

Staging Revolution

Artistry and Aesthetics in Model Beijing Opera during the Cultural Revolution

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Overture

A theatre experience during the summer of 2001 was the seed of this book project. At the Yisu Grand Theatre in Xi'an, I watched *The Red Lantern* (*Hongdeng ji*) performed by the China *Jingju* (Beijing/Peking opera) Company.¹ *The Red Lantern* had been designated as a Model Modern Revolutionary *Jingju* (*geming xiandai jingju yangbanxi*) (hereafter model *jingju*) during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976);² the 2001 production was reconstructed and presented by a new cast. Xi'an's summer is famous for its heat, and the fully packed theatre of 1,200 seats did not have air-conditioning. People were fanning themselves with their programs although even that air was stifling. But this was only the warm-up for that night: the temperature in the auditorium was nothing compared to the heat of excitement during the following two and half hours. The audience passionately applauded for almost each character's entrance, and at the beginning and end of each scene; some delivered lines from the text that they knew by heart simultaneously with the performers, sometimes alone but sometimes joined by their friends and unknown neighbors; some sang quietly and intermittently with the performers; they anticipated famous arias by applauding as soon as its prelude began; they shouted “hao” (bravo) throughout the performance; they constantly exchanged comments on the new cast in contrast to the original; and, needless to say, they offered rounds of thundering ovations at the end. That night, sitting in a steaming hot theatre, wearing a soaking wet T-shirt, and witnessing more than a thousand fervent audience members, I experienced model *jingju*'s legacy in public for the first time.

During the Cultural Revolution, ten model *jingju* constituted an integral portion of the Model Revolutionary Works (*geming yangbanxi*), sometimes known simply as model works (*yangbanxi*). The model repertory included eighteen works in five genres.³ The ten model *jingju*, collectively referred to as Modern Revolutionary

1. In this book, I use *jingju*, the theatrical genre's name in Chinese, to address Beijing/Peking opera. More and more scholars have noticed that *jingju*, though very musical, is much more than an operatic form. I am in support of this acknowledgment.

2. “Wuchanjiuji wenyi de yizhan hongdeng—zan geming xiandai jingju yangbanxi *Hongdeng ji*” [A red lantern for proletarian literature and art: On the model modern revolutionary *jingju* *The Red Lantern*], *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 29 May 1967.

3. See Chapter 4 for the timeline of the designation of model works.

Jingju (*geming xiandai jingju*), were *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (*Zhiqiu Weihushan*, hereafter *Tiger Mountain*), *On the Docks* (*Haigang*), *The Red Lantern*, *Shajiabang*, *Raid on the White-Tiger Regiment* (*Qixi Baihutuan*, hereafter *White-Tiger Regiment*), *Song of the Dragon River* (*Longjiang song*), *The Red Detachment of Women* (*Hongse niangzijun*), *Fighting on the Plain* (*Pingyuan zuozhan*), *Azalea Mountain* (*Dujuanshan*), and *Boulder Bay* (*Panshiwan*). Four ballet dance-drama productions were labeled Modern Revolutionary Dance-Drama (*geming xiandai wuju*): *The Red Detachment of Women*, *The White-Haired Girl* (*Baimaonü*), *Sons and Daughters of the Grassland* (*Caoyuan ernü*), and *Song of the Yimeng Mountains* (*Yimeng song*). Revolutionary Symphonies (*geming jiaoxiang yinyue*) included the symphonic versions of *Shajiabang* and *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*. The other two works were the piano concerto *The Yellow River* (*Gangqin xiezouqu "Huanghe"*) and one set of *jingju* arias with piano accompaniment, "*The Red Lantern*" with Piano Accompaniment (*Gangqin banchang "Hongdeng ji"*). These works present revolutionary stories about Chinese proletarian workers, peasants, and soldiers in the period between the 1920s and the 1960s. Designated as exemplary models of literature and art, they represent the culmination of the massive cultural reconstruction led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution, at least six model *jingju* have been reconstructed: *Tiger Mountain*, *The Red Lantern*, *Shajiabang*, *White-Tiger Regiment*, *Fighting on the Plain*, and *Azalea Mountain*. Some of them have been reconstructed multiple times by different troupes. Ballet dance-dramas *The Red Detachment of Women* and *The White-Haired Girl* have been part of the permanent repertory of the National Ballet of China and the Shanghai Ballet Company respectively. Observing model works' continuing popularity, Fu Jin aptly noted in 2002, "The novels, poems, films and dances that were popular during the Cultural Revolution have long lost their readers or audiences; some fine arts pieces created during the Cultural Revolution are now appreciated as souvenirs of a special decade. But some model works are unique; they are still very much alive onstage."⁴ At core of this intriguing phenomenon is the orientation of artistry in model works as cultural productions promoting prevalent ideology.

In the CCP's discourse, the best-known prescription for the relationship between art and politics is from Mao Zedong's 1942 "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art": "Literature and art are subordinate to politics, and yet in turn exert enormous influence on it."⁵ This approach essentially urges prioritizing politics over literature and art in both creation and criticism. Under this comprehensive dictum, the production of model works exemplifies the politicization of

4. Fu Jin, "Yangbanxi xianxiang pingyi" [An objective discussion of the phenomenon of model works], *Da wutai* [Grand Stage] 3 (2002): 5. According to the context of the article, the "films" and "dances" in Fu's discussion do not include the film versions of model works or the modern revolutionary dance-drama productions in the model repertory.

5. Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1980), 75.

artistic creation, primary manifestations including but not limited to direct political interference in its creative process, highly politicized creative theories and literary and artistic criticism, and the politics involved in the model works' designation and popularization. In this context, I argue that literature and art in service of politics are not automatically devoid of literary or artistic merit. The assumption that artistry was sacrificed to politics in model works, or that there is not much art left, often reflects a preoccupation with the high priority placed on the advocacy of prevalent ideology in these productions. It is nothing but a continuation of the CCP's approach, with rather strikingly parallel advocacy of political criterion in literary and artistic criticism.

Contrary to the long-term presumption of art and politics as binary opposites, when producing model works, artistic and political choices are not necessarily always mutually antagonistic. Certainly, for example, model *jingju* creators fulfilled their political obligations by using their artistic expertise to shape appealing dramatic characters and story arcs that delivered revolutionary messages. A fundamental characteristic of model *jingju* is that, on stage, ideological and political messages must be realized through the most rigorously formulated artistic choices and carried out by exceptional performances and entertaining techniques and devices. For artists, challenges arose on the most basic levels of their art, and the resolution of those matters called for artistic innovations that were developed step by step, each step uniting the efforts and knowledge of the best practitioners of the time. Increasing scholarly attention to the art in model works has underscored its academic legitimacy; one strong voice is Paul Clark when he argues against the usual interpretations of the Cultural Revolution period: "The innovation and experimentation in the field of culture in these ten years contrasts with the orthodox emphasis on destruction and failure."⁶ The artistry in model works, produced with the expertise and commitment of nationally recognized writers, musicians, composers, actors, directors, and designers, deserves close attention on its own merits.

This book focuses on one question: What are model *jingju*, as politicized theatrical entities? In answering this core question, methodologically, I situate model *jingju* at the intersection of three distinct contexts: first, the *jingju* that originated in the late eighteenth century and its revolutionary trajectory under the CCP from the Yan'an period (1935–1947) to the Cultural Revolution; second, the five major components of theatrical artistry—playwriting, acting, music, design, and directing—that comprised model *jingju*'s final versions; and last, the aesthetics of model *jingju*—the nature and expression of beauty—as demonstrated in the finalized productions.

6. Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 4.

Historical Context

A prominent academic focus of Cultural Revolution studies has been the elucidation of the early roots of the Cultural Revolution culture. Colin Mackerras vigorously argues for the tight connection between cultural production and its social, economic, political, and historical contexts, and presents performing arts during the Cultural Revolution against the background of the interaction between art and politics in the Communist period.⁷ Richard Kraus, Richard King, and Ellen R. Judd, among others, have all contributed to important empirical studies of the genealogy of art policies, creative theories, and literary compositions of the Cultural Revolution.⁸ Since the turn of the century, Paul Clark, Rosemary A. Roberts, and Barbara Mittler have contributed to the most exciting and inspiring scholarly approach to contextualize the Cultural Revolution culture within the cultural flow of twentieth-century China, instead of as the product of an isolated decade.⁹ In addition, Xiaomei Chen's and Li Ruru's excellent scholarship, although not focusing on the Cultural Revolution, both include model works as a key link in the chain of twentieth-century China's theatre in the specific context of political theatre and *jingju*, respectively.¹⁰

Focusing on the artistry and aesthetics in model *jingju*, I identify two essential components in its historical background. One is the *jingju*, the particular performing art of constant innovation and development since the late eighteenth century, that served as the foundation genre from which model *jingju* emerged. The other is the interaction between *jingju* (i.e., the art and its practitioners) and politics (specifically the CCP, the party's ideology, and the Chinese government) beginning with the Yan'an period. Yan'an was the CCP's headquarters during 1935–1947. In the official discourse of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the 1944 *jingju* production *Driven to Join the Liang Mountain Rebels* (*Bishang Liangshan*) has been credited as, due to Mao Zedong's enthusiastic praise, “an epoch-making beginning of revolutionizing

7. Colin Mackerras, *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times: From 1840 to the Present Day* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975); *The Performing Arts in Contemporary China* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981); and “Theater and the Masses,” in *Chinese Theater: From Its Origins to the Present Day*, ed. Colin Mackerras (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1983), 145–83.

8. Richard Kraus's “Arts Policies of the Cultural Revolution: The Rise and Fall of Culture Minister Yu Huiyong,” Richard King's “Models and Misfits: Rusticated Youth in Three Novels of the 1970s,” and Ellen R. Judd's “Dramas of Passion: Heroism in the Cultural Revolution's Model Operas” are in *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution*, ed. William A. Joseph, Christine P.W. Wong, and David Zweig (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 219–42, 243–64, and 265–82, respectively. See also Ellen R. Judd, “Prescriptive Dramatic Theory of the Cultural Revolution,” in *Drama in the People's Republic of China*, ed. Constantine Tung and Colin Mackerras (Albany: State University of New York, 1987), 94–118.

9. Clark, *Chinese Cultural Revolution*. Rosemary A. Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre: The Semiotics of Gender and Sexuality in the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966–1976)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). Barbara Mittler, *A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2012).

10. Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002). Li Ruru, *The Soul of Beijing Opera: Theatrical Creativity and Continuity in the Changing World* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010).

old theater.”¹¹ In 1966, Jiang Qing—Mao’s wife—claimed that the application of contemporary revolutionary themes proved that *jingju*, “formerly the most stubborn of strongholds, has been radically revolutionized, both in ideology and in form, which has started a revolutionary change in literary and art circles.”¹² Therefore, recognizing that the revolution in *jingju* took place decades before the Cultural Revolution was launched, this study’s historical context urges the understanding of how the even earlier political wrestling, cultural policies, theoretical debates, and artistic experiments—with their many and various manifestations—shaped the practices and aesthetics of model *jingju*. Emerging from this context was the trajectory of “*jingju*—modern *jingju*—model *jingju*” along which cultural reconstruction in the PRC became a major building block of the new regime, modern *jingju* creations became an integral part of cultural reconstruction as a political choice, and artistic considerations in creating modern *jingju*—some of which were later designated as model *jingju*—became simultaneously political decisions.

Artistic Context

For a thorough understanding of model *jingju*, a three-dimensional approach that accentuates how major artistic components mount a production is essential but long overdue. Different from available scholarship, which mostly pays closer attention to the life of the model works as a segment of China’s cultural history, and the model works in the Chinese lives during the Cultural Revolution, my strategy is absolutely necessary: to explain how dramatic characters are *brought to life onstage*, thus revealing the unique features of stage production. Rigorous attention to the artistic components of model *jingju* can seem to linger on the issue of form, which can appear to be somewhat secondary to content, which itself may denote “essence.” This is a dangerous misunderstanding and has its roots in the CCP’s prescription for the new culture, an important articulation of which appeared in Mao Zedong’s 1942 “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art”: “What we demand . . . is a unity of politics and art, a unity of content and form, a unity of revolutionary political content and the highest artistic form possible.”¹³ And Jiang Qing’s 1966 claim of victory, quoted above, confirms this approach by pairing ideology with form. However, in creating model *jingju*, according to my research, the situation was not quite so simple, because for *jingju*, form and content are never distinct aspects—form *is* content. The way that a script is realized onstage, through music, acting, costume, lighting, scenery, and stage arrangements, constitutes the content

11. Mao Zedong, “A Letter after Seeing *Bishang Liangshan*,” in *Chinese Theories of Theater and Performance from Confucius to the Present*, ed. and trans. Faye Chunfang Fei (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 142.

