

The Rise of Cantonese Opera



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Front cover photo: Actor Gui Mingyang being honored. Note that the actor's personal name is included as part of the inscription on the trophy, which reads, "Fame spreading across the four seas." Vancouver Public Library #48415.

Back cover photo: Xue Juexian's Troupe to Vietnam in 1930. The picture appeared in the inaugural issue of *Juexian Ji*. Image courtesy of the Chinese Opera Information Centre, Music Department, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

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Introduction

In the early twentieth century, what had been an emergent local opera¹ catering to the small market towns and village communities across the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong by itinerant companies expanded into Guangzhou and Hong Kong and captured a mass audience in commercial theaters. In the process, the genre acquired much local flavor distinguished by its own music and performance style, the use of Cantonese dialect (and its proximate variants) for sung and spoken delivery, and a substantial repertoire. This performance style became the Cantonese opera that subsequent generations of Hong Kong people—including my own—grew up with in the latter half of the twentieth century. Not that the Cantonese stage turned stagnant in the intervening years; it certainly has continued to evolve to this day, but basically, the distinctive elements we associate with this popular theater of the far south in China had taken shape before the Pacific War. This study takes us back to that period to decipher the formation of this regional genre.

A study of traditional theater upon its entrance into the city; a scrutiny of how stage practices, aesthetics, and operational dynamics of the performance community morphed and adapted in a new environment; and a discernment of how the genre subsequently reached maturity and flourished—all these facets would likely remind readers of the genesis of Peking opera in the Qing imperial capital Beijing. The introduction of the *pihuang* style of local musical drama by touring companies from the Anhui province during the last years of Emperor Qianlong (r. 1735–95) and its triumph over other styles, including *kunqu*, might well be *the* story in the history of traditional theater in the late imperial era.² A succession of sensational performers, the patronage of the court and the elite literati, and the rousing endorsement of the general populace in the capital's theater district were no doubt instrumental to the rise of Peking opera, but other forces were at work elsewhere to render Beijing the opening act of the unfolding drama. To begin with, the decline of the old Jiangnan core—in cities like Suzhou, Ningbo, and Yangzhou—by the beginning of the nineteenth century apparently depleted the

theatrical resources and personnel for *kunqu* to sustain its vibrancy much longer. The stage was set for the ascendance across the empire of the *huabu* popular theater vis-à-vis the more classical *yabu* drama (read *kunqu*) long favored by the literati. The mid-nineteenth century Taiping Rebellion essentially completed the onslaught and ushered in Shanghai as the premier incubator of popular theater.³ It was therefore in late Qing and Republican Shanghai that Peking opera developed further as an exquisite art form, surged in popularity in the arena of commercial entertainment, churned out high-income celebrity actors, and eventually earned its revered status as the country's "national theater."⁴

Although the storied history of Peking opera need not detain us, the comparative perspective it affords has alerted me to several fruitful avenues to guide my inquiry into the history of Cantonese opera. First of all, whether it is Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, or Hong Kong, the centrality of the city to theatrical formation can never be underestimated.⁵ In the case of Cantonese opera, the entrance into the city marked a shift in performance context, and the ensuing changes in organizational, theatrical, and business practices in the commercial arena demand our attention. Moreover, urban theater was not always successful and glamorous, and I seek to balance the picture by delving into the marketplace perils of commercial entertainment in this historical account. An appreciation of the vicissitudes of commercial theater will bring forth a more accurate picture concerning the theater scene and the specific coping mechanisms of the opera community in the city. It will further unveil the spatial dynamics between the urban core and the rural hinterland in the process of theatrical production and consumption, as well as theater's dissemination and circulation.⁶ Secondly, the relationship between the popular theater on the one hand, and the state and the elites in society on the other, comes into focus as a point of stark contrast between the two genres. Peking opera's privileged position under the patronage of the Qing court and, later, its enduring place in the hearts and minds of the elites was simply unmatched. In this regard, Cantonese opera maintained a much stronger plebeian identity as an entertainment of the common people. For much of the early twentieth century, efforts by the opera circle to align the Cantonese stage with various reform agendas reflected a position of marginality. As we will see, of particular importance to the self-positioning of Cantonese opera as a regional theater was its response to Peking opera's presumptive cultural dominance. The study will investigate a dimension of local culture and identity seldom explored in our study of popular culture in this period and, particularly, the troubled relationships among the theater, local society, and the state.⁷ Last but not least, both Peking opera and Cantonese opera thrived on mobility, but on vastly different scales. Shanghai, Beijing, and Tianjin were centers of theatrical production and consumption and, at the same time, hubs in a larger national circuit of urban theaters knit together by itinerant Peking opera troupes. Stars the like of Mei Lanfang (1894–1961) and Cheng Yanqiu (1904–1958) coveted exposure in foreign

countries, and their occasional tours abroad were highly selective and choreographed to earn international acclaim. Such was not the case for their counterparts in Cantonese opera, whose transnational practices had planted earlier and deeper roots in immigrant strongholds across the Pacific since the second half of the nineteenth century. The latter delivered hometown entertainment to a homesick Chinatown audience, even as most practitioners sought overseas engagements in earnest to make a living and to advance their careers. Tracing the theatrical footprints from South China to the diaspora is not some extra effort made to append an additional chapter barely connected to the principal narrative. Rather, it is undertaken to strive for a more complete and coherent understanding of the historical formation of Cantonese opera.⁸

This study seeks to fill a significant gap in the historical literature that has decidedly and understandably favored the classical *kunqu* and Peking opera. The most recent publications on traditional theater, either in Chinese or English, have largely continued the same trend.⁹ It is hoped that this book will inspire a reimagination of China's theater scene to become more cognizant of other regional genres and inclusive of their complex and particular histories. For Cantonese opera, the existing literature remains modest, even though its significance as a foundation for this study is self-evident. Earlier examples include the works by noted ethnomusicologists Bell Yung and Sau Yan Chan,¹⁰ the anthropological field research pioneered by the late Barbara Ward,¹¹ and the deep historical investigation into ritual theater by the Japanese Sinologist Tanaka Issei.¹² Mainland Chinese scholars, especially the late Lai Bojiang, have published on a range of historical topics, including general syntheses and biographical accounts of major actors.¹³ More recently, in Guangzhou and Hong Kong a new level of interest in local history and matters of cultural heritage has drawn more attention to Cantonese opera as a research subject. Important publications in China now include reference works such as the Guangdong volume of *Zhongguo xiqu zhi* (Annals of traditional Chinese theaters) and the *Yueju da cidian* (Dictionary of Cantonese opera), and they have been augmented by a steady stream of academic monographs.¹⁴ Particularly in Hong Kong, before and after 1997, interest in reclaiming and reconstructing historical memories associated with the surge in local consciousness has raised awareness of and enthusiasm for Cantonese opera as a traditional art form. The 2009 inscription of Cantonese opera by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on its world list of intangible cultural heritage has given the genre yet another big boost.¹⁵ Academic research may not be the primary beneficiary of such wholesale promotion associated with cultural politics in an age of globalization, but there are relevant studies deposited in conference volumes,¹⁶ oral history collections,¹⁷ and an increasing number of publications devoted to individual opera stars.¹⁸ Especially relevant to the period under study are works by fellow historian Yung Sai-shing and music scholar Nancy Rao that have opened our eyes to critical

issues and sources, and pointed to a convergent arc of spectacular vibrancy for Cantonese opera on both sides of the Pacific in the 1920s.¹⁹

My approach in this study reflects a shift toward social history that has gathered many followers in theater history East and West over the past twenty years. As John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan have argued in the introduction to their seminal volume on early English drama, the longstanding emphasis on script analysis presupposes some singular authorial intent, whereas the theoretical shift opens up the theater as a collaborative enterprise and a participatory space that involves many more individuals and entities.²⁰ In particular, I am inspired by the work of European scholars like John Rosselli and F. W. J. Hemmings in the way they lay bare the participating components, complex relationships, and institutional parameters that undergirded an entertainment industry.²¹ At the heart of my story are actors and actresses, theater entrepreneurs and their business agents, playwrights, publicists, stagehands, and others who were members of the Cantonese opera performance circle or community. No less important are the opinion makers in the media, editors and publishers of entertainment magazines, cultural critics, and government officials and censors who held certain views about the popular theater and could affect its well-being in one way or another. To do justice to the internal workings of the opera community, this study pays close attention to the development of key institutions, including the formation of opera troupes, their structures and activities, the strategies and changing fortunes of business firms in control of the troupes (*xiban gongsi*), and the guild organization and any factional divisions. The emphasis on institutions provides a lens through which to examine the collective struggle of the opera community and its vitality, and also the interaction of the theater world with society and the state.

Several major bodies of primary sources form the core of this research. By extracting the daily advertisements of the theater houses and all other relevant news from the Hong Kong Chinese newspaper *Huazi ribao* (1900–40), I was able to construct an extensive and reliable database for as accurate an analysis as possible of the development of the local theater. Combing through the entertainment sections of other local newspapers (such as *Yuehua bao* in Guangzhou) and theater magazines (especially the exceptionally long-lasting *Lingxing*, also of Guangzhou) has furnished historical details generated by keen observers, some of whom were critics and others fans or boosters.²² In addition, standard government documents shed light on public entertainment venues, via items like department reports, yearbooks, and municipal gazettes.²³ Of great value are theater archives and collections of private documents that have surfaced only in recent years. The Taiping Theater Collection, divided up and placed in several depositories in Hong Kong, is a treasure trove filled with historical documents and artifacts unparalleled, for the moment, in sheer quantity and exceedingly rich content.²⁴ In Vancouver, Canada, over three thousand pages of theater advertisements and

news have been extracted from the Chinatown newspaper, the *Chinese Times*, with coverage starting in the 1910s.²⁵ And only less than a decade ago have we begun to tap into internal correspondences and business records related to Chinatown theater companies in operation during the 1910s and 1920s, deposited in the City of Vancouver Archives and the University of British Columbia Libraries.²⁶ Equally intriguing is the bundle of leaflets and playbills collected from the San Francisco Chinatown during its theater's heyday in the mid-1920s, now preserved at the Ethnic Studies Library of the University of California, Berkeley.²⁷ This book is the first fruit of scholarship based on all these newly available materials.

Traditional Theater in the Modern World

This book is organized into three parts to address the underlying processes in the recent formation of Cantonese opera during the early twentieth century: the entrance of Cantonese opera into the city and the arena of urban entertainment, its spirited encounter with assertive state power and rising nationalist discourses, and the ongoing adaptation to migration settings on distant shores. The centrality of urban life, the unstoppable momentum of state-building and the accompanying discursive power, and the heightened mobility of people, commodities, and ideas had profoundly shaped human societies throughout the twentieth century. It is no coincidence that these inescapable conditions of our modern times all impinged on the history of this popular theater in significant ways.

In Part I, Chapter One traces the early history of theater activities in Ming-Qing Guangdong to opera troupes from various parts of China where major theatrical genres had taken shape. The ensuing process of domestication of such extraprovincial theatrical materials, mingled with local musical sources, gradually nurtured a regional style of theater that has been known for its eclectic quality ever since. By the last third of the nineteenth century, local opera had flourished as an itinerant operation with acting troupes performing on stage in temple courtyards and in makeshift structures at rural market fairs across the estuaries of the Pearl River Delta. This was the legendary “era of the red boat,” named after the flat-bottomed wooden crafts used as means of conveyance and as accommodations by the actors.

Chapter Two details the urban shift of Cantonese opera to Guangzhou and Hong Kong after the turn of the century, when a new kind of troupe—city-based and city-bound—came into being. Compared to the previous companies, which trumpeted their variety of performances and claimed a more egalitarian spirit of solidarity, the more stationary urban companies were heavily capitalized operations under the management of theater entrepreneurs, led by their resident stars, supported by a growing cadre of playwrights, and driven by cutthroat competition in an urban entertainment marketplace. By the 1920s, these city troupes and their celebrity performers had become trendsetters and arbiters of operatic tastes and

styles. The material conditions of performance in modern-style playhouses, the logistics of theatrical production in search of profit maximization, the cultural industry of print media and advertising, and the crowd of theatergoers who needed enticement for paid consumption—these were all part of a sea change around the Cantonese stage.

Chapter Three continues the chronicle by examining the storm of business downturn from the late 1920s, with excruciating details drawn from the contemporary records. Specific causes will be identified to account for the two phases in the contraction and collapse of the theater market. Many in the opera community went without sufficient work or had no work at all, privation appeared widespread, and the entire structure of the opera community looked ready to cave in under tremendous pressure. Notwithstanding, the last part of the chapter will highlight several developments by which the performance community demonstrated resilience and found a way to navigate a path out of the disaster.

The rise of Cantonese opera unfolded in the context of political and cultural upheavals in China ushered in by the demise of the Qing monarchy and the frustrated transition into republicanism. From an imperial empire composed of multiple, distinct ethnicities, China had to be reimaged as a nation of singular political identity that subsumed differences and compelled loyalty. In the meantime, political factions at the national level, as well as local elites, especially in urban areas, adopted various modernist programs of state-building and citizenry making. Part II explores the intersection of culture and politics by examining the popular theater as a contentious public arena. As Chapter Four will indicate, there were proponents to align the Cantonese stage with modern sensibility and to use the popular theater to unleash broader social and cultural change. The increasing prominence of women as performers likewise elicited responses from a male-dominated opera community. Even more challenging was the hegemony of rising nationalism that questioned the legitimacy and viability of regional operas. As an emblem of regional identity and a vehicle of dialect-based popular culture, Cantonese opera had to find ways to negotiate, accommodate, and resist various nationalist discourses, especially the ascendancy of Peking opera as the country's preeminent "national theater."

Chapter Five will cast the theater as an arena of conflicts and chaos in society. It examines the many scars of physical violence borne by the opera community, some inflicted from the outside, and others occasioned by eruptions of factionalism. The division from within became chronic especially in the mid-1920s when politics in Guangzhou took a radical turn. This development was no small irony in an age of state-building when different government authorities—including the British in colonial Hong Kong, the successive warlord regimes in control of South China, and the Chinese Nationalist government after 1927—all, to various degrees, sought to police the theater and assert control in the interest of mobilization, discipline, and order.

The last part of the book expands this inquiry from its immediate focus on South China into a transnational portrait painted on a Pacific world canvas. Frankly, it is challenging to trace Cantonese opera's footprints upon departure from the China coast, for the itineraries of actors and troupes constituted so many moving parts. Yet the overseas circuits, largely unmapped and unstudied, made Cantonese opera the most transnational of all of China's regional performance genres. Chapter Six provides an overview on the spread of theater activities in the wake of massive emigration from Guangdong to Southeast Asia and North America from the mid-nineteenth century to the eve of the Pacific War. By the 1920s, Cantonese opera in both regions had gone through an earlier period of divergent fortune to arrive simultaneously at a golden age. The remaining two chapters tap into business archives and local sources in Vancouver to examine a major hub of Chinatown theater within the context of a larger regional circuit across North America. Chapter Seven uses the case study to underscore the vibrancy of transnational networks in the form of business and social contacts that rendered Chinatown theater a viable operation. Indeed, the complex logistics handled by theater merchants for actors to travel long distances and seek entrance into countries with anti-Chinese exclusion laws in place are noteworthy. Chapter Eight takes the argument in a different direction by putting the emphasis on the theater's dynamics as a social and cultural institution in the enclave environment of Chinatown. It shows how Cantonese opera became more than a heartwarming and endearing entertainment to a sojourning population. Nor did the theater merely introduce and elevate gender as an enchanting as well as troubling element to a male-dominated society. Embedded in the nexus of organizational activities, the immigrant theater became an important site for the negotiation and inscription of power relations, normative behaviors, and community politics in the public life of Chinatown.

The bulk of this study focuses on the early part of the twentieth century. However, to set the stage for the rise of Cantonese opera in the modern times, we should begin with the late imperial era.

Conclusion

In the foregoing chapters, I have constructed a three-part narrative to chronicle the rise of Cantonese opera. At the outset, much information on the latter half of the nineteenth century is provided, and the imperial period also is covered as additional background, but the principal time frame is the early part of the twentieth century. It was after the turn of the twentieth century that the emergent popular theater of the Cantonese people pivoted toward the twin cities of Guangzhou and Hong Kong and soon became a highly commercialized entertainment with a sizable urban clientele. The development of commercial theater benefited from a number of developments: an institutional setup of a guild organization; customary practices honored by a performance community; the growing entrepreneurial interest and capital investment in the theater business; and the conglomeration of great theatrical talents on the Cantonese stage. It was in the urban arena, especially when mounted by the heavily capitalized *Sheng Gang ban*, that Cantonese opera came of age and developed its own brand, or blend, of stagecraft, music, costumes, and headgear, together with the use of native dialect in the delivery of an expanding repertoire. Particularly during the Roaring Twenties, these city troupes were the trendsetters, churning out plays after plays drawn on eclectic sources by a contingent of prolific playwrights, featuring and indeed creating high-earning star-level and eventually celebrity actors, and thriving under the media limelight of print advertisements, much of which was generated by the performing community itself and by its boosters. The result was a robust and dynamic entertainment culture in urban China, a topic that has been unevenly explored by historians and minimally attended to aside from its development in Shanghai.

This study of Cantonese opera addresses not simply the flourishing of an entertainment industry in the making, but also the vicissitudes of its formative years. The market's downturn at the end of the 1920s and its nadir in the early 1930s need to be accounted for within the context of an entertainment business driven by severe competition, an escalating bottom line, and the unrelenting pressure

of delivering live productions on stage. Additional challenges came from the unstable political environment and the social chaos of the region, and the rise of new entertainment media, especially sound movies, which afforded urbanites new choices for how to spend their hard-earned money and leisure hours. Lest we jump to an utterly pessimistic conclusion, a key finding of this study is the resilience of the opera community and how it managed to find ways to tap into the underlying appeal of a plebeian theater and to make difficult adjustments in logistics and other long-held conventions in order to stay afloat and rebound. The changes made during the 1920s and early 1930s continued a larger process of ongoing evolution and showcased the remarkable adaptive capacity of Cantonese opera. They also underlined the tremendous resilience of the opera community and its art in facing the severe disruptions and dislocation caused by the Sino-Japanese War and even greater uncertainties in the ensuing postwar years.

Part II of the book delves into the intersection of culture and politics. Here, the story of Cantonese opera offers us an opportunity to go beyond the familiar tropes of intellectual probing, literary intervention, and anxieties and apprehension manifest among the elites to examine discernible fault lines in the arena of popular culture. The case of Cantonese opera warrants special attention because of the genre's unremitting plebeian quality and its quintessential local character as a bearer of a regional identity. Hence, it was from a position of double marginality that the leading practitioners, their fans and sympathetic opinion makers sought to advance and redefine this most popular theater of Guangdong in an era of state building and rising nationalist discourse. The result was an irrepressible reform rhetoric and an incessant effort to upgrade this theater, specifically, to align its content and presentation with a modern sensibility. The activities of the *zhishi ban* that straddled the 1911 revolution, as well as the vogue of the all-female companies around 1920, provide suggestive examples of an alternate theater before many of their main theatrical inputs—derivative, in turn, from spoken drama—were naturalized into mainstream operatic practices in the hands of the *Sheng Gang* troupes. More importantly, it was the encounter with Peking opera and the latter's presumptive rhetoric as a superior art and as China's national theater that Cantonese opera found itself thrust into a perennial defense of its own artistic merits and cultural integrity. Such was the enigma of regional theater under the nation's gaze.

