Yet a biography on Jiang Qing's early life, published in 2000 by a Chinese scholar, Wang Su Ping, recounts Jiang Qing's relationship with her mother and a half-sister that is never mentioned in Witke, Terril, or Min.¹² On the topic of Jiang Qing's mother and her relationship with her family, there is a major historical and factual discrepancy between the scholarship produced in English, by American scholars, versus Ping's account.

The reliability of historical sources on Jiang Qing depends greatly on the periodization of each piece of work, especially regarding Chinese literature published on Jiang Qing. By the time of her death, she was regarded as a counter-revolutionary and a criminal of the State. Histories and biographies on Jiang Qing like those written by Terril and Witke then lacked crucial moments in the last decade of Jiang Qing's life, while under incarceration. Chinese scholars were then discouraged from writing on Jiang Qing entirely.

Other mentions of Jiang Qing can be found in the various biographies written of Mao. One of the most intimate accounts of Chairman Mao comes from the detailed accounts from his personal physician, Dr. Li Zhi-Shi in his book, *The Private Life of*

¹¹ Anchee Min was an actress in China who was cast to play the role of Jiang Qing, in a Communist sponsored film on the life of Madame Mao.

¹² Wang Su Ping, *Before She Was Named Jiang Qing 她还没叫江青的时候 (Ta Hai Mei Jiao Jiang Qing De Shi Hou)*, Beijing: Beijing Shi Yue Wen Yi Chu Ban She, 2000.

Chairman Mao.¹³ In this personal biography, Li mentions the intimate details of Jiang Qing and Mao's relationship as he knew it. From 1954 to Mao's death in 1976, Li was Mao's primary physician. As one of Mao's doctors, Dr. Li inadvertently became entangled in party politics. Li divulges information on Mao's sexual relationship with his mistresses, as well as Mao's strained relationship with his wife, Jiang Qing due to Mao's extra-marital affairs that resulted in his contraction of syphilis.

Jung Chang, another Chinese expatriate, also mentions Jiang Qing in her biography of Mao Zedong, *Mao: The Unknown Story*.¹⁴ Written with her husband, Irish historian Jon Halliday, this biography written on Mao uses many personal accounts and memoirs written by former Chinese red guards and political officials who were active throughout Mao's rule. Her mentions of Jiang Qing are limited by her first appearance in Yanan, the town that Mao occupied before the Communist takeover and her later involvement during the Cultural Revolution, though Jiang Qing's role as both Mao's secretary in the 1940s and then the deputy director of the Central Cultural Revolution group is minimized.¹⁵

Political Propaganda in the Cultural Revolution

Within the scholarship of political propaganda produced under Communist China, much of the emphasis has been on the visual art through propaganda posters and

¹³ Dr. Li Zhi-Sui, *The Private life of Chairman Mao*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1994.

¹⁴ Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: the Unknown Story*, New York: Vintage Books USA: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group; New Ed edition (January 1, 2007).

¹⁵ The lack of biographical information on Jiang Qing contrasts greatly with the wealth of biographies published on Mao. This contrast calls to question the attention put on Jiang Qing and her contributions to the Cultural Revolution as well as her general influence on Mao's regime.

pamphlets produced during the Cultural Revolution. Art historians, as well as scholars of music and performance studies have taken on the study of political propaganda.

Ban Wang's *The Sublime Figure of History Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China*, published in 1997, focuses on the stylistic changes in Chinese Culture before and after the rise of Mao.¹⁶ His exploration in the aesthetics of Communist propaganda points to the differences in style, use of color, as well as thematic differences in the production of political propaganda during the Cultural Revolution.

Another study on Chinese political propaganda focuses specifically on the posters of the Cultural Revolution. In their book, *Chinese Posters: Art From the Great Proletarian Revolution*¹⁷, Lincoln Cushing and Ann Tompkins reveal three main tenets of artistic reform under the Cultural Revolution: "1. Rejection of Western and classical Chinese styles; 2. Developing artwork from previously disenfranchised social strata and regions; 3. Rejection of art 'for art's sake'".¹⁸ Within their work, posters advertising Model Operas are included as another example of how the CCP cultivated a very specific and intentional style of art that permeated public and private spaces in Communist China. Cushing's and Tompkins' archival work on Chinese political posters provides a

¹⁶ Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

¹⁷ The Cultural Revolution is sometimes also referred to as "The Great Proletarian Revolution." scholars have since more popularly used "Cultural Revolution" to denote the period of time from 1966 to 1976 in China.

¹⁸ Lincoln Cushing specializes in the analysis of political posters. His work focuses on archival projects on poster art from Cuba, China, as well as the Soviet Union and the United States. Ann Tompkins lived in China from 1957 to 1965 working as an English teacher and has dedicated her work specifically to the Communist Revolution and her experiences in China. Lincoln Cushing and Ann Tompkins, *Chinese Posters: Art From the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007, 7.

collection of over 150 posters some of which had not been readily available to Western audiences.

Restrictions against the study of the Cultural Revolution has limited scholarship to historians from the United States and Europe. Richard King and Jan Walls explore the various forms of art produced in Cultural Revolution China in their book, *Art In Turmoil* and make note of this scholarly gap in the conversations surrounding Cultural Revolution art.

The post-Cultural Revolution national leadership has discouraged research and teaching on the period at the nation's universities and has focused public attention on the economic successes of the present rather than revisiting a past in which the ruling Communist Party was responsible for injustice and chaos. Thus, the history of the Cultural Revolution has largely been told by those writing outside China: expatriates... or Western scholars.¹⁹

King and Walls' explanation of Western heavy scholarship on Cultural Revolution China is relevant to understanding the historiography of Jiang Qing and Revolutionary Operas. King and Walls identify "Chinese expatriates" and Western scholars as both outside of China. Implying that memoirs written by writers such as Jung Chang and Anchee Min, their work also targets an English speaking audience, which again positions their work in the Western arena.

King and Walls also identify a certain phenomenon in the popularity of Communist propaganda in current popular culture, noting that, "Cultural Revolution art has proved strangely persistent, however, demanding attention with its return as

¹⁹ Richard King and Jan Walls, "Vibrant Images of a Turbulent Decade," *Art in Turmoil: the Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2010, 3.

nostalgia or kitsch...”²⁰ Similarly, Barbara Mittler investigates the resurgence in popularity of Communist era political propaganda art in contemporary China as well as in the West. Her book, *A Continuous Revolution* explores several mediums of art including posters, stage works, literature, and music from the Cultural Revolution era.²¹

Frank Dikotter mentions political propaganda specifically in a chapter entitled “Poster Wars” in his book, *The Cultural Revolution: A People’s History, 1962-1976*.²² Dikotter chronicles the unravelling of student movements at universities specifically in Beijing and Shanghai in which students turned on one another with accusations of “counter-revolutionary thought” and even teachers attacked colleagues in order to protect their own position. The “poster wars” as Dikotter calls it saw a surge in student led protests and various factions denouncing others based on family reputation and Communist affiliation. “They were on the alert of incriminating evidence, and every day fresh posters reported the latest findings.”²³ Thus the “power of posters” was found not only in state produced propaganda, but state sanctioned movements that sought to denounce all “rightists and counter-revolutionaries.”

Revolutionary Model Opera

Within the telling of Jiang Qing’s involvement in the Cultural Revolution, more

²⁰ Richard King and Jan Walls, “Vibrant Images of a Turbulent Decade,” *Art in Turmoil: the Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2010, 4.

²¹ Barbara Mittler, *A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture*, Boston: Harvard University Press, 2013.

²² Frank Dikotter, “Poster Wars,” *The Cultural Revolution: A People’s History, 1962-1976*, New York, Bloomsbury Press, 2016, 53-65.

²³ Frank Dikotter, “Poster Wars,” *The Cultural Revolution: A People’s History, 1962-1976*, 2016, 54.

specifically in her involvement with the Revolutionary Model Operas, the narrative begins and ends with her political ambitions. There are very few full length books dedicated solely to Model Operas. Instead, mentions of Model Operas can be found within analyses of cultural reform and artistic movements of the Cultural Revolution. Analysis of female roles in Model Operas were less nuanced, and the emergence of the Communist heroine within the propaganda has received less attention from academics in the past.

In 1970, historians Walter and Ruth Meserve referred to the feminist nature of Jiang Qing's Model Operas as "overwhelming," indicating that during this time, both before Qing's death and before the end of the Cold War, there was an inescapable predisposition against the productions coming out of Communist China.

Their plays generally showed a social unrest and were built around the evils of the old family system including feudal marriage practices and oppression by the wealthy. The position of women in society was a dominant theme, and the number of heroines rather than heroes in these plays is quite overwhelming.²⁴

Meserve and Meserve provide translations of several stage-shows produced between the late 1950s and 1960s, including the translations of two Revolutionary Model Operas, *The White Haired Girl* and *The Red Lantern*. However, they do not provide commentary or context on the individual plays and theater pieces in their anthology of Modern dramas providing only an introduction and the direct translations of the librettos and scripts.

This kind of anthologized scholarship is also found in Ralph C. Croizier's work. Croizier puts together both Chinese and Western literature of his time in an anthology of

²⁴ Walter Meserve and Ruth Meserve, *Modern Drama from Communist China*, New York: New York University Press, 1970, 10.

primary source essays and speeches given in the decades of the 1950s-60s. His book, *China's Cultural Legacy and Communism* was first published in 1970, before Mao's death in 1976. Croizier's book includes one chapter dedicated to Revolutionary Model Opera.²⁵ It provides an interesting glimpse into the literature produced in the final years of Mao's rule. But because of this gap, the Communist Party line towards the Cultural Revolution was drastically different after the death of Mao and the arrests of his wife Jiang Qing.

A decade later, Kai-yu Hsu, employed a similar approach in his collection of Communist era essays and literature in his book, *Literature of the People's Republic of China*.²⁶ Hsu's introduction to the anthology provides historical information in order to contextualize the individual pieces of poetry and literature. Hsu focuses on the "old versus new" idea to describe the waves of change seen in Chinese Communist literature which bifurcates the transition from Traditional Peking Opera to Revolutionary Opera as a simple divide between traditional and revolutionary. Focusing on the musical and poetic differences between the two styles of Opera, he notes the differences between the arias and the musical modes that were changed.

He situates his work through an examination of the stylistic differences between traditional Peking Opera and Revolutionary Model Opera through analysis of rhythmic

²⁵ Within this one chapter, essays on Model Opera include: Andre Traver, "The Attitude of the Communist Party Toward China's Cultural Legacy" A.C. Scott, "Literature and the Arts in Twentieth-Century China," Anonymous, "Old Operas Come into Their Own," Wang Leh, "New Talent for Peking Opera," Li Jen, "Developing the New Out of the Old," *China's Cultural Legacy and Communism*, Ed. Ralph C. Croizier, 1970, 168-191.

²⁶ Kai-yu Hsu, *Literature of the People's Republic of China*, Indiana University Press, 1980

changes, orchestral augmentations, and what he calls “elevation of the ordinary”²⁷ Hsu’s analysis of the folk hero roles in the Model Operas seems to critique what he sees as an overly simplistic and “easy” model that overuses the trope of the hero who never dies, and the Revolutionary who always succeeds. “The new folk-hero model is a success; it has to succeed because it is realistically easy to emulate... the new successful hero does not die, however; he or she is supposed to succeed, emerging triumphant and unscathed from difficulties. Therein lies the attraction.”²⁸

Discussion of Model Opera in connection with Jiang Qing however has been more skewed. In Roderick Macfarquhar and Michael Schoenhals’ brief introduction of Jiang Qing, they describe her as, “famous for her role in promoting the so-called Revolutionary Beijing Operas.”²⁹ This description calls to question Jiang Qing’s importance in her role as arbiter of change in Model Operas, as well as the overall significance of the Model Operas as a whole. Macfarquhar’s and Schoenhals’ book, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, encompasses the entire history of the Cultural Revolution, but does not center around Jiang Qing as the main contributor to Model Opera.

Alternatively, Paul Clark’s book, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History*, focuses even less on Jiang Qing, but includes a detailed history of the production of the first five Model Operas between Beijing and Shanghai.³⁰ He also shifts to the study of

²⁷ Kai-yu Hsu, *Literature of the People’s Republic of China*, Indiana University Press, 1980, 7.

²⁸ Kai-yu Hsu, *Literature of the People’s Republic of China*, 7.

²⁹ Roderick Macfarquhar, Michael Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, Cambridge, MA, First Harvard University Press 2006, 469.

³⁰ Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

the filmmaking during the Cultural Revolution such as camera techniques, filmmaking styles, and stagecraft. His history focuses on Mao Zedong's project during the Cultural Revolution while mentioning briefly Model Opera as political propaganda.

In this current decade of the 2010s, there has been a surge of scholarship focused specifically on the art produced during the Cultural Revolution. Though Model Opera has remained a chapter and a part of a whole in the discussion of Communist influences on State produced art in Cultural Revolution art. Most recently, Laikwan Pang's *The Art of Cloning : Creative Production During China's Cultural Revolution*, published in 2017, combines Chinese cultural studies with political and theater studies. Pang's book on the creative production of art during the Cultural Revolution also addresses aestheticization around the "cult of Mao." Pang then identifies the economic and political aspects of "The Cultural Revolution was a highly aestheticized period: not only were arts produced by professionals to be distributed to the masses, but the masses themselves also became artists."³¹

Lastly, Xing Fan, professor of Theater and Performance Studies at University of Texas, Austin presents her study of the aesthetics of Model Opera. Her book, expected in May of 2018 is entitled, *Staging Revolution : Artistry and Aesthetics in Model Beijing Opera During the Cultural Revolution*. Fan's previous work on the role of revolutionary women in Twentieth-Century China is sure to appear as a key component of her study on the artistry of Model Opera.

The work of this thesis is placed in a conversation on the importance of Model Opera as well as its influence on the image of the Communists heroine. It focuses on the

³¹ Laikwan Pang, *The Art of Cloning : Creative Production During China's Cultural Revolution*, New York, Verso, 2017, 33.

female figure that was cultivated by Jiang Qing that has still not been fully investigated. This project does not attempt to rectify the full story of Jiang Qing's life, nor is it an attempt to map out the entire history of Chinese women in twentieth-century China. But the motive of this piece is to further complicate the views towards Jiang Qing as well as the changes made towards the style and themes of Opera that have often in the past been disregarded.

Chapter Overview

In chapter one, the focus is on the history of Traditional Peking Opera and its relation to Chinese politics. Starting from the influences from dynastic rule onto the New Chinese Republic and eventually the Communist People's Republic of China. This chapter follows closely the progression of Jiang Qing's early life: her initial love for classical opera, her multiple lovers, and her first encounter with Communism. I separate Jiang Qing's life before Mao, and establish her motivations outside of Mao's orbit.

Chapter two reintroduces Jiang Qing as the wife of Mao. No longer an actress, no longer on the run from former lovers, she is situated next to the most powerful man in China. Both Mao and Qing are compared to different tyrannical dynastic rulers of the past. They are the new emperor and empress of China, and despite their claim for the revolutionary, their inclinations are towards the cultivation of their own personalities. In this Chapter, I introduce the main instigators that sparked the production of Revolutionary Model Operas and highlight the importance that it played in Jiang Qing's personal and political ambitions.

Chapter three offers an analysis and comparison of the female characters in the Model Operas with the female roles of traditional opera. The resolution of conflict in traditional Chinese storytelling resolves with the death of the female protagonist be it by suicide or by other forces. By analyzing Jiang Qing's life, and following her life before Mao, I illustrate how she based many of the Operas off of her own life experiences. It is possible to make a broader observation on how and why Jiang Qing, along with other revolutionaries sought to change China's perceptions of heroism and patriotism.

Chapter four asks if Communist political propaganda actually changed women's everyday lives. Their presence in society as laborers brought them out of the domestic sphere and into the public sphere where they worked side by side with men in factories and farms. This push towards female empowerment was not done in one quick movement. In this chapter I provide interviews from people living in China today and ask of them their memory of Jiang Qing as well as their memory of the Revolutionary Model Operas. The current state of Opera and theater today includes both a revival of Peking Operas as well as a continuation of Model Operas where the two exist together, sharing the same physical spaces in the same opera houses and theaters, but rivaling each other for ticket sales and popularity.



Figure 1.0 Mei Lanfang (Left) was known as a *hua dan*, directly translated as “flowery role” denoting the most feminine soprano roles in traditional Peking Opera. Mei Lanfang Memorial Museum, 1935, Beijing.

Chapter One: “These splendid results of the revolution of Peking opera have shaken the entire field of the arts like a spring thunder-storm”³²

Traditional Peking Opera in Transition

In both Western and Eastern traditions, artists have produced art under the financial support and sometimes political protection of their patrons. These patrons often contributed their political influence that would alter the style of the art or performances as well as the themes portrayed on stage. With traditional Peking Opera, the most successful troupes performed for the Imperial royal family as well as high ranking ministers of the Chinese Imperial government. Under the various Emperors of the Qing dynasty, the popularity of Peking Opera was seriously affected by the tastes of each emperor.³³

Opera thus was not uniformly popular throughout the entire Qing dynasty. Alternatively, it was mostly determined by the whims of each emperor. Though they were a part of one continuous Qing dynasty, from one emperor to the next, there were vast differences in favour for or against opera. The emperor Qianlong, who ruled from 1735 to 1796, was known as a great lover of the Peking Opera and was noted for hosting Peking Opera festivals for the birthdays of each member of the imperial family.³⁴

Alternatively, the Emperor Daoguang (1821-1859) “decried the court’s obsession with

³² Jiang Qing “Hail the Great Victory in the Revolution of Peking Opera, Editorial of *Hongqi (Red Flag)*, No. 6, 1967,” *On the Revolution of Peking Opera*, Beijing, The Foreign Languages Press, 1968, 8.

³³ The Qing dynasty ruled over China from 1644 to 1911. For a complete history of the Qing Dynasty, see Yi Dai’s *A Concise History of the Qing Dynasty: Volumes 1, 2, 3, & 4*, Singapore, Enrich Publishing, 2014.