12. “Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with which Comrade Lin Piao [Biao] Entrusted Comrade Chiang Ching [Jiang Qing],” *Chinese Literature* 9 (1967): 27–28.

13. McDougall, *Mao Zedong’s “Talks,”* 78.

of its performance text. An in-depth examination of model *jingju*'s performance text is the key to the substance of these productions.

Unfortunately, a full-length study examining the three-dimensionality of model *jingju* has yet to appear. Within their respective space constraints, Xiaomei Chen, Paul Clark, Li Ruru, and Barbara Mittler all dedicate chapters in their monographs to acknowledging model *jingju*'s artistic appeal and highlighting important innovations, especially those in music and acting. Articles by Kirk A. Denton, Barbara Mittler, Rosemary Roberts, Yawen Ludden, and this author provide focused examinations of specific artistic aspects, including literature, music, costuming, and acting, sometimes focusing on specific productions.¹⁴ Music in model *jingju* has attracted the most academic attention. Two monographs in Chinese, by Wang Renyuan and Liu Yunyan, provide the most thorough examinations of this aspect.¹⁵ In addition, a recent anthology, *Listening to China's Cultural Revolution: Music, Politics, and Cultural Continuities*, composes a multidisciplinary soundscape during and after the Cultural Revolution.¹⁶

Missing from these studies is a specific critical perspective: an examination of artistic choices in their practical context of mounting the final productions. For example, how did playwrights and musicians cooperate in composing lyrics and melody, searching for a way to give prominence to a principal heroine in a trio? What was required of performers, in terms of vocal techniques, for delivering speech lines and arias composed in a new stage language? How should one adjust costume designs so that the garments fall back into place after performers execute dazzling display of movements? What did it mean for lighting designers to convey the duration of time, clearly prescribed in scripts, on a *jingju* stage? How can musicians playing percussive instruments precisely punctuate performers' movements onstage and, at the same time, follow their conductor's cues from the orchestra pit? And how did directors perform different styles of leadership in rehearsals? Minute as these issues may appear, resolution of each was critical for the productions. The outcomes reveal the most basic challenges faced and strategies employed in presenting modern stories and characters in model *jingju*, as well as the negotiations

14. Kirk A. Denton, "Model Drama as Myth: A Semiotic Analysis of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*," in *Drama in the People's Republic of China*, ed. Constantine Tung and Colin Mackerras (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 119–36. Barbara Mittler, "Cultural Revolution Model Works and the Politics of Modernization in China: An Analysis of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*," *World of Music* 45, no. 2 (2003): 53–81. Rosemary Roberts, "Gendering the Revolutionary Body: Theatrical Costume in Cultural Revolution China," *Asian Studies Review* 30 (2006): 141–59. Yawen Ludden, "Making Politics Serve Music: Yu Huiyong, Composer and Minister of Culture," *TDR: The Drama Review* 56, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 152–68. Xing Fan, "The 'Broken' and the 'Breakthroughs': Acting in *Jingju* Model Plays of China's Cultural Revolution," *Asian Theatre Journal* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 360–89.

15. Wang Renyuan, *Jingju "yangbanxi" yinyue lungang* [Outlined discussion of the music in "model" *jingju*] (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 1999). Liu Yunyan, *Xiandai jingju "yangbanxi" danjue changqiang yinyue yanjiu* [Studies in the female vocal-melodic music in modern "model" *jingju*] (Beijing: Zhongyang yinyue xueyuan chubanshe, 2006).

16. Paul Clark, Laikwan Pang, and Tsan-Huang Tsai, eds., *Listening to China's Cultural Revolution: Music, Politics, and Cultural Continuities* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

between practitioners' artistic sensitivities and political obligations as they utilized their professional expertise to portray appealing dramatic characters delivering abstract, ideological themes.

Aesthetic Context

Two approaches have contributed significantly to studies in model *jingju* aesthetics: the thematic approach, with special attention to textual analysis, and the semiotic approach, focusing on the use and interpretations of signs. For example, based on thematic concerns and story lines, Xiaomei Chen skillfully contextualizes the model works' aesthetics in constructing the ideal characters—in particular females—and the imagined communities in their cultural and ideological dynamics.¹⁷ Reaching beyond the dominant focus of literary studies in this field, Rosemary A. Roberts applies twelve theatrical systems to the analysis of gender and sexuality in model works, also greatly strengthening the examination of aesthetics in gender representation in model *jingju*.¹⁸ And Li Song's study of political aesthetics in model works combines these two approaches. Taking the Chinese society during the Cultural Revolution as "a political text,"¹⁹ Li's discussion of political aesthetics embraces model works' spiritual manifestations, political and class ethnicity, gender and sexuality, ritualistic characters, and semiotic characterization.

My book offers a new approach to model *jingju* aesthetics: how the major artistic aspects interact with each other—sometimes compatible, sometimes antagonistic—and reasons for the consistencies and discrepancies in model *jingju*'s style. Furthermore, this aesthetics is contextualized in the aesthetic principles of *jingju*, the foundation genre of model *jingju*, because the consistency and discrepancy in model *jingju*'s style often have deep roots in its conformity to and deviation from *jingju*. The aforementioned approaches, thematic and semiotic, allow in-depth examinations of the striking aesthetic qualities conveyed in model *jingju*'s major artistic components, but they are often discussed as separate systems of signs or symbols. For stage productions, however, it is the interrelation and interaction among the major artistic aspects that produce and define their distinctive aesthetic features. In a performing art such as *jingju*, with a complex tradition that manifests

17. Chen, *Acting the Right Part*, 73–158.

18. The focus of Roberts's *Maoist Model Theatre*, an excellent scholarship in itself, is gender and sexuality, and the discussion embraces ballet dance-drama and model *jingju*. To this end, the twelve theatrical systems make good sense. For a focused study of model *jingju* as three-dimensional, theatrical entities, however, the discussion of artistic components demands closer attention to their features, manifestations, and functions on the *jingju* stage. For example, lighting and sound effects are not included in *Maoist Model Theatre*, but both of them—and especially lighting design—are an integral part of character portrayal in model *jingju*. Also, the discussion of music in *Maoist Model Theatre* focuses on vocal techniques. It serves the scope and goal of Roberts's semiotic study, although other components of music—musical composition, orchestra, and playing techniques, just to mention a few—are all critical areas for artistic innovation in model *jingju*.

19. Li Song, "Yangbanxi" de zhengzhi meixue [Political aesthetics in "model works"] (Taipei: Xiuwei zixun, 2013), 75.

in all its artistic aspects, an innovation or alteration in any one artistic element inevitably has an impact, directly or indirectly, on other major artistic aspects. Ma Yanxiang, deputy chief of the Art Work Management Bureau under the Ministry of Culture and an experienced playwright, performer, and director, stated in his 1954 speech at the Conference on the Artistic Reform of *Xiqu*,²⁰ “That it is difficult to reform *jingju* is indeed true. . . . From the way of writing scripts to acting, music, stage design, costume, each aspect has become an independent system; meanwhile they are connected to each other, and cooperate with each other. They cooperate with each other so closely and harmoniously that your change in this section will influence another section—you solve one problem, [and] another one will appear.”²¹ The artistic experiments in modern *jingju* from the 1930s to the 1970s, with all the dilemmas, uncertainties, and struggles, were, to a great extent, a search for the perfect way to present contemporary stories and characters—while delivering prevalent ideology—in a convincing *jingju* style. At the core of this style are the aesthetic principles unique to the *jingju* world. And, therefore, to contextualize model *jingju* within the mechanism of theatrical production, with its attendant cooperation, conflict, and controversy, and against the backdrop of traditional aesthetics of the *jingju* world, not only elucidates its style—which is more complex than is often imagined—but also reveals the foundational rationale for its signature features.

This book, then, contextualizes model *jingju* at the intersection of history, artistry, and aesthetics: Integral to *jingju*'s interaction with politics in the CCP's history from the 1930s to the 1970s are practitioners' constant artistic experimentations and the gradual formation of a new sense of beauty. Artistic choices in the final productions are examined through the critical lens of connection/disconnection between the nuanced innovation in model *jingju* and traditional elements and practices. And the definition of nature and expression of beauty in model *jingju* is based on how artistic components interact and how their interactions situate themselves in the aesthetic principles of the *jingju* world.

In these interlocking contexts, the identification of traditional practices in *jingju*'s modern pursuits is foundational, as it shaped some primary approaches in this study. In the PRC's official discourse, modern plays (*xiandai xi*), including modern *jingju*, have specific historical, political, and ideological connotations. Li Ruru, in discussing “modern” (*xiandai*) as a modifier in the term Model Modern Revolutionary Works (*geming xiandai yangbanxi*), observes that “*Xiandai* in this sense is particularly intriguing because it goes beyond its original definition of time and gains the Communist ideological meaning. . . . [W]hen it is applied to the theatre from the 1950s onwards—especially when the government encouraged practitioners to ‘produce a lot of “*xiandai*” plays,’ its meaning narrows to the period from the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921 to the contemporary

20. *Xiqu* is the umbrella term for Chinese indigenous theatre.

21. Ma Yanxiang, “Shi shenme zu'aizhe jingju wutai yishu jinyibu de fazhan” [What is hindering the further development of *jingju*'s stage art], *Xiqu bao* [Theatre Journal] 12 (1954): 20.

socialist construction period.”²² Fu Jin precisely points out, “The specific regulation of themes predicts that modern plays, as a concept, is not completely on a par with traditional repertory [*chuantong jumu*], nor is it something on a par with historical plays [*lishi ju*].”²³ In addition to noting that “modern themes” basically refers to “the CCP’s history and the PRC’s contemporary history,”²⁴ Fu observes that “modern plays” is not merely a thematic category, because “since its birth, it bears certain formal characteristics; for example, its artistic methods are closer to life, instead of conventionalized, at least not completely conventionalized.”²⁵

In this context, the modifier “traditional” in the PRC’s discourse of traditional *jingju* embraces repertory, practices, and aesthetics that constitute the *jingju* world up to the late 1940s. However, it is imperative to note that traditional *jingju* was not a static cultural phenomenon; it went through innovation and experimentation in the hands of practitioners, generation after generation. As many scholars—Ye Xiaoqing, Joshua Goldstein, Andrea S. Goldman, Min Tian, Elizabeth Wichmann, and Li Ruru, among others—have made clear, and as Barbara Mittler puts it, Chinese opera, including *jingju*, is “a genre of change.”²⁶ And despite the Chinese government’s cursory periodization, *jingju*’s tradition did not end in 1949, either. In analyzing PRC performing arts from 1949 to 1976, Colin Mackerras writes, “A related feature which has remained reasonably constant over the years since 1949 has been the strength of tradition and, at the same time, attempts to undermine this power.”²⁷ With fresh insight into *jingju* practitioners’ dilemmas and strategies in their work during this period, through which they also carried the powerful tradition further, this study presents an understanding of model *jingju* as the fruit of the dialogue between traditional practices and contemporary themes, and between the aesthetic pursuit passed down from the past and an original sense of beauty developed and concretized in the new China.

Part I of this book examines *jingju*’s interaction with the CCP and the Chinese government’s cultural policies from the Yan’an period to the end of the Cultural Revolution. Although the Yan’an culture has been officially credited for setting a solid foundation for the new literature and art in the PRC, its connection to the Cultural Revolution culture—which has been officially negated—has been

22. Li, *Soul of Beijing Opera*, 163–64. Based on this observation, Li uses “Revolutionary Contemporary Model Theatre” as the translation of model works’ collective title.

23. Fu Jin, *Xin Zhongguo xiju shi* [A history of the new China’s drama: 1949–2000] (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002), 102.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. Mittler, *Continuous Revolution*, 50. Ye Xiaoqing, *Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas: Drama and the Qing Imperial Court* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, ca. 2012). Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). Andrea S. Goldman, *Opera and the City: The Politics of Culture in Beijing, 1770–1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012). Min Tian, *Mei Lanfang and the Twentieth-Century International Stage: Chinese Theatre Placed and Displaced* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Elizabeth Wichmann, *Listening to Theatre: The Aural Dimension of Beijing Opera* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1991).