Cantonese opera's encounter with the nation and the accompanying modernist impulse were no mere rhetorical exercise. State building meant an expansive and intrusive bureaucracy that sought to mold modern citizenry and asserted prerogative through social mobilization and control. Public entertainment venues like opera theaters were prime candidates for carrying out this statist agenda. Particularly in Guangzhou, the political uncertainty of the republican era only aggravated the local authorities and made whoever was in power more insistent on fiscal extraction, police surveillance, and play censorship. Notwithstanding

the penchant for order and discipline on the part of the state, Guangzhou's commercial theater was anything but orderly and subdued. Audience misconduct and occasional gang violence were unavoidable, but troubles caused by unruly uniformed personnel, collateral damage associated with periodic military clashes, and violence unleashed by factional rivalries and compounded by the radical turns in revolutionary politics of the mid-1920s disrupted business, derailed careers, and cost many lives. The generally more stable environment of Hong Kong helped shelter the commercial theater in the colonial city from the above turmoil, except during the General Strike of 1925–26. No major differences in content or style emerged on the stage between Guangzhou and Hong Kong at this juncture, as a result of largely unrestricted intercity circulation of theatrical personnel (with some notable individual exceptions, as in the famous case of Ma Shizeng, who was banned from performing by the Guangzhou authorities). But the time would come when the paths of Hong Kong and Guangzhou were to diverge significantly.

Last but not least, the study has sought to fill a major lacuna in the history of Cantonese opera by extending the inquiry to the overseas circuits and weaving together the first truly transnational history of this popular genre, encompassing the home area in South China and Cantonese migrant enclaves abroad. The last portion of the book draws on new empirical material to trace the footsteps of itinerant actors and actresses. It delineates a history of theatrical sojourns in neighboring Southeast Asia and distant North America since the mid-nineteenth century that reached a golden age during the 1920s. The Vancouver case study illustrates the dynamic quality of Chinatown theater as a transnational, border-crossing, and ocean-spanning operation and, at the same time, as a local institution embedded within the milieu of an immigrant community of predominantly male sojourners and its particular social organization. In plotting and connecting the major dots on a Pacific world canvas, we have a fuller understanding of the diaspora history behind Cantonese opera and are in a better position to fill in the remaining gaps.

A Final Glimpse

In some ways, the famous *xiaowu* Gui Mingyang (1909–58) had seen it all. His stage career spanned three decades, from the mid-1920s to the 1950s. It encapsulated the formative period of Cantonese opera before the Pacific War, and his twilight years offer us glimpses of the postwar era. Gui Mingyang was younger than Xue Juexian, Ma Shizeng, and Chen Feinong by five to ten years. He almost missed the theatrical high tide of the *Sheng Gang ban*. As a teenager, Gui had signed up as an apprentice and gone to Nanyang—probably Singapore—with his actor mentor for about a year. He did not gain much attention upon his return to South China and languished for another two years with a fringe performing group. When the General Strike in Hong Kong wound down in 1926, it was sheer

good fortune that he was recruited by the newly formed urban troupe Daluotian to join the lowest of the supporting cast for an annual salary of \$150. Taking full advantage of the opportunity the urban arena had to offer, Gui began his steep climb up the ladder. The following year, he was promoted to the first assistant *xiaowu*, making over \$2,000, and then to principal *xiaowu* with a contract of \$5,000 at the age of twenty. He possessed the physical attributes to do well in this role-type: he was tall and handsome, with a dignified appearance. Fans further noted that Gui deftly combined the mannerisms and vocal quality of the two popular stars Xue and Ma. More noticeably, Gui had begun to develop his own stage persona. To the delight of the audience, he played the martial hero Zhao Zilong from the Three Kingdoms period (220–280) with great flair and soon used the impersonation as a platform to brand certain historical plays with his own arias and signature moves.¹

When the theater market in South China slowed down in the late 1920s, the up-and-coming Gui Mingyang could hardly stay put. In the spring of 1930, he took an offer from the San Francisco theater Great China before accepting another invitation to New York City, extending his first tour of the United States to two full years. The tour was an important milestone for the young actor in more than one way. In San Francisco he met his future wife, Wenhua Mei, and in New York City his mesmerizing performance of the Three Kingdoms legend won him the first-ever golden plate awarded by a Chinatown crowd to a male actor (see Figure 14), where only actresses had received such an honor. The trophy earned him the honorific “*Jinpai xiaowu*,” which he brandished readily as a mark of distinction. It is not an exaggeration to say that Gui Mingyang’s rising fame owed much to this major diaspora act.

In the spring of 1932, Gui returned to South China and found the commercial theater going from bad to worse. He joined Liao Xiahuai’s Riyuexing after being promised star-level compensation of, initially, \$12,000 and then \$20,000 the second year. The partnership ended badly as the theater market collapsed in front of their eyes.² In 1934, Gui took his chances by joining a troupe based in Shenzhen. The prior year a Chinese businessman had opened up an opera house as part of an entertainment and gambling joint, hoping to use the theater to attract more patrons to the border town north of British Hong Kong. Sometime after Gui’s arrival, he became a business partner and for the first time a *banzhu*. Despite its location, the troupe named Guannanhua was able to make quite a stir. News items on the troupe and its *banzhu*-cum-pillar appeared regularly in *Lingxing*.³ The magazine praised the company for its innovations, such as the reconfiguration of backdrops by reducing the use of props and presenting scenery in the wing space in layers to enhance the perception of depth for viewers. As *banzhu*, Gui Mingyang was said to have assembled a reputable cast, put due emphasis on high-quality plays, and restricted principal actors to perform on alternate days during the week so they invested time in making new preparations. These “re-

form” efforts apparently paid off. According to *Lingxing*, Guannanhua managed to strike out from Shenzhen on a series of engagements including performances at premier theaters in Guangzhou and some nearby counties during the month of the Chinese New Year in 1935.⁴

Although the state of commercial theater of the late 1930s awaits further research, it does seem that the worst was over by this time and a recovery was at hand. The return of Ma Shizeng in 1933 with a base in Hong Kong’s Taiping Theater and the renewed competition with his archrival Xue Juexian furnished a spark. The removal of the ban on joint performance—first in Hong Kong in 1933 and then in Guangzhou in 1936—likewise generated public enthusiasm. No less helpful was the shift to greater flexibility in the organization of opera troupes. The former yearlong seasonal structure underlying troupe organization and actor employment had vanished during the deep freeze of the early 1930s. After considerable agony and delays caused by internal opposition, the Bahe Huiguan finally accepted the inevitable truth that the minimum threshold for the size of opera troupes was no longer viable. The removal of such a longstanding restriction seems to be exactly what the opera community needed to recoup.⁵ As far as Gui Mingyang is concerned, details of his itineraries for the next several years are missing, but he must have departed from Guannanhua, since he performed with different companies in Shanghai for a good part of 1936, was back in Guangzhou on the eve of its occupation by the Japanese in late 1938, and was in Shanghai again in early 1939. The war must have been unnerving, so much so that Gui Mingyang and Wenhua Mei decided to leave the country. In 1941, they appeared together in Vancouver’s Sing Kew Theater. After Pearl Harbor, Gui and his fellow travelers found themselves stranded. He had to prolong his stay and, willingly or unwillingly, ended up spending the next decade in the United States.⁶

The war with Japan was clearly a game changer for Gui Mingyang, his entire generation, and the opera community at large. The guild hall of the Bahe Huiguan in the Huangsha district, built in the mid-Guangxu era, which had stood as a monument marking recovery and solidarity for nearly half a century, was destroyed during the Japanese invasion of Guangzhou. Many members of the opera community found temporary shelter in Hong Kong, only to be dislocated again when the Japanese imperial army took the British colony in December 1941. To survive, some scattered to the unoccupied areas in the interior of Guangdong and Guangxi; a few were able to find a safe haven in nearby Macau, where theatrical activities rose to a level actually unheard-of in the Portuguese enclave; and still some others had no better alternative than to stay.⁷ Those like Gui must have considered themselves lucky to have taken flight overseas when given the opportunity.

Notwithstanding the devastation, the opera community was determined to rebound. The end of the war saw theatrical activities resume in earnest in both Hong Kong and Guangzhou, and even in the adjacent rural communities, as

local society sought recovery and people yearned for a return to normalcy. Many established figures and former superstars were past their prime, scarred by the war years physically and psychologically, and denied the opportunity to perform regularly or for a long time. Fortunately, a younger cohort of actors and actresses who had been waiting in the wings were ready to take their turn. Especially under a flexible regime of troupe organization, when *banzhu* could assemble and reshuffle cast personnel with relative ease, for seasons as short as a few weeks or as long as several months in response to the market conditions, the commercial stage regained some vitality. Adding to the sense of revival was the homecoming of those who were stranded overseas during the Pacific War, even though their return shrank the pool of performers abroad.⁸

The excitement turned out to be short-lived for Guangzhou. In the years following the assumption of power by the Chinese Communists, politics took command of the popular theater, just as it had taken over almost every aspect of life on the mainland. Step by step, the commercial theater was strangled and replaced by a state-run system of troupes and academies that assumed responsibility for all matters concerning theatrical production and the training and remuneration of personnel. State support was not necessarily a detriment, especially for members occupying the lower end of the performance community, who were now guaranteed work, pay, and even some status in a socialist society. The challenge came from the imposition of an ideological straitjacket that saw commercial entertainment as a sin of capitalism and purported to wean popular theater from its class impurities, past and present. The Cantonese opera community found itself subject to rounds of debilitating political campaigns and inner party struggles that were whimsical in nature. Only the return of some high-profile former stars, such as Xue Juexian in 1954 and Ma Shizeng (and his spouse Hongxian Nü) in 1955, helped the regime score some propaganda points by claiming the higher road of nurturing an art under the twin banners of patriotism and socialism. Theatrical activities continued, technically, one can say, but under conditions heavily circumscribed. And the political emasculation of popular theater went on to run its full course during the Cultural Revolution (1966–75).⁹

It was under such circumstances that the development of Cantonese opera in its home region fully bifurcated between Guangzhou and Hong Kong after 1949. The 1950s, as scholars increasingly recognize, was the last time this traditional regional theater thrived as mainstream entertainment in Hong Kong before the tide turned decisively. Despite the saying at the time that Cantonese opera was lagging—actually a perennial concern since at least the early 1930s, as we have noted—the commercial theater in Hong Kong was barely slowing down in the first decade after being cut off from the mainland. Highly accomplished actors and actresses were not (at least not yet) in short supply, performances seemed plentiful, and scores of modern classics were scripted under the pen of celebrated playwrights, the most prolific being the famous Tang Disheng (1917–59), and he

was hardly the only one. To compensate for the loss of access to Guangzhou and the theater hinterland across the Pearl River Delta, Hong Kong-based performers conducted short tours to nearby Southeast Asia, either individually or in small contingents; the not-too-distant Cantonese community in Saigon-Cholon was an especially attractive location during the 1950s, before the region was engulfed by war. Even the new media seemed to be more friend than foe. Cantonese operas received prime attention in local radio broadcasting, and operatic films were the most popular genre in the booming movie industry. This fascinating decade, as well as the challenging time looming in the horizon, definitely demands its own treatment.¹⁰

Unlike many of his stranded fellow actors, Gui Mingyang remained in the United States after the Pacific War. We do not know exactly the circumstances prolonging his stay. Was it a matter of financial or other personal difficulties? Or did the former “*Jinpai xiaowu*” bide his time to wait out the uncertainties and chaos of the civil war between the Chinese Nationalists and Communists? In any case, he was still billed as a leading member of a troupe performing in New York City in 1949–50.¹¹ Gui finally returned to Hong Kong in the following years. He was only in his forties but suffered considerably from poor health. In October 1957, Gui Mingyang made his way to Guangzhou to settle and was given a warm welcome by its opera community and the party cadres in charge of cultural work. He must have been quite frail and passed away because of tuberculosis the following June. Gui’s death was mourned by his peers and followers, and by fans who were acquainted with his art. He was one of those revered practitioners of stagecraft who had seen the best and the worst of times during the rise of Cantonese opera, both in South China and in far-flung corners of the diaspora.

NOTES

Abbreviations

CLTTC	Taiping Theater Collection, Special Reference, Hong Kong Central Library
CVAWHL	“Wing Hong Lin Theatre Records,” Sam Kee Papers, Add. MSS 571, 566-G-4, City of Vancouver Archives
CVAKHC	“Theatre Management—Kue Hing Co. Ltd.,” in Yip Family and Yip Sang Ltd. fonds, Add. MSS 1108,612-F-7, City of Vancouver Archives
HMTTC	Taiping Theater Collection, Hong Kong Heritage Museum
UBCKHC	“Kue Hing Company File regarding a Chinese Acting Troupe,” in Yip Sang Family Series, fol. 0018, file 3, Chung Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections, University of British Columbia Library

Introduction

1. Scholars generally employ the term *opera* as a loose but adequate translation for traditional Chinese theater known in Chinese as *xiqu*. As Chang Bi-yu of SOAS, University of London, explains, “Literally, *xi* means ‘play and drama,’ and *qu* means ‘music and songs’ . . . (And) as far as the form is concerned, *xiqu* is unique and quite distinct from Western opera.” See Chang, “Disclaiming and Renegotiating National Memory,” p. 51, note 1. For a thoughtful iteration of the fine distinctions among various translations, including drama, theater, opera, and music drama, see Li, *Cross-Dressing in Chinese Opera*, pp. 9–10. Where the author leans at the end is self-evident from the title of the monograph.

2. The literature on the subject in Chinese is vast. For works in English, the study by Colin Mackerras, *The Rise of the Peking Opera, 1770–1870*, remains a classic.

3. The spatial dynamics involved in the broad trajectories of the traditional Chinese theater in this period are discussed succinctly by Meng, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires*, pp. 77–79, and by Goldman, “Kunju de ouran xiaowang.”

4. Joshua Goldstein has argued that the remaking of Peking opera should not be contained in a Shanghai-centric narrative; attention should be given to Beijing, the cultural and institutional bedrock of the genre, as well as the transregional networks of patronage and the phenomenon of urban touring. See his *Drama Kings*, especially chapter 1. On balance, Catherine Vance Yeh has delivered a more compelling argument in favor of Shanghai; see her “Where Is the Center of Cultural Production?”

5. The importance of the city is also brought forth in recent research on the homegrown traditional theater of Shanghai. See Stock, *Huju*; and more recently, Jiang, *Women Playing Men*.

6. On the notion of operatic hinterland, see Yung, “Yitong Yongshou, Zhulong Taiping.”
7. Regarding the early twentieth century, the pioneering works of Li Hsiao-t’i and Hung Chang-tai are especially instructive. See Li, “Opera, Society, and Politics”; and Hung, *War and Popular Culture*.
8. For a critical and theorized discussion of Chinese traditional theater, including Cantonese opera, in the contemporary setting of globalization at the dawn of the new century, see Lei, *Alternative Chinese Opera in the Age of Globalization*. Viewing Chinese music making and practices through the lens of transnationalism and the cultural politics of Asian/Chinese America, see Zheng, *Claiming Diaspora*. Such critical reflections are valuable, but historical scholarship on the unparalleled history of Cantonese opera in the diaspora remains undeveloped. On Southeast Asia, mainland Chinese scholars have offered some preliminary treatment, such as Lai, *Dongnanya Huawen xiju gaiguan*; and Zhou, ed., *Dongnanya Huayu xiju shi*, 2 vols.
9. Goldstein, *Drama Kings*; Goodman, *Opera and the City*; and Ye, *Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas*. Just as revealing is the following study on theater in Taiwan by an American ethnomusicologist: Guy, *Peking Opera and Politics in Taiwan*. For a recent example in Chinese scholarship, see Zeng, *Wanqing yanju yanjiu*.
10. Yung, *Cantonese Opera*; Chan, *Improvisation in a Ritual Context*; and Chan, *Xianggang Yueju daolun*. For a preliminary attempt to furnish a historiography on Cantonese opera, see Ng, “Cong wenhua shi kan Yueju, cong Yueju shi kan wenhua.”
11. Ward, “Not Merely Players”; “The Red Boats of the Canton Delta”; and “Regional Operas and Their Audiences.”
12. Tanaka Issei’s writing on the subject is voluminous. Note the following two in Chinese translation: *Zhongguo de zongzu yu xiju* and *Zhongguo xiju shi*.
13. Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*; and the following single-authored works by Lai: *Guangdong xiqu jianshi*; *Yueju “huadan wang”*; and *Xue Juexian yiyuan chunqiu*. Valuable as it is, this body of writings by Lai (and those of his peers) tends to recycle material, rather uncritically, from an earlier corpus of oral histories and personal reminiscences compiled in the highly charged political environment of the 1950s and early 1960s. Another limitation is the dearth of documentation, a view shared by a younger generation of mainland Chinese scholars. See a critique in Yu, *Mingqing shiqi Yueju de qi yuan, xingcheng he fazhan*, p. 13.
14. *Zhongguo xiqu zhi Guangdong juan bianji weiyuanhui*, ed., *Zhongguo xiqu zhi Guangdong juan*; and Yueju da cidian bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Yueju da cidian*. Recent examples of scholarly publications include Luo, *Yueju dianying shi*; Yu, *Mingqing shiqi Yueju de qi yuan, xingcheng he fazhan*; and Huang, *Guangfu xiban shi*.
15. For an informed and critical perspective at the time, see Yu, “Hong Kong Cantonese Opera at Cultural Crossroads.”
16. Among major conference volumes are Liu and Sinn, eds., *Yueju yantaohui lunwenji*; Lee, Cheng, and Tai, eds., *Xianggang xiqu de xiankuang yu qianzhan*; Chow and Cheng, eds., *Qingxun zuji erbainian*.
17. For an early example, see Lai, ed., *Xianggang Yueju koushushi*; and note the latest initiative taken by the actors’ organization, which has resulted in two volumes thus far: Cheung, ed., *Bahe Yueju yiren koushu lishi congshu*, 2 vols.
18. Publications devoted to individual performers who acquired fame in the period after 1945, mostly commemorative in nature, have become almost an industry. Scholarly works are still relatively rare, but for two fine examples, see Man Hark, ed., *Ren Jianhui*

duben; and Li, ed., *Fang Yanfen "Wanshi liufang Zhang Yuqiao" yuan juben ji daodu*. Note another work led by the Guangzhou-based scholar Ching May Bo, *Pingmin laoguan Luo Jiabao*. In nearby Taiwan, the vibrancy of local theater research and the search for identity have been going hand in hand and preceding the similar development in Hong Kong for over a decade. Of particular interest to my project is the literature on the Japanese era (1895–1945), such as Chiu, *Jiuju yu xinju*; Hsu, *Rizhi shiqi Zhongguo xiban zai Taiwan*; and Hsu, *Rizhi shiqi Taiwan xiqu shilun*.

19. Yung, *Yueyun liusheng*, and a collection of his essays in *Xunmi Yueju shengying*. Sharing a similar South China focus is Ho, "Cantonese Opera as a Mirror of Society." Nancy Rao has published a number of essays about Chinatown theater in the United States during its heyday: "Racial Essences and Historical Invisibility"; "Songs of the Exclusion Era"; "Chongfan Niuyue!"; and "The Public Face of Chinatown."