³⁴ Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937*, University of California Press. Kindle Edition, 2007, 20.

drama as ‘extorting the ordinary people’s fat and grease to provide the pleasures and entertainments of important officials and misdirecting unauthorized taxes to the detriment of [the] common people.’³⁵ Taking into account these constant shifts, traditional opera also changed depending on the proclivities of the reigning ruler.

With the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, Peking Opera troupes needed to find a new audience in the newly formed Republic. Peking Opera itself experienced its own transition period that required its players to become more innovative with their interpretations of classic operas as well as more creative through inventing new operas. Within this period of time, performers took on the role of actor, composer, and even publicist. The remnants of the Imperial court still survived in Beijing, but massifying opera became one of the most important projects for keeping Peking Opera alive in the newly formed Republic of China.³⁶ Troupes had to cater to a new kind of audience in the new post Imperial China.

The theaters are like inns, the troupes are like passing guests. Each company performs plays at an individual theater, four days count as a cycle, and after each cycle it begins all over again... Smaller or less popular troupes would pick up the crumbs, lucky to get a few days performing in one of the big theaters. Once the rotation schedule was decided upon, it was posted by the Qian Gate.³⁷

After this lost period of shifting audiences, Peking Opera troupes recognized the

³⁵The terms “fat and grease” here could be interpreted as *gras* or excess, see Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, 21.

³⁶ After the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, China went through a series of transitional governments until Sun Yat Sen and the Guo-Ming-Dang Nationalist party gained power over most of the country. See Paul Myron Linebarger, *Sun Yat-Sen and the Chinese Republic*, New York: Century Co., 1939. See also Henry Bond Restarick, *Sun Yat-Sen, Liberator of China*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931.

³⁷ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, 30.

effectiveness of producing new Operas for the masses instead of only for the ruling class. In this time between the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911 and the rise of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, Opera troupe members relied on the growing desire for innovation in opera to satisfy both the artistic and financial needs of the troupes.

The Role of Women in Traditional Peking Opera

In Peking Opera, men most commonly played female roles, women who were seen as talented female tenors or contraltos, would also take on male roles. This flexibility in gender role reversals related directly to the history of the Peking Opera and the legacy left by Imperial Chinese rule. After the Qing dynasty took power over China in the 17th century, the Imperial government officially banned female players from performing in public. In the Forbidden City, female actresses were replaced by eunuchs and this reorganization of roles was enforced on theater troupes throughout the country.

One of the main motivations for why the Qing government banned female opera singers and actresses was because many female actresses were considered to be prostitutes. "For actresses the connection between sex work and acting was often immediate and explicit. Many actresses began as children of impoverished families and were indentured as prostitutes when their households collapsed in destitution."³⁸ With this transition, all the female roles in the opera were then played by men. It was only at the very end of the Qing dynasty that women were allowed to play on stages. When women re-entered the theater scene their livelihood still relied on patrons with

³⁸ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, 239.

the understanding of that this exchange included sexual favors. Even in the case of popular actresses, the stigma was inescapable. Thus men still dominated the opera scene even after the ban against female actresses was lifted.

The Male Performer of Female Roles: Mei Lanfang

This ban on female actresses gave way to a new kind of performer that would be known as the *dan*, a man who played the part of the woman. The young boys who were picked to fill these roles were groomed at a young age and through this training, their perceptions of gender, sex, and sexuality were shaped through their understanding of their place in the theater. Many times, the boys who entered these acting schools came from impoverished families, or were orphaned. Others like Mei Lanfang, received their training from masters and came from acting families that had a legacy of producing talented actors.³⁹

The events of Mei Lanfang's life inspired director Chen Kaige, who made two films based on the experience of Peking Opera actors in the early twentieth-century. *Farewell My Concubine*, spans over a fifty year period, following the training, professional life, and personal lives of the two actors against a backdrop of the Japanese occupation of China in WWII to Mao's Communist takeover.⁴⁰ The film explores the relationships among young men living and learning together under a master to become a part of a Peking Opera troupe. *Forever Enthralled* (2008) is a biographical film based

³⁹ Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007.

⁴⁰ Released in 1993, *Farewell My Concubine* is to this date still the only Chinese language film to receive the Palme D'or at the Cannes Film Festival.

on the early life of Mei Lanfang. The film focuses primarily on Mei's project to go to the United States for a North American tour. The film begins with Mei's childhood training and ends with his return from New York having just performed at the Forty-Ninth Street Theater.

In his film, *Farewell My Concubine*, Chen Kaige captures the intensity of Peking Opera training as well as the importance of Peking Opera as a sophisticated artform. In a sort of training montage, a Peking Opera Master tells his pupils that their work is an integral part of the "Chinese way of life."

If you belong to the human race, you go to the opera. If you do not go to the opera, then you are not a human being. Pigs and dogs do not listen to opera. And are they humans? NO! They are beasts! And where there is opera, there is work for actors.⁴¹

This concept that all people go to the opera was a new idea that appeared after the fall of the Qing dynasty. Opera became more accessible to the public and thus the training became more competitive. The young boys who were picked to fill the female roles were groomed at a young age and through this training, their perceptions of gender, sex, and sexuality were shaped through their understanding of their place in the theater.

Each boy was required to take on the personas of various characters not only on stage, but also to understand the significance of that portrayal. In many operas, the characters were based on historical or legendary figures, meaning that the characters have a presence in Chinese culture and history beyond the stage. With the added pressures of learning acrobatic moves and gestures, the actor's training also involved an acute awareness of their character's cultural importance. This transition in artistic

⁴¹ *Farewell My Concubine*, Chen Kaige, 1993, Hong Kong, Miramax Classics, 1999, DVD.

expression also marked a shift that moved away from traditional Chinese conceptions of masculinity and femininity reflecting change in society from Imperial rule to the newly formed Chinese Republic.

Mei Lanfang came from a long line of Peking Opera masters that were based in Beijing (then known as Bei Ping) Opera troupes needed to find a new main source of income after the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911. As Mei Lanfang writes in his own memoirs:

I used to get blisters on my feet when I was practising on stilts and suffered much pain. I thought my teacher should not have made a boy in his teens go through such severe trials and felt bitter about it. But today when in my sixties I can still do feminine warrior poses in such operas as *The Drunken Beauty*⁴² and *The Mountain Fortress*, I know that I am able to do so only because my teachers were severe with me in my basic training.⁴³

Peking Opera training was an interdisciplinary process of mastering music, singing, dancing, acrobatics, martial arts, literature, and history. In addition to mastery of these various artforms, actors also developed their own style in regards to performance and costuming. Actors would make their own choices in specific makeup and costuming details, while still following the guidelines for each role.

Mei Lanfang incorporated his own style into his interpretation of female roles and thus gained fame for his stylistic choices. There were specific hand gestures, and subtle moves cultivated by Mei through his portrayal of certain female characters that

⁴² In referring to *The Drunken Beauty*, Mei Lanfang alludes to an opera based on the history of Consort Yang, a figure that is familiar in folklore, poetry, and opera. The story of Consort Yang ends in her death upon criticisms from the Emperor's ministers claiming that she was a distraction from State affairs. I will discuss the topic of the female demise in traditional Chinese storytelling in Chapter Three.

⁴³ Mei Lanfang, "My Life on Stage," *China's Greatest Operatic Male Actor of Female Roles: Documenting the Life and Art of Mei Lanfang, 1894-1961*, ed. Min Tian, (Lewiston, NY, The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), 30.

allude to his study and interpretation of each opera. This kind of styling is what set his performance experience apart from other male actresses.

A person taking the *huadan* role must give much attention to facial expression, movement and impromptu humorous dialogue. Her costume also tends towards the bold, colourful and splendid, In the Chinese classical theatre, the *huadan* represents the lively, romantic woman.... For instance a pupil whose facial expression is stiff, who is clumsy and heavy in build and whose eyes lack a lively look will never be chosen to learn the *huadan* role.⁴⁴

It is important to note that when speaking about his style and costuming, Mei uses the pronoun “her” in his description of how an actor should style his character. This is significant in his understanding of gender in respect to his craft as a *huadan* or “flowery character/role” a variation of the *dan* that specifically refers to the most feminine roles of a younger female character much like the role of the classic soprano in western opera.

Filling the Void: Male Performers in Female Roles Both On and Off Stage

In the history of Mei Lanfang, there has been a marked effort to remove the fact that Mei Lanfang was a *Song Lang* from official records of Mei Lanfang.⁴⁵ *Song langs* usually accompanied visitors for dinner, drinking wine, singing. At that time, he was known as Meilang. But once he became a full time actor, he was known from then on as Mei Lanfang making it possible to blur the image of him as a professional actor, and his

⁴⁴ Mei Lanfang, “My Life on Stage,” Min Tian, *China's Greatest Operatic Male Actor of Female Roles : Documenting the life and art of Mei Lanfang, 1894-1961*. Lewiston, NY. Edwin Mellen Press, 2010, 33-34

⁴⁵ In Chen Kaige’s film, *Forever Enthralled*, Mei Lanfang’s time as a Song Boy is completely omitted. Chen Kaige chose to omit this detail in his biographical film of Mei’s life, *Forever Enthralled*. Which chronicles the life of Mei Lanfang, highlighting specifically the time leading up to his visit to America, and WWII. This film is set very much in the during a similar time period as *Farewell My Concubine*, yet addresses the issue of gender role reversal quite differently in which Mei’s sexuality is not called to question. His appearance however, starts out as quite feminine and abruptly changes after his first marriage. This transition is perhaps more obvious seeing that there is a change in the actor to represent a growth and maturity in Mei’s character as well as his age. It would seem that his feminine qualities are immediately changed as he passes puberty, marrying his first wife, and ‘becoming a man.’

other role as a *Song Lang*. It was only after 1991 when the Republic of China banned the practice of *Song Lang*. The Beijing police department declared that the *Song Lang*'s works were too similar to those of prostitutes. Since then, *Song Lang* has become a taboo term, with people often denying or ignoring its existence and legacy in relation to the Peking Opera. Even though female actresses were originally banned for their negative connotations with prostitution, the role of the "Song Boy" replaced the role of women both on and off stage.

The Song Boys of the late Qing Period were a replacement for the female actresses who were also associated with sex work and prostitution. Thus, the initial ban on female actresses only created a new space for young male actors to fill the void of entertainers turned sex workers without resolving the stigma carried with being an actor or performer in China.

Mei Lanfang wrote and adapted Operas while performing. Combining acting with composition, Mei Lanfang spearheaded the trend of actors participating in the production and writing process. Thus Jiang Qing's later interventions as producer, writer, and director matched the creative process popularized by Mei Lanfang. However, Jiang Qing eventually marked Mei Lanfang as orthodox and reactionary.

She saw an opportunity to brand Mei as 'attached to the old,' in the name of a new order she felt able to represent because her husband was its chief powerholder... Mei was especially furious at Jiang's crusade against him because in the 1920s he had himself tried to modernize Peking opera, updating the stories and using contemporary costumes but had come to the conclusion that one could not fiddle with the ancient and produce something modern that an opera about kings had to *be* an opera about kings and that history and current themes would never be married in the Chinese theater."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Ross Terrill, *The White Boned Demon*, 192.

Even though he had began the project of modernizing opera, he was seen as a bourgeois remnant of ancient China. “After the Communists came to power he continued to add modern glamour to his ancient style, issued his memoirs in English, made records and films of his performances, and flaunted his friendships with Hollywood personalities.”⁴⁷ Mei Lanfang was seen as a threat to Jiang Qing’s place as a creative personality and his presence as the greatest male actor of female roles further undermined Jiang Qing’s vision of having the stage dominated by women, as well as having their roles bring real significance to the Communist agenda.

Jiang Qing’s former profession as an actress could be seen as an asset in her contribution to creating new operas. But at times, it was also another obstacle that weaken her status since the profession still carried a heavy stigma of prostitution and low social standing.

Since actresses generally were morally suspect, or appreciated only as entertainment, did not Chiang Ch’ing, whose ultimate goal was a revered masculine type of political power, have every reason in her world to avoid restoring her theatrical image in the public mind? Moreover, in China, as almost everywhere, culture was never a predominantly feminine sphere of responsibility. For centuries, men had dominated the theater as playwrights, directors, and musicians, and until recently had monopolized the stage.⁴⁸

Witke’s assumption that Jiang Qing’s political power as well as her cultural contributions were both masculine highlights the aspects of pre and post-Communist Revolution China that remained patriarchal. Qing’s former life as an actress thus created a tension between her life before Mao, and her role as the first lady of China. Though she

⁴⁷ Roxane Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ch’ing*, 384.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

had received training as an actress, and wished to contribute to the revolution of opera, her former life actually marked her negatively since the image of actresses remained little changed.

What's in a name? Jiang Qing as Yunhe and Shumeng

Before she was known as Jiang Qing or Madame Mao, she was called “Shumeng” as a child. Jiang Qing was born in 1914, when, “the last dynasty of Confucian China had fallen three years before.”⁴⁹ Shumeng was the daughter of a moderately wealthy man from the town of Zhucheng.⁵⁰ Her mother was a concubine and lived the life of a servant under the large household. Jiang Qing later on convinced her Communist Comrades that she came from a poor peasant class family. She revised her childhood story and claimed that her father was a poor carpenter. Her father was abusive towards her mother, and by age eight, Jiang Qing and her mother left her father’s household and lived on their own. As Anchee Min suggests, Jiang Qing’s childhood abuses play a part in her adaptation of Revolutionary Model Theater. “Madame Mao later uses the incident in both ballet and opera of the same title, *The Women of the Red Detachment*. The villains come with vicious-looking dogs to chase the slave girl.”⁵¹

After living alone with her mother for a few years, Shumeng moved in with her maternal grandparents. Jiang Qing’s many name changes might not be as capricious as

⁴⁹ Ross Terrill, *Madame Mao The White Boned Demon: A Biography of Madame Mao Zedong*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1984, 20

⁵⁰ Zhucheng is located in the Shandong Province of North-eastern China.

⁵¹ Anchee Min, *Becoming Madame Mao*, 12.

one would think. It was quite popular for artists to constantly take on new stage names and personas as a signal of evolution in their creative process. Jiang Qing's constant changes in name could also signal her search for an ultimate character to portray.

Yunhe loved the stage, finding excitement in the makeup, costumes, and bright lights, and she began to see in it a possible career. Still a whiff of prostitution hung over the underground troupe, in which the jade girls were not only free of family supervision but also subject to the whims of money-making bosses. This gave Yunhe further experience of the predicament of a female in a situation - however appealing in its trappings - of fundamental powerlessness.⁵²

Only a few months after Yunhe's first time acting in an opera troupe, she was found by her grandparents. Her grandfather had to buy her back from the opera troupe since she had told them that she was an orphan, and by taking her in, opera troupe claimed her as their property. Upon returning home, Yunhe was arranged to be married.

Qing's first marriage was arranged by her grandparents at age seventeen.⁵³ Jiang Qing ran away once more, this time from her marriage within a year and moved to Qingdao. In later years, Jiang Qing denied that this marriage ever existed.⁵⁴ "Each time Yunhe broke up with a lover, she left town and started a fresh life in a different city. It happened with Mr. Fei; it would happen in identical fashion with her second and third husbands."⁵⁵ Her first encounter with marriage was not unlike many marriage that

⁵² Ross Terrill, *The White Boned Demon*, 31.

⁵³Anchee Min, *Becoming Madame Mao*, 23.

⁵⁴ With Jiang Qing's first and third marriages, there is an erasure in the official CCP records of her relationships with other men. But on her second marriage with Yu Qiwei, Jiang Qing used her early participation in the Communist movement as further proof of her passion towards Communist and Maoist ideology.

⁵⁵ Ross Terrill, *The White Boned Demon*, 39.

women went through in China during the early twentieth-century. The marriage was arranged by her grandfather, and her husband-to-be was an older widower looking to take on a younger wife.

From Lanping to Jiang Qing: Finding Love and Communism Before Mao

Mao was neither the catalyst of revolutionary spirit nor the first romantic encounter in Jiang Qing's life. After leaving her first husband, Qing moved to the city of Qingdao and worked at the local university. She found a job working at the library and through her job, she was allowed to audit classes at the university. Jiang Qing's first encounter with Communism was through the student activists on campus.

Jiang Qing then became involved with a young Communist activist at Shandong University. Her first contact with Communism was through her second lover, Yu Qiwei. Before they were married, Jiang Qing officially joined the Communist Party in an underground ceremony. Her initial understanding of Communism came from participating in underground meetings led by Yu Qiwei.⁵⁶ Jiang Qing officially joined the Communist Party in 1933 as a part of her devotion to Yu Qiwei. He was eventually arrested by the Nationalist KMT party because of his leadership in the Communist party. Yu Qiwei eventually re-emerged almost a year after his disappearance, and upon his return, Jiang Qing had already taken a new lover.

After Jiang Qing's relationship with Yu Qiwei failed, she moved to Shanghai to pursue theater as well as film roles. In Shanghai, she experienced a few minor successes,

⁵⁶ The KMT, or Guomindang Party took over national power after the fall of the Qing dynasty. Under Guomindang rule, Communists were jailed and sometimes killed for their involvement with the Communist Party. Through a series of skirmishes that occurred from 1922 to 1949. See Chung Gi-Kwei, *The Kuomintang-Communist Struggle*, the Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970.

most notably in the role of Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. She married a fellow actor, Tang Na. Their relationship sparked scandal with Tang Na attempting suicide twice when Jiang Qing threatened to leave him. Her connection with Tang Na eventually became another stain that she would try to remove after she married Mao.

Thirty years later Madame Mao desperately wants to destroy this picture... It is 1967 and she is on her way to becoming the ruler of China. The aging Mao is her ticket. She has to prove to the nation that she had been Mao's lover since her birth. She has to prove that there had been no one between her and Mao.⁵⁷

After Mao had secured power over all of China, Jiang Qing jailed and persecuted her past lovers and ex husbands as a way to recreate her image as Mao's true love. Jiang Qing believed that if too much was known about her past lovers, her image would lose its innocence and dedication to Mao and Maoism.

Jiang Qing started her acting career in a time when female actresses were just beginning to re-enter the theater scene. Her introduction to acting was through a male dominated arena that had replaced women both in their function as actresses as well as sexual companions such as the *Song Langs*.