27. Mackerras, *Performing Arts in Contemporary China*, 2.

sidestepped in China.²⁸ *Jingju* at Yan'an offers a complex picture that embraces both experiments in the 1930s in presenting modern revolutionary stories and controversies around the acclaimed beginning of reforming old theatre, all of which reveal critical insights into the CCP's stance on traditional cultures as it transitioned from a wartime political power to the leading party of the PRC. When examining *jingju*'s interaction with the government's cultural policies in the PRC, artistic experiments—associated with theoretical debates and in their historical and political contexts—are given significant attention, and practitioners are spotlighted at a more central position in the scene. In the four chapters of Part I, I begin with the *jingju* experiments in Yan'an, conducted mostly by amateurs and focusing primarily on thematic concerns, moving on to the *Xiqu* Reform period during which *jingju*—although not enlisted for modern play creation—was a primary reform target and contributed to a first controversial modern production. I then consider the second half of the 1950s when all *xiqu* genres were enlisted for modern plays and when, in the pressured atmosphere, *jingju* practitioners turned to traditional practices to present modern lives. All these experiences help us understand the theatre policies, theoretical debates, and artistic efforts during the early 1960s, directly leading to model *jingju* during the Cultural Revolution.

Part II of this book scrutinizes the major artistic components of model *jingju*: playwriting, acting, music, design, and directing. With special attention to artistic choices and aesthetic concerns, this section highlights face-to-face, personal interviews of model *jingju* creators—playwrights, instrumentalists, composers, performers, directors, technique directors,²⁹ designers, costume makers, stage managers, and so on. Their first-person accounts of the inside stories of the creative process contribute to new understandings of the lived experience of producing model *jingju* that, on a harrowing journey of coping with political interference, is also filled with inspiration and excitement, in rehearsal halls, in greenrooms, in the orchestra pit, in the control booth, and onstage. These interviews are then further examined through performance analysis of the finalized productions reflected in their official film versions. With ethnographic methodology and paying close attention to practitioners' experience, the five chapters of Part II detail how the cultural revolution in *jingju* unfolded as playwrights pondered over better end rhymes for a lead character's lyrics in a particular dramatic situation, as musicians debated how to compose the orchestration for Chinese and Western instruments, as performers searched for the perfect vocal timbre for their roles, as lighting designers experimented with different bulbs for different characters, as makeup designers worked out the foundation color for principal heroes and heroines, and as technique directors went through dozens of iterations for a movement sequence.

28. Li Song casts one of the strongest votes for this connection in his "Yangbanxi" biannianshi (qianpian): 1963–1966 nian [A chronicle of "model works" (vol. 1): 1963–1966] (Taipei: Xiuwei zixun, 2011), 23–34.

29. In model *jingju*, technique directors are the primary creators of dance-acting, combat, and group dances; their responsibilities and contributions are further discussed in Chapter 9.

I conclude this discussion in Coda, which addresses three interrelated questions in model *jingju* aesthetics: Did the notion of beauty matter during the creative process? What is considered beautiful and therefore aesthetically favored? And how is this sense of beauty communicated? I highlight two dominant aesthetic qualities in model *jingju*, the beauty of the sublime and the beauty of masculinity, and analyze imbalance as a primary aesthetic feature in two spheres: gender representation and aesthetic expectations. Finally, I propose that the deep roots of the imbalance in model *jingju* lie in the varied levels of association among the three traditional aesthetic principles—conventionalization, stylization, and synthesis—and each of the five major artistic aspects—playwriting, acting, music, design, and directing—and that, ultimately, the overarching creative directive, the Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism, was a flawed premise for model *jingju*.

From March through May 2005, I observed the rehearsals and performances of the *Azalea Mountain* reconstructed by the China *Jingju* Company in Beijing. The reconstructed version, with the goal of replicating the original production as closely as possible, was supervised by Yang Chunxia, the lead actress from the original cast, and directed by Gao Mukun, a primary technique director, also an actor in the original cast. Stepping into their rehearsal hall, I was struck with the slogan on a red banner on the rear wall, reading “To Inherit Revolutionary Traditions; To Stage Outstanding Productions” (*jicheng geming chuantong, paiyan youxiu jumu*). I could not help wondering what concept of revolutionary traditions was embraced in this particular context. The following two months of daily, intensive rehearsal observations provided invaluable data with regard to how artistic elements were integrated in such a production. Toward the end of the rehearsal process, Gao lamented in an interview, “Two months may be enough for reconstructing a traditional production, but is too short for *Azalea Mountain*.”³⁰ I agree with him. According to my observations, there were just too much to learn during too short a time for the new cast, whose average age was very similar to that of the original cast when they finalized the production in 1973; from vocal placement to melodic embellishments, from new movement sequences to a much faster tempo of combat, and from performing with new percussive patterns to coping with new costumes. To a certain extent, the process of reconstruction was similar to that of how traditional *jingju* repertory was passed down from masters to disciples: young performers eked out an imitation and then, based on masters’ advice and comments, kept polishing until approved by masters. At the core of the challenges to the 2005 cast, as model *jingju* were now taken as part of *jingju* repertory, was the magnitude of innovation and level of professionalism in the polished final production in 1973. In my understanding, this was the essence of the revolutionary traditions for the younger generation of *jingju* practitioners.

30. Gao Mukun, personal interview, Beijing, 4 April 2005. Unless otherwise noted, all interviews are conducted by this author.

Despite all the anxiety during rehearsals, the China *Jingju* Company's *Azalea Mountain* was received with passion: the production drew full houses consecutively during its public performances in Beijing and was immediately invited for tour performances to other cities. In May 2005, I certainly had a sense of déjà vu while sitting among fervent audience members of the reconstructed *Azalea Mountain*; they reminded me of my unforgettable experience with the reconstructed *The Red Lantern* in Xi'an four years before. And my eyewitness experiences of the reconstructed productions of model *jingju* three decades after the end of the Cultural Revolution had only confirmed the powerful traditions embedded in model *jingju* as complex, controversial, challenging, and also charming in their own way, reaching far back into history.

Part I

Jingju, Modern Jingju, and Model Jingju

Jingju at Yan'an

Yan'an was the CCP's headquarters from October 1935 to March 1947. In the PRC's official discourse, literature and art during the Yan'an period are credited for setting a solid foundation for the construction of a new democratic culture, which served the new democracy in the new China. In this context, discussion of *jingju* at Yan'an frequently cites two productions: the 1944 *Driven to Join the Liang Mountain Rebels* and the 1945 *Three Raids at the Zhu's Village* (*San da Zhujia zhuang*). The two productions are so often referenced that they have become the apparent exemplars of both the innovative spirit and repertory of *jingju* at Yan'an, first legitimized by—and then widely promoted with—Mao Zedong's enthusiastic feedback. Commenting on the former production, Mao wrote on 9 January 1944, "What you have begun is an epoch-making beginning of revolutionizing old theater."¹ A year later, he praised the latter by deeming it "a success after *Driven to Join the Liang Mountain Rebels*, solidifying the path for revolutionizing *pingju*."²

New perspectives emerge, however, when *jingju* at Yan'an is examined in the political culture surrounding artistic production during the period when the CCP transitioned from a wartime political power to the leading party of a new regime. After delving into discrepancies between official doctrine and other sources such as personal memoirs, performance records, and script analysis, I argue that *jingju* at Yan'an offers controversial cultural productions that are far more complex than those depicted in CCP's official narrative. Two overlooked aspects deserve close attention. One is that, although the CCP was determined to construct a new democratic culture, in terms of *jingju* performance, traditional repertory was more popular and was more frequently staged than both newly written historical plays and modern plays. The other is that Mao's claim of "an epoch-making beginning" of revolutionizing old theatre was only partly realized through adjusting thematic concerns; it did not reflect the practitioners' dilemma of searching for a satisfying form to serve new content.

1. Mao, "Letter after Seeing *Bishang Liangshan*," 142.

2. *Pingju* was the name for *jingju* at that time. Ren Guilin, "Mao Zedong tongzhi he jingju" [Comrade Mao Zedong and *jingju*], in *Jiuju geming de huashiqi de kaiduan: Yan'an Pingju Yanjiuyuan jinian wenji* [An epoch-making of revolutionizing old theatre: A collection in commemoration of the Yan'an *Pingju* Academy], ed. China *Jingju* Company (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2005), 39–40.

CCP's Vision of a New Democratic Culture

During the decade preceding the PRC's founding, the CCP's vision of the new China's culture emerged in a series of speeches that Mao Zedong delivered in Yan'an. Among them, "New Democratic Politics and New Democratic Culture" in 1940 and "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" (hereafter the "Talks") in 1942 are particularly important. The first took place at the First Representatives Meeting of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region Cultural Association on 9 January 1940. Initially published on 15 February 1940 in the inaugural issue of *Chinese Culture* (*Zhongguo wenhua*), this talk has been widely known under the title "On New Democracy," which was used when it was republished in *Liberation* (*Jiefang*) on 20 February 1940. It was in this speech that Mao drew a blueprint of the new China and defined the new democratic culture as a "national, scientific, and mass culture,"³ serving with new democratic politics and new democratic economy as the three imperative components of the new democracy. The three modifiers—national, scientific, and mass—each emphasizes an attribute of the new culture. It must be Chinese, and absorption of any element of a foreign culture should serve only as a stimulus for developing its Chinese characteristics. It is scientific in the sense that, in critically dealing with China's old culture, it develops out of fine, popular, democratic, and revolutionary elements but refuses the feudal and the superstitious. Being a mass culture, it should serve workers and peasants who "make up over ninety percent of the nation's population" so that the masses will eventually turn into a cultural army in revolution.⁴ A poet, Mao took advantage of his literary competence in wrapping up the speech with a dynamic, romantic ending:

National, scientific and mass culture is the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal culture of the people, the new-democratic and the new Chinese national culture.

When the new-democratic politics, new-democratic economy and new-democratic culture are combined we shall have a republic of New Democracy, a republic of China in name and in fact, the new China we want to build.

New China is within sight of every one of us; let us hail her!

New China is like a ship whose mast is appearing above the horizon; let us acclaim her!

Let us welcome with both hands the new China that is ours!⁵

"On New Democracy" has been acknowledged as an integral part of Mao Zedong Thought, although its discussion of the new democratic culture has been less often referred to—than has been the "Talks"—as the foundation of the CCP's cultural policy. David Holm suspects that the change in the document title may be a cause.⁶ However, after examining the two speeches side by side, I would argue that

3. Mao Zedong, *On New Democracy* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1960), 75.

4. *Ibid.*, 77.

5. *Ibid.*, 79.

6. David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 74.

a deeper reason for this relative disregard is that the “Talks” carried the CCP’s cultural agenda much further than a generalized blueprint: In “On New Democracy,” Mao paid more attention to defining the nature of the new politics, economy, and culture, and to delineating the interactions among them in terms of how each was integral to the combination of the three. But in the “Talks,” the focus of attention was on exactly how the new culture should serve the new politics, and thus offering foundational, pragmatic definitions and principles—though not without logical flaws or muddled prescriptions—not only for the 1940s CCP but also for the new PRC regime during the following decades.

Mao delivered the “Talks” in the midst of the Rectification Movement (1942–1945) that, as Mark Selden precisely puts it, “was directed toward building a unified party committed to common ideas, methods, and goals. It was Marxist to be sure, but the emphasis was on creative adaptation to the unique problems and need of a revolutionary China and people’s war.”⁷ Both Merle Goldman and David Holm have examined the “Talks” as a critical event of the Rectification Movement. Goldman pays special attention to their function as “a direct rebuttal to the criticisms of Wang Shih-wei [Wang Shiwei], Ting Ling [Ding Ling], and their associates.”⁸ Expanding on this approach, Holm notes Mao’s two central objectives: to eliminate “incorrect and harmful opinions (non-proletarian ideas)” and to prepare for the move of deploying cultural workers “in the villages and in direct contact with the rural masses.”⁹ After the Rectification Movement, it is important to note, the “Talks” remained in service as official policy and formed the framework for the CCP’s related policies on literature and art, as well as providing the foundation for prescriptive theories guiding artistic creations. During the Cultural Revolution, announcements, publications, and performances of model works were often part of its regular, official anniversary observances. Even now, the anniversaries of Mao’s “Talks” have been important political and cultural occasions prompting nationwide commemorative activities, frequent observances including reprintings of the “Talks,” conferences on cultural works, and public performances of outstanding theatrical productions and musical pieces.