20. Cox and Kastan, eds., *A New History of Early English Drama*, pp. 1–5.

21. John Rosselli's voluminous writings on Italian opera in the last phase of his long academic career are phenomenal. He opened up the new avenue of economic and social history in the study of opera. See his *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi* and *Singers of Italian Opera*. His article on touring by Italian opera troupes, titled "The Opera Business and the Italian Immigrant Community in Latin America, 1820–1930," published in *Past and Present*, showed me the path and gave me the confidence to pursue a similar study of Cantonese opera in America. In addition, Hemmings, *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France*; Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera*; and an ambitious volume by Bianconi and Pestelli, eds., *Opera Production and Its Resources*, all offer insightful treatment on issues central to my own work.

22. *Huazi ribao* was available in microfilm through the Center of Research Libraries. I read *Yuehua bao* (1927–1930s, various issues) at the Special Collections of Hong Kong University Libraries. The Guangdong Provincial Library in Guangzhou has most of the issues of *Lingxing* (1931–1938), as well as a few other opera magazines.

23. The libraries at Stanford University and the University of California, Berkeley, have excellent holdings on government documents in the Republican era.

24. The Taiping Theater collection has been available to researchers since about 2007, thanks to the generosity of Beryl Yuen, the granddaughter of the original founder of this family business. The bulk of the material related to my work is held by the Hong Kong Heritage Museum. There are some additional items housed at the Hong Kong Film Archive, Special Reference of the Hong Kong Central Library, and the Hong Kong Museum of History.

25. Theater advertisements and relevant news items in the *Chinese Times* (from 1914 to 1970) have been extracted and copied from microfilms by Huang Jinpei as part of a research effort to support a major exhibition, titled "A Rare Flower: A Century of Cantonese Opera in Canada." Organized by the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, the exhibition (1993–96) featured the largest collection of Cantonese opera costumes in North America at the time. I am most grateful to Elizabeth Johnson for sharing this body of material during a research trip in 2000. For highlights of the exhibits, see the following two articles by Johnson: "Cantonese Opera in Its Canadian Context" and "Opera Costumes in Canada." A more recent piece by Johnson on the same subject is "Evidence of an Ephemeral Art."

26. These materials are housed at the City of Vancouver Archives, and the Rare Books and Special Collections of the University of British Columbia Libraries. Together with

the *Chinese Times*, they form the core of the research for the writing of Chapters Seven and Eight.

27. The collection of playbills was first gathered by the venerable Chinese American historian Him Mark Lai and is now available at the Ethnic Studies Library at the University of California, Berkeley. A special note of appreciation is due to Wei-chi Poon, Asian American Studies Librarian, who graciously allowed access to the collection when the university was not in session and the library was closed to patrons.

Chapter 1. Itinerant Actors and Red Boats in the Pearl River Delta

1. The legend of Zhang Wu is recounted in many foundation texts on the history of Cantonese opera, including Mai, “Guangdong xiju shilüe,” pp. 799 and 811; Ouyang, “Shitan Yueju,” pp. 14–15; and Chen, *Yueju liushinian*, p. 137. On the *Jianghu shiba ben* and *shida hangdang*, see Yueju da cidian bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Yueju da cidian*, pp. 54–57 and pp. 333–36, respectively.

2. Mackerras, “The Growth of the Chinese Regional Drama in the Ming and Ch’ing.”

3. Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure*.

4. Zhang, *Zhongguo jiyue xiban*.

5. Lai, *Guangdong xiqu jianshi*, pp. 29–49. In addition to *yi yang*, *bangzi* and *kunqu*, two other styles of local drama, namely *yurao* and *haiyan*, made their way to Guangdong around the same time, but neither matched the popularity and influence of the dominant three; both vanished from Guangdong by the end of the Ming.

6. Lai, *Guangdong xiqu jianshi*, pp. 56–58, on some features in Cantonese opera derived from *yi yang*, such as singing by chorus and the extensive use of percussion instruments. On *yi yang*’s relatively rapid progress in localization, see the latest discussion by Huang, *Guangfu xiban shi*, pp. 52–54. *Kunqu*, of course, had its impact too, for some set plays used as precursors in Cantonese opera were evidently *kunqu* in origin.

7. The original account by Gaspar da Cruz was given in *Tractado*, first published in 1569–70. The reference here is from C. R. Boxer’s *South China in the Sixteenth Century* (1953), cited in translation by Lai, *Guangdong xiqu jianshi*, pp. 53–54.

8. The controversies surrounding the history of the Qionghua Huiguan are often glossed over in general accounts, but there is a lively debate among mainland Chinese scholars in dating its founding and over the question of whether one existed in Guangzhou. See Huang, *Guangfu xiban shi*, pp. 77–88; and Yu, *Mingqing shiqi Yueju de qiyuan, xingcheng he fazhan*, pp. 78–88.

9. On the rise of Guangzhou and the history of the hong merchants, see Yang and Zhang, eds., *Guangzhou jianshi*, chapters 8–9.

10. Xian, “Qingdai liusheng xiban zai Guangdong,” pp. 105–8.

11. Xian’s article “Qingdai liusheng xiban zai Guangdong” remains a classic on the topic, but note the latest discussion in Huang, *Guangfu xiban shi*, chapter 1.

12. Xian, “Qingdai liusheng xiban zai Guangdong,” p. 107; and Lai, *Guangdong xiqu jianshi*, p. 89.

13. See Huang Wei’s most recent effort in tracking the trajectory of *waijiang ban* in Guangzhou, in *Guangfu xiban shi*, pp. 15–24.

14. The following passages are based on Xian, “Qingdai liusheng xiban zai Guangdong,” pp. 109–13.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 117–18.

16. Huang, *Guangfu xiban shi*, pp. 39–41.

17. Cited in Lai, *Guangdong xiqu jianshi*, pp. 73–74. Huang Wei has pointed out that *guangqiang* was in fact the same as *gaoqiang* and was no more than localized *yiyang* style in Guangdong. See his *Guangfu xiban shi*, pp. 52–54.

18. See discussion in Cui and Zeng, eds., *Yueju heshiyou*, especially the paper and subsequent comments by Ching May Bo, pp. 118–25.

19. Tanaka Issei, “Shengong Yueju yanchushi chutan,” pp. 35–43.

20. Cited in Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, p. 12; and also Lai, *Guangdong xiqu jianshi*, p. 176.

21. Lai, *Guangdong xiqu jianshi*, p. 108; and Huang, *Guangfu xiban shi*, p. 76.

22. Ho, “Cantonese Opera as a Mirror of Society,” p. 305. A fuller passage is cited by Lai, *Guangdong xiqu jianshi*, pp. 105–6; see also Huang, “Guangdong ‘waijiang ban,’ ‘bendi ban’ chukao,” pp. 85 and 91.

23. Ho, “Cantonese Opera as a Mirror of Society,” p. 305.

24. Huang, *Guangfu xiban shi*, pp. 22–24.

25. Lai, *Guangdong xiqu jianshi*, pp. 93–94; Xian, “Qingdai liusheng xiban zai Guangdong,” p. 119.

26. Quoted in Xian, “Qingdai liusheng xiban zai Guangdong,” p. 115; and Lai, *Guangdong xiqu jianshi*, p. 113.

27. Mai, “Guangdong xiju shilüe,” pp. 803–4; Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, pp. 13–17; Yu, *Mingqing shiqi Yueju de qiyuan, xingcheng he fazhan*, pp. 124–35.

28. Mai, “Guangdong xiju shilüe,” pp. 803–4.

29. Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, p. 19; Chen, *Yueju liushinian*, p. 147. Mackerras refers to it as a “charming incident,” though no effort is made to ascertain its historicity, in *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times*, p. 148.

30. Quoted in Lai, *Guangdong xiqu jianshi*, p. 138.

31. The original document is included by Tanaka Issei in his collection of sources on Yuan-Ming-Qing theater. Quoted in Lai, *Guangdong xiqu jianshi*, pp. 136–37.

32. A Chinese newspaper in San Francisco, *Tangfan gongbao*, printed a list of opera troupes and their casts formed in the second year of the Guangxu reign, i.e., 1876. The information was provided by Jiqing Gongsuo, a brokerage organization for the *bendi ban*, to be discussed later in this chapter. I thank Elizabeth Sinn for sharing a copy of the announcement in *Tangfan gongbao*.

33. The passage was originally recorded in a local county gazette and has been widely cited in the literature, such as in Mackerras, *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times*, p. 147; Huang, “Guangdong ‘waijiang ban,’ ‘bendi ban’ chukao,” p. 91; and Ho, “Cantonese Opera as a Mirror of Society,” p. 302. Traditions died hard, as the author went on to criticize such performance as devoid of quality by the standard of classical drama, and as morally corrosive and thereby subversive of the social order. See Lai, *Guangdong xiqu jianshi*, pp. 155–56.

34. On Liu Huadong, see Mai, “Guangdong xiju shilüe,” pp. 804–5; and Chen, *Yueju liushinian*, pp. 99–100.

35. See two pieces of investigative studies, Ou, “Lishi shang de Liu Huadong,” pp. 70–72; and Li, “Liu Huadong yu Yueju guanxi bian,” pp. 13–36.

36. Mai “Guangdong xiju shilüe,” pp. 811–12. See also Yueju da cidian bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Yueju da cidian*, pp. 54–64.

37. Lai Bojiang offers an example of a performance staged in Hong Kong in the summer of 1891. The opera depicted the Sino-French War fought some seven years earlier, except that the Chinese smashed their enemies in the play, contrary to the actual results in the conflict. See Lai, *Guangdong xiqu jianshi*, p. 158.

38. Huang, “Bahe Huiguan guanshi,” p. 221. Huang was the last chairperson of the Bahe Huiguan before its reconstitution and incorporation into the mass organization under the new communist government in 1949. His oral history recollection has been tapped by a number of authors, including Lai, *Guangdong xiqu jianshi*, pp. 139–40.

39. Huang, *Guangfu xiban shi*, pp. 89–92.

40. According to Lai Bojiang and Huang Jingming, toward the end of the nineteenth century Cantonese opera companies were of two kinds based on the geographic areas they served. They were the *Guangfu ban* and *guoshan ban*, the former concentrating in and around the Pearl River Delta and the latter traveling along the peripheries to the east, north, and west of the core area. The *Guangfu ban* were the principal *hongchuan ban*; they presented a more comprehensive cast of actors of all different role-types, and their players possessed more refined skills and enjoyed higher status than their counterparts. Around 1900, *Guangfu ban* numbered some thirty-six, with the larger ones featuring over sixty actors, about ten musicians, and some seventy to ninety supporting staff. By all accounts, they were setting standards, defining styles, and developing conventions for the performing community at large. Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, pp. 281–85. It is very likely that they based the discussion on Liu Guoxing’s reminiscences in “Xiban he xiyuan,” pp. 330–31.

41. Tanaka Issei, *Zhongguo de zongzu yu xiju* and *Zhongguo xiju shi*.

42. A succinct description of the seasonal structure can be found in Xie and Li, “Qingmo Minchu Yueju shihua,” p. 40; and Liu, “Bahe Huiguan huiyi,” p. 163.

43. Xie and Li, “Qingmo Minchu Yueju shihua,” pp. 34–36; Huang, “Bahe Huiguan guanshi,” p. 224; and Chen, “Hongchuan shidai de Yueban gaikuang,” pp. 318–9.

44. Tanaka Issei, “Shengong Yueju yanchushi chutan,” pp. 43–46, using an example dated 1915.

45. The various sources and their suggested founding years are as follows: Xie and Li, “Qingmo Minchu Yueju shihua,” pp. 34–36 (1876); Huang, “Bahe Huiguan guanshi,” p. 222 (1882–83); Cui, Guo, and Zhong, eds., *Bahe Huiguan qingdian jinian tekan*, p. 10 (1889); and Liu, “Bahe Huiguan huiyi,” p. 165 (1892). My estimation leans toward the latter years based on the discussion in Huang, *Guangfu xiban shi*, pp. 290–91.

46. For some comparative perspectives, juxtaposing the trajectories of Cantonese opera with Peking opera, see Ng, “Cong wenhua shi kan Yueju, cong Yueju shi kan wenhua,” pp. 24–25.

47. There are minor discrepancies over the names and compositions of the different subsidiary units according to different recollections. For instance, one account, by Liu Guoxing, paints the organization of the staff as one exclusively for senior management personnel, but Xie Xingbo and Li Shaozhuo recall a more humble entity representing staff in charge of costumes, headgear, and sundry equipment. See Liu, “Bahe Huiguan huiyi,” pp. 165–67; Xie and Li, “Qingmo Minchu Yueju shihua,” p. 36; and Huang, “Bahe Huiguan guanshi,” p. 222.

48. Huang, *Guangfu xiban shi*, pp. 295–96.

49. Xie Xingbo and Li Shaozhuo offer a diagram showing the layout of the guild hall in “Qingmo Minchu Yueju shihua,” p. 37. For a detailed discussion of the corporate activities and functions of Bahe, see Huang, *Guangfu xiban shi*, pp. 296–309.

50. My discussion of the red boat’s physical layout and functional allocation of space in this and the following paragraph is drawn from Liu, “Xiban he xiyuan,” pp. 335–42; Xie and Li, “Qingmo Minchu Yueju shihua,” pp. 38–41; and Huang, *Guangfu xiban shi*, pp. 93–99.

51. For a most illuminating treatment on the red boat, attending to not only the physical but also sociocultural configurations, see Ward, “The Red Boats of the Canton Delta.” The term *traveling hostels* is from p. 237.

52. Chen, “Hongchuan shidai de Yueban gaikuang,” pp. 310–11; Xie and Li, “Qingmo Minchu Yueju shihua,” pp. 40–41.

53. Ward, “The Red Boats of the Canton Delta,” pp. 250–52.

54. Liu, “Yueju banzhu dui yiren de boxue,” pp. 126–27. There were some variations depending on the financial standing of the troupes. Less resourceful ones might issue the second one-third allotment only at the very end of the entire season. See the accounts given by Chen, “Hongchuan shidai de Yueban gaikuang,” p. 318; and Xie and Li, “Qingmo Minchu Yueju shihua,” p. 41.

55. On taboos, see Xie and Li, “Qingmo Minchu Yueju shihua,” pp. 43–45; and Huang, *Guangfu xiban shi*, pp. 131–43.

Chapter 2. Urbanization of Cantonese Opera

1. The account by Liu Guoxing, as rendered in “Xiban he xiyuan,” was originally printed in 1963, in *Guangdong wenshi ziliao*; it has been reissued several times in various collections. My copy of the essay is from *Yueju yanjiu ziliao xuan*, issued by Guangdongsheng Xiju Yanjiusuo in 1983—see p. 359.

2. Since Liu Guoxing claimed to be one of the actors involved, it is only reasonable to take him at his word; he is cited by several studies, including Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, p. 33; and Ferguson, “A Study of Cantonese Opera,” p. 94. However, I have not come across any reference to Zhukangnian in the theater advertisements of *Huazi ribao* after 1912, and even more puzzling is the lack of any trace of the troupe for the 1919–20 opera season and in the ensuing years. The troupe also did not appear in two other lists of opera companies printed in local entertainment magazines: *Liyang Zazhi*, no. 1 (1918), pp. 79–82; and *Juchao*, no. 1 (1924), no page number.

3. Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, p. 285.

4. Note an article offering a brief history of theater houses in Guangzhou in *Yuehua bao*, March 31, 1933. It mentioned nothing about the background of the occasion, nor the troupes involved. It is also unclear whether patrons were to pay for their admission.

5. See the above-mentioned essay in *Yuehua bao*, March 31, 1933; and also Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, pp. 313–4.

6. *Huazi ribao*, May 3, 1895, as cited by Ching, “Qingmo Yueshang suojian xiyuan yu xiyuan guankui,” p. 107.

7. The proposal was submitted by an American trading company, perhaps, on behalf of some local Chinese merchants with U.S. connections. See Ching, “Qingmo Yueshang suojian xiyuan yu xiyuan guankui,” p. 107.

8. See two earlier studies by Law and Bren, *From Artform to Platform*, pp. 15–16; and Leung, “Xianggang Yueju yishu de chengzhang,” pp. 654–55. The most recent work on theater houses in early Hong Kong is furnished by Ng, “Xianggang Yueju xiyuan fazhan.”

9. The discussion in this paragraph is drawn primarily from Ching, “Qingmo Yueshang suojian xiyuan yu xiyuan guankui,” pp. 108–10. Her analysis is based on an official document and some contemporary local news reports that have never been tapped.

10. The subject of the theater and the state will be examined at length in Chapter Five.

11. Liu, “Xiban he xiyuan,” pp. 360–61.

12. Advertisements for various Hong Kong theaters began to appear in the following month in the *Huazi ribao*: Puqing, March 1902; Taiping, May 1904; and Jiurufang, September 1911.

13. Guangdong Shengli Zhongshan Tushuguan, ed., *Jiuyue baitai*, pp. 30 and 110.

14. Jinshan Bing, Zhu Cibo, and Bai Jurong are often mentioned as instrumental in the development of *pinghou* and the switch to local Cantonese. See a most recent reference in Jia, ed., *Zhongguo jindai xiqu shi*, 2:29. Also noteworthy was the role played by a handful of amateur troupes active in Hong Kong and Guangzhou in the last years of the Qing and the first decade of the Republican period. Commonly referred to as *zhishi ban*, they advocated a reformist if not a pro-revolutionary agenda, hoping to harness popular theater for the sake of political and social change in China. Their history and significance will be examined in Chapter Four.

15. See, for example, two year-long rental contracts signed with the Taiping Theater in 1923 and 1926, respectively. They both indicated a flat rate per day and some extra fees. HMTTC #2006.49.54 and #2006.49.98.

16. In a piece of oral history published in the late 1980s, two elderly interviewees (one of them identified as a former actor) recalled a hundred male actors and their signature plays from the period 1900–20. Xie and Li, “Qingmo Minchu Yueju shihua,” pp. 29–33.

17. Wong and Tseng, eds., *Xishuo Yueju*, pp. 14, 44–46.

18. Advertisements placed by two playhouses on the same day began to appear in *Huazi ribao* in October 1904.

19. Xie and Li, “Qingmo Minchu Yueju shihua,” p. 47. The earliest piece of advertising on *quanhang da zahui* appeared in *Huazi ribao*, July 3–7, 1900.

20. The picture on Cantonese opera troupes prior to the twentieth century is very sketchy; the latest study by Huang, *Guangdong xiban shi*, has added little to our knowledge of this early period. For two classics on opera troupes in general, mainly informed by the history of Peking opera, see Qi, *Xiban*; and Zhang, *Zhongguo xiban shi*.

21. Liu, “Yueju banzhu dui yiren de boxue,” pp. 130–32.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 130–34. He E’lou and his family apparently had a history of running theater business in Hong Kong, dating back to the 1870s. See Ng, “Xianggang Yueju xiyuan fazhan.”

23. Ng, “Cong Taiping xiyuan shuodao Sheng Gang ban.”

24. There are three documents regarding He Shouan’s dealing with Taian in HMTTC: see #2006.49.649 on an investment he made in July 1911, and #2006.49.647 and #2006.49.648 regarding his withdrawal in June 1917.