Theaters were no longer exclusively male spaces; women gained legal sanction to enter them as both actresses and audience members. But this public agency came at a price. Shifting from an imperial polity to a republic meant that actresses as public women became entangled in the 'body problem,' regarded as objects as much as subjects. Whereas male actors could start distancing themselves from the demeaning role of commodified sexual companion, actresses faced relentless exposure to sexual exploitation and moral denunciation.⁵⁸

For Qing and other actresses, it was more difficult to occupy the theater space compared to their male counterparts. Actors like Mei Lanfang to this day are remembered for their

⁵⁷ Anchee Min, *Becoming Madame Mao*, 83.

⁵⁸ Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, 130.

achievements in Opera despite his past as a *Song Lang*. While actresses and even women who enjoyed theater were continuously scrutinized for their involvement in dramatic arts. In the next chapters, this tension re-appears in the practice as well as the creation of Revolutionary Model Operas as female actresses appear in stronger roles as female protagonists. Jiang Qing did not just change in the themes of the operas, but also in the involvement of women in the production process.



Figure 3.0 From *The Red Lantern*, the young protagonist is stopped by the Japanese before they kill her adoptive father. Photo taken by author, August 2017, Beijing, China.

Chapter Two: “Chairman Mao is the sun and the sun is the Communist Party.”⁵⁹

In 1937, Jiang Qing left Shanghai to move to Yen-an in Shaanxi province, the wartime Communist headquarters.⁶⁰ Still known as “Lanping” at this point, Jiang Qing became a drama teacher in Yen-an. Her motivations for moving to Yen-an have been attributed to a desire to participate in the resistance against the Japanese occupiers.

Her first meeting with Mao has been yet another point of dispute in her history. In a fictionalized version, spread initially by Jiang Qing’s supporters she fell in love with Mao at first sight when she saw him give a speech upon her arrival in Yen-an.⁶¹

During Roxanne Witke’s interviews, the story is recounted by Jiang Qing differently. Qing’s personal account of her initial encounter with Mao placed him as the pursuer and her as the reluctant recipient of his love.

He sought her out personally and offered her a ticket to a lecture he was to give at the Marxist-Leninist Institute. Startled and awestruck, she declined, then swiftly conquered her shyness, accepted the ticket and went to watch him perform.⁶²

⁵⁹ This line can be found in *The White Haired Girl*, originally written as an opera in the 1950s, it was then adapted as a ballet under Jiang Qing as one of her Eight Revolutionary Model plays. See Ting Yi and Ho Ching-chih, “The White Haired Girl”, trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, *Modern Drama from Communist China*, ed. Walter Meserve and Ruth Meserve, New York: New York University Press, 1970.

⁶⁰ From 1936 to 1947, the city of Yen-an was the official headquarters of the Chinese Communist Party. The town was situated against a mountain, with multiple complex caverns and structures built into the mountainside as a defense during the Japanese Occupation. The Chinese Communist Party for a time allied with the Nationalist Guo-Mindang party as well as the Americans to fight the Japanese during WWII. See Richard Bernstein, *China 1945: Mao's Revolution and America's Fateful Choice*, New York: First Vintage Books, 2014.

⁶¹ Anchee Min, *Becoming Madame Mao*, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000, 91.

⁶² Roxane Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977, 153.

The description continues as Jiang Qing remarks on her opinions of romantic feelings and overt displays of affection, “...she would say that to exhibit individual feelings, romantic imagination, and attractive sexuality in life or literature was to display ‘bourgeois fallacies...’”⁶³ yet in Witke’s own words, she described Jiang Qing in the same passage quite differently.

Paradoxically, though, I found her to be a person of intense feelings, extraordinary imagination, and evident femininity. Yet she gave me no reason to believe that she had ever been plagued by any conflict between romantic love and revolutionary determination.⁶⁴

Without attempting to overly psychoanalyze the romantic feelings that Jiang Qing felt for Mao, this presentation of their first meeting allows the possibility that at one point, the two were truly in love. This question of romance is rarely addressed in Jiang Qing’s relationship with Mao. As she gained political power, her relationship to Mao has been diminished to a political stepping stone.

Emperor Mao and Empress Jiang Qing

In October of 1949, Mao and Jiang Qing moved into the Forbidden City, and occupied the same quarters as the former emperors and empresses of the Qing dynasty that had fallen more than three decades prior. Jiang Qing was the new empress of China. When Mao officially took over Beijing, he settled in the old Imperial Palace. Jiang Qing was given one of the former empress's quarters and the new Communist

⁶³ Roxane Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing*, 153.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

government was installed within the same walls as the Qing dynasty that they had marked as bourgeois and reactionary.

By the 1960's Mao had slowly become a God-like figure not dissimilar to the Emperors of Imperial China.⁶⁵ Similarly, Jiang Qing was compared to the Tang dynasty Empress who ruled over China as the first and only female ruler of China.

She had started to compare herself to Wu Zetian. Articles praising the sixth century empress as a great unifier of the nation appeared in the press, even though she was popularly reviled as a ruthless, wicked ruler who had mercilessly crushed her opponents. Madame Mao had several imperial gowns tailored after those of the empress, although she never wore them in public.⁶⁶

The use of the word “empress” here could be construed as a revision of Wu Zetian’s position as China’s only female emperor. The distinction between Empress and Emperor is important since Wu ruled as the sole sovereign of China without a male counterpart; though she did start as a concubine and then empress of the emperor Taizong in the Seventh-Century.⁶⁷ Comparisons such as this between Jiang Qing and Wu Zetian characterize both women as ruthless, villainous figures in Chinese history denoting a deep disapproval of female leaders.

This imperial comparison between Mao and Jiang Qing allowed political dissenters to masquerade their critiques through old imperial stories. Their disapproval for

⁶⁵ This comparison can be seen in many of the depictions of Mao in propaganda posters. For more analysis of this image, see Barbara Mittler’s *A Continuous Revolution, : Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture*, Boston: Harvard University Press, 2013. See also Kingsley Edney’s *The Globalization of Chinese Propaganda: International Power and Domestic Political Cohesion*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

⁶⁶ Frank Dikotter, *The Cultural Revolution: A People’s History*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2016, 304.

⁶⁷ Wu Zetian or Wu Zhao has repeatedly been depicted as a ruthless female ruler, edging out her own sons and political opponents. For a more nuanced history of Emperor Wu, see N. Harry Rothschild, *Wu Zhao: China’s Only Woman Emperor*, London: Pearson Longman, 2008.

Mao's total control over the country could sometimes pass as criticism against the *ancien Regime*.

The spark that inspired Jiang Qing to write and rewrite traditional Peking Operas was the rise in popularity of a play, *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*. In 1960, the deputy Mayor of Beijing, Wu Han, published his retelling of *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*. The story follows an old tale of a Ming dynasty official in the imperial court. Hai Rui was a minister who was imprisoned for criticizing the emperor. It criticizes the misguided Emperor for not listening to his ministers and paints Hai Rui as a faithful servant of The Republic who was wrongfully punished for trying to save China.

The play was seen as an allegory to Mao's rule with Mao as the corrupt Emperor and Hai Rui as the faithful official who is wronged. "The political debacle it provoked was grounded in an axiom of Chinese history: the drama, as well as the novel, poetry, and written history are mirrors that either flatter or disfigure the images of the ruling class."⁶⁸ Overt criticism against Mao or the CCP was seen as treasonous, but through *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, Wu Han was able to spark a series of political debates that either praised or critiqued his play. Members of Mao's Politburo also contributed to the literary critique of *Hai Rui*.

The use of historical allusion as a means of political attack had a long tradition in China, but in this case the Chairman himself had urged the leaders to study the character of Hai Rui in the first half of 1959. Mao was fascinated by the Ming-era official, who was both courageous in speaking out to the emperor himself, but rather his misguided ministers. Mao used this historical figure to blame the party leadership for the mounting disaster caused by the Great Leap Forward.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Roxanne Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing*, Boston, Little Brown and Company, 1977, 297.

⁶⁹ Frank Dikotter, *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962-1976*, New York, Bloomsbury Press, 2016, 47.

At first, the play was seen as a critique against the old regime, a denouncement of the Imperial dynastic rule of the past that Mao had so gallantly squashed. But, “the drama’s allusions to recent politics were all too clear. Poor harvests combined with poor planning during the Great Leap Forward had caused painful setbacks among the people. The ‘upright official’ Peng De-huai had pinned responsibility upon ‘Emperor’ Mao...”⁷⁰ Mao initially enjoyed the play, but then realized its political significance. After this revelation, Mao sought to eliminate all those who agreed with the sentiments of the play. This persecution actually further proved the allegory correct by taking down Peng De-huai as well as writer and deputy mayor, Wu Han.

[Minister Zhou Enlai] ... declaring in December 1964 that the Ministry of Culture was ‘entirely rotten’ and run by the joint forces of capitalism and feudalism. He purged the ministry from top to bottom, but this was not enough. Jiang Qing and Lin Biao, now increasingly working together, convened a meeting in Shanghai in February 1966 to discuss literature and the arts in the army. Their report concluded that since the founding of the People’s Republic, ‘the literary field and most professors have stood as a black force...’⁷¹

Afterwards, the play could only be seen as an allegory to Mao’s rule with Mao as the corrupt Emperor and Peng De-huai as Hai Rui, the faithful official who is wronged. Jiang Qing was also a staunch critic against Wu Han’s work in *Hai Rui Dismissed From Office*.

In 1962, Jiang held the Peking Opera Festival in Beijing as her first reintroduction into the theater world. She would then rewrite traditional Peking Operas,

⁷⁰ Frank Dikotter, *The Cultural Revolution*, 48.

⁷¹ Ibid, 49.

revising their stories to match Communist Ideology and eventually banned all traditional Peking Operas, replacing them with the Model Operas that she created.

From Revision to Revolution: Jiang Qing's Modernizing Project on Peking Opera

Jiang Qing's initial project on Opera was to edit the existing Peking Operas of the past. Traditional Peking Opera-houses and acting troupes at first were told to "revise" their operas yet under the guise of reformation, the Communist regime eventually banned most of the traditional operas for their portrayals of feudal power. Any traditional Operas that included depictions of emperors, princes, or any power hierarchies were considered "bad operas" and were either banned, or revised heavily. "These bad operas played the reactionary role of disintegrating the socialist economic base to pave the way for the restoration of capitalism."⁷² This call for revolutionary opera came nearly fifteen years into Mao's regime.

The use of terms such as "activism" and "revolution" seem counterintuitive when describing government sanctioned movements. Revolution relies on the uprising of people *against* the authority whereas in China, what was considered revolutionary was sponsored by the Communist Government and led by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing. As Terril argues, "...Mao and Jiang were in the mood for linkage; they tied literary, political, and foreign-policy issues into one apocalyptic package."⁷³

⁷² Jiang Qing, "Hail the Great Victory in the Revolution of Peking Opera, Editorial of *Hongqi (Red Flag)*, No. 6, 1967," *On the Revolution of Peking Opera*, Beijing, The Foreign Languages Press, 1968, 8.

⁷³ Ross Terrill, *The White Boned Demon*, 255.

Until the late 1950s, however, there was a Party policy of general tolerance of “letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend.”⁷⁴ This was designed to allow the arts to flourish and unite the people while strengthening the dictatorship of the Communist Party. This policy also allowed a freedom of criticism which the CCP began to curb in 1957 before initiating the all out purges of “the great socialist cultural revolution” of the 1960s.⁷⁵

Qing’s revolution against art and theater sought to erase the traditions and history of China to create a culture that solely recognized and celebrated the history of the founding of a Communist China. This new kind of opera focused on contemporary themes, glorified the political regime, and sought to negate the tradition themes of Peking Opera that included Confucian philosophy and Chinese history.

As Qing concedes in her speech, “not that we don’t want historical operas...”⁷⁶ She warns that “...these traditional operas will have no audience worth mentioning unless they are carefully re-edited and revised,” stating that they would be performed only under circumstances when the historical opera is used to exemplify the success of the Communist Regime.⁷⁷ However, she continues by remembering the traditions and techniques that are preserved in her new version of Opera.

⁷⁴ Between 1956 and ‘57, Mao launched this initiative to encourage criticism against the government. It was only known later that this was a ploy to root out dissidents against the CCP and capture any and all enemies of the State.

⁷⁵ Meserve and Meserve, *Modern Drama from Communist China*, 11.

⁷⁶ Jiang Qing, “On the Revolution of Peking Opera,” 5.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

In adapting for Peking opera, attention must be paid to two aspects: on the one hand, the adaptations must be in keeping with the characteristics of Peking opera, having singing and acrobatics, and words must fit the melodies in Peking opera singing. The language used must be that of Peking opera. Otherwise the performers will not be able to sing. On the other hand, excessive compromises should not be made with the performers.⁷⁸

Jiang Qing claimed in her speech that in order to carry out her revolutionary message, operas would have to be heavily retrofitted to match the rhetoric of the CCP.

Infusing the already existing plays with Communist ideology was not enough. Actors were becoming more involved in the creative process, writing their own operas and interpretations of Opera. Jiang Qing did the same and even wrote her own short theater pieces when beginning from when she was in Qingdao University.⁷⁹ After the first festival of Opera in 1962, Jiang Qing began her campaign to label Peking Operas feudal and reactionary. She contributed in the denouncement of Wuhan's *Hai Rui*, and attempted to make a link between her presence as the first lady of China with Mao's deteriorating health, as well as instigating a new idea of Cultural Revolution that would follow after the failure of the Great Leap Forward. "Chinese Opera, telling moral tales from the past, its heroes gorgeous and its villains grotesque, is a potential tool of ideological dictatorship. Jiang Qing saw a Maoist opera as a tool for her climb to power."⁸⁰

Feminism as Individualism vs Female Liberation Under Communism

⁷⁸ Jiang Qing, "On the Revolution of Peking Opera," 6.

⁷⁹ Ross Terrill, *The White Boned Demon*, 125.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 220.

Maoist era female liberation that was not specifically feminist in name, but relied on the principles of Communism in order to free women from the general oppression of the *ancien regime*. “Not only was exclusion of feminism from the official discourse erase a history of Chinese feminism from the public mind, it was also integral to the claim that the Chinese Communist Party was *the* liberator of Chinese women.”⁸¹ The ‘failure’ of feminism is contrasted to the success of the CCP’s line on Chinese women’s liberation.

Mao discussed women’s liberation early on in his career in the CCP and addressed the question of feminism in relation to the farmers and laborers that he studied while in the county of Xunwu in the South of China. Before Mao assumed leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, he was sent to small villages in the Xunwu area to take accounts of class struggles. Mao delineates class differences among the peasantry and identifies three levels of peasantry: 1. The poor peasant, who is the most susceptible to Communist reforms; 2. The middle peasant, who carry out some small forms of exploitation because they might own land, and; 3. The rich peasants who cling to the old ways. They are the closest to the richer classes and believe that their labor and exploitation of other laborers will bring them wealth. Mao then integrated his observation on dynamics between men and women in the peasantry.

Women and men are equal partners in production in Xunwu. Strictly speaking, in terms of farming, women’s duties are much heavier than those of men. Because certain tasks require physical strength, men are more likely to take charge... Do male peasants oppose the liberation of women? No, they do not. Once the whole class is liberated, poor peasants and famhands will soon free their women.⁸²

⁸¹ Zheng Wang, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999, 3.

⁸² Mao Zedong, *Report From Xunwu*, trans. Roger R. Thompson, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 216.

Feminism” (*nuquan zhuyi*) was considered a negative term by the Communist Party. In CCP literature, the word “feminism” was always accompanied by the adjective “bourgeois” and often by the qualifier “Western.”⁸³ Thus the way Mao encountered women’s liberation was through the basic tenets of Communism as the great liberator of all.

Due to the influence of Communist literary trends, female characters in Jiang Qing’s Model Operas did not have classical “feminine traits.” Some of the characters did not have obvious gender characteristics. They were not physically weak, they were physically capable when compared to men, and able to perform classically “manly” acts such as: digging coal, sheep herding, and rifling. As one former Red Guard recalled, “the Red Guards had no sex.”⁸⁴ In the Model Operas, the female protagonists rarely have lovers, or trivial things such as family and children. Their direct image is bold and strong. From a performative standpoint, what they care the most about is the Party’s cause and the nation’s interests as men do. The portrayal of the strong female heroine does not explore the fact that she is a woman, but rather dismisses her gender and sex as a secondary component when compared to her identity as a Communist.

Similarly, the concept of masculinity was also altered. Classical understandings of femininity and masculinity follow a bifurcated relationship. Kam Louie asserts that with the notion of the basic *yin-yang* definition of harmony of opposites, there exists, “the

⁸³ Zheng Wang, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*, 3.

⁸⁴ Sex here denotes primary and secondary sex characteristics of male or female see Rae Young, *Spider Eaters*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

common superficial appreciation of *yin-yang* theory, femininity and masculinity are placed in a dichotomous relationship whereby *yin* is female and *yang* is male.”⁸⁵ There is a common misconception that the *yin-yang* binary splits man and women simply between the binaries of “light and dark” and “strong and feeble.” Kam goes on to explain that in the Confucian *Analects*, “... both sexes can be either or both *yin* and *yang*...” and that, “...both men and women embrace both *yin* and *yang* at any particular point in time.” These classical Confucian ideas of masculinity were rejected by the Communist Party because they came from the same feudal Confucian ideals that were based on imperial hierarchy. The subordinate was the subject, and their loyalty always looked upwards towards either a minister or emperor.

Working between Shanghai and Beijing, Jiang Qing united China’s greatest choreographers, musicians, actors, playwrights, and composers under one National Opera Troupe. All of the librettos of the Revolutionary Model Operas list the author as the *Zhongguo Jing Ju Tuan* (Chinese National Peking Opera Troupe) even though there were individual authors and composers for each of the operas. Many of the Operas that are included in the Model Opera Cannon were in fact written earlier in the 1950s and then adapted into Operas by Jiang Qing and her team. This erasure of individual ownership and identity bled into both the production process as well as the themes of the Operas themselves.