In Mao’s own words, the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art was held for the purpose of exchanging opinions “on the correct relationship between work in literature and art and revolutionary work in general, on the correct development of revolutionary literature and art and better assistance from them in our other revolutionary work.”¹⁰ In his opening speech delivered on 2 May 1942, Mao raised five problems to be solved in order to secure the correct relationship and the correct

7. Mark Selden, *The Yanan Way in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 190.

8. Merle Goldman, *Literary Dissent in Communist China* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 34.

9. Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*, 92.

10. McDougall, *Mao Zedong’s “Talks,”* 57. The “Talks” was first published on 19 October 1943 in *Liberation Daily* (*Jiefang ribao*), and has been revised and republished in various editions since that time. I examine the original 1943 version for this study because it provides a direct reference for the examination of the CCP’s pre-1949 attitude toward literature and art.

development: position, attitude, audience, work, and study. On 23 May, Mao concluded the discussion by focusing on two core questions: Whom should the new literature and art serve? And how should this service be fulfilled? By clarifying the former and offering solutions to the latter, Mao anchored the new literature and art in the new politics.

Mao proposed the concept of “popular masses” when answering the first question.¹¹ In line with and expanding on the mass attribute of the new democratic culture proposed in “On New Democracy,” he arrived at a definition of “popular masses” by reasoning that “the broadest section of the people, who constitute more than ninety percent of the total population, are workers, peasants, soldiers, and the petty bourgeoisie. . . . These four kinds of people constitute the largest sector of the Chinese nation and the broadest popular masses.”¹² Mao further prioritized the first three categories. “Workers, peasants, and soldiers are again the most important element in these four groups; the petty bourgeoisie are fewer in number, their revolutionary determination is weaker, and they have a higher cultural level than workers, peasants, and soldiers. Our literature and art are therefore primarily for workers, peasants, and soldiers, and only secondarily for the petty bourgeoisie.”¹³

But one might still wonder what is meant by the literature and art that are *for* the popular masses. Instead of defining this directly, Mao offered a counterexample of literature and art that give priority to the petty bourgeoisie, thus failing to serve workers, peasants, or soldiers. “Many comrades place more emphasis on studying the intelligentsia [from petty bourgeois backgrounds] and analyzing their psychology; their main concern is to show their side of things, excusing and even defending their shortcomings, instead of guiding the intelligentsia from petty bourgeois backgrounds and themselves as well towards closer contact with workers, peasants, and soldiers, to take part in their actual struggles, to show how things are with them and educate them.”¹⁴ Mao warned that when people’s “innermost souls are still in the kingdom of the petty bourgeoisie,”¹⁵ they cannot wholeheartedly like the proletariat, including “their emotions, their manner, or their budding literature and art.”¹⁶ Based on Mao’s diagnosis of inappropriate approaches to creation, we can identify major characteristics of the literature and art that are *for* the popular masses: its focus of attention should be on proletarian workers, peasants, and soldiers; such literature and art should be based on sincere feelings for them; it should originate from a complete understanding of and close contact with them; this literature and art should take the side of proletarian workers, peasants, and soldiers when showing their lives; it should educate them; and it should be intricately involved with their own literature and art.

11. *Ibid.*, 64.

12. *Ibid.*, 65.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*, 65–66.

15. *Ibid.*, 66.

16. *Ibid.*

With “whom should the new literature and art serve” clarified, Mao further discussed three key strategies solidifying the theory of how to serve the audience, each addressing a significant perspective, namely, accessibility, function, and quality. First and foremost, Mao prioritized reaching a wider audience by offering what they can understand. He justified this judgment by acknowledging the illiteracy of proletarian workers, peasants, and soldiers who were the primary audience of literature and art. In this context, Mao’s interpretation of what would satisfy the audience was “a wide-reaching educational movement in the form of cultural knowledge and works of literature and art that they urgently need and can readily accept.”¹⁷ And only at this point—once the wider audience’s need is satisfied—may artistic standards be raised as part of the wider audience’s further development.

The second strategy was to identify and implement the subordination of literature and art to politics with full awareness of the former’s power. In Mao’s “Talks,” creating literature and art accessible to the wide audience of proletarian workers, peasants, and soldiers is, to a great extent, to serve proletarian revolution. This significant function was stated unambiguously: “Literature and art are subordinate to politics, and yet in turn exert enormous influence on it.”¹⁸ Here, Mao’s argument in support of this conclusion articulates his recognition of literature and art’s basic nature. “In the world today, all culture or literature and art belongs to a definite class and party, and has a definite political line. . . . In a society composed of classes and parties, art obeys both class and party and it must naturally obey the political demands of its class and party, and the revolutionary task of a given revolutionary age; any deviation is a deviation from the masses’ basic need.”¹⁹

Last but not least, Mao advocated pursuing the unity of correct political content and artistic appeal but only in that order of priority. In fulfilling the function of serving politics, the quality of literature and art should be evaluated with two criteria, the political and the artistic. Regarding the relationship between the two, Mao demanded “a unity of politics and art, a unity of content and form, a unity of revolutionary political content and the highest artistic form possible.”²⁰ This by no means suggests accepting an equivalence of politics and art. As Mao put it, “Politics is certainly not equivalent to art, and a general world outlook is certainly not equivalent to a methodology of artistic creation. . . . [I]n every class society and in every class within that society, without exception, political criteria are always placed ahead of artistic criteria.”²¹

With assertive, straightforward demands in the “Talks,” Mao forcefully advocated for the new literature and art’s political role in the new China. In the realm of practice, in particular creative methods, however, Mao’s pronouncements describing

17. *Ibid.*, 71.

18. *Ibid.*, 75.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, 78.

21. *Ibid.*

how to execute the service left a muddled picture. For this study, two interconnected issues deserve close attention: the relationship between form and content, and how to deal with foreign and old cultures.

At first glance, it is clear that Mao established two sets of concepts—politics and art, and content and form—and prioritized the former in each set through the recommendation for “a unity of politics and art, a unity of content and form, a unity of revolutionary political content and the highest artistic form possible.”²² The bottom line here is that the content must be revolutionary and politically correct first, and only under this condition should the pursuit of form be unfolded. Mao used fascist literature and art as the counterexample, arguing, “Insofar as a work is reactionary, the more artistic it is the more harm it can do to the people and the more it should be rejected. The common characteristic of all literature and art of exploiting classes in their period of decline is the contradiction between their reactionary political content and their artistic form.”²³ Mao’s example is logically flawed in the first place, because by acknowledging that work with higher artistic merit can do greater harm to people—even without explicit arguments on how this happens, though presumably through its great appeal to audiences—Mao seemed to admit art can transcend politics, thus undermining his own theory denying the independence of art from politics. In addition, Mao treated the relationship between content and form in the same way as he did the relationship between politics and art. In other words, in Mao’s formulae, form is subordinate to content but in turn exerts enormous influence on the latter, just as art relates to politics in his theory. But Mao avoided two critical issues: where the boundary between form and content is, and from where the new literary and artistic forms should be emerging. Both issues are extremely important to the question of how to deal with foreign and old cultures in constructing the new.

In the “Talks,” Mao made three references to foreign and old cultures, with the central argument that they should be taken advantage of in a discriminating fashion. The most direct advocacy for the correct attitude was, “We do not by any means refuse to use the old forms of the feudal class and the bourgeoisie, but in our hands these old forms are reconstructed and filled with new content, so that they also become revolutionary and serve the people.”²⁴ When identifying popular life as the only source for the new literature and art, Mao complemented the definition by arguing, “We must absorb these things [books and other works already in existence] in a discriminating way, using them as models from which we may learn what to accept or what to reject when we process works of literature and art as conceptualized forms from the literature and art in popular life in our own time and place. . . . [W]e certainly may not reject the ancients and foreigners as models, which means, I’m afraid, that we must even use feudal and bourgeois things. But they are only

22. *Ibid.*, 78.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, 65.

models and not substitutes; they can't be substitutes."²⁵ The third reference was made in discussing the relationship between political and artistic criteria: "The proletariat must also reject the reactionary political qualities of bourgeois works of literature and art and accept their artistic qualities only with discrimination. There are some things which are fundamentally reactionary in political terms, and yet can have a certain artistry, for example, fascist literature and art."²⁶

With the almost interchangeable use of politics and content, and that of art and form, Mao proposed a careful selection of artistic practices and elements forming the foreign and old cultures, in the service of a new content. These arguments, however, were based on an unjustified assumption, that form and content *can* be separated from each other. Or, possibly, they were meant to be an announcement: it *will* happen in our hands. But if, in Mao's own words, having the foreign and old cultures as models could make "the difference between being civilized or vulgar, crude or refined, advanced or elementary, fast or slow,"²⁷ then does it mean the foreign and old cultures have—at least somewhat—civilized, refined, and advanced forms that are independent from their feudal, bourgeois, exploitative, and reactionary content? Does this mean the form of the new literature and art should arise through reconstructing the old? To what extent should we reconstruct it? What are the criteria for selecting practices and elements forming the new literature and art? For those old, formal elements that are not used in the new culture, were they feudal, bourgeois, or reactionary in the first place? All these unanswered questions left much space for interpretive abuse.

Jingju at Yan'an and Driven to Join the Liang Mountain Rebels

When the CCP moved its headquarters to Yan'an in the mid-1930s, *jingju* was already a popular entertainment, although due to the lack of traditional costumes and professional expertise, performance was limited to amateur practices, primarily *qingchang* (aria singing with musical accompaniment but without costumes or makeup) and selected scenes of traditional *jingju* in workaday clothes. One strategy for creating new plays during the late 1930s was "to fill old bottles with new wine" (*jiuping zhuang xinjiu*). This common practice used a traditional play's literary structure and performance practices as a model but replaced its characters with modern ones. For example, the 1938 *On the Songhua River* (*Songhua jiang shang*) was based on the traditional play *Fisherman's Revenge* (*Da yu sha jia*), *Liujiu Village* (*Liujiu cun*) in 1938 followed the model of *Black Dragon Residence* (*Wulong yuan*), the 1939 *Evening Raid on an Airport* (*Ye xi feijichang*) was after one scene in *Luoma Lake* (*Luoma hu*), and *Zhaojia Town* (*Zhaojia zhen*) in 1939 used *Qingfeng Village* (*Qingfeng zhai*) as a model.

25. *Ibid.*, 69.

26. *Ibid.*, 78.

27. *Ibid.*, 69.

Part II

Inside Model *Jingju*

Foundation of Productions: Scripts and Playwriting

Wang Zengqi, a playwright who participated in creating both *Shajiabang* and *Azalea Mountain*, describes the moment when *Shajiabang*'s script was finalized:

It was in a room at the Great Hall of the People (to the best of my memory, it was in the Anhui Hall).¹ Behind a line of desks sat Jiang Qing, Yao Wenyuan, and Ye Qun (perhaps with other people but I can't recall).² Facing them another line of long desks, behind which performers and I sat. Everyone had a script with characters printed in a large size. . . . Performers took turns reading the script, sentence by sentence. At a certain point, Jiang Qing said, "Changes are needed here." Then [I] was expected to offer suggestions right away. It was almost like a "palace interview."³ After listening [to me], Jiang Qing said, "Okay." Then, this would mean, "the answer pleases Her Majesty."⁴

This happened in May 1970, as part of the preparation for the production's film version. For Wang Zengqi, the script's finalization was the culmination of a seven-year journey during which three major versions were crafted and under constant revision. As early as in Jiang Qing's 1964 "On the Revolution in *Jingju*," playwriting and scripts were pinpointed as the foundation of modern *jingju*; it demanded a reprioritization of the artistic constituents of *jingju*, elevating scripts to the center of creation, in replacement of the performer. This practice was strictly followed in creating model *jingju*, and a revisit of Wang Zengqi's seven-year journey will reveal some central issues in establishing the foundation for productions.

It began in the winter of 1963, when the Beijing *Jingju* Troupe was assigned the task to create a modern *jingju* based on the *huju* script, *Sparks amid the Reeds*. The play focuses on Sister Aqing, a female underground CCP member stationed in

1. The Great Hall of the People, located in Beijing, hosts the country's most important meetings and ceremonies. Meeting rooms in the building are named after each administrative region at the provincial level. The Anhui Hall is named after the Anhui Province.

2. Yao Wenyuan was a member of the Central Cultural Revolution Group and the Political Bureau of the CCP's Central Committee in 1970. He was an important leader in ideology, propaganda, and cultural criticism, and was prosecuted as one of the Gang of Four after the Cultural Revolution. Ye Qun was a member of the Central Committee of the CCP and the Political Bureau of the CCP's Central Committee in 1970.