25. Chen, “Hongchuan shidai de Yueban gaikuang,” pp. 318–9.

26. These documents are available in HMTTC #2006.49.1 to #2006.49.8. A few *shiyue* can also be found in CLTTC.

27. See HMTTC #2006.49.350 to #2006.49.355 for six copies of loan receipts. CLTTC holds one such loan receipt.

28. See Liu, “Yueju banzhu dui yiren de boxue,” pp. 134–43, for a discussion of the *banling* and its variations. Also Chen, “Hongchuan shidai de Yueban gaikuang,” pp. 320–21. In another piece of reminiscence, Liu expressed outrage at the case of Jinshan Bing. The latter allegedly had performed under Hongshun for some nineteen years, after which he was traded to Yuan Xingqiao’s Taian for a sum of eighteen thousand dollars, covering the cost of twenty-six years remaining on his *banling*. Liu, “Xiban he xiyuan,” pp. 343–45. About a dozen *banling*, acquired by Taian between 1914 and 1917 are deposited in HMTTC.

#2006.49.107 to 2006.49.123. They are mixed together with some performance contracts. It should be pointed out that some related businesses and especially shady entities like gambling joints and outright gangsters were likewise involved in such exploitative schemes.

29. Liu, "Xiban he xiyuan," pp. 361–62; and "Yueju banzhu dui yiren de boxue," pp. 143–44. Liu's recollection is validated by data gleaned from theater advertisements.

30. Wong, "Jiazhu shiye yu Xianggang xiyuanye."

31. For government regulations, see "Places of Public Entertainment Regulation Ordinance, 1919," in *Hong Kong Government Gazette*, October 31, 1919, pp. 452–54. Also "Gongzhong yulechang guize" (Regulations governing public entertainment venues), in Dai, ed., *Gangqiao xuzhi*, pp. 461–62.

32. Liu, "Xiban he xiyuan," p. 341; and "Yueju banzhu dui yiren de boxue," pp. 132–33.

33. Note a rental agreement signed by He Haoquan with Taiping in early 1923, extending the current contract covering the 1922–1923 season through the summer of 1924. HMTTC #2006.49.98.

34. *Huazi ribao*, December 13, 1923.

35. *Ibid.*, June 3, 1921. See Chapter Five for the disturbances caused by nonnative soldiers stationed in Guangzhou.

36. *Ibid.*, December 22, 1921.

37. *Ibid.*, October, 29, 1921.

38. *Ibid.*, November 16, 1921.

39. *Ibid.*, June 10 and November 19, 1921.

40. *Ibid.*, November 5 and 9, December 14, 1921. The deceased was Xiaosheng Fu. Three months earlier, the troupe had a close call when a bandit group intruded into the makeshift theater and kidnapped the son of a local villager for ransom. *Ibid.*, September 13, 1921.

41. Bai Jurong's oral history reminiscences in Li, ed., *Yueju yishu dashi Bai Jurong*, p. 34.

42. Xie and Li, "Qingmo Minchu Yueju shihua," p. 46.

43. *Huazi ribao*, January 25, 1923. Liu Guoxing mentioned another bandit attack on Daronghua around 1920 in Shunde. See his "Yueju banzhu dui yiren de boxue," p. 128.

44. Liu Guoxing had much to say about Li Fulin in several pieces of personal reminiscences: "Yueju banzhu dui yiren de boxue," pp. 127–29; "Xiban he xiyuan," p. 364; and "Bahe Huiguan huiyi," pp. 173–74. For another contemporary account of Li Fulin, this time by a westerner, see Franck, *Roving through Southern China*, pp. 256–57.

45. The term *bifurcation* comes from Ferguson, "A Study of Cantonese Opera," p. 82.

46. The issue is available in the Chinese Opera Information Centre, Department of Music, Chinese University of Hong Kong. An advertisement for the magazine appeared in *Huazi ribao*, July 5, 1924. A copy was sold for \$1.20. No subsequent issue has been found, and it is quite possible that the project folded after one issue.

47. The assassination of Li Shaofan and the subsequent trial of the accused murderer were reported at length in *Huazi ribao* between August 17 and September 15, 1921. This incident and other similar cases of violence targeting actors will be examined in Chapter Five. Suffice it to say here that the urban circuit was far from a safe haven for actors.

48. On the cast of the enhanced Renshounian, see *Huazi ribao*, August 17 and October 13, 1922.

49. See an advertisement on Xinzhonghua in *ibid.*, September 8, 1922.

50. The honor to perform in front of the visiting dignitaries supposedly belonged to Mei Lanfang, but his visit was postponed because of a strike by Chinese seamen that

spring. See *ibid.*, April 1 and 10, 1922. On Zhu's murder, see *ibid.*, May 29 and 31, 1922. Advertisements on the revived Huanqiule appeared in *ibid.*, August 18 and September 18, 1923.

51. See a report on the travels of Yongtaiping through the rural communities in *ibid.*, December 27, 1921.

52. Songtaiping's overhaul was announced in *ibid.*, September 1–2, 1922. On its rural itineraries, see later reports dated December 13, 1922; and November 26 and December 19, 1924. According to Beryl Yuen, the granddaughter, who spoke at a workshop at Lingnan University in December 2012, Yuan's business suffered a setback as a result of the seamen strike in early 1922, which caused him to shuffle his priorities and downsize his theater investment.

53. On Liyuanle, see *Huazi ribao*, August 11, 1924. See also Lai, *Xue Juexian yiyuan chunqiu*, pp. 27–28.

54. See advertisements on these actors in the following issues of *Huazi ribao*: on Zhu, February 14, 1921; on Liang Rong, May 23 and June 4, 1921 (he was not the famous *wusheng* with the same stage name); and on Shezai Li, November 4 and December 24 and 27, 1921; October 31, November 2 and 7, and December 5, 1923.

55. See Lai's biography, *Yueju "Huadan wang" Qianli Ju*. On "zhaopai gou," see Wang, "Wo jiyizhong de 'Renshounian' ji qita," p. 63. *Huazi ribao*, July 2, 1923, carries a special announcement on Qianli Ju's return to the stage following a short period of sickness. The piece made it sound as if special permission was obtained from the local authorities to prolong the performance past midnight to mark the occasion. The troupe clearly did not want to miss this opportunity for additional publicity.

56. A copy of such *xidan* with "jiading" was re-created from memory in Xie and Li, "Qingmo Minchu Yueju shihua," p. 47.

57. *Huazi ribao*, March 9, 1923. A critique of the play appeared in the inaugural issue of *Juchao* (1924).

58. *Huazi ribao*, February 17, 1922.

59. *Ibid.*, August 1 and 15, 1924; March 13 and April 18, 1925.

60. Shen, *Ma Shizeng de xiju shengya*, p. 58.

61. One gets a sense of the juggling and reshuffling of actors among the troupes, and the latest moves of individuals, by comparing rosters from year to year. On Renshounian, see *Huazi ribao*, July 25, 1924; on Liyuanle, see *ibid.*, August 11, 1924; and also the account in Lai, *Xue Juexian yiyuan chunqiu*, pp. 27–28.

62. The vibrant history of Cantonese opera in the diaspora will be explored in depth in Part III.

63. Yung, "Jinru chengshi; wuguang shise."

64. The role-type *wenwusheng* likely appeared around 1922. I came across the first mention of *wenwusheng*, appearing in a troupe named Daronghua, in *Huazi ribao*, September 12, 1922. The next time was with Dazhonghua, in *ibid.*, July 30, 1923. In the 1924 inaugural issue of the magazine *Juchao*, out of twenty troupes on its list of opera companies, six had adopted this new role-type.

65. Mai Xiaoxia offered a rather comprehensive list of over sixty playwrights in his "Guangdong xiju shilüe," pp. 819–20. For a similar view on the two cohorts, see Lai and Lai, *Tang Disheng*, p. 15.

66. For short biographical entries on Liang and Li, as well as some other playwrights, see Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, pp. 134–41.

67. For an example, see a short essay on Luo Jianhong in *Xichuan*, no.1 (1931), pp. 39–42. Luo is said to be the first scriptwriter who joined the circle, in the late 1910s, without any prior experience as an actor.

68. Leung Pui Kam has estimated that over 1,800 Cantonese opera plays were performed in 1911–9, and another 3,600 in 1920–36. These figures are based on the titles of the plays and should be taken cautiously, because it was common for plays to be copied or revived, with or without modification, under different titles. See Leung, “Yueju (Guangfu daxi) yanjiu,” pp. 812–13.

69. I have acquired photocopies of the inaugural issue of *Liyang Zazhi* and no. 8 of *Liyuan Zazhi* from the Provincial Zhongshan Library in Guangzhou. I have seen a photocopy of the front cover of *Liyuan Jiahua* in the Chinese Opera Information Centre, Chinese University of Hong Kong. On organizing activities among playwrights, see a report in *Lingxing*, no. 104, October 1934, p. 16.

70. Rental contracts at the Taiping Theater required visiting companies to pay Wen a small commission for the publicity services rendered. See HMTTC #2006.49.54 and #2006.49.84.

71. *Huazi ribao*, November 4, 1921.

72. *Ibid.*, January 21 and 23, 1920; November 15, 1921; November 3, 1922; and February 2, 1925.

Chapter 3. Urban Theater and Its Modern Crisis

1. See Chen, *Yueju liushinian*, pp. 2–4, 20–30. *Huazi ribao* reported Chen’s impending departure from Daluotian to organize his own troupe on June 20, 1928.

2. Ng, “Chen Feinong Huanan shizai (1924–1934) yu Yueju shijie de bianqian.” Chen did resume performance upon return to South China and continued to do so during the wartime in Macau. After the war and the Communist victory in 1949, he settled in Hong Kong and ran an academy to train students in his beloved art.

3. *Huazi ribao*, November 1925 through February 1926.

4. The tour of Xinzhonghua was reported in *ibid.*, December 21, 1925. On Bai Jurong, see Li, ed., *Yueju yishu dashi Bai Jurong*, pp. 35–38. On performance activities in Guangzhou at this time, see Ma Shizeng’s personal reminiscences in Shen, *Ma Shizeng de xiju shengya*, p. 54.

5. A rental agreement was signed by Yuan Xingqiao of Taiping and the wife of He Shouan on behalf of Xinzhonghua. HMTTC #2006.49.54. The document mentions a similar engagement by Renshounian.

6. Yuan did set up three new troupes between 1928 and 1931, including Xinjiyuan, Yitongtaiping, and Yongshounian. See Yung, “Yitong Yongshou, Zhulong Taiping.”

7. Chen, *Yueju liushinian*, pp. 7 and 27.

8. Shen, *Ma Shizeng de xiju shengya*, pp. 62–64; Chen, *Yueju liushinian*, pp. 7–8, 27. Li Fengyuan argued in a commemorative essay in 1935 that Daluotian was the best troupe of the era. Fourth Anniversary Issue of *Lingxing* (May 20, 1935), p. 36.

9. Li Fengyuan in *Lingxing*, Fourth Anniversary Issue (May 20, 1935), p. 36.

10. Reading through what is available in the theater advertisements of Hong Kong’s *Huazi ribao* for the 1927–28 season, no other troupe was even mentioned but these four!

11. Shen, *Ma Shizeng de xiju shengya*, pp. 65–72; Chen, *Yueju liushinian*, pp. 7–8, 28. On the new discipline of industrial time and the routine of work and leisure for the petty

urbanites in Republican China, see Wang, “Tourism and Spatial Change in Hangzhou”; and Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor*, chapters 3–5.

12. See advertisements by the Lee Theater in *Huazi ribao* in August of 1927. Chen Feinong claimed that Daluotian performed at its formal opening, *Yueju liushinian*, p. 28.

13. *Huazi ribao*, June 27, July 23 and 26, 1928. Dai, ed., *Gangqiao xuzhi*, section on theater, no page number.

14. *Yuehua bao*, July 31, 1928.

15. *Huazi ribao*, June 6–7, 15, 20, and July 23, 1928. Jutianle’s first advertisement in *Huazi ribao* appeared on August 1. Chen Feinong gave an account of his business partner in *Yueju liushinian*, p. 10.

16. *Huazi ribao*, June 20 and August 11, 1928. See another report on this conflict over Bai Jurong in *Yuehua bao*, September 27, 1928. According to Bai, he was partial to Gaoshengle himself but decided to withdraw from commercial performance altogether for a period to avoid any further complication. Li, ed., *Yueju yishu dashi Bai Jurong*, p. 38. Liu Guoxing recalled in his oral history that He E’lou returned the favor with an aggressive bid to buy out He Haoquan but was turned down. Liu, “Yueju banzhu dui yiren de boxue,” pp. 144–45.

17. *Huazi ribao*, July 9 and 27, 1928.

18. *Ibid.*, June 8 and July 2, 1928. Note Joshua Goldstein’s examination of comparable issues in theatrical aesthetics in Peking opera during the Republican period in *Drama Kings*, especially chapters 1 and 3.

19. See *Huazi ribao*, June 4, 12, and 16, 1928, on *huadan*; *ibid.*, June 28, and August 7, 1928, on *banghua*.

20. References to salaries appeared often in the column. See, for example, the case of Li Congpo, an up-and-coming *xiaowu* who was not quite top-tier yet, according to our columnist. Notwithstanding, his estimated contract for 1928 was approaching \$20,000. *Huazi ribao*, July 28, 1928.

21. This is most clearly seen in an essay titled “My view on the organization of *Sheng Gang* troupes,” in *Huazi ribao*, July 3, 1928. Two weeks later, in another essay, he referred to the two key players as pillars with (primary) responsibility (*zeren taizhu*). *Ibid.*, July 18, 1928.

22. *Yuehua bao*, August 12 and 21, 1929.

23. Liu Guoxing, “Xiban he xiyuan,” p. 362. There was news in 1931 that He Haoquan made an attempt to recoup, but the result is not clear. *Yuehua bao*, June 23, 1931.

24. This might not be the first time. Our favorite columnist in *Huazi ribao* pointed out back in 1928 that Xue’s troupe *Xinjingxiang* offered fellow actors the chance to purchase shares. *Huazi ribao*, June 5, 1928.

25. See *Yuehua bao*, August 12, 1929; and July 28, 1930.

26. *Ibid.*, June 15, 1930.

27. *Ibid.*, July 29, 1929; and June 10, 1930.

28. Printed in *Huazi ribao*, March 12, 1924.

29. Chen, *Yueju liushinian*, pp. 7 and 27; and Shen, *Ma Shizeng de xiju shengya*, pp. 58–69. On Dayaotain, see *Huazi ribao*, September 13, 1927. Several years later, another essayist offered a litany of concerns, beginning with the astronomical earnings of actors, supposedly around \$60,000–70,000 for Chen Feinong, Ma Shizeng, Xue Juexian, and the like. See *Yuehua bao*, July 14, 1934.

30. *Lingxing*, Issue 40, August 1932, pp. 2–3. Nine companies were included in the survey.

31. See, for example, the midyear reports in *Lingxing*, Issue 4, March 1931, pp. 30–32; and Issue 27, February 1932, p. 6.

32. See an essay discussing the various causes behind the theater recession in *Yuehua bao*, May 31, 1933.

33. Chen, *Yueju liushinian*, p. 31; and reports in *Yuehua bao*, July 8, 1930; and August 15, 1931.

34. Renshounian's popularity on the rural circuits was primarily the result of an eighteen-installment series titled *The Exploits of Jiang Ziya (Longhu Du Jiangong)*. It was based on the epic fantasy novel *The Investiture of Gods (Fengshen Bang)*. Xinchunqiu's most memorable play was *A City under Siege (Weicheng Jiandie)*, which premiered in 1930. Later, another season saver for Liao Xiahuai's Riyuexing was *Efang Palace Consumed by Fire (Huoshao Efangong)*. See Zhang, "Sanshi niandai Guangzhou Yueju gaikuang," p. 15; an interim report on the season in *Lingxing*, Issue 4, March 1931, pp. 30–32; and Chen, *Yueju liushinian*, p. 30.

35. This thesis about "time and money" was echoed by almost everyone who wrote on the subject at that time. For the opera theater to survive, some commentators suggested that it should follow the model of movies by shortening performances and slashing admission. Others worried that a reduced time frame would undermine the integrity of plot design and the delivery of intricate arias and time-honored artistry. See an exchange in *Yuehua bao*, March 4, April 2, May 27, and August 7, 1934. Fares analysis is hard to conduct systematically, for there is so much variation, depending on the venues, the troupes, the plays, the time, and so on. The general impression is supported by my extensive readings of theater advertisements in Hong Kong and Guangzhou of this time.

36. Zhang, "Sanshi niandai Guangzhou Yueju gaikuang," pp. 106, 110, and 122.

37. Dai, ed., *Gangqiao xuzhi*, pp. 465–66; Guangzhou Shizhengfu, *Guangzhou zhinan*, pp. 240–41.

38. *Lingxing*, Issue 51, December 1932, pp. 17–18.

39. See essays in *Yuehua bao*, August 21, 1929, and April 7, 1934. Elizabeth Sinn raised the same question during a conversation in Chicago, April 3, 2005.

40. Yung Sai-shing, *Yueyun liusheng*.

41. Li, ed., *Yueju yishu dashi Bai Jurong*, pp. 38–40; Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, pp. 200–202.

42. Luo, *Yueju dianying shi*, chapter 2.

43. According to this author, the East River region was battered by flooding, local authorities in the West River area launched a campaign to pacify local unrest and prohibited theater performance, and last but not least, the officials in charge of the North River imposed a punitive surcharge on theater plays. There was no conspiracy, but rather a case of bad luck, declared the author of an essay in *Yuehua bao*, September 27, 1932. Three months later, another report in *Lingxing* was in agreement with the above analysis—see Issue 51, December 1932, pp. 1–2.

44. *Yuehua bao*, June 11, 1933.

45. Two such incidents were reported in *Lingxing*, Issue 52, December 1932, pp. 3–4; and Issue 102, September 1934, pp. 9–10.

46. See reports in *Yuehua bao*, February 4 and 9, March 11, 1934.

47. *Ibid.*, June 26, 1934. Early that month, *Lingxing* reported an incident involving a dispute between an actor and his creditor, Issue 95, June 1934, pp. 3–6. This may have prompted the essayist to write his piece in *Yuehua bao*.

48. HMTTC #2006.4 9.645. On the shrinkage of credit, see *Lingxing*, Issue 62, May 1933, pp. 1–4.

49. *Yuehua bao*, August 14, 1933, and July 18–19, 1934.

50. *Ibid.*, October 15, 1933, and June 11, 1934.

51. *Ibid.*, March 21, 1934.

52. All these personnel decisions and changes were much discussed in the press. See *Lingxing*, Issue 3, February 1931, p. 39; and Issue 35, June 1932, p. 9; and *Yuehua bao*, October 29, 1930.

53. Xinchunqiu's tour of Shanghai was reported in *Yuehua bao*, June 10, 20, and 23, 1931. On the mishaps in that rural engagement, see *Lingxing*, Issue 32, April 1932, pp. 27–28.

54. See reports in *Yuehua bao*, September 18 and October 1, 1933; also *Lingxing*, Issue 74, September 1933.

55. See back-to-back reports in *Lingxing*, Issue 72, August 1933, and Issue 73, August 1933.

56. *Yuehua bao*, February 13, 1934.

57. *Ibid.*, June 7, 1931; June 26 and August 8, 1934. Incidents involving unpaid wages were nothing new. Hong Kong *Huazi ribao* reported the case of a female company in the summer of 1924 when the actresses took their grievances to the local police, July 8, 1924.