In *The Red Lantern*, the young female protagonist is an orphan. Her motivations are rooted in fighting for the Communist Cause and her adoptive father and

⁸⁵ Kam Louie, *Theorizing chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 9.

grandmother are Communists who fight against the Japanese Occupiers. The story emphasizes the fact that all people, young and old, male and female live, under Communist ideology and only find liberation through Maoism. Their loyalty is not placed on a particular person, but to the collective Communist struggle. This concept however is contradicted in the CCP's own rhetoric that glorified Mao as the living symbol of the Communist Party. The quotation, "Chairman Mao is the sun and the sun is the Communist Party" from the adapted Opera, *The White Haired Girl*, suggests that Mao Zedong and the CCP were one in the same.⁸⁶ The quotation takes it a step further in its comparison of Chairman Mao to the sun, a god-like figure who exists as the shining example that all others should follow.

Emotionality and individualism are eliminated in Jiang Qing's personal rhetoric as are they absent in the Model Operas. In her discussion of her first encounters with Mao, romance is considered a bourgeois concept that has no room in the revolutionary struggle. The struggles of the collective and the will of the Communist Party are placed as the true protagonist of every opera. In the the next chapter, the contrast between the classical female role in Peking Opera and the revolutionary Communist heroine will explore further this idea that Qing perhaps used the female heroine as a vessel to carry out the CCP line.

⁸⁶ Ting Yi and Ho Ching-chih, "The White Haired Girl", trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, *Modern Drama from Communist China*, ed. Walter Meserve and Ruth Meserve, New York: New York University Press, 1970, 105.



Fig. 4.0 From *Farewell My Concubine*, Consort Yu steals the Emperor's sword and dances for him before she commits suicide. Photo taken by author, August 2017, Beijing, China.

Chapter three: “And my mother and daughter are as staunch as steel...”⁸⁷

Women and Flowers: The Dream of the Red Chamber As an Example of the Classic Death of the Female Protagonist

In the garden of a large mansion, a girl picks up the petals of dying flowers from the ground. She weeps for the death of the plants and flowers and digs small graves for their withered corpses. She sees herself as a flower going out of bloom, a forgotten blossom of beauty that people will forget and step on once it's fallen to the ground. Believing that the dead flowers deserve to be buried, she begins to wonder how she will be remembered when she dies. Lin Dai Yu picks up each flower petal from the ground and speaks her troubles to her fallen beauties.

I bury thee when thou dust become,
Who will bury me when I leave the world?
One may think I am crazy burying flowers,
Who will be the caretaker of the deceased me?
When flowers wither and spring comes to a close,
It is time for a girl to see the last of her days.
Once the spring ends and the girl dies,
Flowers and girl would be unknown to one another.⁸⁸

In *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Lin Dai Yu dies of heartbreak.⁸⁹ She is regarded as one of Chinese literature's most tragic and beautiful characters. *Dream of the Red Chamber*

⁸⁷ Wong Ou-hung and Ah Chia, “The Red Lantern,” trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, *Modern Drama from Communist China*, ed. Walter Meserve and Ruth Meserve, New York: New York University Press, 1970, 352.

⁸⁸ Cao Xueqin, *Hung Lou Meng: Dream of the Red Chamber*, trans H. Bencraft Joly, Kelly and Walsh Limited, Macau, 1893, pp. 98. This translation by H. Bencraft Joly is the oldest English translation of the novel. The author, Cao Xueqing also added forty more scenes to the end of the novel two years after he published the novel between 1791-1793.

⁸⁹ *Dream of the Red Chamber* in the past has also been translated as “Dream of the Red Mansions,” “Red Chamber Dream,” as well as “Story of the Stone,” The translation used most commonly in contemporary times as well as the official translation by the Chinese Communist Party is *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

has been depicted in various forms as films, television shows and even as an opera. The original iteration of the story is a novel written by Cao Xueqin in 1791. The novel can be compared to *Romeo and Juliet* in both its tragic plotline and widespread popularity.

Lin Dai Yu's beauty lies in her physical frailty that links to her ability to spin poetry out of her sadness. Her story begins when she moves into the home of her mother's natal family after she is orphaned. She is unable to lift her hands and it is difficult for her to express her sorrow due to her love for her cousin, Jia Bao Yu. The two engage in childish love, *philia*, as cousins and call each other "brother" and "sister."⁹⁰ As they grow, their love develops and they wish to marry, but under the meddling of their elders, Jia Bao Yu is arranged to be married to another cousin. In the planning of the marriage, the two are led to believe that they will be married and when Lin Dai Yu realizes that she cannot marry her love, she dies. In various versions of the story, her death occurs at the very moment of the wedding ceremony. She dies alone in her room, moments before Jia Bao Yu realizes that he has married the wrong cousin. Lin Dai Yu's impending death is constantly foreshadowed throughout the story, and the scene of her weeping for the dying flowers mirrors her physical and emotional frailty.

At the end of the story, Jia Bao Yu falls ill and is close to death, and eventually leaves his family and his wife to become a wandering ascetic. In one of the final scenes of the story, rumors of his wanderings spread through his home and his fate is left ambiguous. It is possible to interpret that he too died of heartbreak.

⁹⁰ Philia is the Greek term for brotherly or sibling love as well as friendship and is considered one of the four forms of love. I use philia here to denote a specific kind of love exhibited between the characters Lin Dai Yu and Jia Bao Yu since they are cousins and begin their love affair as children. There is a very important level of innocence between the two of them, and the purity of their affection is important to note. See C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, Geoffrey Bles, London, 1960.

Farewell My Concubine: Repetition of Suicide in Theater and Real-life Practice

In the Classical Peking Opera, *Farewell My Concubine*, the Emperor Ba Wang faces defeat under enemy invasion. He calls on his most favored concubine, Yu, and seeks her companionship in his final hours. Stricken with grief, Concubine Yu asks her emperor if she may follow him into the afterlife. In the opera, Yu dances for the emperor and attempts to distract him from his impending defeat and while his attention is diverted, she steals his sword and kills herself. Concubine Yu professes her love for her master and love for her country through her suicide. Concubine Yu is accepted as a historical figure from the Chinese Ming dynasty, though she has become a legendary figure in Opera. Women such as Concubine Yu derive respect and honor through their suicides.

In a real life example of female suicide, a young woman living in the city of Changsha committed suicide in 1919 to avoid an arranged marriage to an older man. The case of Miss Zhao was not unique, it was not only a trope exercised by characters in novels and plays, but an actual practice that for many women seemed to be the only release and freedom that they had on their own lives. In an article written for a local Changsha newspaper, Mao directly addresses the suicide of Miss Zhao and the issue of female suicide among Chinese women. He notes:

... women have always been treated very differently from men, and relegated to the dark corners of society. Not only are they denied happiness, they are also subjected to many kinds of inhumane mistreatment. That this incident of a woman being driven to suicide should occur at a time like this, when the truth is very clear and there are loud calls for the liberation of women, shows just how profound are the evils of our nation's society. Today we need not express more pity for the deceased, but rather we should look for a method that will thoroughly

correct this problem so that from now on such a tragedy as this will never happen again.⁹¹

In his article, Mao is not apathetic in response to the struggle and tragedy of Miss Zhao. Mao on the contrary attempts to identify suicide as the only means of escape for women. Mao understands the suicide as the product of Miss Zhao's untenable social circumstances in being constrained by social customs that fail to recognize the independence and value of women. By treating China's population in this way, the way people followed antiquated customs were a source of China's weakness. Mao rejects the traditional ideal of the woman as subject to ruler, father, and husband, and of the female martyr, who would die to preserve her chastity. For Mao, Miss Zhao's suicide was not really a suicide. He suggests that she did not wish to die, but could not live in the society she inhabited. Suicide, he argued, is in fact wrong, but this suicide in his view was much more nearly a case of murder by society.

Sociologist Jason Manning uses both Durkheim's study of suicide in *Le Suicide* as well as Donald Black's theory of social control highlighting the various components of moralistic suicide. His understanding of moralistic suicide and its effect on others aligns with the classic tropes of female suicide especially in the story of Miss Zhao.

Moralism is also apparent when self-killers take steps to maximize the impact that their deaths will have on others. Those using suicide as a tactic of protest or appeal often structure their acts so as to attract maximum attention and sympathy, such as by committing suicide in public places and choosing dramatic and painful methods like burning. Others take action to ensure their death will

⁹¹ Mao Zedong, "Concerning the Incident of Miss Zhao's Suicide," *Women in Republican China*, edited by Hua R. Lan and Vanessa L. Fong, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 81.

harm an opponent.⁹²

Manning explains the societal implications that first drive a victim to attempt suicide and then the impact that their suicide has on others. This concept of choosing a specifically dramatic method of suicide mirrors the deaths of Consort Yu and Lin Daiyu as well as the real story of Miss Zhao.

The Death of the Female Character as the Resolution of Conflict

Both in real-life practice and in theater women complete suicide in order to take on a semblance of power over their lives exerting their agency on their own future. In *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Lin Dai Yu does not commit suicide. But her death is caused by heartbreak, and there is no biological cause for her death other than her aforementioned frail nature. Her death follows a classic trope in stories where the conflict in a story is resolved by the woman taking her life.⁹³ Suicide and death by “melancholia” was a real phenomena that occurred in Chinese society. The women who died in this way were what Katherine Carlitz refers to as “heroines of fidelity”⁹⁴

Katherine Carlitz analyzes the meaning behind shrines erected in the honor of Moral Confucian Widows starting from the Song dynasty (960 to 1279 AD) to the late Qing (1644 to 1912) Carlitz equates the act of widow suicide and moral suicide to be the

⁹² Jason Manning, “Suicide as Social Control,” *Sociological Forum*: Vol. 27, No. 1 (MARCH 2012), 207-227, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41330920>

⁹³ The death of the female is so resonant in classical Chinese stories that there is a popular proverb that describes this phenomenon, *hong yan bo ming*, meaning that beautiful women always suffer poor fates. The proverb suggests that beautiful women always die young and is used in

⁹⁴ Katherine Carlitz, “Shrines, Governing-Class Identity, and the Cult of Widow Fidelity in Mid-Ming Jiangnan”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (August 1997), 612-640

apex of female morality while men would be enshrined for public service or other acts of moral service. In the first-traditional-case, the woman defends her personal honor, and the other the honor of the collective Communist Party. This is one of the key ruptures between the preservation of the individual versus the preservation of the collective.

Carlitz defines the women who commit widow suicide as “heroines of fidelity.” Women who commit suicide upon the death of their husbands in order to follow them into the afterlife, as well as a display of their fidelity to their husbands and refusal to remarry or carry on without their husbands. Carlitz points to the classical Confucian relationships that function in Chinese society. Among these five relationships, only one mentions women in the relationship between husband and wife. Within this narrow space given to women in their roles in society, their identity and actions are always in relation to their husband and their marital family.

Three Bonds and the Five Relationships, in which women's fidelity was understood as the domestic analogue of male loyalty. (The Five Relationships are those between ruler and subject, husband and wife, parent and child, older and younger sibling, and older and younger friend.) His [Confucius] construction of what it meant to be "worthy" and Chinese made a place for the faithful widow's gesture and gave communities an incentive for claiming the glory of her self-sacrifice.⁹⁵

Within traditional frameworks of women committing suicide, heroines of fidelity who commit suicide are seen as heroic figures or honorable martyrs. Their stories are made famous because of their ultimate sacrifice, invoking a kind of pathos towards their sorrow. Shrines were sometimes erected in their honor, and epic poetry would highlight

⁹⁵ Katherine Carlitz, “Shrines, Governing-Class Identity, and the Cult of Widow Fidelity in Mid-Ming Jiangnan”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (August 1997), 613

their deaths as great acts of heroism. Local stories of female martyrs were even a source of pride for certain villages and families.

This female version of heroine-ism that relied on the death of the female persisted well into the early twentieth-century. As a counterpart to the classical “heroine of fidelity,” I propose “heroines of the revolution” as Jiang Qing’s version of the new Communist heroine.

Dream of the Red Chamber Under Communist Reform

Under Mao, there was controversy whether it was appropriate to continue this study of “redology” since it is a piece of bourgeois and elitist literature.⁹⁶ Scholars under the Communist Revolution made claims that *Dream of the Red Chamber* actually highlights the downfalls of traditional arranged marriages, and attempted to appeal to the Communist revolutionary mindset while preserving this traditional piece of work. Johannes Kaminski, unpacks a bit of the contradictory nature of literary critique on *Dream of the Red Chamber* under the Mao era. Kaminski highlights that Mao himself was a learned, well read scholar of classical Chinese texts, and often offered up his own literary critiques of great works including *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

In highlighting the novel’s unsparing portrayal of arranged marriages, their argument connects with a particular sensitivity that Mao had as a young man. As a runaway from a marriage set up by his father, he teamed up with different student alliances that promoted women’s equality and romantic freedom, for example, the New People’s Association. Because these unpleasant marriage practices affected most young people, they quickly became emblematic for much

⁹⁶ In Chinese literary critique, there is an entire field of study referred to as, “redology” that is dedicated to the analysis of just *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

that was wrong with feudalism.⁹⁷

The promotion of free and equal divorce between men and women was first seen as a form of liberation that should be granted to both men and women. Taking cues from classic Marxist ideology on men and women, Mao was open to the idea of freedom of marriage and divorce. (Mao himself having divorced his second wife in order to marry Jiang Qing.) However, after Mao personally took a survey of the rural peasant class, it was brought to Mao's attention that preserving marriages between farming class men and women was important in the sustainability of farms and the CCP slowly moved away from the debate on freedom of divorce between men and women.

The tragic death of Lin Dai Yu denotes an old fashioned portrayal of women that contradicts the message of Maoist era female liberation that is not specifically feminist, but relies of the principles of Communism in order to “free women.” In a letter on the study of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Mao addresses the school of scholars dedicated to studying classical Chinese literature,

It seems that a struggle may now be able to get under way against the Hu Shih school of bourgeois idealism in the field of classical literature, which has poisoned the minds of the young for more than thirty years.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Johannes Kaminski, “Toward a Maoist Dream of the Red Chamber: Or, How Baoyu and Daiyu Became Rebels Against Feudalism,” *Journal of Chinese Humanities*, Vol. 3 (2017), 188.

⁹⁸ In other translations “bourgeois ideals” is also written to be “capitalist ideals” Kaminski, for example, uses “capitalist” instead of bourgeois. See Mao Zedong, “Letter Concerning the Study of the Dream of the Red Chamber [Letter to the comrades of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and other comrades concerned.]” *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, (Peking, China Foreign Languages Press, October 16, 1954).

Mao's letter was written and addressed to "... the comrades of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and other comrades concerned."⁹⁹ His writing reflects an internal conflict between Mao's appreciation of classical Chinese Literature, and his responsibility to publicly condemn any and all "reactionary" or traditionally bourgeois works of literature and art. This is one of the dilemmas that roused in Jiang Qing and Mao the idea of a specific revolution on culture. "In her telling, the two aspects of her personality again emerged clearly. On public duty she was the literary watchdog who had alerted her master to dangers at the gate. But in her private person she was an ebullient lover of the tale."¹⁰⁰ Mao was also well read, and well versed in Ancient Chinese texts, literature and poetry. He read Western philosophies most obviously Marx, but also Hegel and Nietzsche. This background calls to question the public versus private opinions of both Mao and Qing on the topic of classical Chinese Literature.

Dramatic Women: Heroine-ism on Jiang Qing's Stage

The character that women portrayed in the opera had traditionally been the passive, sad, dramatic woman who resorts to suicide. In Jiang Qing's operas, the heroine does not die because of individualistic problems, nor does the heroine have to die in order to conclude the story. The Communist heroine risks her life to fight for the Communist cause either against the Japanese oppressor or the bourgeois landowners. Jiang Qing cultivated the new leadership role that women could play within the operas

⁹⁹ Mao Zedong, "Letter Concerning the Study of the Dream of the Red Chamber (October 16, 1954)," *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung vol. VI*, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1977.

¹⁰⁰ Roxane Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing*, 278

and attempted to act out that leadership role in real life with her position as creator of political propaganda. Jiang Qing used Model Operas as a way to ingrain to the public a shift from the heroine of fidelity and a move towards a stronger female heroine. This new heroine is heroic because of her love and loyalty for the New Communist China, thus shattering the Confucian bifurcated relationships.

Some of the central heroic figures of the newly created model theatrical works were female, precursors of strong and militant heroines in films, novels, and the visual arts, and prompting suspicion that Jiang Qing's advocacy of leading roles for women onstage was a move to prepare public opinion for her own accession to supreme power when her husband died.¹⁰¹

As discussed in earlier chapters, exploring her life before Mao is important in understanding her motivations for creating female characters based on survival. There are multiple layers within the narrative of Jiang Qing's life that are representative of the struggles women went through in order to move towards modernity while holding on to their Chinese identity. Jiang Qing however, through her unconventional upbringing (as I introduce in chapter one) was raised partially by a mother who ran away from her marital family and then left Jiang Qing - then Yunhe - to be raised by her natal family.¹⁰² This departure from traditional filial piety and family loyalty, especially to one's marital family, is seen in *The Red Lantern*.

¹⁰¹ Richard King and Jan Walls, "Vibrant Images of a Turbulent Decade," *Art in Turmoil: the Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 8.

¹⁰² As mentioned in Jiang Qing's short biography in Chapters One and Two, Jiang Qing only changed her name to Jiang Qing after she married Mao. Her birth name is known to be Shumeng later renamed Yunhe by her grandfather and then Lan Ping while she was an actress in Shanghai. Going through name changes and having multiple stage names and literary pen names was very popular and was seen as an "in vogue" practice to signify an artist's creative transformation from one stage of their life to another.

In the story of *The Red Lantern*, the female protagonist is the only main character that survives. Her adoptive father and grandmother as well as the other comrades fighting against the Japanese die as martyrs of the resistance against the Japanese occupation. She however survives. She is the one who is able to carry out the underground resistance against the Japanese and with the help of two other female characters, they are able to deceive the occupying Japanese soldiers and warn the rest of the Communist resistance. Resistance against the Japanese was a very important theme in Chinese Communist propaganda and in *The Red Lantern*.¹⁰³

The young girl, the daughter and granddaughter becomes the only living survivor of the Japanese enemies and it is her responsibility to carry out the Communist underground resistance. “He has killed my granny and dad. In desperation he threatened me, but I defy his threats, nursing hatred in my heart; no cry shall escape me, no tears wet my cheeks, but the sparks of my smoldering fury will blaze up in flames of anger...”¹⁰⁴ Her defiance against the Japanese occupiers is fueled by her loyalty to her family members, even though it is known now to both her and the audience that they are not her blood relatives. She then works with the Communist underground to launch an attack against the Japanese using the red lantern that was left behind by her father.