3. The palace interview used to be the final step of the civil service exam in the imperial China. For a palace interview, candidates were summoned to the capital for an interview with the emperor.

4. Wang, "Guanyu *Shajiabang*," 125.

a village called Shajiabang, who helps hide and take care of wounded New Fourth Army soldiers. Planning to stage the production during the New Year's season of 1964, Wang, Xiao Jia, and Yang Yumin adapted the script to *jingju* within five days, and the troupe then rehearsed intensively. For this version, they used the title *An Underground Liaison* (*Dixia lianluoyuan*), because "it is suspenseful and catchy."⁵ According to Wang, Jiang Qing watched a dress rehearsal but cancelled the public performance, concerned that the adaptation and production were crude.⁶ The creative process of developing a second version was then launched; Wang and Xue Enhou took more than ten days this time and rewrote the script during the early spring of 1964. For the second version, they strengthened Sister Aqing's singing part by adding arias and reinstated the original title, *Sparks amid the Reeds*. After more elaborate rehearsals, the show premiered on 31 March, and the troupe staged this version at the 1964 Beijing Festival. On 23 July 1964, Mao Zedong watched the production and offered suggestions on issues including New Fourth Army soldiers' musical images, the use of stage combat at the end, and the play's title. Based on Mao's suggestions transmitted to the troupe by Jiang Qing, Wang and his colleagues revised the script into its third version during late 1964 and finished in early 1965. In the third version, Guo Jianguang, the political director of the wounded New Fourth Army soldiers, was significantly strengthened; new songs and speeches were added for Guo, and he took the lead in the final combat scene; and the play title was now *Shajiabang*. In 1969, following the directive that model plays should be no longer than two hours, Wang, Xue, and Yang further revised the third version, rearranging the order of some arias and shortening stage speech.⁷ The revised third version became the foundation for revision and finalization in May 1970, described at the beginning of this chapter.

Considerations of crafting and revising activities during this process were closely associated with supervision from political authorities. For example, Jiang Qing offered comments and suggestions on specific issues including characters' interaction, the use of nouns in song lyrics, characters' names, and the language in Sister Aqing's stage speech.⁸ Opinions from top political leaders such as Tan Zhenlin, a chief commander of the New Fourth Army—the troop portrayed in *Shajiabang*—were taken as important reference. Furthermore, the enhanced attention to Guo Jianguang is the result of direct political interferences. Until the 1964 Beijing Festival, Sister Aqing was the absolute central figure, leading stage actions and making the final arrangements for New Fourth Army soldiers infiltrating the

5. Ibid., 122.

6. Ibid. Wang recalls that the Beijing *Jingju* Troupe already announced the premiere of *An Underground Liaison*, and Jiang went to the performance venue and ordered the advertisements to be removed. Otherwise, Chen Tushou identifies that this order was from Mayor Peng Zhen; see Chen's "Ludang huozhong de muhou fengyun," 72.

7. Two references are important in delineating this process: Wang's "Guanyu *Shajiabang*"; and Dai's *Yangbanxi de fengfengyuyu*, 51–60 and 156–58.

8. Wang, "Guanyu *Shajiabang*," 125–26.

enemy's headquarters, disguised as instrumentalists and chefs for the chief enemy's wedding, and capturing all enemies. Initiated from Mao Zedong's 1964 suggestion that the play ends with a direct raid—and the approach was later interpreted as to emphasize military struggles (signified by Guo) instead of underground struggles (signified by Sister Aqing)—beginning from the 1965 version, Guo was raised to the status of a principal hero. He now leads a newly composed final combat scene that replaces the original wedding scene, and new arias in earlier scenes are designed with the specific purpose of portraying “the blood-and-flesh relationship between soldiers and the masses, and a political director's—with firm revolutionary spirit—readiness for devotion to revolution and battles,” as well as “the hero's calmness and bravery.”⁹ But Guo's raising prominence causes irresolvable difficulties, because he simply does not play a significant role in dramatic actions in early scenes, which are led by Sister Aqing. This explains why, even though Guo is listed first on the character list in the finalized version, which, in the practice of model *jingju*, indicates his status as the principal hero, both Guo and Sister Aqing are discussed as “principal heroic characters” in this production.¹⁰ Commenting on Guo's increased prominence, Wang Zengqi diplomatically acknowledges that a combat scene featuring a direct raid could accommodate *jingju* dance-acting and combat techniques.¹¹ But Wang's children recorded a private conversation in their family, revealing the playwright's concerns: “It was in the early 1970s, when model works were in their heydays. We were discussing [at home] which plays were good. Dad [Wang] suddenly said, ‘In twenty years, no one knows how it will be. In my opinion, only *The Red Lantern* and *Tiger Mountain* will pass on.’ . . . [Dramatically] *Shajiabang* is not quite consistent; the first half features Sister Aqing but the second half, Guo Jianguang.”¹²

Yet supervision from political authorities does not make any of the leaders an author; as Wang straightforwardly puts it, “Jiang Qing did not write a single line of song lyrics.”¹³ The scripts are the fruit of the collective efforts of professional playwrights, poets, writers, editors, directors, composers, and performers, coalescing in each version. In some cases, for instance in *The Red Lantern*, the director Ajia served as a primary playwright, and suggestions from various sources were absorbed during revisions. In some cases, such as *On the Docks*, multiple groups of playwrights contributed to different versions. And in other cases, *Azalea Mountain* for one, particular scenes drafted by single playwrights were appraised in group discussions during which colleagues offered comments and suggestions to each other.

9. Jiang Zhishui, “Cong *Ludang huozhong dao Shajiabang*” [From *Sparks amid the Reeds* to *Shajiabang*], *Xiju bao* [Theatre Journal] 2 (1965): 34–35.

10. Hong Guang, “Pijingzhanji tuichenchuxin: Tan *Shajiabang* changqiang he wudao chuanguzuo de jidian tihui” [Break open a way through bramble and thistle; weed through the old to bring forth the new: Some experience in designing song and dance for *Shajiabang*], *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 8 February 1970.

11. Wang, “Guanyu *Shajiabang*,” 124.

12. Wang Lang, Wang Ming, and Wang Chao, *Laotou'er Wang Zengqi: Women yanzhong de fuqin* [Wang Zengqi the old guy: Father in our eyes] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2000), 129.

13. Wang, “Guanyu *Shajiabang*,” 125.

Once rehearsals were launched, directors, composers, and performers might offer further input based on their practical experience. Playwrights kept polishing scripts during the entire process.

In examining the textual foundation for these theatrical productions, I approach these scripts from five aspects: synopses, characters, themes, plotting and theatricality, and dramatic narrative. We begin with a review of the stories and their characters. The synopses, followed by a discussion of the roles and functions of dramatic characters, serve as the foundation for exploring overarching themes. To afford insight into the delivery of those significant motifs, I offer further analysis on plotting and theatricality. The last section focuses on crafting, an especially noteworthy aspect, examining the narrative structure and use of language in model *jingju* in the context of their connections to traditional practices.

Synopses

The majority of model *jingju* are adaptations from fully developed works. Similarly to *Shajiabang*, the script of *The Red Lantern* is adapted from a *huaju* play; *On the Docks* is adapted from a *huaiju* script;¹⁴ *Tiger Mountain* is based on the novel *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, with reference to a *huaju* production; the dance-drama *The Red Detachment of Women* is the foundation of the *jingju* version; *Song of the Dragon River*, *Azalea Mountain*, and *Boulder Bay* are based on *huaju* plays; and major events in *Fighting on the Plain* are obtained from three films—*Guerrillas on the Plain* (Pingyuan Youjidui), *Tunnel Warfare* (Didao zhan), and *Mine Warfare* (Dilei zhan)—and two novels—*Guerrillas on the Railroad* (Tiedao Youjidui) and *An Armed Team behind Enemy* (Dihou Wugongdui). It is no coincidence: These original sources were fairly mature and successful pieces on their own merits. With established characterization and plotting, they offered a solid textual foundation for adaptation. The synopses of *Tiger Mountain* and *Shajiabang* are made clear in Chapter 4 and the beginning of this chapter respectively; those for the rest eight plays are as follows.

The Red Lantern recounts the story of Li Yuhe, an underground CCP member during the War of Resistance against Japan (1937–1945). Li lives in the guise of a switchman with his adopted mother, Granny Li, and adopted daughter, Tiemei. He receives the task of sending secret codes to the guerrillas but is betrayed to the Japanese gendarmerie by a traitor. Foreseeing danger, Granny Li reveals their family story to Tiemei. The Japanese kill Li and Granny Li, who refuse to submit the secret codes, but they release Tiemei, hoping that she will lead them to the codes. With the help of her neighbors, Tiemei escapes from home and finally succeeds in sending the codes to the guerrillas. The guerrillas annihilate the Japanese gendarmerie and kill both the traitor and the head of the Japanese gendarmerie.

14. *Huaiju* is a regional theatre form that is popular in Jiangsu Province, Shanghai, and Anhui Province.

On the Docks tells the story of stevedores in Shanghai in the summer of 1963. Led by Fang Haizhen, the secretary of the CCP branch of a stevedores' brigade, workers are rushing to load seed rice being sent as aid to Africa by the Chinese government. Qian Shouwei, a dispatcher who previously worked for Americans and Japanese controlling the docks, arranges to sabotage the stevedores' efforts out of his hatred for the new China. Qian mixes fiberglass with wheat and switches it with a sack of seed rice; he also cultivates a young stevedore's feelings of disappointment and humiliation in his job. Fang discovers Qian's sabotage, leads her colleagues in searching for the switched wheat, and persuades the young stevedore to stay. At the end, the seed rice to Africa is sent on time, and Qian is captured.

White-Tiger Regiment is set during the Korean War (1950–1953). Yan Weicai, leader of a scout platoon of the Chinese People's Volunteers, is designated as the head of a Dagger Squad. He is given the task of annihilating the headquarters of the White-Tiger Regiment, a South Korean crack unit. Yan and his comrades disguise themselves as South Korean soldiers and approach the headquarters in darkness. With the guidance of Sister Choe, a local Korean woman, the squad goes around the central guard post in front of the headquarters and approaches the target from the back. The squad conducts a successful raid on the White-Tiger Regiment, kills the American advisor, and captures the head of the regiment alive.

The Red Detachment of Women is about a female troop under the CCP's leadership during the Second Civil War (1927–1937). Hong Changqing, the CCP representative of the detachment, saves Wu Qinghua, a maid near death who escaped the detention of the Tyrant of the South (hereafter South), a landlord who murdered her parents. At Hong's advice, Wu joins the army. In a raid on South's headquarters, Wu cannot restrain her hatred and fires before receiving a command for action; this leads to South's escape. Hong patiently helps Wu understand the meaning of revolution as a fight for the proletariat, rather than for personal revenge. In a later fight, Hong is captured by South; he refuses to cooperate and is killed. At the end, the Red Army and the Red Detachment of Women kill South. Wu is appointed as the new party representative of the detachment.

Fighting on the Plain is set in the War of Resistance against Japan (1937–1945). Zhao Yonggang, a platoon leader of the Eighth Route Army, receives the task of carrying out armed guerilla struggles on the plain, thus preventing Japanese from sending reinforcements to the Taihang Mountain. Zhao and his comrades first burn the Japanese central blockhouse and capture their food supplies. To destroy the Japanese arms, Zhao and one fellow soldier disguise themselves as special agents working for Japanese and blow up a train loaded with weaponry right before it departs for the mountains. Japanese troops follow Zhao and his compatriots to the Zhang Village to ambush them. Eighth Route Army soldiers and the militia of the Zhang Village take advantage of tunnels in the fight. At the end, the leader of Japanese troops is captured alive and executed.

Song of the Dragon River tells a story of peasants on the southeastern coast in 1963. In combating a severe drought in the rear mountain area, Jiang Shuiying, a CCP branch secretary of the Dragon River Agriculture Team, leads peasants in building a dam so that the diverted water can save 90,000 *mu* good farmland.¹⁵ This, however, is at the sacrifice of 3,000 *mu* farmland of their own. Huang Guozhong, who previously worked for a landlord, arranges to sabotage the peasants' efforts out of his hatred for the new China. He tries to delay the dam's completion and spreads the rumor that the drought on the rear mountain is now in control and the sluice gate should be closed. Jiang patiently persuades her colleagues who have reservations regarding the dam, and she also discovers and reveals Huang's true identity. Later in the year, all agriculture teams in drought areas have a good harvest, and they support the Dragon River Agriculture Team with food supplies.