58. *Lingxing*, Issue 55, January 1933, p. 13; and Issue 56, February 1933, pp. 5–9. Both *Lingxing* (Issues 59–67, April to June, 1933) and *Yuehua bao* (June 21, July 5, 15 and 25, 1933) provide tidbits on the struggle of the troupe (renamed Tangtianbao) in the ensuing months and its eventual collapse.

59. *Lingxing*, Issue 66, June 1933, p. 27; Issue 67, June 1933, pp. 19–21. Also *Yuehua bao*, June 22, 1933.

60. *Lingxing*, Issue 81, November 1933, pp. 25–27

61. *Yuehua bao*, September 20 and 26, 1933; January 22, 27 and 31, February 2, March 10, June 10 and August 30, 1934. Also *Lingxing*, Issue 82, December 1933, pp. 9–10.

62. Liangyixuan was a local business that pioneered the use of leaflets and the print media in general for advertisement purpose. See its advertisements in local pictorial serials such as *Shishi huabao* and *Xiangqi huabao*, collected in Guangdong Shengli Zhongshan Tushuguan, ed., *Jiuyue baitai*, pp. 257–61. I saw a copy of *Zhenlan* on permanent display at the Guangdong Province Cantonese Opera Museum in Foshan during a visit in November 2009.

63. *Liyong Zazhi*, no. 1 (1918); *Liyuan Zazhi*, no. 8 (1919). It is possible that the first magazine was simply renamed and became the second one, based on their dates and issue numbers, but we are not sure. These two issues are the only extant copies I have come across, both at the Provincial Zhongshan Library in Guangzhou. According to information provided by the Chinese Opera Information Centre at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, there was an earlier publication called *Liyuan Jiahua*, issued in 1915, but the collection contains only a photocopy of its front cover and a page of content material.

64. *Juchao*, no. 1 (1924). The magazine cost a dollar and twenty cents, according to an advertisement on *Huazi ribao*, July 5, 1924.

65. *Xinyue Ji*, no. 3 (1931).

66. This special issue was printed in July 1930 and was co-published by Juexian Touring Troupe and its host in Vietnam Yongxing Theater. The Chinese Opera Information Centre, Chinese University of Hong Kong, holds five other issues of *Juexian Ji*.

67. *Qianli zhuangyou ji* was printed in March 1931. I consulted the copy at the Special Collections, Hong Kong University Libraries.

68. *Lingxing*, Issue 10, May 1931, p. 98; Issue 56, February 1933, p. 37; and Issue 60, May 1933, p. 29.

69. The quote is taken from the first anniversary issue (29), March 1932, pp. 2–3.

70. In October 1932, the magazine printed 3,500 copies and set the goal of increasing total subscription to 2,000, according to Issues 46 and 47. In January of 1935, its Hong Kong office alone had over 2,000 subscriptions (Issue 109).

71. Yeh, “A Public Love Affair or a Nasty Game?”

72. Lai, *Xue Juexian yiyuan chunqiu*; and essays in the commemorative issue of *Yueju Yanjiu*, no. 4 (1987).

73. On the suspension of Juexiansheng, see *Yuehua bao*, June 26 and 29, 1932. Xue’s short-term engagement on two different occasions was reported in *Lingxing*, Issue 49, November 1932, p. 3; Issue 50, December 1932, pp. 5–6, 1932; and Issue 60, May 1933, pp. 7–8.

74. Shen, *Ma Shizeng de xiju shengya*, pp. 72–99.

75. See *Lingxing*’s report on Ma’s return to Hong Kong and an exclusive interview in Issue 53, January 1933, pp. 1–4.

76. The original copy of the agreement signed by Chen Feinong at the Solicitor’s Office of Woo and Nash on January 16, 1933, can be found in HMTTC #2006.49.28.2. Articles 7 and 8 spell out Ma’s indisputable authority on matters of performance. The condition, apparently, was public knowledge; see *Lingxing*, Issue 73, August 1933, pp. 11–12.

77. *Yuehua bao*, October 31, 1933.

78. Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, pp. 37–41. The bulk of materials in the HMTTC pertain to Ma Shizeng after he was recruited in 1933. They are in the form of business and personal correspondence, some box-office receipts, photographs, and about 180 play scripts used during this period. As for Xue Juexian, the Chinese Opera Information Centre at the Chinese University of Hong Kong has a collection of advertisement leaflets of Juexiansheng between 1931 and 1940. These two bodies of historical materials deserve further scrutiny.

79. At one point, a report in *Lingxing* seems to indicate that the compromise proposal was approved, but it turned out not to be the case. *Lingxing*, Issue 66, June 1933, p. 1; Issue 67, June 1933, pp. 2–3; and Issue 72, August 1933, p. 7. Also *Yuehua bao*, August 14, 1933.

80. *Lingxing*, Issue 98, July 1934, pp. 7–16.

81. *Yuehua bao*, July 23, 28 and 29, 1934; *Lingxing*, Issue 100, August 1934, p. 3.

Chapter 4. The Cultural Politics of Theater Reform

1. Qu, “Yueju lun,” p. 110.

2. Quoted from the preamble of the founding principle of the institute, as stated in *Xiju Zazhi jizhe*, “Guangdong Xiju Yanjiusuo de jingguoqingxing,” p. 47.

3. Chen, “Yueju yu Xinhai geming,” pp. 289–92.

4. The association was actually established by the local authorities in Sichuan in alignment with the Qing government’s wide-ranging reform program. It lasted until 1912. Xie, “Jindai Zhongguo xiqu de minzhu geming secail he Guangdong Yueju de gailiang huodong,” pp. 227–28.

5. The piece is titled “Guanxi ji” (Upon attending an opera); cited in Xie, “Jindai Zhongguo xiqu de minzhu geming secail,” pp. 242–43. The short essay has been selected for inclusion in various collections of historical documents from this period, such as the famous *Wanqing wenxue congchao*, edited by A Ying, pp. 67–72.

6. There were also printed librettos. Xie, “Jindai Zhongguo xiqu de minzhu geming secail,” pp. 251–59.

7. Ibid., pp. 256–59.

8. See Chen, “Yueju yu Xinhai geming,” pp. 293–94. Troupes made up of teenagers first appeared during the revival in the post-Taiping era. Referred to as *tongzi ban*, they provided a venue for training of a younger generation and were relatively inexpensive to operate. For an account based on oral history, see Xinzhu and Liang, “Yueju tongzi ban zashu,” pp. 514–27. Cainange was probably the first Cantonese opera-performing entity committed to the cause of revolution. Although most sources mention a two-year life span, Cainange was still performing in Hong Kong in the spring of 1909, according to a theater advertisement in Hong Kong’s *Huazi ribao*.

9. According to a report in *Huazi ribao*, February 15, 1908, the group was first named Youtian She in Macau and became Youtianying after being resurrected in Guangzhou. See also Chen, “Yueju yu Xinhai geming,” pp. 294–95. In his autobiography, Chen Feinong mentioned a “Jiazi Youtianying,” referring to the year 1924, which was likely the last time the name was invoked in a revival. Chen, *Yueju liushinian*, pp. 16–17

10. Synopses of the two plays are provided in Xie, “Jindai Zhongguo xiqu de minzhu geming secail,” pp. 262 and 266. For a list of over sixty plays—about one-fourth involving Huang Luyi—see Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, pp. 24–26.

11. Xie Binchou is the most explicit, calling Youtianying “the first formal *zhishi ban* to appear on stage.” See his “Jindai Zhongguo xiqu de minzhu geming secail,” p. 266. For a list of these amateur groups from a contemporary source, see “Editorial” in *Liyang Zazhi*, no. 1 (1918), pp. 6–7. There seems to be a spike in the activities of these amateur groups in 1912, right after the success of the anti-Qing revolution based on the advertising records in *Huazi ribao*.

12. See, for example, the program of Linlanghuanjing at its fourteenth-anniversary function in Hong Kong, summarized in *Huazi ribao*, April 12, 1921. It was a spoken-drama society, and its members also celebrated the occasion with “opera with gongs and drums” (*luoguxi*, i.e., traditional opera).

13. Ho, “Cantonese Opera as a Mirror of Society,” pp. 306–11.

14. Xie, “Jindai Zhongguo xiqu de minzhu geming secail,” p. 265; a more extensive list is provided by Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, p. 31. Regarding Xinzhu, see an oral history by his spouse, Xiyang Nü, “Xinzhu xiaozhuan.”

15. Two of the most celebrated musicians, both versatile and innovative, are Lü Wencheng (1898–1981) and Yin Zizhong (1908–1985). See Huang, “Minzu yinyuejia Lü Wencheng.” Music making and the role of musicians deserve a separate study of their own. See the discussion on scriptwriters in Chapter Two.

16. For instance, see an official injunction against the performance of local operas issued by the prefect of Guangzhou in the Tongzhi era (1862–74), quoted in its entirety by Tanaka Issei, “Shengong Yueju yanchushi chutan,” p. 41.

17. On regulations by the local authorities in Guangzhou, see Ching, “Qingdai Yue-shang suojian xiyuan yu xiyuan guankui,” p. 108. Two prints from 1906–7 show seats for women at the upper balcony in theaters in Guangzhou. See Guangdong Shengli Zhongshan Tushuguan, ed., *Jiuyue baitai*, pp. 60–61.

18. Ng, “Xianggang Yueju xiyuan fazhan.”

19. Yung, “Jinru chengshi; wuguang shise,” pp. 80–85.

20. Penned in 1733, the essay was quoted by Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, pp. 73–74.

21. In Cantonese opera, *wusheng* was honored as “riding the dragon head” (*qilongtou*). On *wusheng*’s paramount status within the corporate body, especially at times of ritual, see Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, p. 108.

22. According to Chen Tie'er, there was an incident in the 1920s involving the venerable Liang Yuanheng. Visibly upset by the arrogance of several up-and-coming youngsters, the senior actor challenged the *huadan* players on the spot to declare in front of the deity that they had never been sodomized. Those present apparently were taken aback and dared not utter a word. Chen further explains that the sexual violation was intended to inculcate femininity into a disciplined male body. Wong and Tseng, eds., *Xishuo Yueju*, p. 160. In 1922, a fairly well-known *huadan*, Saoyun Lan, was molested on the street in Guangzhou. According to a news report, the perpetrator was apprehended by the police. *Huazi ribao*, April 19, 1922.

23. The phrase is from Luo, "Gender on the Stage." See also Cheng, "The Challenge of the Actresses."

24. The Singapore reference comes from Li Zhongjue, as quoted in Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, p. 281. On U.S. immigration records, email communication from Elizabeth Sinn, April 11, 2005.

25. See *Huazi ribao*, 1900–1912. Advertisements on Cantonese opera female troupes first appeared in the 1906–7 season. There were a few female troupes visiting from Shanghai in the latter part of this period.

26. Liu, "Yueju banzhu dui xiren de boxue," pp. 132–33. According to Goldstein, there was a similar backlash in popular theater in other urban centers in China. See his *Drama Kings*, pp. 110–13.

27. Most studies of women in the pleasure industry focus on Shanghai—for instance, Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, and, more recently, Field, *Shanghai's Dancing World*. Providing a case study from the Upper Yangzi is Wang, "Masters of Tea." Note further this work of Ho on Guangzhou, "Selling Smiles in Canton."

28. The most informative account on *shiniang* and *nüling* is rendered by former practitioners through oral history. See the following three pieces: Wen, "Guangzhou 'shiniang'"; Xiong, et al., "Guangzhou 'nüling'"; and Tong and Yang, "Jiushehui Guangzhou nüling xuelei shi."

29. See an article on the *nüban* in Foshan in *Yuehua bao*, March 30, 1930.

30. *Liyang Zazhi*, no. 1 (1918), pp. 12–13.

31. Wo Foshan Ren, ed., *Li Xuefang*, p. 2.

32. *Liyang Zazhi*, no. 1 (1918), pp. 12–13.

33. *Liyuan Zazhi*, no. 8 (1919), pp. 3–5.

34. My tabulation, based on theater advertisements in *Huazi ribao*, shows that both troupes appeared in Hong Kong for fifty-one days in the second half of the 1919–20 season, a record matching that of the *Sheng Gang* troupes as shown on Table 2. For 1920–21, their number of appearances declined proportionally but remained respectable, just under seventy days, for the entire season.

35. Chen, *Yueju liushinian*, pp. 83, 157–58, and 173.

36. For a fascinating discussion on claque in a different context, see Hemmings, *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France*, chapter 7.

37. The group could be the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce. The sources offer no explanation for the substitution, except that the two *nüban* were obviously deemed presentable for the occasion, and even of comparable merit, by the sponsors. *Huazi ribao*, October 18, and November 14, 16, and 19, 1918.

38. *Huazi ribao*, November 20, 1918. See a report on another benefit performance, this time by Li Xuefang, for the Fanbian Hospital in Guangzhou in *Liyuan Zazhi*, no. 8 (1919), p. 28.

39. Wo Foshan Ren, ed., *Li Xuefang*. It was also in Shanghai that Li entertained her best-known admirer among an older generation of elite literati, Kang Youwei. Huang and Shen, *Shanghai Yueju yanchu shigao*, pp. 128–32, 166. Ching, “Jindai defang wenhua de kuadiyuxing,” pp. 4–6.

40. *Huazi ribao*, June 27, 1919. Huang and Shen, *Shanghai Yueju yanchu shigao*, pp. 135, 151, and 170.

41. *Liying Zazhi*, no. 1 (1918), pp. 12–13. Huang and Shen, *Shanghai Yueju yanchu shigao*, pp. 135 and 151.

42. The deliberation at the guild meeting was reported by *Huazi ribao*, July 14, 1921. The Bahe Huiguan seems to have finally accepted females as members in the late 1920s, but for the lack of information this piece of institutional and cultural history will have to await further study.

43. *Huazi ribao*, March 20, June 16, and August 30, 1920; August 25 and September 2, 1921.

44. *Ibid.*, July 28, 1920.

45. Xie and Huang, “Yueju quan nüban yipie,” pp. 534–38.

46. Li Xuefang evidently changed her mind and took an extended tour of North America in just a few short years. As we shall see in Chapter Eight, she and a number of accomplished actresses played an important role in ushering the Chinatown theater into its golden age in the mid-1920s.

47. Chen, *Yueju liushinian*, p. 33.

48. Note especially the following articles of Yeh, “Where Is the Center of Cultural Production?” and “A Public Love Affair or a Nasty Game?” For another nuanced decoding of star making, see Duchesne, “The Chinese Opera Star.” Finally, Goldstein has argued that the remaking of Peking opera should not be contained in a Shanghai-centric narrative; attention should be given to Beijing, the cultural and institutional bedrock of the genre, as well as the transregional networks of patronage and the phenomenon of urban touring. See his *Drama Kings*, chapter 1.

49. Mai, “Guangdong xiju shilüe,” p. 812. I use the term *beiju* to adhere faithfully to my sources. The term *beiju* was the usual reference for Peking opera in the writings I have tapped from the 1920s and 1930s. Exactly when the term *Jingju* came into popular usage in both the Cantonese opera circle and in Guangdong and Hong Kong society in general requires further research. The change could be more than semantic and was yet another fascinating facet of Cantonese opera’s encounter with Peking opera.

50. See Chen, *Yueju liushinian*, pp. 23, 79, and 158. For an intimate account offered by Xinzhu’s spouse on his painstaking efforts to learn how to play Guan Gong, taught by the Peking opera actor Li Rongfang and based on the style of Li’s mentor, the famed San Mazi, see Xiyang Nü, “Xinzhu xiaozhuan,” pp. 29–36. The examples of Chen Feinong and Xinzhu are both mentioned by Mai Xiaoxia, suggesting that their cases were well known among their contemporaries. See Mai, “Guangdong xiju shilüe,” p. 812.

51. The reference to backdrop specialists from Shanghai appeared regularly in theater advertisements in the early 1920s.

52. Works on Mei, in Chinese and English, are plentiful. See a dated but still very informative and charming account by Scott, *Mei Lan-fang*.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 92–97.

54. *Huazi ribao*, September 26–December 4, 1922.

55. See advertisements of Mei’s tour in Guangzhou’s *Yuehua bao*, November 28–December 4, 1928. Chen Feinong’s claim in the memoir that his troupe, Juntianle, was the only one to

stay in Guangzhou to put up a fight may be self-serving. Theater advertisements show only a brief overlap in scheduling before Chen's troupe also left. Chen, *Yueju liushinian*, p. 30.

56. Shao, *Culturing Modernity*, pp. 176–95.

57. I base my account of Ouyang Yuqian's stay in Guangdong mainly on the following sources: "Ouyang Yuqian nianbiao"; Ge and Lu, "Ouyang Yuqian zai Guangdong"; Liang, "Ouyang Yuqian zai Guangdong de xiju huodong"; and Chen, "Guangdong Xiju Yanjiusuo de qianqianhouhou." In addition, several other informative items are cited below.

58. *Xiju Zazhi* jizhe, "Guangdong Xiju Yanjiusuo de jingguoqingxing," pp. 45–55.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

60. Chen, "Guangdong Xiju Yanjiusuo de qianqianhouhou," pp. 62–63, on the performance program.

61. Qu, "Yueju lun"; the quote is from pp. 14–15. On the modernist logic of state certification of professional competence and occupational skills, see a fascinating discussion in Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor*, pp. 45–50.

62. Ouyang, "Hou hua." There is some indication that Ouyang may have befriended Ma Shizeng and invited him to join some sort of advisory group at the Guangdong Theater Reform Institute. See Shen, *Ma Shizeng de xiju shengya*, pp. 79–80.

63. Ouyang, "Yueju beijuhua de yanjiu," p. 331; the same quote is also cited in translation by Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, pp. 163–64.

64. The performance turned out to be political theater. Instead of offering several classical Peking opera plays as requested, Ouyang and his cast staged several spoken dramas with strong anti-imperialist content, causing the provincial authorities and the guests considerable embarrassment. See Chen, "Guangdong Xiju Yanjiusuo de qianqianhouhou," pp. 63–64.

65. *Xichuan*, no. 1, January 1931, p. 65.

66. *Lingxing*, Issue 5, March 1931, p. 41.

67. *Ibid.*, Issue 23, December 1931, p. 7.

68. *Xinjue Ji*, no. 3, August 1931, pp. 1–9.

69. See, for example, the Fourth Anniversary Issue of *Lingxing*, published in May 1935. See particularly essays by Xue Juexian, Gui Mingyang, and Liao Xiahuai.

70. See a report in *Lingxing*, Issue 14, July 1931, p. 142. For the perspective of the Guangdong Theater Research Institute, especially how its opponents in the municipal government undermined its work, see Chen, "Guangdong Xiju Yanjiusuo de qianqianhouhou," p. 59.

71. This inaugural issue of *Juexian Ji*, and several others published in the following years, are available at the Chinese Opera Information Centre, the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

72. Lai, *Xue Juexian yiyuan chunqiu*, pp. 110–13. Like other writers, Lai dated the piece to 1936, not realizing that it had been recycled from an earlier work.

73. *Qianli zhuangyou ji*. A copy of the booklet is available in the Special Collections of the Hong Kong University Libraries.

74. *Lingxing*, Issues 1–5 (February–March 1931).

75. *Ibid.*, Issues 52–56 (December 1932–January 1933) offer substantial coverage on Ma's activities upon his return.

76. *Qianli zhuangyou ji*, n.p.