The Red Lantern brings forth a new kind of piety and loyalty towards the Communist cause rather than the insular family. It breaks away from the traditional

¹⁰³ Much like in the Eastern front of World War Two, Communists were a large part of the fighting force in the resistance against the Nazis.

¹⁰⁴ “The Red Lantern” *Modern Drama from Communist China*, ed. 365.

notions of family loyalty and highlights the importance of loyalty to the party. The woman is neither bound to her natal family, nor is she obligated to serve a husband. Her motivations expand to the Communist Party, though it also denotes another type of binding relationship that still shackles the “new woman” to the Party and not her own will.

Bryana Goodman describes the progressive New Culture rhetoric of the early Republican period and the image of female suicide as the antithesis of the modern “New Woman.”

... suicides were a part of the old culture. Just as May Fourth intellectuals imagined a radical discontinuity between the old dynastic and despotic Chinese culture and the new Republican nation, they fantasized about a new woman who could break with all the traditional associations of her gender. According to the “new learning” (xinxue), suicide was abject behavior which revealed a lack of character and spirit. Armed with individual integrity, education, public spirit, and dedication to the new republic, the new female citizen would certainly find a positive means to resolve problems and build a future, rather than engage in a negative act of self-destruction. The old-style woman was the foil to the new citizen. She was a wretched, victimized, and characteristically suicidal creature.¹⁰⁵

In that moment when the heroine survives and the male protagonist dies, there is a purposeful shift away from the tradition suicide tropes of classical Chinese storytelling. This change makes Jiang Qing’s project of Model Revolutionary Operas a feminist project. Feminism, however, was seen as a western, selfish and self-serving project with Mao declaring that, “the women will be freed once the communist revolution frees all of the people...”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Bryna Goodman, “The New Woman Commits Suicide: The Press, Cultural Memory and the New Republic”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 64:1 (Feb., 2005), 75

¹⁰⁶ Mao Zedong, *Report From Xunwu*, trans. Roger R. Thompson, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 217

Traditional operas were often based on folklore and legends or historical events. Model operas were also based on legendary figures from WWII that work to highlight the heroism and heroine-ism of the Communist resistance fighters that fought against the Japanese during WWII. By using some of the traditional tropes of adapting Operas based on history, Jiang Qing combined both the classical techniques of adapting stories into her version of Opera. Both in real life and in the Model Operas, women struggle in order to fight towards modernity while also holding on to their Chinese identity.

Jiang Qing Mirrors the Old Instead of the New

Jiang Qing's own suicide is a morbid bookend to the Chinese Communist project to redefine the ideal Communist comrade i.e. the woman or girl in the red scarf and green uniform. We see these portrayals in both Communist propaganda posters as well as in the Model Operas created by Jiang Qing. Through her I am able to highlight her agency, her political agenda, her abusive childhood and arranged first marriages in order to follow her personal and political trajectory to the point where she was able to helm the production of 8 Model plays that are significant in the artistry of Peking Opera as well as the representation of Chinese Communist ideology. Jiang Qing, along with other revolutionaries sought to change China's perceptions of heroism and patriotism. Qing's "‘Never forget,’ she once said, ‘that beauty is not as important as power.’"¹⁰⁷

The fact that Jiang Qing was labeled a treasonous criminal against the CCP directly mirrors the way Concubines like Yang Guifei and Consort Yu were blamed for the shortcomings of their emperors. In the demise of Jiang Qing, Mao is not unlike the

¹⁰⁷ Ross Terrill, *Madame Mao, the White-Boned Demon: A Biography of Madame Mao*, New York: Touchstone (Simon & Schuster), 1984, 114.

emperors of classical operas wherein he became old, corrupt, and unable to lead the country. In the opera, *The Drunken Beauty*, Concubine Yang Guifei, is condemned to death by the ministers of the emperor because she was accused of being a distraction to the emperor. Her death is, again, the resolution of a conflict in a classical Chinese legend. Jiang Qing's own demise mirrors this storyline as she was arrested as a counterrevolutionary after Mao's death in 1976 and blamed for the failures of the Cultural Revolution.

Jiang Qing was labeled as a traitor against the Communist Party and declared the perpetrator of the deaths of close to 800,000 Chinese citizens during the Cultural Revolution. After Jiang Qing was condemned to death, she was imprisoned for nearly a decade. The initial death sentence allowed a two year period for Jiang Qing to repent for her crimes. After refusing to repent, she remained in prison. She was then taken to a hospital for her diagnosed throat cancer. She committed suicide in 1991 by hanging herself in the bathroom of her hospital room.

During her trial, Jiang Qing remarked, "Everything I did, Mao told me to do. I was his dog; what he said to bite, I bit."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Ross Terrill, *The White Boned Demon*, 15.



Fig. 5.0 An actress preparing for a performance of *Journey to the West*. Photo taken by author, August 2017, Shanghai, China.

Chapter Four: Interviews and Reflections on Remembering Chinese Opera and How it Will be Remembered.

Guan-xi: "It's All About Who You Know"

When I described my research topic to my father, he told me that in order to find good interview subjects, we would have to rely on connections. "Everything in China is about connections and who you know," he told me. With all of my interview subjects, I was introduced in some way by a mutual friend or connection. Using connections with mutual friends and family, I was able to build an assortment of interview subjects. An old family friend went to elementary school with the granddaughter of Mei Lanfang for example. Though it was sometimes quite a superficial connection, it allowed me to gain access to interview subjects whose stories would most likely continue to go untold. The general methodology of "snowballing" takes on a much more important role in Chinese society.¹⁰⁹ It allowed me to slowly gain momentum and gather more and more interview subjects. (specifically from Shanghai and Beijing.)

In China, this concept is sometimes known as *guan-xi* which can be understood as "commonality" or having something or someone in common. Through these small threads of commonality, we can then follow the same process as the "snowball method" for gathering sources. I equate *guan-xi* with the snowball method since it relies on the relationships between interview subjects in order to expand the research pool. It also could reveal something about this connected group as a whole, linked by a web of mutual friends, cousins, second cousins and old classmates. The concept of *guan-xi*

¹⁰⁹ Snowball sampling (or chain sampling, referral sampling) is a nonprobability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. It is used by researchers to identify potential subjects in studies where subjects are hard to locate. See L.A Goodman, (1961). "Snowball sampling", *Annals of Mathematical Statistics*, 148–170. See also, David L., Morgan (2008). *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc. pp. 816–817.

might seem similar enough to American alumnae associations and elite clubs and fraternities. It could also be seen as a more systematic form of nepotism. Though in this case, *guan-xi* can be utilized to elevate one's status simply based on superficial connections with acquaintances that do not necessarily have to be direct family members, nor does it have to be from an elder to a younger counterpart.¹¹⁰

This method can be on the one hand an effective way to make an instant connection and become more familiar with an interview subject, thus “breaking the ice.” Yet, on the other hand, this makes it potentially more difficult to maintain a clear and professional conversation during the interview. In China, it is still considered dangerous and taboo to speak in public about the atrocities of Tiananmen Square or the famines during the revolution caused by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Censorship and monitoring of all forms of media is strictly controlled when it comes to criticisms against the CCP.

The questions I asked covered three general areas. First, I asked about their personal connection and recollections of Peking Opera. The pool of people that were interviewed spanned a diverse range of age groups, socio-economic background, education, and geographic location and each had their own version of what Peking Opera was to them. Second, I transitioned to a discussion of Model Revolutionary Operas and asked about their understanding of Model Operas. If they were old enough to remember the original Operas from 1966 to 1976, I questioned further. Third, after establishing an understanding of their knowledge of Peking Opera as well as Model

¹¹⁰ In China, many connections in social life as well as business rely on diaphanous relations between friends of friends and distant family members. *Guan-xi* is how people get into schools, obtain jobs, and sometimes it can even help acquire an expedited drivers license.

Opera, I brought up Jiang Qing. This was usually the most difficult aspect of the interview. As mentioned in the last chapter, Jiang Qing was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1980 and under the official CCP rhetoric, was an enemy of the state.

Some of the subjects spoke with long pauses, reflecting on their memories and other times the words they spoke seemed rehearsed. Every subject would repeat some of the same phrases and euphemism when it came to discussing the Cultural Revolution. “Six-six” is the colloquial way to refer to 1966, the official start date of the Cultural Revolution. Similarly with “four-nine,” or 1949 to describe the year Mao came into power officially. In the following pages, I offer six interviews conducted in the span of two visits to China (Beijing and Shanghai) in August 2017 and January 2018.

“Art cannot be kept in a cage...” Interview with Mei Wei ¹¹¹

I met Mei Wei with my uncle, who is actually a close family friend of my father’s.¹¹² We meet in his office at the Mei Lanfang Memorial Museum in Beijing. The museum is one of the former residences of Mei Lanfang and has now been renovated into a museum dedicated to his life. The building is in the style of a traditional *zai-zi*, a

¹¹¹ Mei Wei, 2018, Interview by author, Beijing, January 1.

¹¹² A prime example of *guan-xi*, my “uncle” who I will refer to multiple times in this chapter, is a former college classmate of my father’s. In Chinese custom, all elders who are around the age of your parents are considered uncles and aunts, others closer in age are considered brothers and sisters. This kinship term can be extended to close friends, but also strangers with whom you are trying to establish a connection to i.e. a shopkeeper or a friend of a friend. For an expanded discussion on the usage of familial terms in China, see Paul Chao, *Chinese Kinship*, New York: Routledge, 2011, see also Susanne Brandtstädter and Gonçalo D Santos, *Chinese Kinship: Contemporary Anthropological Perspectives*, New York: Routledge, 2009.

series of multiple small houses that surround a main courtyard.¹¹³ The main building is the chamber of the “master of the house,” and various smaller buildings would have been assigned to the multiple wives, sons, and sometimes brothers of the eldest family member. Originally, the home was the residence of an Imperial duke. This kind of residence was also called a *wang fu*.¹¹⁴ This particular residence was gifted to Mei Lanfang by the Chinese Communist Party in 1949. Mei Lanfang was invited to return to the capital from Shanghai in order to take part in new cultural projects that were endorsed by the CCP. Mei Lanfang’s fame and influence in the art world was seen as an asset to the CCP’s goal of revising the art scene to adhere to the “New China” mentality.¹¹⁵

Mei Wei’s understanding of Peking Opera does not only come from his family legacy. His Masters studies at Peking University focused on the history of Chinese Opera. As a descendant of Mei Lanfang, his insights on the progression of Opera in China provide a particular point of view as an active participant in the theater world, but also as a Chinese citizen living in current day China. Mei began with a brief overview of pre-revolution Peking Opera. As discussed in chapter one, Mei Wei echoed the idea

¹¹³ For a more in depth description of the home/estate dynamic of imperial China, See Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China*, Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1997.

¹¹⁴ *Wang Fu* means “duke’s estate” which denotes either an uncle or nephew of the emperor in the Qing dynasty.

¹¹⁵ The idea of a “New China” started during the May Fourth Movement in 1919. Led by the newly formed Chinese Communist Party, the May Fourth Movement gave way for what is known as New Culturalists, who infused their activism with ideas of “liberalism, anarchism, socialism, Marxism, and feminism...” See Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, 11.

that Peking Opera was already going through an evolution two decades before the Model Revolutionary Opera projects of the Cultural Revolution.

There were operas written specifically for the emperor and at that time, politics really affected the *Jing-Ju*.¹¹⁶ But after 1911 there was even less control on the opera troupes.¹¹⁷ The troupes had a lot of freedom and it was a very developed industry. The actors were the most important. The individual actor became the face of the troupes and the leaders of the troupes. It was an actor driven, opera troupe based on individuality. All of the actors would need to create and innovate new operas. So the actors were much more than just players on a stage. It was their responsibility to innovate new plays and also draw in a crowd.¹¹⁸ Mostly through name recognition. And so Mei Lanfang's troupe was successful because of his personal innovations in artistry and composition made him famous. As an actor it was most important to keep the troupe alive.¹¹⁹ During that time, they were all creators of operas as well as actors. They would sometimes use their operas to parody real life and also make commentaries on politics and society. Some of them were also talking about women's issues. It was up to the actors to decide. This kind of innovation existed up until '49.

From the 20s to the War there was a period of creativity¹²⁰. Just in Beijing alone there were almost 200 active troupes. Some of them that were successful would

¹¹⁶ *Jing Ju versus Peking Opera*. In my interviews all of my subjects refer to Peking Opera as "Jing Ju" which is the Mandarin word for what English speakers would know as "Traditional Peking Opera". From here I will go back to using the term "Peking Opera", but I would like to highlight this crucial contrast in translation.

¹¹⁷ 1911 is the year of the fall of the Qing Dynasty, officially ending China's thousands years history of imperial, dynastic rule. See William T Rowe, *China's last Empire :The Great Qing*, Cambridge, Mass, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009. See also Frederic E. Wakeman, *The History of Imperial China*, New York, Free Press, 1975.

¹¹⁸ Actors traditionally played a large role in the scripting and staging of Peking-opera works. They also regularly created different versions and interpretations of classic works. See Mei Lanfang, "The Phoenix Returns to its Nest," Sophia Shangkuan, Beijing, New World Press, 1988.

¹¹⁹ The phrase thay Mei Wei repeated to describe the survival of the opera truopes was, *yang-huo* which literally means to keep alive.

¹²⁰ Mei Wei refers to "the war" here meaning WWII or the Second Sino-Japanese war.

be in big opera houses and the audience had the power to choose. Depending on who their favorite actor was.

Mei's ticket prices were extremely expensive. About one "da yang" for a ticket.¹²¹ people could also choose second tier and third tier troupes if they couldn't afford it. The industry was very large. There was a willing audience and huge consumption. The supply was large and so was the demand. Actors could definitely find work. The actor needed to make sure and decide which step they were going to take. In order to keep their troupe alive and make money. Most honestly, it was about basic capitalism for these opera troupes. The society back then was conducive for this kind of system.

Individualism versus Collectivism in the Peking Opera

Mei Wei's description of the pre-Communist era Peking Opera industry highlights the importance of the individual actor. The responsibility of creating new plays was upon the actors themselves and as Mei Wei explains, there was a sizeable and willing audience ready to consume these new operas. With the 1949 revolution and the rise of Mao, the spotlight was decidedly widened in order to focus on the collective in line with the CCP's political ideologies. Mei Wei argues that regulating and politicizing opera stifled creativity and directly changed Mei Lanfang's creative process.

Before the official start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, artists were still allowed to perform and debut new work, though under the supervision of CCP officials. Art and culture had a purpose in this "New China" as a way to progress the CCP and *not* for the sake of gaining fame or personal fortune. Yet without this incentive of monetary and social capital, the motivations for artists to create new operas would seem to have

¹²¹ A *da-yang* is the equivalent of about one thousand Chinese RMB which is roughly one-hundred and fifty USD. USD - U.S. Dollars (\$) RMB - Ren Ming Bi or Chinese Yuan (¥) The current exchange rate is 1 USD to 6.5 RMB. See Department Of the Treasury Bureau of Fiscal Service Funds Management Division "Treasury Reporting Rates of Exchange" Treasury Reporting Rates of Exchange as of December 31, 2017, <https://www.fiscal.treasury.gov/fsreports/rpt/treasRptRateExch/currentRates.html>

diminished. As a great Master of Opera, Mei Lanfang was given a more respected status within the CCP ranks. He also protested against the Japanese during their occupation of China in WWII and thus was also honored as a part of the resistance.

A famous anecdote that further elevated Mei Lanfang's fame was his refusal to perform for the Japanese occupiers. Mei, as an actor of female roles was already very well known internationally, having travelled to the U.S. in 1930 as well as Russia and Japan throughout the thirties. But when the Japanese requested for Mei to perform for them, he refused and declared that he had retired. Furthermore, he then began to grow out a mustache, physically putting forth an outward image of dissent against the Japanese. This gesture of growing out facial hair was an overt display of masculinity on the part of Mei Lanfang, despite his professional career that relied on portraying women on stage.

It is ironic that this distinct symbol of both patriotism and individualism garnered Mei Lanfang praise from the CCP since it was the CCP that worked so hard to erase the individual hero. In the Model Operas, the heroes act to protect the collective. They wear peasant clothing and the characters are replaceable beings who are representative of the proletariat struggle as a whole. Mei Wei described the time period between 1911 and 1949 as a time of freedom and innovation though his nostalgia for this time period might come directly from his station as a Peking Opera historian.

After '49, this capitalist idea was crushed. It was all about Communism and the consolidation of private property. The government completely changed. And the CCP used very different tactics for the "betterment of China" even on the topic of culture. I have to say all of these politicians like Mao, they themselves definitely enjoyed Opera. He even met Mei Lanfang before and spoke to him in the 50s. Mao met Mei. Chairman Mao enjoyed traditional Peking Opera himself and sometimes would go specifically go to watch operas and request to read the

librettos ahead of time to consult the story/plot. Mao also once requested to have everything be done with the color Red as a symbol of revolution. But he definitely had an appreciation and understanding of traditional Peking Opera. Mei did not want to be involved in politics, but sometimes it was impossible. At the time, the idea was that they wanted the artistry to continue, but somehow for the betterment of the people and China and the CCP. Mr. Mei never left China. He did not go with some of his other fellow actors to flee to Taiwan. He decided not to leave China. And he received the appreciation of the CCP. But he was requested to move from Shanghai to Beijing. This is the house that he was given in 1949 upon his return to Beijing.