Azalea Mountain is set during the Second Civil War (1927–1937) between the CCP and the Nationalist Party. Ke Xiang is a CCP representative in a peasants' self-defense troop established by Lei Gang on Azalea Mountain. The major local despot, Viper, schemes to wipe out the troop. In secret collusion with the deputy leader of the troop, Wen Qijiu, Viper lures Lei into coming down from Azalea Mountain by capturing Lei's adopted mother; he then captures Lei. Ke leads a Dagger Squad in swinging over mountain streams on rattans and rescuing Lei and his adopted mother. Returning to Azalea Mountain, Ke reveals Wen's true identity and points out that taking revenge for wrongs inflicted upon individuals only leads to sacrifice in vain, and that to follow the party is the fundamental rule of revolution. At the end, Lei's self-defense troop is officially absorbed into the China Workers' and Peasants' Army under the CCP.

Set in September 1963, *Boulder Bay* is about the militia at a fishing harbor in southeast China, fighting against the Anti-Communist National Salvation Army's plan of a raid on the coast. A fisherman discovers an empty knife sheath that a Nationalist covert agent at Boulder Bay is meant to use as an identifying device when making contact with the outside. With the sheath, Lu Changhai, the militia leader successfully establishes contact with the enemy agent holding a dagger and acquires intelligence regarding the raid. The militia prevents the Nationalist troops from escaping. Lu follows the head of the Nationalist unit to a lonely reef close to the open sea. He lures the enemy's backup forces inside the cordon established by the CCP's naval vessels and sends out a summoning signal to his comrades. Ultimately, the enemy agents are wiped out, and the commander of the Nationalist unit is captured alive.

15. 90,000 *mu* comprises approximately 14,826 acres, or sixty square kilometers.

Meeting the Characters

The amounts of characters with personal names or nicknames in a single model *jingju* range from nine in *On the Docks* to twenty-one in *Shajiabang*. Also present in each play are anonymous minor supporting roles that appear in groups of different sizes. According to their roles and functions in plotting, characters can be divided into three major categories: principal heroes/heroines, other positive characters, and negative characters.

Principal heroes/heroines are the most mature of revolutionaries—the bravest, wisest, most resolute, and most loyal to the CCP and Chairman Mao, with the deepest love for the proletariat and the most hatred for class enemies; also, they maintain a dependable consistency in terms of their personalities, revolutionary spirits, Communist belief, and loyalty to the CCP and Chairman Mao. They are mature proletarian revolutionaries from their first entrances, and the difficulties they encounter do not have any impact on them except to confirm their revolutionary determination. Class traits are significant for these characters, as the absolute majority of the scripts identify the proletarian family history of the principal heroes/heroines, thus confirming that they are from the lowest of the low. Yang Zirong is born to a landless peasant family, Li Yuhe used to be an apprentice worker, Fang Haizhen starts work as a coal shoveler before the Liberation, Yan Weicai tells the story of his mother, a proletarian, being killed by Americans and Nationalists, Hong Changqing is born to a sailor's family, Zhao Yonggong used to be a miner before joining the army, Jiang Shuiying is from a poor peasant's family, Ke Xiang is born to a coal worker family and loses all her relatives in a fire deliberately set by a mine owner, and Lu Changhai is a son of poor fisher-folk.

Accompanying the principal heroes/heroines on their journeys is a large group of other positive characters, which can be further divided into three subcategories: mature supporting positive characters, positive characters experiencing personal growth, and positive characters in groups. The mature supporting positive characters are determined comrades and active supporters of the principal heroes/heroines: some cooperate with them in critical actions, and others provide resolute support in spirit, materials, or both. In each play, there is at least one such character: Chief of Staff in *Tiger Mountain*, Granny Li in *The Red Lantern*, Granny Sha in *Shajiabang*, Gao Zhiyang in *On the Docks*, Aunt Choe in *White-Tiger Regiment*, Company Commander in *The Red Detachment of Women*, Granny Zhang in *Fighting on the Plain*, Uncle Ajian in *Song of the Dragon River*, Granny Du in *Azalea Mountain*, and Granny Zeng in *Boulder Bay*. Some other positive characters experience major changes during the development of the plot. They grow from proletarians with no or limited understanding of the CCP and its revolution into revolutionaries with a clear vision of the struggles and firm beliefs in the CCP. Some of their early choices cause obstacles or reversals for the principal heroes/heroines in fulfilling their tasks; the process of their personal growth sometimes contributes significantly

to dramatic tension. These characters include Li Yongqi and Chang Bao in *Tiger Mountain*, Tiemei in *The Red Lantern*, Han Xiaoqiang in *On the Docks*, Li Zhitian in *Song of the Dragon River*, Wu Qinghua in *The Red Detachment of Women*, Lei Gang in *Azalea Mountain*, and Qiaolian in *Boulder Bay*. The rest of the positive characters often appear in groups, such as soldiers, peasants, workers, and poor people, and may not have individual names. They have few lines and rarely sing but often play important roles in travel scenes and combat scenes.

The third major category encompasses negative characters. They are the targets of the CCP's series of struggles: during the Second Civil War (1927–1937), as in *Azalea Mountain* and *The Red Detachment of Women*, the targets are local despots, the Nationalist Party, and its troops; in the War of Resistance against Japan (1937–1945), as in *The Red Lantern*, *Fighting on the Plain*, and *Shajiabang*, the primary enemies are Japanese invaders, though other targets include the Nationalist Party and its troops, as well as local bandits; in *Tiger Mountain*, which takes place during the War of Liberation (1945–1949), the revolution focuses on local bandits, the Nationalist Party, and its troops; *White-Tiger Regiment*, during the Korean War (1950–1953), has as the enemy both Americans and South Koreans; in the 1960s, with *On the Docks*, *Song of the Dragon River*, and *Boulder Bay*, the villains are well-disguised Chinese enemies who hate the new China, the Nationalist Party, and its troops. The moral opposites of the principal heroes/heroines, these negative characters are depicted as brutal, lusty, malicious, greedy, amoral, corrupt, and, sometimes, devious.

Character categorization is a primary step of characterization in model *jingju*, and, as Richard King concisely points out, it intricately associates with the effort to portray “typical people in typical circumstances” in the special context of “The Basic Task.”¹⁶ “Typical characters, in their Cultural Revolution manifestations, were entirely exemplary. . . . The typical circumstances in which they emerged were the product of the struggles or contradictions in the party’s official reading of the history of the Chinese Revolution in the Mao era, that is, the years since the early revolutionary activities of Mao Zedong.”¹⁷ In the practice of playwriting, this typicality is conveyed through realizing the Three Prominences, through negotiating principal heroes’/heroines’ individual with universal qualities, and by granting principal heroes/heroines greater agency in literary and musical narrative in confrontations with the negative.

Principal heroes’/heroines’ typicality, as King pinpoints, places the emphasis on them being exemplary of the qualities attributed to other positive characters, and therefore the negotiation between principal heroes’/heroines’ individual and universal qualities manifests in the relationship and interaction between the two groups of characters. It was raised to the level of “one of dialectical unity:” “While the principal hero is one of the [proletarian] class and one of the masses, he is at the

16. King, “Typical People in Typical Circumstances,” 185–204.

17. *Ibid.*, 200–202.

same time the representative of his class and the masses. The masses are the basis from which the hero springs, and the hero sets an example for the masses. It is only from a heroic collective that a great hero emerges.”¹⁸ Based on this explanation, certain specific rules were derived from the creative experience:

In portraying the principal hero, while we must not alienate him from the masses, we must, however, make him stand head and shoulders above the masses. When we create a heroic image towering above the ordinary positive characters, we must also create a group of heroes who form the basis of the principal hero’s existence and on whom the principal hero exerts his influence. However, the two must not be of one and the same stature. When portraying the ordinary positive characters we must give the principal hero primary consideration. Such portrayals must set off the principal hero with ordinary positive characters, who are not allowed to steal his show. On the other hand, we should on no account belittle the masses in order to show off the principal hero as a “superman,” “a crane among a brood of chickens.”¹⁹

Scene 4 of *Tiger Mountain* is believed to be “the most typical example in which Yang Tzu-jung [Yang Zirong] is set off by other characters.”²⁰ In this scene, Yang Zirong, Chief of Staff, and other soldiers draw up a plan for taking Tiger Mountain. During a process of investigation, deliberation, and brainstorming, the strategy of sending someone to infiltrate the enemy’s lair in disguise—and Yang is the ideal candidate—is proposed, by coincidence, by three separate groups: Chief of Staff, Yang himself, and other soldiers after their group meeting. At the end, Chief of Staff indicates that the plan is pending approval from a party branch committee meeting, therefore emphasizing the message that “Yang Tzu-jung [Yang Zirong] draws inexhaustible strength from the party leadership and his comrades-in-arms.”²¹ Later, this message is confirmed in Scene 8: Yang has been on the mountain for seven days and has collected the needed information. But as he is ready to send out the intelligence, the local bandit, suspecting Yang’s real identity, decides to put him to the test. At this dramatic moment filled with tension and suspense, anticipating a critical plot reversal, the principal hero delivers the core aria; the lyrics of the opening section reinforce the message of the party leadership and the significance of his comrades’ support:

Yang:
 (Offstage sings “*er huang dao ban.*”)²²
 Hacking through thorns and thistles,
 I battle in the heart of the enemy. (*Enters.*)

18. Shanghai *Jingju* Troupe *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* Production Team, “Strive to Create the Brilliant Images of Proletarian Heroes,” 69.

19. *Ibid.*, 69–70.

20. *Ibid.*, 70.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Er huang* is the mode of this aria. *Dao ban*, along with the *hui long* and *man ban* in the following parentheses, are all metrical types.

(Changes to “*hui long*.”)

When I look into the distance and think of my
Comrades-in-arms, the army and the people, waiting for the signal
To attack these wolves, my spirits soar.

(Changes to “*man ban*.”)

The Party places great hopes on me,
Comrades at the Party branch committee meeting offer weighty advice.
Their many exhortations give me strength,
Their flaming hearts warm my breast.²³

When confronting negative characters, principal heroes'/heroines' leading position in dramatic actions directly manifests in song lyrics and melody; this is best seen in the trio sung by Sister Aqing, Hu Chuankui, and Diao Deyi in Scene 4 of *Shajiabang*. The dramatic situation is the very first meeting of the principal heroine and two major negative characters: Sister Aqing needs to figure out why Hu and Diao have come to Shajiabang and how long they will stay, Diao tries to determine Sister Aqing's background and identity, and Hu has trouble understanding why the other two are testing each other. In this trio, each character's narration of inner thoughts alternates with those of others, yet is not overheard. It is an extended application of *beigong* (back-to-back), a convention widely used in traditional *jingju*, though usually employed with only two characters.

Diao: This woman is quite out of the ordinary.

Sister Aqing: What dirty tricks is Diao Deyi up to?

Hu: This fellow Diao simply gives me no face.

Sister Aqing: This silly fool is useful for keeping off the wind.

...

Diao: She's neither humble nor pushy.

Sister Aqing: He's both sinister and crafty.

Hu: What can Diao Deyi be driving at?

Sister Aqing: Whom are they working for, Jiang or Wang?²⁴

Diao: I'll sound her out in a roundabout way.

Sister Aqing: I must watch his every move and not fall into his trap.²⁵

Creators of this trio state that, “in this ‘*beigong*,’ the three characters respectively focus on their own inner thoughts, so this trio is actually three monologues happening at the same time. But their thoughts arise from observations of and inspirations from each other, so that the thoughts are also connected. [In musical composition, t]his trio is treated as a duet, and in fact, it is a special duet, a modified version of

23. “Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy” Group of the Peking Opera Troupe of Shanghai, rev., *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy: A Modern Revolutionary Peking Opera* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1971), 39–40.

24. Jiang refers to Jiang Jieshi, the commander-in-chief of the Nationalists; Wang refers to Wang Jingwei, the head of the Japanese puppet government.

25. Peking Opera Troupe of Peking, rev., *Shachiapang: A Modern Revolutionary Peking Opera* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1972), 18–19.