77. Lai, *Xue Juexian yiyuan chunqiu*, pp. 104–5; Mai, "Guangdong xiju shilüe," p. 792.

78. See some receipts of donations in HMTTC #49.1467.337 to #49.1467.343. See also the minutes from a meeting of the Bahe Huiguan on January 25, 1938, in the same collection, #49.1467.102. Chairing the meeting was Xue Juexian.

79. Lai, *Xue Juexian yiyuan chunqiu*, pp. 140–43.

80. Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, chapters 4–5; the quote is from p. 196.

81. For a discussion of these two related projects, see Yung, “Yueju shuxie yu minzhu zhuyi,” pp. 160–66. Note also a fascinating treatment on the question of regional and national identity in Ching, *Diyu wenhua yu guojia rentong*, chapter 1.

82. Mai, “Guangdong xiju shilüe,” p. 791.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 792.

84. *Ibid.*, pp. 808, 813, and 818.

Chapter 5. *The State, Public Order, and Local Theater in South China*

1. *Huazi ribao*, August 17 through September 15, 1921, covered the trial of the suspect in great detail.

2. *Ibid.*, May 29 and 31, 1922.

3. Reprinted in *ibid.*, June 12, 1922.

4. At the trial, the jury was struck by the perceived sloppiness in the handling of incriminating evidence by the local police and acquitted the suspect.

5. Goldstein, “From Teahouse to Playhouse”; and *Drama Kings*, especially Part I.

6. The disruptive force at work in public entertainment venues like commercial theater is the emphasis in Meng, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires*, chapter 3.

7. *Yuehua bao*, August 9, 1931.

8. *Ibid.*, August 31, 1931.

9. *Huazi ribao*, July 23, 1928.

10. Note a lengthy essay titled “My View of Theater Houses in Hong Kong,” printed in fifteen installments in *Huazi ribao*, January 16 through March 4, 1925, that critiqued the unkempt environment, the lack of proper etiquette, and the poor management of theaters in the colony. The author claimed to have lived in Hong Kong for over twenty years and referred to the new-style theaters in Nantong, Shanghai, and elsewhere in North China as (far more desirable) points of contrast.

11. *Huazi ribao*, February 21, 1930.

12. *Ibid.*, June 15, 1928.

13. A local gang set upon Guangzhou’s Taiping Theater, after its members were initially being repulsed by the theater guards. See *ibid.*, April 8, 1924.

14. On the local military scene in Guangzhou and across the province during the period from the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty to the ascendance of Chen Jitang in the late 1920s, see Yang and Zhong, eds., *Guangzhou jianshi*, chapters 19–22; Jiang and Fang, eds., *Jianming Guangdong shi*, chapters 12–14.

15. Haizhu’s occupation was reported in *Minguo shisan-sinian Guangzhoushi shizheng baogao huikan*, Section on Finance, p. 3. On the Taiping Theater, see *Guangzhou nianjian*, juan 8, p. 86.

16. *Huazi ribao*, August 29 and September 4, 1922. See Figure 1 in Chapter Two.

17. *Huazi ribao*, February 15, 1924; see another report on November 26, 1925, for a similar scare, also at Nanguan.

18. *Ibid.*, June 10, 1924.

19. *Ibid.*, February 28, March 4, 6, and 8, 1924. See another report in *Yuehua bao*, April 1, 1929.

20. *Huazi ribao*, September 2, 1922.

21. Scott, *Mei Lan-fang*, p. 96. See a report in *Huazi ribao*, October 26, 1922.
22. Liu, "Yueju banzhu dui yiren de boxue," pp. 127–8. The Zhuhuanian incident was reported in *Huazi ribao*, April 9 and 11, 1924.
23. *Lingxing*, Issue 30, March 1932, p. 17
24. *Huazi ribao*, December 21, 1922.
25. *Ibid.*, August 26, 1927.
26. There is not a lot of reliable information on this incident. The local newspapers were silent, mainly because it happened during the tumultuous Guangzhou–Hong Kong General Strike of 1925–26. This account is based on Lai, *Xue Juexian yiyuan chunqiu*, pp. 36–37 and the reminiscences of a close associate, Deng, "Wo yu Xue Juexian." Since these bodyguards usually carried firearms, the municipal government of Guangzhou warned the police to use extra caution whenever undertaking inspection of local theaters. See *Guangzhoushi Shizhengting Mingguo shibanian xinnian tekan*, p. 103.
27. *Huazi ribao*, July 9, 10, and 14, 1923.
28. *Ibid.*, August 8, 1924. See an article in *Xichuan*, no. 1 (January 1931), pp. 6–10, on the killing of five opera actors from Li Shaofan to Bai Julong between 1921 and 1924.
29. *Huazi ribao*, August 8–10, 15, and 24, 1929. The Guangzhou daily *Yuehua bao*, perhaps tipped off by the local authorities, repeatedly poked fun at the actor and his throng of female admirers; see August 29 and 31, 1929. Years later, Ma's mainland Chinese biographer pinned the blame squarely on the corrupt and criminal activities of the local Guomindang regime. In this version, Ma was the victim of his own stubborn refusal to kowtow to gangsters and their threats. See Shen, *Ma Shizeng de xiju shengya*, pp. 74–76.
30. Ma's attempts to seek permission to perform in Guangzhou were reported in the local media. See *Yuehua bao*, May 2 and 26, 1930.
31. Scott, *Mei Lan-fang*, p. 93. The author was quoting from a letter in the Hong Kong press referring to the killings of Li Shaofan and Zhu Cibo right before Mei Lanfang's first visit to the colony.
32. On the early history of the Bahe Huiguan, see Liu, "Bahe Huiguan huiyi," pp. 164–69; and Xie and Li, "Qingmo Minchu Yueju shihua," pp. 35–37. On guild organization and functions, see Rowe, *Hankow*; and Goodman, *Native Place, City and Nation*.
33. See Guangdong Shengli Zhongshan Tushuguan, ed., *Jiuyue baitai*, pp. 257–61, contains five items of print advertisement by Liangyixuan in some local pictorial serials in 1906–7.
34. I saw a very old and frail copy of *Zhenlan* among the permanent exhibits at the Cantonese Opera Museum in Foshan during my visit in November 2009.
35. Liu, "Bahe Huiguan huiyi," pp. 172–3.
36. Chen, "Jiefangqian Yuejujie de hangbang jiuge," pp. 194–95; Liu, "Bahe Huiguan huiyi," p. 166; and Liang, "Dageming shiqi 'Bahe Gonghui' gaizhi wei 'Youling Gonghui,'" pp. 83–84.
37. Liu, "Xiban he xiyuan," pp. 347–48; Chen, "Jiefangqian Yuejujie de hangbang jiuge," pp. 194–96.
38. Liu, "Xiban he xiyuan," pp. 350–51; Chen, "Jiefangqian Yuejujie de hangbang jiuge," p. 196; and Liang, "Dageming shiqi 'Bahe Gonghui' gaizhi wei 'Youling Gonghui,'" pp. 84–85.
39. Liu, "Xiban he xiyuan," pp. 347, 350–55.
40. Chen, "Jiefangqian Yuejujie de hangbang jiuge," p. 201; Liu, "Xiban he xiyuan," pp. 348 and 365.

41. A very detailed account is available in Zhu et al., “Guangzhou yuehang.” Besides the musicians working with opera troupes and female singers discussed here, there were others specializing in ritual music, funeral occasions, and accompaniment for courtesans in pleasure houses, and still others who worked at hostels and restaurants. See also Chen, “Jiefangqian Guangzhou Yueyue yiren de hangbang zuzhi ji qi jiuge neimu,” pp. 25–26.

42. On the background of the Puxian Tang musicians and the rivalry with troupe musicians, see Zhu et al., “Guangzhou yuehang,” p. 136; Chen, “Jiefangqian Guangzhou Yueyue yiren de hangbang zuzhi ji qi jiuge neimu,” pp. 27–28; and a joint account by Liu and Zhu, “Pufutang he Bahe Gonghui, Puxian Gonghui de maodun,” pp. 159–60.

43. Liu and Zhu, “Pufutang he Bahe Gonghui, Puxian Gonghui de maodun,” pp. 162–63; Chen, “Jiefangqian Guangzhou Yueyue yiren de hangbang zuzhi ji qi jiuge neimu,” p. 29.

44. Chen, “Jiefangqian Guangzhou Yueyue yiren de hangbang zuzhi ji qi jiuge neimu,” pp. 29–34; Liu and Zhu, “Pufutang he Bahe Gonghui, Puxian Gonghui de maodun,” pp. 167–70; Zhu et al., “Guangzhou yuehang,” pp. 152–53. Most accounts point to Shezai Qiu as the principal culprit behind the political violence. He had served under the warlord Li Fulin and possessed useful connections to the authorities. He occupied a leadership position at the Bahe Huiguan for an extended period in the 1920s and early 1930s. The suppression of Pufu was noted in the municipal government’s administrative report for 1928, *Minguo shiqinian Guangzhoushi shizheng baogao huikan*, p. 85.

45. Chou, “Ji ‘Guangdong Youling Gonghui,’” pp. 91–96; Liang, “Dageming shiqi ‘Bahe Gonghui’ gaizhi wei ‘Youling Gonghui,’” pp. 88–89; Chen, “Jiefangqian Yuejujie de hangbang jiuge,” pp. 202–5; Liu and Zhu, “Pufutang he Bahe Gonghui, Puxian Gonghui de maodun,” pp. 165–66. Aside from the above oral-history records, note a rare report in Hong Kong’s *Huazi ribao*, August 8, 1927, about the union’s struggle to maintain its registration. See also *Minguo shiqinian Guangzhoushi shizheng baogao huikan*, p. 86.

46. See Lai and Huang’s succinct comparison in their *Yueju shi*, pp. 286–87.

47. *The Hong Kong Government Gazette*, no. 13 of 1888 (March 24, 1888), Chapter V, Items 26–28.

48. *The Hong Kong Government Gazette*, no. 18 of 1908 (October 16, 1908), pp. 1,254–55, cited as “The Theatres and Public Performances Regulation Ordinance 1908.”

49. *The Hong Kong Government Gazette*, no. 22 of 1919 (October 31, 1919), pp. 452–54, cited as “The Places of Public Entertainment Regulation Ordinance, 1919.”

50. Dai, ed., *Gangqiao xuzhi*, pp. 460–62.

51. *Hong Kong Administrative Reports*, see Section II on Law and Order, table II (or IV from 1925 onward) list of offences under subsection H, Police Magistrates’ Courts, 1918–30. The only exception was the year 1921, with an astounding 264 cases; historian John Carroll notes that the year was marked by numerous strikes and union activities. See Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong*, p. 97.

52. *Huazi ribao*, January 16, 1920.

53. *Ibid.*, August 4, 1927. The reason for his ban from Hong Kong is not known.

54. *Yuehua bao*, November 15, 1931.

55. *Huazi ribao*, January 7 and 16–17 1920; July 4, 1921; and August 4, 1927.

56. Chen, *Yueju liushinian*, pp. 33 and 99.

57. *Huazi ribao*, August 1 and 4, 1919.

58. *Ibid.*, March 30–31, 1921; November 6, 1924.

59. See an undated drafted letter most likely written by the owner and managing director, Yuan Zhanxun, referring to an incident in October 1937, in HMTTC #2006.49.931.1. For

a copy of the Taiping's permit with all the stipulations issued by the Secretary for Chinese Affairs in 1937–38, see #2006.49.332.

60. Ching, “Qingmo Yueshang suojian xiyuan yu xiyuan guankui,” pp. 107–11.

61. The regulations were issued on April 21, 1912. See *Guangzhou shizheng gaiyao*, Section on Public Safety Bureau, pp. 3–10. The quote is from p. 5.

62. *Guangzhou shizheng gaiyao*, Section on Public Safety Bureau, pp. 7–10. The term *hygienic modernity* is adopted from Rogaski, “Hygienic Modernity in Tianjin.”

63. *Zhonghua Minguo shisannian Guangzhoushi shizheng guili zhangcheng huibian*, Section on Public Safety, pp. 53–58, and Section on Public Hygiene, pp. 25–26. *Guangdongsheng Gongganju shimin yaolan*, Section on Local Administration, pp. 138–39.

64. For reports on police crackdown, see *Huazi ribao*, August 11, 1920; and June 14, 1922. A *Guangzhou* entertainment magazine singled out a police inspector as vigilant in such moral crusade. See *Liyuan Zazhi* no. 8, (1919), pp. 32–33. See a report reprinted in *Chinese Times*, January 10, 1919.

65. *Guangzhou shizheng gaiyao*, Section on Education Bureau, pp. 50–51; *Zhonghua Minguo shisannian Guangzhoushi shizheng guili zhangcheng huibian*, Section on Education, pp. 46–47. See also reports in *Huazi ribao*, August 6, 1920; September 13 and 15, 1921; and September 23, 1922.

66. Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China*.

67. *Minguo shiqinian Guangzhoushi shizheng baogao huikan*, Section on Education, p. 27; and *Guangzhou nianjian*, p. 89. A list of committee members and their respective assignments to different venues was given in *Shizheng gongbao*, Issue 326–27 (1929), p. 103.

68. *Guangzhou nianjian*, p. 89. The deceptive practice was mentioned in *Guangzhou shizheng gaiyao*, Section on Education, pp. 50–51. The results of censorship were reported in *Shizheng gongbao* (1928), Section on Education, p. 67; and (1929), p. 90.

69. *Shizheng gongbao* (1929), Section on Education, p. 90; *Guangzhou nianjian*, p. 89.

70. *Guangzhou shizheng fagui*, Section Two on Society, pp. 55–66.

71. *Guangzhoushi Shehuiju Minguo ershiernian yewu baogao*, Section Five on Society and Culture, pp. 31–4.

72. See *Lingxing*, Issue 49 (November 1932), p. 29, for some reactions to the ban on *shenguai* plays.

73. Note an eighty-eight-page booklet issued in 1931 by the Education Bureau in Shanghai, titled *Shencha xiqu*, which could easily be produced by the local bureaucrats in Guangzhou. For a discussion on the Nationalist Government's program of censorship on a related form of popular entertainment, see Xiao, “Constructing a New National Culture.”

74. *Huazi ribao*, August 6, 1921. On a different scale and better known is Chiang Kai-shek's extortion from the bankers, industrialists, and financiers in Shanghai—see Coble, *The Shanghai Capitalists and the Nationalist Government*, 1927–1937.

75. *Guangzhou shizheng gaiyao*, Section on Finance, pp. 6–8.

76. *Ibid.* The original licensee for Haizhu requested an early termination of the agreement after the city officials extended its midnight rule for the closure of the theater to the weekend, undercutting the profit margin.

77. *Minguo shisan-nian Guangzhoushi shizheng baogao huikan*, Section on Finance, pp. 3–5; *Guangzhou nianjian*, Section 9 on Finance, p. 17

78. *Guangzhou nianjian*, Section 9 on Finance, pp. 99–102. Also *Shizheng gongbao*, Issue 399 (July 1932), pp. 13–14; Issue 401 (August 1932), pp. 37–41; and Issue 406 (October 1932), pp. 36–38.

79. *Guangzhou Shizhengfu liangnianlai shizheng baogao*, Section Three on Finance, pp. 27–28; *Guangzhou Shizhengfu sannianlai shizheng baogao*, Section Five on Finance, pp. 323–24. *Shizheng gongbao*, Issue 450 (December 1933), p. 50; and Issue 478 (October 1934), p. 3.

80. *Huazi ribao*, March 12, 1924.

81. For the full details of registration requirements, see *Guangzhou shizheng fagui*, Section on Society, pp. 64–66. Also a report in *Yuehua bao*, February 27, 1930.

82. *Yuehua bao*, March 17, 1930.

83. *Minguo shisan-sinian Guangzhoushi shizheng baogao huikan*, Section on Finance, pp. 4–5.

84. In May 1930, for instance, the theater houses in Guangzhou submitted a joint petition to the city government for an exemption of the education surcharge, without any success. *Yuehua bao*, May 16, 1930. Another fruitless petition to reduce business tax was reported in 1934. *Yuehua bao*, February 13, 1934. Similar cases were recorded in *Shizheng gongbao* during this period. See, for example, two rejections issued by Mayor Liu Jiwen in the fall of 1933, in Issue 436 (August 1933), p. 40; and Issue 442 (October 1933), pp. 22–23.

85. *Shizheng gongbao*, Issue 510 (September 1935), pp. 116–17

86. *Shizheng gongbao*, Issue 484 (December 1934), pp. 113–4; Issue 494 (March 1935), pp. 88–89; Issue 500 (May 1935), pp. 128–29.

Chapter 6. Popular Theater in the Diaspora

1. This first Chinese opera troupe arriving in San Francisco has received a fair amount of scholarly attention in studies of Chinese theater in the United States. For an earlier example, see Rodecape, “Celestial Drama in the Golden Hills”; and for a more recent piece, see Lei, *Operatic China*, pp. 25–39. Ching May Bo of Sun Yatsen University in Guangzhou has offered some fresh perspectives by discerning connections between theater-building activities in San Francisco and South China in her “Qingmo Yueshang suojian xiyuan yu xiyuan guankui.” In the background was the dawn of a new era of trans-Pacific link ushered in by the California Gold Rush and the pivotal “in-between” role assumed by Hong Kong, as put forth by Elizabeth Sinn in her most recent work, *Pacific Crossing*.

2. On the troupe’s travails in New York, see Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*, pp. 74–76, 86–90.

3. For historical background on Chinese organizational activities in the nineteenth century, Ng, “Urban Chinese Social Organization,” pp. 471–74.

4. Lee, *Chinese Street Opera in Singapore*, pp. 15–16.

5. Ngow, *Xinjiapo Huazu huiguan zhi*, vol. 3, pp. 11 and 168. The fact that this organization of Cantonese opera actors in Singapore was renamed Bahe Huiguan in 1890 gives us an additional piece of evidence in dating the founding of the Bahe Huiguan in Guangzhou prior to 1890. See discussion in the last part of Chapter One.

6. Riddle, *Flying Dragons, Flowing Streams*, p. 20.

7. Chu et al., “Chinese Theatres in America,” pp. 23–29; Riddle, *Flying Dragons, Flowing Streams*, pp. 20–30.

8. Love, “Chinese Theatre on the Victorian Goldfields, 1858–1870.”

9. Sebyrk, “A History of Chinese Theatre in Victoria,” pp. 111–45.

10. On federal census records and a discussion of some additional sources on the size of the Chinese population, as well as a general portrait of Chinatown social life, see Chen, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850–1943*, pp. 55–60 and 90–94.

11. Chu et al, “Chinese Theatres in America,” chapters 2–3; Riddle, *Flying Dragons, Flowing Streams*, pp. 30–32, 36–51.

12. My account of the 1870s and 1880s draws heavily from Riddle, *Flying Dragons, Flowing Streams*, chapter 2.

13. “Chinese Theatres in San Francisco,” pp. 295–96.

14. Fitch, “A Night in Chinatown,” p. 354. Fitch’s estimation of the musical drama of the Chinese immigrants—and his tolerance—might have somewhat diminished, judging from this concluding passage in another piece written a few years earlier: “For the Americans . . . two or three hours of the noisy spectacle are enough. One emerges from the smoke-laden atmosphere into the fresh night-air with the same sense of relief felt in escaping from a railway-car, after an entire day spent amid the dusty and grime and clatter of the train. The confused sound of the awful orchestra still rings in the ears, and its barbaric strains tyrannize over one’s dreams.” See his “In a Chinese Theater,” pp. 189–92.