He sold his old house during the revolution and since he refused to perform for the Japanese, he left his large property and household in Beijing. The CCP then gifted him another home which is the building we are sitting in now. Mei was respected since he was also against the Japanese and refused to perform for them during the occupation.¹²² He also had a creative and innovative spirit. Even the KMT and the Japanese both regarded Mei as a great opera master.¹²³ This is a great feat for him. He was able to navigate the politics for his art. He produced new art even after '49 and I remember seeing recordings of these shows. He had a yearning to continue creating new operas. I would use a chess metaphor that he was a very good chess player but then after '49 he became a chess piece... [*he makes a rectangular shape with his two hands, representing the chessboard, and then moves his hand to move a chess piece to show the shift in power dynamics for the players.*]

¹²² Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 and established the puppet government of Manchukuo in 1932. The war, may be divided into three phases: a period of rapid Japanese advance until the end of 1938, a period of virtual stalemate until 1944, and the final period when Allied counterattacks, principally in the Pacific and on Japan's home islands that brought about Japan's surrender. For more on the initial occupation of Manchuria and other regions of China, see Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism (Twentieth Century Japan: The Emergence of a World Power)*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998. See also Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937-1945*, New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013.

¹²³ During Japanese Occupation, Mei was living mostly in Shanghai. As a port city with many concession territories owned by France and Great Britain, life in the city would vary greatly depending on the specific district. Shanghai was occupied in certain areas by the Japanese. Artists oftentimes were asked to perform for the Japanese soldiers. See Frederic E Wakeman; Wen-Hsin Yeh, *Shanghai Sojourners*, Berkeley, University of California, 1992. See also Thomas B Stephens, *Order and discipline in China : the Shanghai Mixed Court, 1911-27*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1992.

But something happened that made him [Mei Lanfang] realize that the circumstances were not the same. He suggested a change in opera. In order to go forward and continuously innovate but without completely changing the spirit of the *jingju*. He wanted to make sure that the style and the opera was still preserved. Within the creation of new Operas, Mei had a philosophy that he called, *Yi-bu-bu-huan-xing*.. (One step forward yet not moving.) The CCP after this, took Mei and labeled him as a reactionary lacking revolutionary spirit.

As discussed in chapter one, Mei Lanfang's career flourished during the time period between the fall of the Qing and he continued to produce new operas well into the 1950s even after Mao's rise to power. Mei's description of the Communist reforms on opera is neither entirely negative nor positive. His recognition of Model Opera as a continuation of Opera as opposed to a rupture in the artform is a crucial point. Unlike other contemporaries who have studied Model Opera, Mei Wei considers them to be one part of the Chinese Opera legacy as a whole.¹²⁴

The difference with Model Operas is not to focus on the individual but for the nation. Jiang Qing understood opera. She understood stagecraft. None of her artists could fool her, and if they did they would lose their heads. The Model Opera was used for propaganda, I would say for brainwashing. She used the entire nation's artists to create these Model Operas. Mei died in '61 so he didn't see the Model Operas. [*When he started to mention Jiang Qing, his hand hovered above his pack of cigarettes. I saw him feeling one of the pockets in his trousers... most likely for a lighter, but he stopped and decided not to smoke.*] When you close your eyes and listen to the model operas, it feels like Peking Opera, but somehow it isn't at the same time because you start to hear western orchestra music. So that is its power. The operas that they were able to produce if you listen a lot of the tunes include the traditional Peking Opera. If you listen, you can recognize that it is Chinese opera. It is the same melody and tune. So even though Mei was not able to live to see these Operas, I believe that this sentiment of *Yi-bu-bu-huan-xing* is exactly what is seen in the Model Operas.

¹²⁴ As noted in the historiography, Model Opera has been studied as a part of Communist political propaganda in the fields of History, Political Sciences, Art History, and Performance Studies. A debate still continues over its place in the Peking Opera study as a whole.

Maintaining the spirit of the traditional opera while innovating for a modern audience. They didn't change form, but they did take one step forward for the revolution. The artistry and the level of artistry reached a certain level. It reached a level of innovation that nowadays even we do not have and cannot achieve. The Model Operas achieved something in the modernity of it. I believe that most people your uncle's age [*he gestures in my 'uncle's' direction. He indeed was a part of the generation that remembers quite deeply the Model Operas*] would remember the songs and be able to sing them.

Model Operas actually follow the progression of Modernizing Peking Opera (*Yi-bu-bu-huan-xing*). Even while it had a political agenda. But let's not talk about politics. Within the artistry, it is undeniable that Model Operas are a part of the evolution of modernizing Peking Opera even though unfortunately it was included and roped in with the politics. But it was always this way. When in the end of the imperial era, the troupes were producing art that reflected the politics and also followed the wishes of the government (Qing dynasty) Mei always wanted to innovate and create new operas. It was his living for him while he also acted on stage.

One step forward, two steps back? "Yi-bu-bu-huan-xing"

Mei Wei made an educated guess that his great-grandfather would have approved of the innovations made during the production of the Model Operas. He conjectured that the creation of the Model Operas actually followed the philosophy of *Yi-bu-bu-huan-xing* as his great-grandfather had suggested. Yet before the time of the Cultural Revolution, and by the time of Mei's death in 1961, Mei had been labeled a reactionary. Since he had refused to fully cooperate with the CCP officials, it was impossible for him to produce new operas. This was Mei's belief that even with innovation, there needed to be a respect of traditional styles and techniques. Mei had received his training starting from the age of five and performed on stage for an audience at eleven.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Mei Lanfang, "My Life on Stage," *China's Greatest Operatic Male Actor of Female Roles: Documenting the Life and Art of Mei Lanfang, 1894-1961*, ed. Min Tian, Lewiston, NY, The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010.

Actors however had a very low status in life. With his fame, he was able to elevate his status in society. After the revolution... Peking Opera also has a different place. Mei's time, actors and the individuals were the most important. And after "New China" was created, it was about the party and the group. The troupes were all state sponsored and the government would create opera groups and it became a party initiative. These politicians also had a real understanding of the art. But nowadays, the people in charge of the troupes are only political figureheads who are administrators and not experts in opera. They are "fake experts" and there is a loss of the individual actor's spirit. They function under the pressure of the administrators who are not lovers of Opera. The money that the operas make now are also not the same, even with the first class actors. There has to be agreements with the opera house then with the troupe and then with the actor. And because of the lack of money and the issues with payment, then the actors refuse to act. Even when they want to. Because there are very little opportunities. It is a very small "bowl" it is not the same as before. There are very few venues for actors to perform.

Every troupe and group is owned by the government.¹²⁶ The show can't go on this way. They have been limited to only one bowl of soup. Before each actor could have their own "bowl" These troupes even now DO create new shows but it isn't the same. For example last year, it was the 95th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist party and the Beijing troupe created a new play called "The Party's Daughter" (*Dang de Nu er*) and then the Chinese National troupe also produced another show called "The Party's Daughter" which was a different play with the same name!¹²⁷ When questioned about the similarities, the administration responded that "the party may have many different daughters."

The opera schools still exist and the troupes still exist but the motivation has completely changed. It has now become controlled by CCP administrators who do not understand Opera. They are all *wai hang*.¹²⁸ [*He waves his hand in the air in*

¹²⁶ The major opera troupes in China are nationalized and controlled by the state. There is ample funding, Though, from my interview with Mei, his argument that there lacks the spirit of innovation that existed during Mei Lanfang's heyday. His critique of

¹²⁷ The two pieces of Opera mentioned should not be confused with the 1958 Chinese film directed by Lin Nong nor should it be confused with the North Korean play, *A True Daughter of the Party* (2011).

¹²⁸ *Wai hang* directly translates means "outside the specialty" it would refer to either an amateur or a casual admirer of an artform or metier.

a sweeping motion, wiping away the legitimacy of these outsiders.] Art cannot be kept in a cage... it needs to be freer. If it starts needing care/life support, then that's the moment when this form of art is delegated to the museums and not in the public. Look at where we are sitting now, we are in a museum and even though there is a great opera house dedicated to the name of Mei Lanfang, it feels like a part of ancient history without innovation. It's no longer in the present.

The Codification of Theater

Mei Wei's description of Opera in the Twenty-First Century is defiant against the nationalization and codification of theatre. Currently in China, in order to become a professional actor or musician, there are a series of exams and evaluations that an artist must pass in order to progress to the next official ranking. Stage acting as well as many other arts are separated into different levels based on a series of exams. Most professional actors are divided into first class, second class, and third class.¹²⁹ Throughout their training and into their career, they are evaluated and ranked against a national standard. Musicians must take exams each year in order to progress to the next level, and these exams begin from elementary school.

The Opera industry of the pre-Communist Revolution era of the early twentieth-century that Mei Wei describes directly contrasts against the format of the Model Opera. The credit of the Model Operas is attributed to a group and never a single composer. When they published librettos, they simply wrote 'National Jing-Ju Opera Troupe'. Even Jiang Qing herself was not officially credited in the librettos of the Model Operas. Following the dogma of the CCP, the Model Operas were created for the enjoyment of the people. "All our literature and art are for the masses of the people, and in the first

¹²⁹ In the programs or playbills of each performance, next to the actors' names there will be a note on which class they are in. *yi-deng-ji* means "first class."

place for the workers, peasants and soldiers; they are created for the workers, peasants and soldiers and are for their use.” Most publications from the Foreign Languages Press begin with this epigraph from Mao. It originally comes from his speech, "Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art" given in 1942. It denotes very well the CCP sentiment towards art and literature produced during the Cultural Revolution as a project made for the proletariat, by the proletariat.¹³⁰

As Mei Wei spoke more about the Model Operas, he often paused with hesitation. This hesitation was connected to the mention of Jiang Qing, a difficult and controversial topic of conversation even today. But he spoke with candor about politics and propaganda, even referring to Model Operas as a “brainwashing technique”. Yet his physical reaction to reach for his pack of cigarettes signaled to me that there was an underlying unease attached to his discussion of Jiang Qing. This sort of physical or vocal reaction to the mention of Jiang Qing continued throughout my interviews. There is a tension in his praise for Jiang Qing’s contribution to the revolution of opera. Jiang Qing is still officially marked as a counter-revolutionary and enemy of the Chinese Communist Party. As a result, she is still associated with the stigma of the failure of the Cultural Revolution. Yet when discussing Model Operas, it is impossible to properly discuss these productions without invoking her name. Mei conceded that Model Operas in his opinion were the last great period of innovation to Peking Opera. For Mei, the

¹³⁰ Mao Zedong, "Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art, (May 1942)," Beijing: Foreign Languages Press of Beijing, May 1942, 1.

“spirit” of opera is preserved in the power of nostalgia in Model Revolutionary Opera and maintains similar musical styles and choreography as traditional Peking Opera.¹³¹

Throughout our conversation, Mei Wei claimed that his discussion was not about politics. This rhetoric is often used as a kind of protective shield from government retribution. By using a preface of “art-talk,” all of his critiques of both the Cultural Revolution as well as against the current CCP government remains in the realm of academic study of theater. In criticizing *The Party’s Daughter*, Mei voiced his disappointment against the nationalized opera troupes that compose pieces that neither contribute to the innovation of the art, nor provide any substantial commentary on current Chinese society.

“I don’t really like any of the Model Operas...” Actresses’ Perspectives

On my second day in Shanghai, I went directly to the theatre. My father’s former co-worker was a violinist with the Shanghai City Orchestra and knew the head of the Shanghai Peking Opera troupe. I was allowed to enter the dressing rooms before the performance to observe and speak to the players while they got ready. There were four dressing rooms, one main female dressing room, one main male dressing room, and two others for the principal actors. As the women in the main dressing room began to arrive, they seated themselves in front of the mirrored tables and began to prepare their makeup.

The actresses were told that I was a researcher from America and that I was allowed to take photographs and chat with them as long as it didn’t take away time from

¹³¹ For theories on the power of art and nostalgia and its political power see: Peleggi, Maurizio. *The Politics of Ruins and the Business of Nostalgia*. (Bangkok, Thailand: With Lotus Press. 2002). AND Todorova, Marii Nikolaeva; Zsuzsa Gille. *Post-Communist Nostalgia*. (New York: Berghahn Books. 2012)

their makeup process. The entire dressing procedure from makeup to hair to costuming took about two hours. I sat down next to one of the actresses and introduced myself. I asked her if I could record our conversation and at first she refused, thinking that I was a journalist. But once I explained that I was “just a young student,” she softened and allowed me to ask her questions. Upon her request, she did not want to be named, though I assured her that the interview would be published in English and only in the U.S.¹³² I will use her nickname, “Yiyen” when referring to her.¹³³ Yiyen was in the process of putting on her stage makeup for the show. This process took more than an hour to complete from hair and makeup to costuming.

I have to do my own makeup because I am just a backup dancer. You know, the main actor, the male lead.. he is a “first class” *yi-deng-ji* actor and so he is in a different dressing room and he has a professional makeup artist prepare his face and hair and he has a costumer to himself. We DO have someone to do our hair for us, but I think it’s because the wigs are very expensive and so they want to be able to make sure that the hair is done perfectly without damaging the wigs. The makeup *laoshi* checks out makeup when we’re done and teaches us the techniques and then we have to do our own makeup.¹³⁴ [*She shows me the bejeweled hairpieces that she keeps in a small plastic bag along with the rest of her makeup.*]

¹³² I am a fluent Mandarin speaker, though I speak with a non-regional, neutral accent, at times it is actually important to indicate to people that I do not live or work in mainland China. Publishing politically sensitive articles, even on the Cultural Revolution is still prohibited and highly censored and monitored by the Chinese government in all forms of media on the internet, film and television as well as print media.

¹³³ Yiyen, 2017, interview by author, Shanghai, August 12.

¹³⁴ *Lao shi* meaning teacher, is a nickname given as a sign of respect to older professionals, masters, and artists since they pass on and teach their techniques to the younger players. They are not necessarily teachers in the sense of school teachers. For further reading in the backstage theatre of traditional Peking Opera and hierarchies within theatre troupes, see Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 2007.

I have been with the Shanghai Opera troupe for six years now. I am old. I'm turning twenty-nine next year, but I am married and I have a son. So I have a good life. There is decent money to be made, and since my husband and I are both single children, now we can have another child! I want a daughter this time. They changed the rules recently so that only children may have two children.¹³⁵ I think that this is fair, since grandparents deserve to have more than just one grandchild. My parents were very happy to have a grandson, and my in-laws were also overjoyed. I don't think that my son will be an artist. The life is too hard. I want him to do well in school and go to Central City Shanghai High School.¹³⁶ Maybe something like finance so that he knows how to handle money independently. [*I ask her about Model Operas and mention my knowledge of Mei Lanfang*].

You know there's an entire wall dedicated to him in this theater? It's on the mezzanine level. He was so famous. It's so hard to be famous now if you are a Peking Opera actor. The famous ones are all so old and they only perform in concerts in plainclothes. Mei Lanfang is still one of the most famous, everyone knows his name and I guess he was one of the last stellar *hua-dan*. There are not many men who play female roles anymore. It's because there are actually more female actors now and well... the women deserve a chance to be on stage. Why would we have men playing women when there are so many willing women who want to act!

I don't really like any of the Model Operas, the songs are played sometimes for school children. The ballets are nice though, *Red Detachment of Women* is a very nice ballet. The costumes are not as nice, though the dance moves and acrobatics are still very difficult. They have recordings of the music and some films of the

¹³⁵ China's one child policy was implemented in 1975 under Deng Xiaoping. The policy enforced rules restricting one child per household as an effort to curb overpopulation. In 2015, the PRC announced a reform to the one child policy and now allows two children per household. For a more in depth discussion on the one child policy see Mei Fong, *One Child: The Story of China's Most Radical Experiment*, New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing, 2015. See also Susan Greenhalgh, *Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008. For a discussion of China's reform of the policy, see Leta Hong Fincher, "China Dropped Its One-Child Policy. So Why Aren't Chinese Women Having More Babies?" *The New York Times*, Feb 20, 2018 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/20/opinion/china-women-birthrate-rights.html>

¹³⁶ Central City Shanghai High School or, *Zhong Dian Zhong Xue* is the central public high school in any given city. In China, entrance into public middle and high schools (sometimes even elementary schools) is dependant on standardized entrance exams. The schools are ranked and the best schools are called "central schools" denoting not its location but it's level of importance as the best in the city.

Model Operas available somewhere. I don't know where. I don't usually like to talk about politics.

Yiyen went through intense training in dance and acting in high school. She, unlike some of the other actors in the Shanghai Peking Opera troupe, did not attend university. In the hierarchy of the opera troupe, Yiyen explained to me that this to her, was a job. It was a profession that she enjoyed, but a profession nonetheless. Her priority was her son, and the potential of having another child truly excited her.

Her observation on the decline of *hua-dan* actors seemed to be an off-hand comment on the competitiveness of the enforced hierarchy in the current performing arts system. The nationalized ranking system is integrated into the performing arts universities and thus, those who graduated from top schools - most notably Beijing Central Academy of Drama and Shanghai Theater Academy- are most likely to be ranked higher.

Yiyen also mentioned *Women of the Red Detachment*, which is an opera turned ballet that was also produced by Jiang Qing. The ballet originally featured an exclusively female cast that follows the story of an all female military regiment of the Red Army. The ballet was performed for President Nixon on his visit to China in 1972, and was also made into two different film adaptation, one as a ballet and another as an opera. Yiyen's fondly remembered the choreography of the ballet and she did not seem bothered by the ballets revolutionary themes. As Yawen Ludden observes in his dissertation on the music of Model Opera, an emerging younger generation does not have a living memory of the Cultural Revolution, and thus, can appreciate the aesthetics of the operas separately.

Yet there is one more group that we need to consider, and that is the rising generation of scholars that were born after the Cultural Revolution. For them, the products of the Cultural Revolution are historical artifacts, remnants of a former China that is so unlike the one they know today. Because they can look on the Cultural Revolution dispassionately, it is this generation that can finally give yangbanxi an objective assessment. The consensus emerging from this group is that yangbanxi are of the highest artistic quality. They praise the music for its beauty and its emotional complexity, and they are not bothered by larger-than-life protagonists, who, after all, are not so different from the superheroes of today's movies.¹³⁷

Another actress, Hui-hui, volunteered to talk to me after overhearing my conversation with Yiyen and seemed interested in sharing her thoughts. We talked while she put on her makeup. I asked her about her role in the Opera and she told me that her role was nameless.¹³⁸

I am not a singer. I am a very bad singer. I play two different roles in the show. In three scenes, I play one of the ladies in waiting of the Arabian queen. In the others I perform acrobatics as a cave demon. We wear masks for the demon role so I simply cover my makeup when I wear the mask. Like I said, I am not a good singer, I am a much better dancer. We are all called actors I guess but really it's more about the movement and gymnastics moves for people like us. When I was young, I wanted to be a gymnast, but I didn't get into the national academy for gymnasts and since I also danced, I started learning more dancing along with acrobatics. I went to the performing arts school in Shanghai.