Coda

In Barbara Mittler's *A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture*, firsthand interviews with acknowledged artists, writers, and scholars, as well as forty anonymous interviewees with different personal backgrounds, offer invaluable insights into drastically different aesthetic experiences with model works. Some people directly connect it to disastrous memories, as a musician born during the 1930s states, "The model works are a reminder of this very hard and very bitter time. We heard them from where we were locked up in those 'cowsheds,' and we found this extremely difficult to bear."¹ Some acknowledge model *jingju* as an important phase in the *jingju* history, as an intellectual born in 1958 comments, "The model works are, of course, a real step forward in the development of Beijing Opera insofar as they popularized the form and gave it an important push."² Some are passionate about model *jingju*, like a *guqin* player born in the 1940s who says, "The revolutionary Beijing Operas are a continuation of tradition, in terms of structure. They are just like traditional opera, using the same meters and all that—*daoban*, *erliu*, etc. Of course there is change, innovation. But the basis is really quite traditional, and the changes are made to fit the tradition."³ And some focus on the changes in model *jingju*, as a photographer born in 1960 argues, "Of course, the model operas are reformed Beijing Operas, but their nature, the way they are being performed, is really not at all the same. . . . With Jiang Qing's model operas, even if you have a very low cultural level, you are able to understand them."⁴

People's aesthetic experiences with model works—including model *jingju*—and their corresponding interpretations, though drastically different, all confirm one important issue: these works encapsulated, prescribed, and popularized a distinctive aesthetic and style. Different times produce not only different aesthetics but also different communications of aesthetics, and, therefore, in examining the aesthetics in model *jingju*, I focus on the nature and expression of beauty. In this coda, I address three interrelated questions in creating model *jingju*: Did the notion

1. Mittler, *Continuous Revolution*, 39.

2. Ibid., 56.

3. Ibid. *Guqin* is an ancient Chinese instrument of the zither family.

4. Ibid.

of beauty matter during the creative process? What is considered beautiful and therefore aesthetically favored? And how is this sense of beauty communicated? I highlight two dominant aesthetic qualities in model *jingju*: the beauty of the sublime and the beauty of masculinity, and analyze imbalance as a primary aesthetic feature in two spheres: gender representation and aesthetic expectations. Finally, I propose that the deep roots of the imbalance in model *jingju* lie in the varied levels of association among the three traditional aesthetic principles—conventionalization, stylization, and synthesis—and each of the five major artistic aspects—playwriting, acting, music, design, and directing, and that, ultimately, the overarching creative directive, the Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism, was a flawed premise for model *jingju*.

Conscious Pursuit of Beauty

One could assume that, in productions with proletarians—the poorest of the poor—as protagonists, and in productions with such a strong political orientation as model *jingju*, beauty would be the last thing considered. But I argue that these plays were developed within the context of a conscious and meticulous pursuit of beauty. Jiang Qing's communications to the production team of *Tiger Mountain*, which served as directives for revisions, provide revealing information. On 24 June 1965, Jiang discussed the production in detail, scene by scene, with regard to problems to be solved and elements that she found less than satisfying. Although her feedback was delivered in an arbitrary rather than organized manner, this long talk straightforwardly addressed the notion of “beauty” (*mei*) as an important element in her deliberations.

Numerous comments applied directly to acting: “the performance of bayonet-fighting needs to be refined to the level of art [*yishu*]”;⁵ “the combat in the skiing scene is not acceptable; it is simply not beautiful [*mei*]”;⁶ “when Yang Zirong practices his martial art, it can be shorter, but his performance should be appealing and it should be beautiful [*mei*]”;⁷ and “in the final combat scene, the soldiers should perform splendid [*piaoliang*] techniques.”⁸ Music was another focus of her attention, as when, for example, she stated that “the melody of Yang Zirong's arias can borrow some melody of *wusheng* roles. *Wusheng* melody sounds handsome [*yingjun*]; it sounds too rigid now.”⁹ The talk also covered costumes. She observed, “Vulture's costumes should be prettier [*piaoliang*].”¹⁰ With regard to the *mise-en-scène*, her comment on Scene 1 was “thirteen soldiers are enough, otherwise the image will be

5. “Jiang Qing tongzhi lun wenyi,” 127.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, 138.

8. *Ibid.*, 139.

9. *Ibid.*, 128.

10. *Ibid.*, 140.

too crowded . . . the composition of the final *liangxiang* is good-looking [*piaoliang*]; it looks comfortable.”¹¹

In these suggestions, enhancing the “beauty” in acting called for refinement of movement and better performance of techniques; the “handsome” in music described the temperament of Yang Zirong’s musical imagery, the “prettiness” of Vulture’s costumes required better fabric(s) and color(s), and the “good-looking” composition in the *mise-en-scène* referred to the balance and harmony in stage image composition. Although the exact meaning of “beauty” was never definitively theorized or defined, Jiang’s comments and suggestions indicated a strong passion for an elevated artistic level that would greatly enhance both visual and aural audience appreciation.

The significance of Jiang, a highest authority over literary and artistic creation, calling for a conscious pursuit of beauty cannot be overemphasized. Although the word “beauty” rarely appeared in any official discourse on model *jingju*, Jiang’s suggestions clearly pinpointed it as a major criterion for determining the artistic level of a production. From Mao’s 1942 “Talks” to Jiang’s “Summary” in 1966, the criteria for ideal literary and artistic work were, in Mao’s words, “a unity of politics and art, a unity of content and form, a unity of revolutionary political content and the highest artistic form possible,”¹² and, in Jiang’s words, “the unity of revolutionary political content and the best possible artistic form.”¹³ Jiang’s directives on revisions reveal that, given the prerequisite of satisfying the criterion for “political content,” beauty was at least one of the central issues in the effort to create the highest and best possible artistic form.

Interestingly, this conscious pursuit of beauty echoes the basic aesthetic value in traditional *jingju*; as Elizabeth Wichmann theorizes, “Everything within the world of the play must above all be beautiful.”¹⁴ Indeed, beauty is the key in the *jingju* world: “In training schools and rehearsal halls, the criticism heard with much the greatest frequency, directed at song, speech, dance-acting, and combat alike, is that the particular sound or action being performed is incorrect because it is not beautiful. And the highest praise that can be given a performance is to say that it is beautiful. Ultimately, beauty as an aesthetic value connotes conformance to the aesthetic aim and principles of Beijing opera—anything that is not within the aesthetic parameters of Beijing opera is not beautiful within that world.”¹⁵

The parallel of attention to the issue of beauty in model *jingju* and traditional *jingju* invites further thought. On the level of abstract conceptualization, it indicates that “beauty” transcends ideology and politics. Xu Fude, a designer for *Tiger Mountain* and *On the Docks*, believes that this is nothing but a natural choice.

11. *Ibid.*, 129.

12. McDougall, *Mao Zedong’s “Talks,”* 78.

13. “Summary,” 33.

14. Wichmann, *Listening to Theatre*, 2.

15. *Ibid.*, 3.

“The reason is very simple: no matter the social class, beauty is always attractive. This is universal; the good-looking is simply what appeals. It cannot be replaced by anything else. For example, in the field of design, no matter whether you go with a stylized style or a realistic style, you want something beautiful.”¹⁶ On a more concrete level, however, while the attention to the issue of beauty is evident in both traditional *jingju* and model *jingju*, the essential qualities and artistic expressions of beauty may not be the same in each. For example, Jiang’s specific suggestions regarding acting and music in *Tiger Mountain* emphasize that Yang Zirong and the PLA soldiers, though portrayed with techniques and elements partly borrowed from traditional practice, should appear different from traditional characters yet still be artistically appealing. It is this difference that contributes to the essential qualities and unique expressions of beauty in model *jingju*.

Two Striking Aesthetic Qualities

In model *jingju*, what I will call “the beauty of the sublime” and “the beauty of masculinity” are strikingly prominent. The beauty of the sublime transcends the mundane issues and concerns of individual commoners, foregrounds the interests of a much larger group of human beings, and passionately praises the devotion of an individual to lofty ideals and higher causes. It manifests primarily in the general motivations and specific actions of the principal heroes/heroines.

These stories of proletarian heroes/heroines fulfilling impossible tasks are reflections of the overall goal: the liberation of all mankind from oppression, a motif elevating the heroes/heroines above the quotidian. In *Tiger Mountain*, Yang Zirong’s lyrics announce that he wishes to “Let the red flag fly all over the world, / Be there seas of fire and a forest of knives, I’ll charge ahead. / How I wish I could order the snow to melt, / And welcome in spring to change the world of men.”¹⁷ Li Yuhe declares on his execution ground in *The Red Lantern* that “I long to soar like an eagle to the sky, / Borne on the wind above the mountain passes / To rescue our millions of suffering countrymen— / Then how gladly would I die for the revolution.”¹⁸ In *Shajiabang*, Guo Jianguang confidently affirms that “With battle drums rumbling and the red flag unfurled, / We’ll recapture the region south of the Yangtze at one stroke.”¹⁹ Fang Haizhen, in *On the Docks*, asserts that “to serve the people of China and the world whole-heartedly and entirely. That is our highest ideal.”²⁰ In *White-Tiger Regiment*, Yan Weicai swears, “We pledge ourselves to fight to the finish to defend the eastern outpost of socialism, for the victory of the Chinese and Korean

16. Xu Fude, personal interview, Shanghai, 25 May 2005.

17. “Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy” Group of the Peking Opera Troupe of Shanghai, *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, 21.

18. China Peking Opera Troupe, *The Red Lantern*, 35.

19. Peking Opera Troupe of Peking, *Shachiapang*, 28.

20. “On the Docks” Group of the Peking Opera Troupe of Shanghai, *On the Docks*, 38.

people. We shall win glory for the motherland!”²¹ Jiang Shuiying argues in *Song of the Dragon River* that the interest of the proletariat should always enjoy a higher priority than that of any individual, so that by “burying imperialists, revisionists, and anti-revolutionaries, all mankind can be liberated.” In *The Red Detachment of Women*, Hong Changqing argues that “only by liberating all mankind may the proletarian liberate themselves.” Zhao Yonggang confirms in *Fighting on the Plain* “with power of the people’s war, we welcome a magnificent new China.” In *Azalea Mountain*, after recalling the tragic death of her entire family, Ke Xiang describes her maturation as follows, “Like a sudden storm the Autumn Harvest Uprising, / A bright lamp to show the way, lit up my heart. / I saw we must take up arms to win liberation; / I joined the army, the Party, to fight for the poor.”²² Lu Changhai in *Boulder Bay*, wounded yet determined to capture pirates in collusion with the Nationalists in Taiwan, rhetorically states, “To cleanse this globe for a bright sunlit future today we must wipe out all pests and monsters.”²³

With the grand vision of the ultimate liberation of all mankind, the principal heroes/heroines undertake daunting tasks with tremendous bravery and wisdom. For the oppressed and exploited, they have the most profound empathy; for class enemies, they have the utmost hatred. They are extremely calm and wise in harrowing situations; when put at risk, they never hesitate to sacrifice anything, including life, to achieve their goals. To their fellow comrades, they are most patient, warm, and considerate; when confronting their enemies, they do not give an inch. Their courage, wisdom, bravery, and capability are superior to those of all other characters. They are not only soldiers fighting for an ideal world for all mankind but also models of revolutionary perfection.

The beauty of the sublime as an aesthetic quality in model *jingju* is directly related to what Mao Zedong advocated in his 1942 “Talks”: “literature and art in conceptualized form” satisfy people better than those in their natural form, because “while both are beautiful, literature and art that have been processed are more organized and concentrated than literature and art in their natural form; they are more typical and more idealized, and therefore have greater universality.”²⁴ After revisions during the 1950s, Mao’s remark became even more explicit when quoted in Jiang’s “Summary” in February 1966, “Life as reflected in works of literature and art can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer to the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life.”²⁵ Positioned on this higher plane, principal heroes/heroines personify all qualities of ideal proletarian revolutionaries, and they are characterized as spiritual nobility.

21. Shantung Provincial Peking Opera Troupe, “Raid on the White-Tiger Regiment,” *Chinese Literature* 3 (1973): 33.

22. Wang, *Azalea Mountain*, 16.

23. Ah Chien, “Boulder Bay,” *Chinese Literature* 4 (1976): 113.

24. McDougall, *Mao Zedong’s “Talks,”* 70.

25. “Summary,” 37.