15. McDowell, “The Chinese Theater,” pp. 27–29, 41.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 28–30.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 33–40.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 42–43.

20. Lamplugh, “In a Chinese Theatre,” pp. 36–40.

21. Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey*, pp. 184 and 223. Seid Back, a merchant recognized for his public spirit by the local Chinese community, was its sponsor.

22. Lee, *Chinese Street Theater in Singapore*, especially pp. 16–17; Zhou, ed., *Dongnanya Huayu xiju shi*, vol. 2, pp. 481–82. The social functions of popular theater in migrant society will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Eight.

23. Zhou, ed., *Dongnanya Huayu xiju shi*, vol. 2, p. 483.

24. On Collingwood, quoted in Zhou, ed., *Dongnanya Huayu xiju shi*, vol. 2, pp. 479–480, from his *Rambles of a Naturalist on the Shores and Waters of the China Sea: Being Observations in Natural History during a Voyage to China, Formosa, Borneo, Singapore, etc., Made in Her Majesty’s Vessels in 1866 and 1867* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1868). On Zeng’s remark, see excerpt in Fujian Shifan Daxue Lishixi Huaqiaoshi Ziliao Xuanjizu, ed., *Wanqing haiwai biji xuan*, pp. 11–12.

25. Cited in Lee, *Chinese Street Opera in Singapore*, pp. 20–21.

26. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Strait Settlements*, pp. 48–49, 52, 85–87.

27. Ng, “Urban Chinese Social Organization.”

28. Fujian Shifan Daxue Lishixi Huaqiaoshi Ziliao Xuanjizu, ed., *Wanqing haiwai biji xuan*, p. 13.

29. Cited in Lai, *Guangdong xiju jianshi*, p. 281; and Zhou, ed., *Dongnanya Huayu xiju shi*, vol. 2, p. 486. The exceptional cross-dialect appeal of the Cantonese theater in the multi-dialect environment of Singapore may be implied in Li’s comment, as suggested by Yung Sai-shing in private communication during my visit to Singapore in November 2009.

30. Masters, “The Chinese Drama,” pp. 436–38.

31. Riddle, *Flying Dragons, Flowing Streams*, 100. On Portland, see Wall, “In a Chinese Theater.” Writing in 1900, one theater critic claimed to have conducted “numerous visits to Chinese theatres in half a dozen America cities.” See Townsend, “The Foreign Stage in New York,” p. 39.

32. Riddle, *Flying Dragons, Flowing Streams*, pp. 100–101. See Bonner, *ALAS! What Brought Thee Hither?*, pp. 87–96; Irwin, “The Drama in Chinatown,” pp. 857–69.

33. Wayang Street was renamed Eu Tong Sen Street in 1919. Surrounding Lichun Yuan were Smith Street, Temple Street, and Trengganu Street. See Lee's discussion in *Chinese Street Opera in Singapore*, pp. 22–24; and also an earlier study by Cheong, “Yueju zai Xinjiapo,” pp. 20–21. Some scholars claim that Puchangchun was renamed Qingweixin after the acquisition by Eu Tong Sen in the late 1910s. See Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, p. 352. More on Eu Tong Sen and his foray into theater business below.

34. Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, p. 351.

35. Lee, *Chinese Street Opera in Singapore*, pp. 23–25.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26.

37. The earliest reference to Cantonese opera in Cholon appears courtesy of the Qing diplomat Cai Jun in 1884—see *Fujian Shifan Daxue Lishixi Huaqiaoshi Ziliao Xuanjizu*, ed., *Wanqing haiwai biji xuan*, pp. 14–15. Unfortunately, little else by way of documentation is available about the development of the Chinese theater in this country. The omission of Vietnam in the double-volume compendium *Dongnanya Huayu xiju shi* by scholars at Xiamen University is a reminder of the paucity of historical material.

38. The Eu Yan Sang International Ltd. has provided a brief history on its company website at <http://www.euysang.com/index.php>, accessed on September 21, 2009. See the following studies by Chung: “Doing Business in Southeast Asia and Southern China”; “Surviving Economic Crises in Southeast Asia and Southern China”; and “Migration and Enterprises.”

39. This version is gleaned from a piece of oral history by Xinzhu et al., “Yueju yiren zai Nanyang ji Meizhou de qingkuang,” pp. 156–57. Another version has the wife of Eu Tong Sen rather than the mother as opera lover.

40. Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, p. 352.

41. “Xianggang Yu Rensheng gehao laiwang,” 1917

42. “Xianggang Yu Rensheng gehao laiwang,” 1918–23. Gao's teacher was He Qi, who mentored, some years later, the famous opera actor Xin Ma Shizeng. The role of Hong Kong in facilitating this kind of long-distance business and cultural and social relationships is discussed at great length by Sinn in *Pacific Crossing*.

43. “Xianggang Yu Rensheng gehao laiwang,” 1924–25. On commercial art, see Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor*, chapter 3.

44. Lee, *Chinese Street Opera in Singapore*, pp. 26–28, 32–37.

45. The story of the Shaws has been told capably by Poshek Fu and his co-authors. See Fu, ed., *China Forever*. Of particular interest is the chapter by Yung, “Territorialization and the Entertainment Industry of the Shaw Brothers in Southeast Asia,” pp. 133–53. Also the history section of the Shaw Organization website at http://www.shaw.sg/sw_about.aspx, accessed on December 9, 2009.

46. Liu, “Yueju yiren zai haiwai de shenghuo ji huodong,” p. 178; and Lai, *Guangdong xiju jianshi*, p. 290. The Singapore census of 1921 put the total number of Chinese “Actors, Artists, and Musicians” at over a thousand, of which a substantial portion were engaged in Cantonese opera. Cited in Lee, *Chinese Street Opera in Singapore*, p. 20.

47. Liu, “Yueju yiren zai haiwai de shenghuo ji huodong,” pp. 172–76.

48. Riddle, *Flying Dragons, Flowing Streams*, p. 140.

49. As we will see in Chapters Seven and Eight, the case of Vancouver deserves attention because of the survival of highly valuable records that shed light on the operation of its Chinatown theater. The case study demonstrates with ample evidence the intricate business ties and personal networks that furnished both trans-Pacific linkages and intraregional

multilateral connections. The rest of this chapter will first attend to the centrality of the two American hubs.

50. Aside from the collection of Chinatown theater playbills in the Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley, which provides a daily record of performances in San Francisco over a critical stretch of time in the mid-1920s, my discussion in the following pages leans heavily on the work of Nancy Rao. Rao is the first to tap into U.S. immigration files to reconstruct the picture of Chinatown theater during its golden age. See her two recent pieces “Chongfan Niuyue!” and “The Public Face of Chinatown.”

51. Noticing the successful application by American circus managers and their attorneys on behalf of jugglers and gymnasts from China, Chinatown merchants sought similar legal aid and invoked the same argument to sponsor the entrance of their entertainers. Rao, “Chongfan Niuyue,” pp. 263, 271–73.

52. Chinatown Theater playbills, Box A, on the Mandarin, and Box D, on the Great China, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley. See the Vancouver connections in Chapter Seven.

53. Rao, “Chongfan Niuyue,” pp. 261–63.

54. Chinatown Theater playbills, Box A, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley. On the quota distribution in 1925, see Rao, “Chongfan Niuyue,” p. 263.

55. Rao, “Chongfan Niuyue,” pp. 263–65.

56. Chinatown Theater playbills, Box D, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley.

57. Rao, “The Public Face of Chinatown,” pp. 245–47. Li had just retired from the stage in South China a few years earlier.

58. Leung Pui Kam has identified some thirty-two actors, mostly males, with a stage name beginning with the label “Jinshan.” See his “Yueju (Guangfu daxi) yanjiu,” p. 703. See Henry Yu’s discussion of the “Gold Mountain” as a unifying geographical imaginary underlying more than a century of migration activities in the Cantonese diaspora in his “Mountains of Gold.”

59. Xie, “Huaqiao yu Yueju,” p. 35.

60. Nancy Rao’s ongoing project on Chinatown theater in the United States in the 1920s promises to shed new light on the important role of actresses; for a glimpse of her fascinating treatment, see “The Public Face of Chinatown.” I will have more to say on this topic based on the Vancouver material in Chapter Eight.

61. *Huazi ribao*, July 3 and 18, 1928.

62. According to a report in *Huazi ribao*, March 15, 1930, the rival of Shao Rong was able to draw the attention of the French colonial government to Ma’s troubled relationship with the authorities in Guangzhou, causing the actor to be briefly detained at the port of entry. Despite the unpleasant surprise at the outset, the tour appeared to be a financial success. See *ibid.*, June 21, 1930.

63. See two separate reports on Ma’s and then Xue’s trips to Vietnam in *Xichuan*, no. 1 (January 1931), pp. 1–5.

64. See the special issue of *Juexian Ji* prepared for the tour to Vietnam. Also a report in *Yuehua bao*, June 13, 1930, on the business deal between Xue and his host on the eve of the journey.

65. *Qianli zhuangyou ji*; see the discussion in Chapter Four.

66. *Yuehua bao*, January 23, 1934. Similar reports echoed the same pessimism in the following months: February 22, April 7, and October 30, 1934.

67. *Lingxing*, Issue 109 (January 1935), pp. 5–6; also *The San Francisco News*, November 5, 1934, news clip in the Chinatown Theater file, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley.

68. As he was a former star, Chen's travails continued to be of interest to readers in South China. See *Yuehua bao*, March 19, April 22, and June 23, 1934. The picture Chen put together in his memoir was a lot more favorable: *Yueju liushinian*, pp. 10, 33–37. See also rumors of his return to South China in the entertainment magazine *Youyou*, Issue 15 (April 1936), pp. 4–5; Issue 26 (September 1936), p. 3.

69. *Lingxing*, Issue 67 (1933), pp. 25–26; and *Yuehua bao*, April 28 and August 25, 1933.

70. Xiao's overseas tours in 1933 and 1934 apparently provided such a breath of fresh air in a depressing time for the theater circle that they drew fairly detailed coverage by the South Chinese media. See, for example, the Guangzhou daily *Yuehua bao*, January 1, April 21, June 24, July 16, July 20, August 3, and September 1, all in 1934.

71. Fu, ed., *China Forever*.

72. Reports in local magazines in Guangzhou allow us to trace Xue's interest in touring Nanyang over a period of several years. In the spring of 1934, a confidant of Xue's made a trip to Singapore to explore such a possibility (*Lingxing*, Issue 92, May 1934, pp. 1–3). In early 1935, Xue and his spouse made a private visit, his first to British Malaya, presumably to check out the situation himself (*Lingxing*, Issue 114, March 1935, pp. 1–4). He finally undertook a three-month tour in 1936, reportedly, at the invitation of Run Run Shaw, one of the brothers in charge of the enterprise's ambitious Nanyang extension plan (*Youyou*, Issue 15, April 1936, pp. 4–5; Issue 25, September 1936, p. 2; Issue 27, September 1936, p. 1; Issue 31, November 1936, p. 2.). See also a special issue of *Juexian Ji*, printed in August 1936 for the occasion.

73. HMTTC contains several documents about this tour. See, for instance, a letter from the Taiping Theater to a shipping company inquiring about fares, dated June 14, 1937 (#2006.49.306); a series of correspondence between the touring group and the home office (#2006.49.536 to #2006.49.582); and two posters about performances in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur (#2006.49.949 and #2006.49.950).

Chapter 7. Theater as Transnational Business

1. Choy, *Paper Shadows*, pp. 41–56. For another compelling story woven together beautifully, based on a personal account by the author's mother, see Chong, *The Concubine's Children*, pp. 120–22.

2. Choy, *Paper Shadows*, p. 281.

3. Preston, *Opera on the Road*, p. 42.

4. Rao, "Racial Essence and Historical Invisibility" and "Songs of the Exclusion Era."

5. The extraction of theater advertisements and relevant news items from microfilms stored at the Asian Library of the University of British Columbia was undertaken meticulously by Huang Jinpei as part of a research effort to support a major exhibition, titled "A Rare Flower: A Century of Cantonese Opera in Canada," by the Museum of Anthropology at UBC.

6. On San Francisco, the collection of Chinatown Theater playbills available at the Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley, is indispensable. I relied heavily on Nancy Rao's pioneering work on New York City to inform my analysis.

7. CVAWHL.

8. The records are deposited in two separate collections: CVAKHC and UBCKHC. The materials got split for unknown reasons, but fortunately the contents appear to remain intact, albeit in two locations.

9. "Chinese Theatre," J. S. Matthews, December 4, 1947, City of Vancouver Archives, AM 54, vol. 13,506-C-5, file 6. Matthews did not mention the name and the exact location of the theater in the piece, but he did say that the facility had been burned down the previous week, which was what prompted him to jot down his memory. According to news clippings located in the City of Vancouver Archives, M15610, this was the old Sing Kew Theater in Shanghai Alley, the one that Wayson Choy attended as a toddler.

10. The only other piece of information on this theater house in this early period may be seen in a picture of Shanghai Alley taken after the riot of 1907. It shows a sign, in Chinese, pointing to the "Theater Upstairs." See Yee, *Saltwater City*, p. 31.

11. Sebryk, "A History of Chinese Theatre in Victoria," pp. 111–40.

12. *Chinese Times*, January 20 and February 16, 1915. According to other sources, Ko Sing was located at 124 East Pender Street, and Sing Ping at 536 Columbia Avenue (also identified as "at rear of 106–114 East Pender Street," perhaps because of its corner location).

13. CVAWHL, files 10–11. For a short report on Loo in the Western press, see Yee, *Saltwater City*, pp. 33–34. Thanks to Edgar Wickberg for the reference.

14. Stanley, "Chang Toy."

15. CVAWHL. Specific references are provided below.

16. Yee, "Sam Kee," pp. 70–96, especially p. 73. For an unspecified reason, Yee has examined only the pre-1916 activities of the Sam Kee Company and thus has omitted entirely Chang's involvement in Wing Hong Lin.

17. The top three shareholders were in control of 22, 21, and 20 shares, respectively, out of a total of 100. CVAWHL, "Corporation record," file 1, especially minutes from the inaugural meeting (undated) as well as two other meetings on December 9, 1916, and May 17, 1917, respectively. See also CVAWHL, "Stock certificates," file 2.

18. The appointment of Sun Tong Chong as the recruitment agent was officially approved at the first board meeting. See CVAWHL, "Corporation record," file 1. Also, CVAWHL, "Leases, indentures, and correspondence," file 3, holds a receipt for a check in the amount of HK\$1,120, payable to "Sun Tong Chong" as commission, dated January 18, 1917. On *Jinshanzhuang*, see Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home*, pp. 34–40, and Sinn, *Pacific Crossing*, pp. 137–89.

19. The ruling was rendered by the U.S. immigration officials in the 1890s as part of the effort to make a finer distinction between Chinese laborers, the primary target of exclusion, and other categories of Chinese travelers. See Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey*, pp. 68 and 83.

20. The head tax was initially set at \$50, then raised to \$100 and then \$500 by 1903. See Ng, *The Chinese in Vancouver, 1945–1980*, p. 11.

21. Guarantor letter from Choe Duck to the Canadian Surety Company, November 8, 1916, in CVAWHL, "Correspondence," file 13. As a sponsor, a *xiban gongsi* had the option to pay the bond fund itself. On occasion, the required bond amount was as high as a thousand dollars per person. See undated (1923?) correspondence sent to the Canadian immigration authorities, obtained by Sebryk from the City of Victoria Archives and appended in her MA thesis, "History of Chinese Theatre in Victoria," pp. 169–70.

22. CVAWHL, "Actor's contracts," files 10–11. The four contracts identify the *xiban gongsi* as Tongsheng, which was probably the name used prior to the formal incorporation of

Wing Hong Lin in November 1916. All four actors appeared on the payrolls of Wing Hong Lin during its first season; see CVAWHL, “Receipts for wages signed by actors and staff,” file 9.

23. CVAWHL, “Actor’s contracts,” files 10–11.

24. Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, pp. 281–301. The authors further note that, back in South China, troupes working outlying rural circuits away from the Pearl River Delta core were smaller in size, and their members were also adept at playing multiple role-types.

25. For a succinct discussion of these artistic elements and how they may account for Cantonese opera’s ability to adapt overseas, see Rao’s “Songs of the Exclusion Era,” p. 407.

26. That being said, I have yet to come across any incident of this kind in the research. Rather, as we will see in Chapter Eight, the presence of actresses did arouse considerable excitement and cause incidents of a different kind.

27. It is interesting to note that U.S. currency was used on these contracts, perhaps because the United States was the most popular destination for Chinese immigration to the western hemisphere. In any case, with minor exceptions during this period (the 1910s through the 1930s), the two currencies largely traded on par. See Powell, *A History of the Canadian Dollar*, p. 97.

28. Note the reminiscences by several actors: Liu, “Yueju banzhu dui yiren de boxue,” pp. 126–27; Xinzhu et al., “Yueju yiren zai Nanyang ji Meizhou de qingkuang,” pp. 158–59; and Liu, “Yueju yiren zai haiwai de shenghuo ji huodong,” p. 182. Some of the practices adopted for overseas engagements were much decried by actors as sheer exploitation.

29. CVAWHL, “Actor’s Contracts,” files 10–11.

30. Minutes of meetings, March 9 and April 3, 1918, CVAWHL, “Corporation Record,” file 1. For a report on the incident in the theater house, see *Chinese Times*, March 9, 1918.

31. CVAWHL, “Actor’s Contracts,” files 10–11. See Liu Guoxing’s comment on the lowly origins of the opera actors who traveled to North America during the early period in “Yueju yiren zai haiwai de shenghuo ji huodong,” pp. 181–2.

32. See receipts from two local printers, in CVAWHL, “Receipts,” files 14–17.

33. Minutes of meetings, May 17, 1917 and May 4, 1918, CVAWHL, “Corporation record,” file 1. According to payrolls, actor turnover during both seasons appears to have been negligible. See CVAWHL, “Receipts for wages signed by actors and staff,” file 8.

34. *Chinese Times*, September 5, 1918–April 12, 1919.

35. On the cultural construction of Chinatown as alien physical and social space by mainstream society, see Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown*.

36. *Chinese Times*, 1920–25.

37. For trends in Chinese immigration and domestic movements, see Lai, *Chinatowns*, pp. 56–67.

38. See Wickberg, ed., *From China to Canada*, chapters in Part 2 and Part 3 that deal with the years right before and after the legislation of the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923. Yee offers a focused discussion on Vancouver during this period in *Saltwater City*, pp. 49–73. In China, the mid-1920s were eventful, to say the least, with the May Thirtieth Movement, the Guangzhou–Hong Kong General Strike, and the founding of the Guomindang Government in Nanjing.

39. *Chinese Times*, September 1, 1921–February 6, 1922. The theater was located at 720 Main Street, according to the news clip “Remember Our Chinese Opera?” March 25, 1966, City of Vancouver Archives, M15, 610.

40. Chinatown Theater playbills, July 9–October 23, 1923, Box F, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley. One actor, Shezai Jie, had taken off to Havana, Cuba,

and later joined his comrades briefly in San Francisco in October 1923 on his way back to China.