[I ask her if she liked opera when she was a child.]

We didn't really listen to old opera music at home. My grandmother liked some old songs and we would watch television series that were also telling the same stories like *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Journey to the West*. These are stories that everyone knows. These stories are repeated in print as novels, children's books, television series, movies as well as Operas. This Opera for example is just one section of the *Journey to the West*. I think it is popular

¹³⁷ Yawen Ludden, 2013, "China's Musical Revolution: from Beijing Opera to Yangbanxi," PhD diss., School of Music at the Kentucky University, accessed May 2, 2018, 444. https://uknowledge.uky.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=music_etds.

¹³⁸ Hui-hui, 2017, interview by author, Shanghai, August 12.

because so many kids still watch the cartoons and series on tv and there is a lot of acrobatics and stage fighting. It's fun to watch. Every year for the Lunar New Year there will be some version of the Opera performed on television.¹³⁹

So I became a part of the opera troupe based off of my dancing teacher's recommendation. But because I feel like I am not a good singer, I probably won't progress much. I can't raise my ranking if I don't pass dancing, acting, and singing exams. I only just started last year so I know that if I work hard taking voice lessons, I can be successful. [*She stops speaking to look at me and observes my clothing, my shoes, and then my notebook.*]

Why do you care about Peking Opera? [*This is a question that I had been asking myself multiple times during this entire process. I take this time as an opportunity to explain my interest in Revolutionary Model Opera and I start by mentioning the film, "Farewell My Concubine"*]

OH I love that movie, it is so sad and tragic and beautiful. It is so sad that Leslie Cheung jumped off that building. It was heartbreaking seeing the movie and then his real life imitate the story.¹⁴⁰ So sad. I do remember the part of the movie where they start collaborating with the revolutionaries to create new operas. I watched that movie for the first time a few years ago.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ *Chun Jie Lian Huan Wan Hui* is a nearly six hour television special that is broadcast throughout China to celebrate the Lunar New Year.

¹⁴⁰ Cantonese actor Leslie Cheung portrayed the character of "Dieyi," who in the film struggles with his sexual identity. Cheung in real life also struggled throughout his career to "stay in the closet." When news of his homosexuality became widespread, Cheung fell into a depression that eventually led to his completion of suicide on the 1st of April 2003. Cheung's story as an actor reflects the experiences of many men and women who are confronted by the shame culture associated with homosexuality in China.

¹⁴¹ *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) was initially released by the Beijing Film Group, then banned by the Chinese government after two weeks of its initial release in 1993. The film was then re-released in 2000, and is now officially banned by China for its portrayal of the Communist party as well as its scenes of homosexuality and suicide. As discussed in Chapter One, *Farewell My Concubine* serves as an example of the fickle relationship between the CCP and theatre both in its storyline and its dramatic real-life story. See Jenny Kwok Wah Lau, "'Farewell My Concubine': History, Melodrama, and Ideology in Contemporary Pan-Chinese Cinema," *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 49 No. 1, Autumn, 1995, pp. 16-27. Patrick E. Tyler, "China's Censors Issue a Warning," *The New York Times*, September 4, 1993. Also see Helen Hok-Sze Leung, *Farewell My Concubine: A Queer Film Classic*, Vancouver, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2010.

Killing the Diva

These two actresses' description of their profession was pragmatic. Both employed a type of humility that is performed socially in China. Particularly in my conversation with Hui-hui, she repeated many times that she was not a good singer, and that there was still *so much* for her to learn. It was a kind of self-effacement that I had seen many times before and even employed on myself when in conversation with elders, strangers, even older family members. Humility is greatly valued in China and is seen as a necessary part of etiquette. China is a collectivist society which stresses the interdependence of individuals within that society. Personal successes are less important than the joint success of the team. Furthermore, this is not a new phenomenon that arrived in 1949, but a much older understanding of collectivity that exists in Confucian ideologies of filial piety, state-subject relationship, and social hierarchy.

As discussed in previous chapters, in the past, actresses in the theater were looked down upon and commonly associated with prostitutes. In China, there is another term, *xi-zi* that is used as a derogatory word for actors.¹⁴² The term distinguishes coming from a lower class family, implying that acting as a profession is a route taken by those with lesser education or family means. Jiang Qing herself first became an actress only after running away from home, and pretending to be an orphan.¹⁴³ This image of the *xi-zi* however is becoming outdated, with the rise in popularity of large feature films, the

¹⁴² See Weikun Cheng, "The Challenge of the Actresses: Female Performers and Cultural Alternatives in Early Twentieth Century Beijing and Tianjin", *Modern China*, 22:2 (Apr., 1996), And, *The use of "public women": commercialized performance, nation-building, and actresses' strategies in early twentieth-century Beijing*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 2002.

¹⁴³ Anchee Min, *Becoming Madame Mao*, New York, Houghton Mifflin Co., 2000.

influence of hollywood style blockbuster movies have elevated the status of actors and actresses.

After these interviews, I then left Shanghai to go to Beijing, where I was told there would be more Peking Opera related resources. Peking Opera owes its namesake to the capital city, and with the influx of tourists who visit Beijing, there are more revival shows that draw a foreign audience. With this crowd, many shows have been revised into what is called a *zhe-zi-xi*, which is a type of anthology performance of just the most famous scenes from various operas designed to give tourists a taste of Peking Opera.

“I Am a Dying Man Who Loves a Dying Art”

In Beijing, I was able to contact a member or *piao-you* of a Peking Opera appreciation group, or what we could call a fan-club. Mr. Li is a member of a *piao-you-tuan*.¹⁴⁴ The members of the group are mostly retired or amateur performers. Mr. Li explained to me that most of the members have some connection with Peking Opera either from their childhood or a family member. I was told by Mr. Li that it is very rare now to see an opera in its entirety.

When I was very young, we would come together to listen to familiar songs. Usually during the New Year to celebrate and remember traditions. There would be recordings of famous Opera singers who are known for a specific role. Shang Kang for example is the Head of the National Peking Opera association and he is also a “first class” level actor. He works to preserve and keep opera alive and most importantly keep the heritage and artistry of Opera alive in order to bring joy to the people. The spirit of Opera. We would hope that in the New Year, we can receive prosperity and unity and health. The New Year is when the family comes together. However the western new year is now also very popular. I don’t really

¹⁴⁴ Li Yunde, 2017, interview by author, August 21.

celebrate the western new year. Chinese New Year is when we have traditional music and Opera songs playing.¹⁴⁵

I am a great appreciator of Peking Opera because it makes me think about what China used to be like. In my opinion, Model Opera is not Peking opera. I don't like to listen to those songs and I don't watch them when they are in the theatre. You know Peking Opera is now considered a national cultural treasure by the Chinese government? It is a protected part of our history and heritage.

Yes I enjoy Opera, but that is because I am old. I didn't start really listening to old operas until after I was retired. Old people in China now are always looking for things to do. They dance, they go on group walks, if they are lucky, they have grandchildren to make them happy. I don't think of myself as a *xi mi*.¹⁴⁶ I am retired now and I think that studying Opera is a good way to spend my time. Usually I study the librettos first so I can understand the dialogue, and then we go watch or listen to recordings. We are too old to do any of the movements, but some of the members are still very good singers.

For Mr. Li, it is important to him to make a distinction between Model Operas and Peking Operas. His *Piao-you* group only studies and performs what they consider to be "the classics." They do not include Model Operas in their repertoire, and beyond that, generally look at the Model Operas as an inferior variation of an ancient artform. This opinion directly contrasts with the ideas put forth by Mei Wei.

There are two possible ways to interpret this insistence to separate Model Operas from Peking Opera. One, according to Mr. Li, is that Model Operas are not the same as peking Operas because they were composed and created during the Cultural Revolution.

¹⁴⁵ It is traditional for certain operas to be performed during specific festivals corresponding to the Chinese lunar calendar. Not unlike the Twelfth Night festival that gave way to Shakespeare's comedy, *Twelfth Night*. See Mei Lanfang, "My Life on Stage," *China's Greatest Operatic Male Actor of Female Roles: Documenting the Life and Art of Mei Lanfang, 1894-1961*, ed. Min Tian, 33-34.

¹⁴⁶ *Xi-mi* directly translated means "theater obsessed" or someone who is fully enamoured with theater and traditionally was a wealthy young man or woman who spent their time at the theatre obsessed its actors. It is traditionally considered a derogatory term used to critique the leisurely lives of the bourgeoisie. .

Mr. Li's appreciation for the artform extends to the discipline in the form and practice involved in Peking Opera training. While Jiang Qing attempted to incorporate classical opera techniques in the production of Model Operas, Mr. Li sees the little differences and innovations in the Model Operas, as a dilution of the classic traditions of Peking Opera.

Secondly, Mr. Li still retains an extremely negative memory of the Cultural Revolution. His family was punished in the late 1950's as sympathetic to the "rightist" cause due to their legacy as academics. They lost their family home, and he along with his siblings were sent down to work on farms during the Cultural Revolution. His staunch division between Peking Opera and Model Opera is a part of a greater disdain for the ruthless practices of Mao's regime. Mr. Li's dedication to Peking Opera could be his own way of defiantly holding on to an artform that was -for a decade- banned during his youth.

"I don't really listen to classic Peking Opera... I never did"

Sitting at a table in a crowded restaurant, I brought up the subject of my thesis to my two guests who have come to speak about their memories, Ms. Xinghuan and Mr. Yiding. The elderly duo was receptive to my work and intrigued that an American would care about Opera at all. I started with Xinghuan, who grew up in Shanghai. She told me that she was born in 1945, the year of the end of WWII. She seems proud to be born during an auspicious time in China's History. In Chinese tradition, specific dates of birthdays are much less important than the year. 1945 was the year of the rooster, something that I had in common with her that further encouraged her to open up about her memories of the Cultural Revolution.

Are you familiar with Model Operas?

Of course, I don't know all of them by heart but yes I would say that I am familiar.

What do you remember about the Model Operas?

They were fun I suppose. I can't remember a lot but I can probably still remember some of the tunes. The songs are familiar and if someone says the name of a song, I usually can hum along to it. Sometimes I can even remember the lyrics. I don't think they are so popular anymore because people don't want to be watching a show full of revolutionary spirit.

What occasion would you watch the Model Operas?

We watched the Model Operas in the theaters and opera houses. I remember that there were also groups that would perform in school auditoriums as well.

Where did you get the tickets?

Sometimes we would buy our own tickets, or they would give us tickets. My older sister would come home and have tickets for us and then we would go see the model operas for fun. The tickets were not very expensive. Not at all. Because Model Operas were made for us peasants. "Lao bai xing" so it wasn't expensive at all.

What do you know about Jiang Qing and Model Operas?

Jiang Qing actually started before 1966 with changing the operas into Model Operas. She probably started in '63 preparing the Operas and creating them. A lot of the early work was done in Shanghai I believe. She was an actress before here in Shanghai. But not a very successful actress, and only on stage. She wanted to be a movie star I think, but she never did. She was probably in Shanghai at the same time as I was when I was a child. But I never heard of her until she became Mao's wife. She also had a different name. I was working in Shanghai when she started the project in the city. She was re-writing and creating a lot of Communist plays that then became the Model Operas, but I think in the beginning they weren't so popular. It was only because she was Mao's wife that she got the support she needed.

Do you listen to Opera music now?

I don't really listen to the music, but I like seeing the costumes and the dancers in the shows when its on television. Particularly *The Drunken Beauty* and *Journey to the West*. To be honest, I don't think I have ever seen an entire show from beginning to end. Only ever certain scenes or short pieces of the famous ones.

The fact that Xinghuan had never seen an entire Peking Opera is not surprising given her age. Even before the official ban on Peking Operas in 1966, reforms on Peking Opera were implemented as early as 1960. Additionally, the lifestyle of the new proletariat did not have time for bourgeois entertainments such as traditional Peking Opera.

However, she is incorrect in her memory of Jiang Qing being in Shanghai at the same time as her childhood. Xinghuan was born in 1945, and by then, Jiang Qing had already married Mao and had been living in Yanan for six years. These small historical inaccuracies however reveal her willingness to remember details about Jiang Qing, and even place herself temporally and geographically close to Qing.

Yiding's opinions on Jiang Qing were even more surprising. He conceded that he remembers the Model Operas much better than traditional Peking Opera, arguing that Model Operas are inherently easier to understand, given that the dialogue is in Mandarin as opposed to the stylized Beijing Operatic vernacular. His memories of Jiang Qing border on praise, as he candidly stated:

During the revolution, people didn't really go to the Opera. I didn't at least. It's also different than regular stage plays or musicals. Model Opera is more like a musical. Even though the melodies were similar. When they sing, it sounds similar, like Peking Opera. But the instruments that they used and the orchestra is different. Peking Opera uses only traditional instruments and now it's become a western orchestra. Which I think is completely different. There are still traditional Chinese instruments but the Model Operas use a lot of western instruments and the feeling is different the "Wei-dao" isn't the same.¹⁴⁷ I don't really listen to classic Peking Opera. I never did. I was a child during the revolution and we didn't have this culture. I don't think many people had this appreciation for traditional Peking Opera. Nowadays there are very few people

¹⁴⁷ *Wei dao*, can be translated as taste or feeling, something intangible that someone feels in connection to a performance or style of art.

who like and listen to Peking Opera. You have to really really like it in order to go and buy a ticket to listen to Peking Opera. I don't think young people enjoy Opera music. It's too slow and too difficult to understand. I don't even understand the lyrics sometimes.

I think Jiang Qing really did something incredible and difficult. She brought together all of the artists, choreographers and songwriters in all of China and created these Model Operas. So this is a feat. Regardless of her other politics, this was a feat. I remember sometimes there were also model opera groups and clubs in factories and work farms. And it is for the people to feel happy. And they all are able to sing a few lines. Although there weren't a lot. They didn't really create that many plays. Jiang Qing still does not have a good reputation here. Cultured people maybe see her more objectively to understand the operas. Because if you talk about Model Operas, then you have to talk about her. She was the creator of the Cultural Revolution. She did a lot of work. There was a lot of work done. There are also a lot of Model Operas that were recorded on film. Jiang Qing had wanted to make more films of these Model Operas but they aren't easy to find anymore. You can't find them at the bookstore. They wouldn't really put them on the shelves in Shanghai, but maybe in Beijing. Maybe even online, you could find copies of these recording but they aren't easy to find. If you look at these Model Operas objectively, you could say that they were good shows. Very beautiful. Artistically, they are a success. The productions were huge and spectacular.

When I watch, to be honest I am able to understand the Model Operas. I can't understand Peking Opera. I can't understand their lyrics and I can't understand their dialogue. Peking Opera versus Model Opera to us normal people there is just one difference, one we can understand and the other we are able to understand. It's been changed.

The Elitism of "Jing-Ju"

The archaic language of Peking opera requires productions to use electronic subtitles on large screens on either side of the stage. While it is indeed helpful in understanding the dialogue and the lyrics of the Peking Opera, it truly hampers the experience as well as the development of new operas. For Jiang Qing, the project of

modernizing opera extended to language as well. In this case, “Old Chinese” or traditional Chinese was the language of the educated class.

The question of the generation gap among my interview subjects is less clear than would be assumed. Mr. Li, Xinghuan, and Yiding are all around the same age, but because of their other experiences during the Cultural Revolution, they intrinsically tie their memory of Model Opera with the way they were treated by the CCP. Xinghuan and Yiding were CCP party members, though not fervent revolutionaries. They came from a lower social class that was then treated favorably.

This reevaluation of the products of the Cultural Revolution is certainly due to shifting demographics in China. Those who had been in the prime of their life and had had their careers disrupted by the events of the Cultural Revolution no doubt harbored bitterness toward that period.¹⁴⁸

As Mr. Li, the *piao-you* pointed out, the popularity of Opera is on the decline. Both Traditional Peking Opera as well as Revolutionary Model Operas have become a vestige of Chinese history. Mei Wei also remarked that with the codification of theater under the current Chinese government, nationalized opera troupes compose operas that keep in the CCP party line. However, popularity of Opera both in China and the West have seen a progressive decline in popularity simply due to sheer shifts in musical styles. The memory of Model Opera is still stained with the memory of the Cultural Revolution, though with the younger generation, it is possible to highlight the artistic value of Jiang Qing’s project and appreciate her contribution to the artform.

¹⁴⁸ Yawen Ludden, “China’s Musical Revolution: from Beijing Opera to Yangbanxi,” 444.



Fig. 6.0 The Great Hall of the People, Beijing, China. Photo taken by Author, January 2018, Beijing, China.

Conclusion

When conducting research in China, I had the opportunity to see productions of both Peking Operas and Model Operas. I felt a sense that these two forms of theater now exist together, making up one large umbrella category of “Chinese Opera.” Peking Opera is now declared a protected cultural and historical art by the Chinese government. In 2010, Peking Opera was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the choice was supported by the Chinese

government as a way to preserve what they now consider a national treasure.¹⁴⁹They cohabitate the same spaces, not unlike the *wang fu* that now houses the Mei Lanfang Memorial Museum.

As I sat in a plush red velvet seat in the fourth row of the Mei Lanfang National Opera house in Beijing, I watched actors performing in a revival of *The Red Lantern*. The actors on stage were acting out peasant life, while the audience was nestled in an opulent modern concert hall. The tickets were graciously purchased by my uncle who lived in Beijing. They cost 3,000 RMB per ticket which is close to 500 American Dollars. During the performance, I felt a sense of cognitive dissonance while watching players on the stage tell the story of the Communist underground resistance.

The sets mimicked the peasant lifestyle and the actors wore torn costumes with patches sewn on them to re-create a sense of proletarian struggle. Yet the current Opera - that includes Peking Opera- industry in China is a multi-million dollar business. The stories themselves were already stylized versions of WWII history as Jiang Qing and her producers imagined it, and now this production based on the reselling of fictional Communist peasant stories seemed doubly invalidated.

After Jiang Qing's arrest, Model Operas were banned by Deng Xiaoping's administration and it was not until 1986, that they reemerged of Model Opera in a televised performance of one song from *The Red Lantern*. The revival of Peking Operas now exists alongside the continued production of Model Operas in China today. The opportunity that I was given, to experience both the production of a Model Opera as well

¹⁴⁹ UNESCO, Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, November 2010, Nomination File No. 00418, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/peking-opera-00418#>.

as traditional Peking Opera speaks to the erasure of Cultural Revolution rhetoric that Jiang Qing had worked so hard to spread. Model Opera is now incorporated as a part of Peking Opera in general, and thus its difference as political propaganda is lost.

Yet somehow both in and out of Mainland China, there is an inexplicable popularity attached to the propaganda of the Communist Revolution. The persistence of Communist propaganda has found its place wedged between social commentary and “real art.” Or as Richard King and Jan Walls put it, “Cultural Revolution art has proved strangely persistent, however, demanding attention with its return as nostalgia or kitsch...”¹⁵⁰ There is a sense of morbid nostalgia for both classical Chinese themes meshed together with Communist Revolution art which are both now seen as relics of the past. Both are now discussed as a part of history as opposed to active components of contemporary Chinese life.

In the Cold War period, research and fieldwork on China was conducted outside of Mainland China in regions such as Taiwan, Vietnam, Hong Kong, and Macau where there are large populations of ethnic Chinese (*huaqiao*). This research is still incorporated as Chinese History, even though the research was conducted outside of China.¹⁵¹ Westerners were not allowed free entry into Mainland China until the induction of Deng Xiaoping’s Open Door policy in 1978. This policy was mainly aimed towards opening economic and business relations with Western countries, although, it

¹⁵⁰ Richard King and Jan Walls, “Vibrant Images of a Turbulent Decade,” *Art in Turmoil: the Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2010, 4

¹⁵¹ This greatly concerned me when I started my research since to me, it felt somehow disingenuous to write an ethnography or history of China without ever even stepping foot in the country. This was especially evident when I read Steven Sangren’s “Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu, and the Eternal Mother” where he analyzes Female Deities and worship practices in Taiwan.

also allowed scholars to enter China more freely.¹⁵² This also reflects China's focus on economic development in the past few decades over cultural and historical studies. Politics between Taiwan and the United States in relation to China pose an odd triangle where scholars are unable to share information, either by choice, or by limitations of foreign relations.¹⁵³

Political commentary and criticism are closely monitored and speaking out against the Chinese government both against its past and present is still a dangerous endeavor for Chinese Nationals. As mentioned before, the study of revolutionary art in China is discouraged in China. The current administration maintains stringent censorship laws that ban open discussions on the Cultural Revolution. Different forms of censorship include bans against social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube. Key terms have either been redacted or completely erased from search engines in China that make it impossible to search for specific information relating to the Chinese government. Google as a search engine, as well as many of its connected applications including Gmail, have been banned from usage since 2014.¹⁵⁴ Google China a subsidiary of Google was shifted to Google Hong Kong, in 2010. This decision was

¹⁵² See Guocang Huan, *China's Open Door Policy: 1978-1984*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, see also, Leonard Silk, "Economic Scene; The Open Door Policy in China," *The New York Times*, September 27, 1985. Web. <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/09/27/business/economic-scene-the-open-door-policy-in-china.html>

¹⁵³ My connection to this topic has been a methodological minefield in which I have had to navigate my personal emotions and politics while allowing my love for Chinese art and culture to fuel my work. My mother's family fled from Mainland China to Taiwan because of the rise of Mao, while my father's family gained success and prestige because of it.

¹⁵⁴ Sherisse Pham and Charles Riley "11 Things You Won't Find in China," *CNN Tech*, March 17, 2017, <http://money.cnn.com/gallery/technology/2016/05/23/banned-china-10/3.html>

made due to the overly stringent search restrictions enforced by the Chinese Government.

Through the study of art and theater, access to information is less restricted as a result a kind of loophole has been used by others to navigate the censorship laws in China. I see these obstacles as a part of the larger social issues in China that limit freedom of information and access for its citizens to their own history.

This project for me, has been an exploration into Opera as an artform and as a tool to uncover political and social shifts in twentieth-century China that still affect Chinese national identity to this day. The rise of the female hero, as well as the rise of the female worker serve as precursors to the way women are viewed in Chinese society. China is currently seen in the world as a global Superpower, a formidable opponent to American, Western influence, yet most of the study of China focuses on its economic growth. I would argue that to understand China's growth in the past few decades, its changes in social norms and gender roles also play a great part in China's so called economic success story. Within this narrative, there are major gaps that have left out both the legacy of women's liberation in the Cultural Revolution, as well as the current status of women in China.

Today, the Film and Television industry in China is state owned. The China Film Group Corporation oversees the funding, production, and distribution of over 60% of film revenue from the film and television productions released in China.¹⁵⁵ Though there is a relative diversity in the genres and types of productions made in mainland China,

¹⁵⁵ "China's Film Industry - A New Era," Deloitte Global and Deloitte China, 2017, 3, <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/cn/Documents/technology-media-telecommunications/deloitte-cn-tmt-china-film-industry-en-161223.pdf>.

there is a resurgence of traditional, feudal portrayals of women in many of these productions. Violence against women, domestic violence, sexual violence and suicide are tropes that recur in many popular television series. Not only is there a reemergence of this trope in film and television, but the real-life perpetration of violence against women is an issue that has been rarely addressed by the current CCP government.¹⁵⁶

Although China is a signatory of the United Nations Convention Against All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), they have entered a reservation to the convention, specifically article 29 that excuses China from arbitration under the International Court of Justice.¹⁵⁷ China's first national law against domestic violence was only passed in March of 2016.¹⁵⁸ The most paradoxical phenomenon is that throughout all of the political and societal changes that China has gone through since 1949, the same party, the CCP has controlled Chinese politics. Oftentimes refuting past political figures - such as Jiang Qing - and condemning policies as time passes. These shifts can be seen quite clearly through the CCP line on Opera as well as its changing dialogue on

¹⁵⁶ William L. Parish, Tianfu Wang, Edward O. Laumann, Suiming Pan and Ye Luo, "Intimate Partner Violence in China: National Prevalence, Risk Factors and Associated Health Problems," *International Family Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 30, No. 4, *Gender-Based Violence and Reproductive Health* (Dec., 2004), pp. 174-181, Accessed May 2, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1566491>.

¹⁵⁷ "On 18 December 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It entered into force as an international treaty on 3 September 1981 after the twentieth country had ratified it. By the tenth anniversary of the Convention in 1989, almost one hundred nations have agreed to be bound by its provisions." See United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, "Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women," 1989, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>.

¹⁵⁸ Cheng Tingting, "Battling Domestic Violence in China," *The Asia Foundation*, Accessed May 2, 2018, June 29, 2016, <https://asiafoundation.org/2016/06/29/battling-domestic-violence-china/>.

China's Cultural Revolution legacy.

It is often through the cracks of other political reforms, that art can find new ways of expression. In contrast to the Communist political propaganda spearheaded by Jiang Qing, when China introduced its open door policy, artists like Ai Weiwei could share their artwork with Westerners and vice versa.¹⁵⁹ Ai was able to travel to the United States and collaborate with Andy Warhol, creating new, subversive art that oftentimes played with the style and themes of Communist Propaganda, continuing a cycle of artistic play.

¹⁵⁹ Ai was arrested by the Chinese government in 2011 declaring that his art was “deviant and plagiarist.” He was incarcerated for over three months in Beijing.

Appendix I. Timeline of Events

	General History	Jiang Qing	Mao Zedong
1893			Birth of Mao in Shaoshan, China
1900	Boxer Rebellion and Invasion of the Eight Nation Alliance against Beijing.		
1908			Mao is married at age fourteen, arranged by his parents.
1911	Fall of the Qing dynasty after a series of rebellions. The Republic of China is formed and Sun-Yat-sen is elected president.		Mao arrives in Changsha to continue his education at age twenty after the death of his first wife.
1912	The Nationalist Guo-Mindang Party (GMD) is formed under Sun		
1914	Start of World War I	The birth of Jiang Qing (née, Shumeng) in Zhucheng, China	
1917	Start of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia		
1918	End of World War I		Mao moves to Beijing after graduating from First Provincial Normal School of Hunan.

1919	May Fourth Movement in Beijing against the Treaty of Versailles: the Japanese are given territory in Shandong Province that was seized from Germany.	Shumeng's feet are bound at age four.	Mao's mother dies on October 5, 1919. Mao also participates in the May Fourth Movement
1920			Mao marries a second time to Yang Kaihui, the daughter of his Professor, Yang Changji
1921	The Chinese Communist Party is founded		Mao attends the first session meeting of the Chinese Communist Party
1924	An alliance between the CCP and the GMD is formed. Lenin dies.	Shumeng and her mother leave her father's home after his death and travel from town to town.	Mao attends the Nationalists' First Congress in Canton, with representatives from the CCP.
1925	Sun Yat-sen dies		
1926	The GMD leads the Northern Expedition to expel remaining warlords	Shumeng is given the name Yunhe by her grandfather and moves in with her mother's parents to receive schooling.	Mao returns to Changsha as a prominent leader of the peasant movement and gives speeches alongside Russian revolutionary, Boris Freyer
1927	The GMD attacks Communists in Shanghai and begin a purge of Communists.	Yunhe runs away from home and joins the local Peking Opera troupe. She lies and says that she is an orphan.	Mao leads Autumn Harvest Uprising in Changsha, Hunan
1928	Chiang Kai-shek becomes chairman of the GMD and Republic of China.	Yunhe's mother remarries and does not see Yunhe. Her grandfather buys her back from the Opera troupe.	Mao acquires troops and begins to form the Chinese Communist Military

1930	GMD sends five waves (more than 1 million soldiers) against rising Communist power led by Mao	Yunhe attends the Shandong Province Experimental Arts Academy but is later arranged to be married.	Mao's second wife is executed by the GMD after refusing to denounce Mao. Mao marries for a third time to He Zizhen
1931	Japan invades Manchuria. The Chinese Soviet Republic is founded in Jiangxi-Fujian Provinces	Yunhe divorces and moves from Jinan to Qingdao University and works in the library while auditing classes. She meets Yu Qiwei, and becomes a member of the Communist Party.	Moscow recognizes Mao as the President of the new Soviet State in China. Mao shares power with military leader Zhu De.
1932	Japan founds the independent state of Manchukuo of occupied territory in Manchuria.	Yu Qiwei is captured by the GMD for being a Communist radical.	Mao leads the military to expand the Chinese Soviet State. He is denounced for disrespect of Party leadership.
1933	Japan continues to take territories in northern China, moving closer to Peking.	Yunhe sails from Qingdao to Shanghai. She is nineteen.	
1934		Yunhe is captured as a suspected Communist.	Mao launches the Long March in October evading the GMD
1935		Yunhe takes a new name, Lan Ping meaning "Blue Apple." She stars as Nora in Ibsen's <i>Dollhouse</i> . Begins affair with Tang Na.	Mao leads a series of marches to capture more territory for the CCP
1937	The Japanese invade Beijing through the Marco Polo bridge and official mark the beginning of the second Sino-Japanese War. The Capital of China is moved from Beijing to Chongqing, China.	Lan Ping stars in small Communist propaganda films and is motivated to move to Yanan, where Mao has set up his opposition camp against the GMD.	Mao meets Lan Ping while lecturing in Yanan.

1938	The Japanese now hold regions of Manchuria, and the large Northern cities of Peking and Tianjin.	Lan Ping and Mao are married in Yen-an.	Soviet General V.V. Andrianov visits Yen-an bringing 3 Million USD (estimated equivalent 40 Million USD today)
1939	The Japanese Army attacks Changsha	Lan Ping becomes pregnant with her only daughter, Li Na.	
1941		Lan Ping becomes Jiang Qing. She begins projects on making Communist films in Yen-an.	Mao gives speech, "Reform in Learning, the Party and Literature," launching internal "thought reform" in Yen-an, also known as "The Yen-an Terror."
1945	The Atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. China regains control of Taiwan after the Japanese surrender.		Mao and Chiang Kai-shek meet in Chongqing with American General George Marshall, but no peace treaty is signed between the CCP and GMD
1946	China is thrown into civil war.		
1947	The GMD bomb Mao's headquarters in Yen-an	Jiang Qing and Li Na flee Yen-an with other red guards.	Mao ordered over 200,000 of his men to leave Yen-an.
1948	The PLA has control of over 160 million Chinese citizens. North Korea separates under leader Kim Il-Sung		Mao leads the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in a series of attacks against the GMD
1949	Chiang Kai-shek and his administration flee to Taiwan to re-establish the Nationalist Chinese state of the Republic of China.	Jiang Qing and Li Na move into the forbidden city with Mao but is given one of the concubine's gardens. Jiang Qing visits Russia for the first time.	Mao officially enters Beijing and founds the People's Republic of China. (PRC)

1950	The PRC conduct a purge of reactionaries, landlords, and “rightists.” The Korean War begins.	Jiang Qing allies herself with Kang Sheng, head of intelligence and security. After alienation from Mao. She makes trips to outer Provinces.	Tensions between Mao and Stalin rise as disputes rise over outer and inner Mongolia. Mao’s older son dies in the Korean War
1953	End of the Korean War	Jiang Qing inserts herself into the cultural scene through the Culture Minister Zhou Yang.	
1956	Mao launches the “hundred flowers campaign” that encourages criticism against the CCP	Jiang Qing goes to Moscow for cancer treatment	Mao contracts syphilis from his mistress.
1957			
1958	The start of the Great Chinese Famine that lasts for three years.	Jiang Qing returns from Moscow.	Mao launches The Great Leap Forward that results in a huge farming failure.
1959	The last of the rightist government critics are sent to labor camps or “eliminated” Mao steps down as president of the PRC and is succeeded by Liu Shaoqi		Peng De-huai is taken out of office as Defense Minister. China officially cuts ties from the USSR.
1960	<i>Hai Rui Dismissed from Office</i> is published		.
1961		Jiang Qing begins to edit old scripts and librettos of Operas and Plays.	
1962	The PRC sends more troops to Vietnam.	Jiang Qing travels between Shanghai and Beijing to launch her Opera project.	

1963	President Liu Shaoqi and General Secretary Deng Xiaoping consolidate power.	<i>There Will be Followers</i> , the inspiration for <i>The Red Lantern</i> is published. Jiang Qing edits the play into a Model Opera.	Mao is relegated as a symbolic figurehead of the PRC and CCP.
1964	China tests its first atomic bomb.	Jiang Qing holds a Peking Opera Festival in Shanghai <i>Women of the Red Detachment</i> premieres.	Mao publishes his <i>Little Red Book</i>
1965		Jiang Qing and Mao move to Shanghai to work with Lin Biao in preparation for the Cultural Revolution.	
1966	Deng Xiao-ping and Liu Shaoqi are arrested.	Jiang Qing and Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen come together and are known as the Gang of Four.	Mao gives his support to the Cultural Revolution.
1967	China detonates its first hydrogen bomb	Jiang Qing becomes the deputy head of the Cultural Revolution Group.	
1968	Tet Offensive in Vietnam.	Jiang Qing bans all traditional Peking Operas and most non-Communist films.	
1969	The Beijing subway system is opened.	A series of artists, writers, and “rightists” are arrested and sent to labor camps. Art is destroyed in the name of the Cultural Revolution.	Mao names Lin Biao his successor, bypassing Jiang Qing
1970			Mao’s health continues to decline.
1971	The People’s Republic of China is recognized by the UN, replacing the Republic of China (Taiwan)		U.S. Secretary of state, Henry Kissinger travels to Beijing to meet Mao.

1972	U.S. President, Richard Nixon visits China.	Jiang Qing receives the Nixons and <i>Women of the Red Detachment</i> is performed for Nixon.	Nixon meets with Mao, but Mao continues to be sick.
1973	The U.S. withdraws troops from Vietnam.		
1976	Hua Guofeng becomes Premier of China. Kang Sheng, and Lin Biao die.	Jiang Qing is arrested with the Gang of Four.	Mao Zedong dies at age 82 after a series of two heart attacks. His body is embalmed and rests in Tiananmen square.
1978	Deng Xiaoping becomes Paramount leader of China.	Jiang Qing recovers from her first suicide attempt.	
1980	Deng Xiaoping implements the “one-child-policy” in urban areas.	Jiang Qing stands trial for crimes against the state. Jiang is first sentenced to life in prison.	
1981		Jiang Qing is required to write monthly “self criticisms” while in prison and waits out a two year suspended death sentence.	
1989	Tiananmen Square protests.		
1991		Jiang Qing commits suicide while receiving treatment for cancer in her hospital bathroom.	

Appendix II. Glossary of Chinese Terms

An Ju Le Ye: Chinese proverb that denotes living a peaceful and happy life, provided by the ruler.

Gong Chan Dang: The Communist Party, literally translated, “the equal wealth party”

Guo Ming Dang: The Chinese Nationalist Party also known as the Kuo-Ming-Tang

Hua Dan: A male performer of specifically a female soprano role

Jing Ju: directly translated as “capital theater” or the Mandarin term for Peking Opera

Lao Bai Xing: The common people, or peasants

Min jian: among the folk people

Nan Dan: A male actor to plays a female role

Nu-quan: Women’s Rights

Wang-fu: Duke’s residence or mansion

Wei-dao: directly translated, taste or feeling

Xi-mi: directly translated as “dazzled by theater,” an avid or obsessive fan of opera.

Xi-zi: a derogatory term of an actor or actress

Yang-huo: to keep alive, or to stay fed

Yi-bu Bu-huan-xing: Taking a step forward, but not changing form, a term used by Mei Lanfang to describe the evolution of Peking Opera.

Zai-Zi: The classical Chinese mansion, which is constructed around a center square or garden.

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- Ballets:

Red Detachment of Women (红色娘子军)

The White-Haired Girl (白毛女)

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