41. A local contact told the federal theater project research team that the troupe had come to San Francisco after rather “indifferent results” in Vancouver. Business intelligence on box-office results, actors’ compensation, and the like is not the most reliable, because rumors could be part of a publicity effort to arouse general interest or perhaps, in this case, serve to undercut the bargaining position of the party involved. See Chu et al., “Chinese Theatres in America,” p. 76.

42. The rivalry is mentioned in many different places, including Chu et al., “Chinese Theatres in America,” p. 77; Liu, “Yueju yiren zai haiwai de shenghuo ji huodong,” p. 188; Lai and Huang, *Yueju shi*, pp. 369–70; Suzhou Nü, “Yueju zai Meiguowangshi shiling,” p. 259; and, last but not least, Riddle, *Flying Dragons, Flowing Streams*, pp. 144–45.

43. *Chinese Times*, March 20, 1923–May 16, 1924.

44. See Rao’s discussion in “Songs of the Exclusion Era,” pp. 404–5 and 413; and Bonner, *ALAS! What Brought Thee Hither?* p. 93.

45. Chinatown Theater playbills, Boxes D, E, and G, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley. See also Bai’s biography in Li, ed., *Yueju yishu dashi Bai Jurong*, pp. 35–38, based on oral history.

46. On Ma, see Shen, *Ma Shizeng de xiju shengya*, pp. 91–99. Note, of course, Ma’s publicity pamphlet *Qianli zhuangyou ji* of over 200 pages, prepared on the eve of his journey, as already mentioned in earlier chapters.

47. *Chinese Times*, January 21, 1918; Clark, “‘Seat Down Front!’” pp. 33 and 54. These monetary figures offered to the media by interested parties should be viewed with caution. Chinatown Theater playbills, December 2, 1924–May 9, 1926, Box A, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley.

48. *Chinese Times*, March 20, 1923–May 16, 1924.

49. Chinatown Theater playbills, December 2, 1924–January 19, 1926, Box A, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley. See also *Chinese Times*, September 12, 1927–February 13, 1928; Rao, “Songs of the Exclusion Era,” p. 419.

50. Stanley, “Yip Sang.”

51. For a short biography of Bick Lee, see <http://www.vancouverhistory.ca/whoswho.L.htm>, accessed on March 15, 2014.

52. Lim was born in Victoria. Besides Gim Fook Yuen, his own family business, Lim was employed as the manager of the Chinese department of the Victoria branch of the Bank of Vancouver. See <http://chinatown.library.uvic.ca/lim.bang>, accessed on March 18, 2014.

53. “Kue Hing Company’s Share Certificates,” in CVAKHC, file 2.

54. Both documents are available in UBCKHC.

55. The individuals involved in Kue Hing were generally aligned with the Guomindang faction in Vancouver’s Chinatown. For the rivalry between the Chinese Freemasons and the Guomindang within the context of Chinese organizational activities, see Wickberg, *From China to Canada*, pp. 101–4, 157–68.

56. “Kue Hing Company, Articles of Association, May 1923,” in UBCKHC.

57. See “Kue Hing Company, Correspondence,” in CVAKHC, file 1, covering mainly the period June–August 1923. Another set of letters and telegrams, from August 1923 to July of 1924, is available in UBCKHC.

58. Lim Bang to Kue Hing Co., telegram, June 28, 1923, in CVAKHC, file 1.

59. Correspondence on this business move between January 26 and February 27, 1924, in UBCKHC.

60. The actress was Guan Yinglian, and two additional troupe members seem to be involved in the dispute. Ying Mei Luen Hop Co. to Kue Hing Co., letter, May 31, 1924, in UBCKHC.

61. *Chinese Times*, April 7–June 22, 1923.

62. Lim Bang to Kue Hing Co., telegram, June 27, 1923, in CVAKHC, file 1.

63. See correspondence from June 27 to July 12, 1923, in CVAKHC, file 1.

64. See, for example, Lee, *At America's Gates*.

65. For instance, Houser charged Kue Hing \$410 for his legal representation up to the summer of 1923. Paul Houser to Wong On, September 17, 1923, in UBCKHC.

66. On the brewing internal conflict, see Y. C. Leong and Leong Kai Tip to Kue Hing Co., letter, July 1, 1923, in CVAKHC, file 1.

67. For instance, Suzhou Nü, "Yueju zai Meiguo wangshi shiling," p. 260.

68. Lim Bang to Kue Hing Co., letters, August 21 and 27 and September 2, 1923, in UBCKHC.

69. Low Chung and Y. C. Leong to Kue Hing Co., letter, October 16, 1923, in UBCKHC.

70. The authorization to conduct the investigation was given in Kue Hing Co. to Lim Bang, letters, October 15–16, 1923, in UBCKHC. See also the affidavit signed by the directors on October 27, 1923. No formal indictment or report can be found in the existing records, and my findings are based on various correspondence, all from the same file. The new management consisted of David Lee, Wong Yee Chun, and Chan Horne.

71. See relevant correspondence, January 26 through February 27, 1924, in UBCKHC.

72. The first sign of trouble appeared as early as late December. Kue Hing tried to have a defiant actor deported. While the case was pending, a dozen other actors decided to join the defection. See relevant correspondence in UBCKHC, especially Kue Hing Co. to Paul Houser, letter, April 15, 1924.

73. *Chinese Times*, January 13, 1933, and March 2, 1935. The architectural drawing prepared for the alteration is available in the City of Vancouver Archives, job no. 563, 1934, in Townley, Matheson and Partners fonds, Add. MSS 1399,917-F

74. Zheng, *Claiming Diaspora*, p. 97; Riddle, *Flying Dragons, Flowing Steams*, pp. 150–58.

Chapter 8. Theater and the Immigrant Public

1. *Chinese Times*, February 11, 1919.

2. In December 1918, a subsidiary of the local Chinese Freemasons received a glass plaque from the Youjie Huiguan to celebrate its founding. Half a year later, the Huiguan was similarly involved in the inauguration of a society of Chinese seamen, itself a group of transients not unlike the actors. *Chinese Times*, December 16, 1918; and June 21, 1919.

3. Both Zhang and Huang were at the beginning stage of their performing careers, which would be marked by extensive travels across much of North America and the Caribbean in the following decade. Zhang was said to be earning some \$6,000 for her contract with the troupe Puruyi according to a report in the *Chinese Times*, January 21, 1918. In 1925, a San Francisco magazine described her as a Chinatown sensation at a salary of \$17,000 a year. Clark, "Seat Down Front!" p. 33. Nancy Rao has provided a snapshot of Huang's itinerary in the mid-1920s, including Cuba and both coasts of the United States, in her "Chongfan Niuyue!" pp. 267–68.

4. As noted, the initial announcement was made on February 11. The fictive name appeared in print on the following days, February 13 through 15.

5. *Chinese Times*, February 23 and April 6, 1916; and March 9, 1918. See discussion at the beginning of next section. The following incident was reported from Winnipeg in *ibid.*, October 28, 1916: after a Chinese spoken-drama troupe arrived, a troublemaker approached the management, demanding free admission for his group; he was reported to the local police.

6. *Ibid.*, April 1919–December 1920.

7. Its relative inactivity notwithstanding, the Liyuan Tang (later renamed Bahe Huiguan) in Singapore was the only organization set up by and for Cantonese opera actors outside of South China before the Pacific War. On the development of Chinese associations in Singapore in the early part of the twentieth century, see Ng, “Urban Chinese Social Organization.”

8. I take the idea of the theater as social space from an inspiring collection of essays on the history of English drama in Cox and Kastan, eds., *A New History of Early English Drama*. My formulation is also shaped by the influential work of Japanese sinologist Tanaka Issei on rural theater in traditional China and that of the Taiwan scholar Chiu Kun-liang on local theater during the Japanese colonial period. See Tanaka Issei, *Zhongguo xiju shi*; and Chiu, *Jiuju yu xinju*.

9. *Chinese Times*, February 23, 1916. Various accounts left by observers from the late nineteenth century indicate that the audience of Chinatown could be quite discriminating. For example, Frederic Masters recorded the following incident in a piece in 1895 about Chinatown theater in San Francisco: “An actor one night stammered and broke down in the middle of his piece. Instantly, a man rose in the body of the pit, uttered a coarse epithet, and savagely gave the cue word, accompanied by a piece of sugar cane hurled at the blundering actor’s head.” See Masters, “The Chinese Drama,” p. 441.

10. *Chinese Times*, April 6, 1916.

11. See the recollection of Suzhou Nü, “Yueju zai Meiguo wangshi shiling,” p. 260. There were variations in practice, regarding timing and also the amount of the discount. On San Francisco, Clark observed that “actually most of the audience comes in round nine o’ clock”—see his “Seat Down Front!” p. 33. In a playbill distributed by the Mandarin Theater, dated April 19, 1926, discount admission began at 9:30 p.m. See Chinatown Theater playbills, Box A, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley. Several years later, in Vancouver, admission discounts started as late as 10:30 p.m., according to a theater advertisement in the *Chinese Times*, September 22, 1930.

12. *Chinese Times*, July 24, 1915.

13. *Ibid.*, February 7 and 16–26, 1921.

14. *Ibid.*, April 22 and 27, 1916; July 9, 1927.

15. Chinatown Theater playbills, Box A, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley.

16. This was noticed by the author during a visit in the summer of 2002. Until recently, the building was used to house Republican-era publications and documents of the Guangdong Provincial Zhongshan Library.

17. *Chinese Times*, April (no date), 1915.

18. *Ibid.*, April 25, 1916.

19. Wickberg, ed., *From China to Canada*, chapters 3, 8, and 12.

20. *Chinese Times*, December 9–12, 1918.

21. *Ibid.*, December 24, 1920.

22. CVAKHC, “Kue Hing Company’s Share Certificates,” file 2. Also UBCKHC, “Kue Hing Company, Articles of Association, May 1923.” Lee was actively involved in the Lee’s

Association, the Toishan Ning Yeung Association, and later in the 1930s a Guomindang-sponsored Chinese language school. Biographical entry on Bick Lee, <http://www.vancouverhistory.ca/whoswho.L.htm>, accessed on March 15, 2014.

23. Masters, “The Chinese Drama,” pp. 440–41.

24. Liu, “Yueju yiren zai haiwai de shenghuo ji huodong,” pp. 183–84. See also Riddle, *Flying Dragons, Flowing Streams*, pp. 144–45.

25. Suzhou Nü, “Yueju zai Meiguo wangshi shiling,” p. 259.

26. Xinzhu et al., “Yueju yiren zai Nanyang ji Meizhou de qingkuang,” p. 167. Liu, “Yueju yiren zai haiwai de shenghuo ji huodong,” p. 185.

27. On shouts of “Bravo!” see Xinzhu et al., “Yueju yiren zai Nanyang ji Meizhou de qingkuang,” p. 164, and Suzhou Nü, “Yueju zai Meiguo wangshi shiling,” p. 260.

28. Available evidence all pertains to North America, especially when talking about the awarding of golden plates, although we should not rule out similar occurrences in Southeast Asia. I follow Daphne Lei in her use of the term paratheatrical. See her *Operatic China*, pp. 50–53, 75–80.

29. *Chinese Times*, January 12, 1928.

30. The itinerary of Jinshan Bing and Xin Guifei can be strung together based on advertisements in the *Chinese Times*. On their pending arrival, August 16, 1927; the couple’s separate debuts, September 12 and 14, 1927; announcement of their departure, February 13, 1928.

31. Xinzhu et al., “Yueju yiren zai Nanyang ji Meizhou de qingkuang,” p. 167; Suzhou Nü, “Yueju zai Meiguo wangshi shiling,” p. 259.

32. *Chinese Times*, March 24, 1941. Huang was one of the four interviewees for the piece by Xinzhu et al., “Yueju yiren zai Nanyang ji Meizhou de qingkuang.”

33. Xinzhu et al., “Yueju yiren zai Nanyang ji Meizhou de qingkuang,” pp. 166–68.

34. See, for instance, an account published back in Guangzhou in *Lingxing*, Issue 39 (August 1932), p. 9.

35. *Chinese Times*, January 21, 1918.

36. Rao, “The Public Face of Chinatown,” pp. 235–48.

37. Clark, “‘Seat Down Front!’” The essay devoted considerable attention to Zhang Shuqin, who was performing at the Mandarin at the time.

38. This paragraph is much shaped by Rao’s insightful discussion in “The Public Face of Chinatown.” See also Xinzhu et al., “Yueju yiren zai Nanyang ji Meizhou de qingkuang,” p. 151, on the challenge posed by women to the practice of female impersonation. The popularity of *chousheng* is based on my own reading of theater advertisements and playbills.

39. Liu, “Yueju yiren zai haiwai de shenghuo ji huodong,” pp. 174–75.

40. *Chinese Times*, no date, 1915.

41. *Ibid.*, June 14–15, 1916.

42. *Ibid.*, March 9, 1918. The decision of the management was recorded in its minutes of meetings, CVAWHL, also on March 9, 1918.

43. *Chinese Times*, December 10–12, 1918.

44. Cheng, “The Challenge of the Actresses.”

45. Rao, “The Public Face of Chinatown,” pp. 238–48.

46. The playbill was dated September 23, 1926. Chinatown Theater playbills, Box B, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley. See Wong, *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, pp. 215–17; Chong, *The Concubine’s Children*, pp. 120–22; and Choy, *Paper Shadows*, pp. 41–56.

47. Rao, "The Public Face of Chinatown," pp. 248, 253–55.

48. Jin Wah Sing and Sing Kew had their debuts within two weeks of each other; see *Chinese Times*, April 14 and 28, 1935. Occasional reports on their performances appeared in this Chinatown daily the rest of the year.

49. Information on Ching Won is minimal. Later reports seem to indicate that its activities focused on Chinese music and modern drama, not traditional opera. *Chinese Times*, March 18 and 28, 1940. Email correspondence from Elizabeth Johnson, April 21, 2005.

50. On New York, see Bonner, *ALAS! What Brought Thee Hither?* p. 95; and Duchesne, "A Collection's Riches." For San Francisco, refer to Riddle, *Flying Dragons, Flowing Streams*, pp. 149–58.

51. Note reports in *Chinese Times*, January 11, March 21 and 29, May 10, and December 27, 1936.

52. Records show that Jin Wah Sing sponsored the group from the Empress of Russia at least on three different occasions in the latter half of 1936. See *Chinese Times*, July 9–10, August 29, September 1 and 3, and October 20, 23, and 26–27, 1936. The third time, in October, the program became rather elaborate, involving fund-raisers with the Chinese Benevolent Association. A few of the individuals appeared on the Chinatown stage from time to time in the following year. A different set of four players from the oceanliner came on shore in December of 1937, indicating that the collaboration was still in place after a year and a half. *Ibid.*, December 3, 1937. The last time actors from the Empress of Russia were mentioned in the news happened as late as March 1941. It was said that the group was to return to China for good and would donate their wardrobes to the cause of national salvation, in full swing at the time. *Ibid.*, March 24, 1941.

53. *Ibid.*, December 29, 1936; January 9–10, 1937. According to a report in mid-1937, both actresses were well liked and received a six-month extension of their contracts, lengthening their sojourn in Vancouver to at least one full year. *Ibid.*, July 10, 1937.

54. Chen's arrival was first reported by the *Chinese Times*, on April 8, 1937. She and three others were featured in a playbill, dated April 25, 1937, in the City of Vancouver Archives, PAM 1937–75. According to the daughter of Chen Feiyan, her mother was born to her parents, both actors, while in Myanmar. She spent some years in Singapore, returning to the native county of Xunde in Guangdong. She performed for several years at a young age in Singapore, Manila, and Vietnam before her arrival in Canada. She settled in Toronto after World War II. I was introduced to the daughter Mrs. Della Tse, thanks to Henry Yu. Interviewed by author, Vancouver, B.C., August 9, 2004.

55. *Chinese Times*, May 18–19, 1937.

56. *Ibid.*, October 8, 1937 and various issues through the end of 1941. See also a playbill on the program by the Sing Kew Mixed Company dated November 30, 1940, in the City of Vancouver Archives, PAM 1940–118.

57. References to Jin Wah Sing as *xiyuan* and *xiban gongsi* appeared in 1938; see various issues of the *Chinese Times*. Also a playbill dated March 26, 1938, in the City of Vancouver Archives, PAM 1938–133.

58. *Chinese Times*, various issues from September 1939 to December 1941.

59. *Ibid.*, October 22, 1936.

60. *Ibid.*, various issues in 1935 and 1936.

61. *Ibid.*, October 22–23, 26, 1936; and December (?) 1941. Another good example of a community-wide organization that benefited from such theatrical charities was the St. Joseph Hospital, which served the Chinatown neighborhood. *Ibid.*, June 19, 1937.

62. See, for instance, reports on Jin Wah Sing's performance to contribute to a general relief fund in China in *ibid.*, November 15, 1937; another series of reports, in 1940, noted at least two additional shows by the same, with proceeds forwarded to the Nationalist Government in Chongqing via the Chinese Benevolent Association, *ibid.*, February 24, March 19 and 28, 1940.

63. Note a fund-raiser for the refugees in Xunde in early 1940 that involved both Jin Wah Sing and Sing Kew—see *ibid.*, February 15 and 22, 1940. A month later, Ching Won Musical Society performed at a similar function, this one for the neighboring county of Xinhui. See *ibid.*, March 8, 11, 18, and 28, 1940.

64. For actresses, see *ibid.*, November 14, 1937; February 22, 1940; and December (no date), 1941. See also an account in Choy, *Paper Shadows*, pp. 57–64. The deployment of feminine bodies (and also infants) as a strategy to draw attention and arouse sympathy is noted by Karen Leong and Judy Wu in their study of the China Relief movement in the United States during the Pacific War. See their “Filling the Rice Bowls of China.”

65. The notion of corridor is from Kuhn, *Chinese among Others*.

Conclusion

1. The information in this and the following paragraphs is drawn from an interview with the actor published in *Lingxing*, Issue 109 (January 1935), pp. 10–11 unless otherwise stated.

2. *Ibid.*, Issue 31 (April 1932), pp. 9–10; Issue 36 (July 1932), p. 18; Issue 69 (July 1933), p. 1; and Issue 85 (January 1934), p. 48.

3. *Ibid.*, Issue 65 (June 1933), p. 9; Issue 68 (July 1933), p. 13; Issue 97 (July 1934), pp. 17–20; Issue 98 (July 1934), pp. 5–7; and Issue 100 (August 1934), pp. 14–15.

4. See a brief discussion of Gui Mingyang's reform efforts in Huang, *Guangfu xiban shi*, pp. 270–72.

5. See *ibid.*, pp. 237–41, on the slow recovery.

6. Bits and pieces of Gui Mingyang's itineraries can be found in *Lingxing*, Issue 180 (November 1936), p. 5; Huang and Shen, *Shanghai Yueju yanchu shigao*, pp. 189–90, 377–81; and Huang, *Guangfu xiban shi*, pp. 241–42, 369–71.

7. Huang, *Guangfu xiban shi*, pp. 241–58.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 258–66.

9. See the discussion in the doctoral dissertation by Ferguson, “A Study of Cantonese Opera,” pp. 111–4.

10. On the postwar years, see the preliminary findings in the pioneering work of Lee Siu Yan—for example, his “Yinyue, zhengzhi, yu shenghuo.” On radio programming, see Yip, “Wushi zhi jiushi niandai Xianggang Diantai yu Bengang Yuequ, Yueju fazhan de guanxi.”

11. Zheng, *Claiming Diaspora*, pp. 98–99.

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