Favoring the sublime, or transcending the issues and concerns in the daily lives of commoners and advocating devotion to higher considerations, provides an intriguing contrast to traditional *jingju*, in which characters, whether aristocrats or beggars, are portrayed with a somewhat worldlier approach. Traditionally, characters live in the mundane world in which abstract notions such as politics, justice, and morality are often interpreted and depicted through conflicts in a character's personal life, through interactions within the private sphere, and through solutions supported by earthly philosophy. In this world, interpersonal relationships manifest in the interactions among particular individuals: characters are constructed through their relationships with friends, sworn brothers/sisters, family members, employees, rivals, and enemies. Among all these relationships, family, including its related obligations, serves as the fundamental concept and the basic unit for all of an individual's social relations. In a way, there is no essential difference between a military general's loyalty to the emperor and a servant giving up his life for his master. The former is devoted to the father of the country, the latter to the emperor of his household. Although this parameter does not deprive traditional *jingju* of characters with outstanding courage, wisdom, bravery, or capability, it must be noted that, except for gods, characters answering higher calls—such as the ultimate meaning of life—are rare. Compared to the principal proletarian heroes/heroines of noble spirit in model *jingju*, traditional characters, even the nobility, are more often portrayed as involved primarily with the mundane concerns of their families or personal lives.

In model *jingju*, the beauty of the sublime is intricately associated with a perceived beauty in masculinity. In pursuing the spirit of a new era in which the once-oppressed proletarians are now in charge, the beauty of masculinity as an aesthetic quality manifests in both an accentuated manliness for positive male characters and in increased masculine elements in female character portrayal. For the principal heroes/heroines, the loftiness and purity of their convictions are substantiated by the physical forcefulness conveyed in each aspect of performance.

Yang Zirong in *Tiger Mountain* is an excellent example of a principal hero. As noted in Yang's costume and makeup renderings, he must be "young, vigilant, forceful, serious, tall and strong, and neat."²⁶ Yang's singing style is "vigorous, bright, unostentatious, and genuine."²⁷ His speech is always resolute, his dance-acting movements vigorous and nimble. In the one-on-one combat with Vulture in the final scene, he defeats the enemy with outstanding combat skills. Using song as an important tool to convey the sense of a new era, *Tiger Mountain's* production team once contrasted Yang's song with the song in traditional *jingju*, starting with a description of the traditional practice:

26. Shanghai Jingju Tuan *Zhiqiu Weihushan* Juzu, *Geming xiandai jingju Zhiqiu Weihushan (1970 nian 7 yue yan-chuben)*, 308.

27. Shanghai Jingju Tuan *Zhiqiu Weihushan* Juzu, "Manqiangreqing qianfangbaiji," 36.

In *sheng* melody, they were fond of melodic embellishments including *man chanyin* and *man huayin* [slow glide-tone],²⁸ as well as frequent changes in dynamics; in enunciation, they were always unwilling to get rid of the old habit of using Huguang pronunciations and Zhongzhou speech-tones and rhymes.²⁹ It is not difficult to imagine that musical images “portrayed” by this singing style are inevitably graceful ladies, elegant scholars, and [are full of] old and decayed courtliness.³⁰

In contrast, “in Yang Zirong’s melody, the singing techniques—in which strength is complemented by grace, with strength being the primary method, and pauses are combined with continuity to emphasize his forcefulness and handsomeness—are used to portray his brave and vigilant personality; also used is chest voice strengthening the thickness of his vocal timbre, in order to portray his grand vision and vigorous attitude.”³¹

Tong Xiangling provided further information regarding this development process: “Originally, the lyrics in Scene 5 were rather poetic, like ‘Dazzling snow, misty fog.’ So, the composers followed the poetic style. And in my song, the melody sounded very poetic and gentle. This was really incompatible with Yang Zirong, who marches forward courageously, braving wind and snow.”³² In the search for the sense of a new era, implementing changes involved the cooperative efforts of playwrights, composers, orchestra, and actor.

In order to change this situation, the first step was that playwrights provided vivid lyrics. Later, that line became “I press through the snowy forest, spirit soaring!” Now the lyrics themselves are a vivid portrayal of the character’s forcefulness. The composer used *erhuang*-lead-in-meter set one octave above the original pitch range. In my song, for the last two written-characters, I took this farther, and sang an octave higher than the tones in the score. In 1969 when the film was produced, Yu Huiyong added the orchestra with Chinese instruments combined with Western instruments. All these contributed to Yang’s extremely powerful image.³³

Female characters in model *jingju* are—without exception—positive. These women are leaders, key supporters, and indispensable participants in the mass struggle for justice and a better life for the proletariat. They are female creators of a new order and female masters of a new era. The most thorough review of model *jingju*’s important contributions in gender representation appears in Rosemary A. Roberts’s *Maoist Model Theatre: The Semiotics of Gender and Sexuality in the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966–1976)*, in which she vigorously argues against treating

28. *Man huayin* is produced by singing a decelerating, smooth glide among pitches with very small variations.

29. Huguang pronunciations refer to the pronunciations of the dialect in the Hubei area. Zhongzhou speech-tones and rhymes refer to the speech-tones and rhyme categories of the dialect in the Henan area. They are the foundation of singing and heightened speech in traditional *jingju*.

30. Shanghai Jingju Tuan *Zhiqiu Weihushan* Juzu, “Manqiangreqing qianfangbaiji,” 35.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Tong, “Yang Zirong” *yu* Tong Xiangling, 90–91.

33. *Ibid.*, 90.

the masculinization of women as synonymous to the erasure of their femininity.³⁴ Sharing Roberts's attention to nuances in gender representation, I have proposed that female character portrayals in model *jingju* present a careful integration of toughness and gentleness, thus demonstrating a uniquely revolutionary femininity.³⁵ Paradoxically, this revolutionary femininity was realized by drawing significantly from practices and techniques that used to be assigned to male characters, then fusing them with performance elements traditionally assigned to women; these "drawing" and "fusing" activities took place in varying approaches to different aspects of performance.

The ideal singing style of female characters in model *jingju* is "vigorous, bright, guileless, and unostentatious, conveying the sense of a new era."³⁶ In performance, this style manifests in a new vocal timbre that is a combination of small-voice and big-voice, an approach to enunciation with special attention to the portrayal of characters' decisiveness, carefully executed melodic embellishments, and dynamics noticeably more forceful than their traditional counterparts. As examples in Chapter 7 illustrated, melodic techniques and melodies for traditional male roles—*xiaosheng*, *laosheng*, and even *jing*—became convenient sources of strategies that conveyed the sense of new women in a new era and were fused with female melodic techniques and melodies. Perhaps Yang Chunxia, the original performer of Ke Xiang, describes this revolutionary femininity in song most precisely: "Her [Ke Xiang's] status and personality require that her song is decisive and firm, yet mild and profound. . . . [I]t should be tough outside, gentle inside."³⁷

Compared to the adjustments in aural dimensions, even more masculine elements were integrated in the physical portrayal of female characters. In the body language of their dance-acting and combat choreography, a portion of the traditional female movement vocabulary is abandoned, and a movement vocabulary and a larger extension of movement, traditionally reserved for male characters, are sometimes used in the performance of female characters. For example, traditional basic positioning and gestures of palms, fists, and hands for male characters serve as the templates for both male and female characters in model *jingju*. For hand positioning, the one with index finger pointing out and thumb holding the tips of the middle, ring, and small fingers is the only one frequently used by all female characters. This is in significant contrast to traditional practice in which at least ten basic hand and finger gestures are frequently used,³⁸ and some master performers were able to perform more than a hundred.³⁹ That female characters in model *jingju*

34. Roberts, "Gendering the Revolutionary Body"; and *Maoist Model Theatre*.

35. Xing Fan, "Revolutionary Femininity in Performance: Female Characters in Beijing Opera Model Plays during China's Cultural Revolution," in *New Modern Chinese Women and Gender Politics: The Centennial of the End of the Qing Dynasty*, ed. Chen Ya-chen (New York: Routledge, 2014), 51–72.

36. Xiao, *Geming xiandai jingju xuechang changshi jieshao*, 3.

37. Liu, *Xiandai jingju "yangbanxi" danjue changqiang yinyue yanjiu*, 286.

38. Wan, *Xiqu shenduan biaoan xunlian fa*, 64–67; and Yu, *Zhongguo xiqu biaoan yishu cidian*, 35–39.

39. Li, "Mao's Chair," 6.

completely abandon the traditional hand gestures probably stands at one extreme of the spectrum of retained traditional movement vocabulary. But compared to movements adapted from traditional male character vocabulary for the new male characters, far fewer were borrowed from the traditional female movement vocabulary for proletarian female characters in model *jingju*.

The application of traditional male characters' movement to female characters' body language is also manifested in the much larger size of movement. In traditional repertory, particular role-subcategories require specific sizes of movement and, in general, those for female characters are smaller in size than those for male characters. For example, *yunshou* (cloud hands) is a basic movement sequence with essentially the same movement arrangement for all role-subcategories. It consists of parallel circular and independent movements of the hands and arms with accompanying movements of the neck, eyes, shoulders, and torso, all coordinated by the area between the rib cage and the top of the pelvis and involving shifts of weight back and forth between the feet. The basic movement arrangement of *yunshou* is set, but each performer needs to follow the specific movement size of his/her role-type specialization. For *jing* roles, the highest level of the right hand during the movement sequence should be higher than the performer's head. For *laosheng* roles, it should be at the level of the performer's eyebrows. For *wusheng* roles, it should be at the level of the performer's forehead. But the highest level of the right hand for *dan* roles should not be higher than the performer's nose.⁴⁰ In model *jingju*, however, women's movements are larger in size, with limb positioning straighter, and the movement size of the principal heroines is close to that of their male counterparts. In these productions, female characters, in particular the principal heroines, are not only on the same intelligence level with the principal heroes but are also equally capable physically.

Imbalance in the Expression of Beauty

Intricately linked with the beauty of the sublime and the beauty of masculinity, the two dominant aesthetic qualities, is the notion of imbalance in model *jingju*'s expression of beauty. It is a critical aesthetic feature that sets model *jingju* apart from the traditional aesthetics of the *jingju* world, in which masculinity and femininity complement each other in contributing to the harmony between the *yin* and the *yang*, and both leading and supporting roles—including those involved in fights between the honorable and the evil—apply the same aesthetic system of practices in performance. In model *jingju*, certain aspects are heavily out of proportion, and it is the consequential imbalance that results in aesthetic challenges.

The accentuated masculinity in model *jingju*, while contributing to the sense of a new era, underlines its difference in approach from traditional *jingju*, in which the

40. Zou, *Shenduanpu koujue lun*, 30–31.

beauty of femininity is the focus in the portrayal of female characters. Moreover, the beauty of femininity is equal in importance to the beauty of masculinity. In a spectrum with ultramascularity at one end and ultrafemininity at the other, the various role-subcategories in traditional *jingju* fit in different positions along this spectrum. Taken together, they contribute to a balanced picture of the feminine and the masculine. In traditional *jingju*, the portrayal of female characters must adhere to an integrated and comprehensive set of rules for acting, music, costumes, and makeup. The central purpose of this portrayal is to strengthen the femininity in both interior and exterior features of the characters. *Wudan* and *daomadan* roles, usually female warriors and female generals, are probably the least feminine among all the female characters. However, their melodies, vocal timbre, speech, body language in dance-acting movement and combat, costumes, and makeup are all executed within the parameters of the traditional set of rules for *jingju*'s female characters. Rarely do they employ artistic elements belonging to their male counterparts,⁴¹ which is a much more common practice in model *jingju*.

Associating gender identities in model works with traditional aesthetics from a semiotic perspective, Rosemary A. Roberts suggests that, "taking gender as a continuum with ultra-femininity at one extreme and ultra-masculinity at the other, what happened in the Cultural Revolution was not the erasure of gender and sexuality from public and particularly literary, discourse, but a shift of gender parameters along political lines, with the parameters for 'the revolution' shifted towards the masculine end of the gender continuum and the parameters for the 'counter revolution' shifted towards the feminine end. Within each political category, revolutionary and counter-revolutionary, relative gender differentiation was maintained."⁴² Based on this precisely drawn gender continuum, I offer further insights. "The revolution"—positive characters including principal heroes/heroines, major supporting positive characters, and revolutionary masses—are the absolute majority of the characters in model *jingju*. In the meantime, with rhymed written-characters from masculine categories dominating in their song lyrics and speech, and with accentuated manliness in the portrayal of positive male roles and increased masculine elements in the performance of female roles who are all positive, "the revolution" leans heavily toward the masculine. With this group's supremacy in both quantity and

41. When it occurs in traditional *jingju*, it is always considered an unusual touch that a performer brings to character portrayal. For example, in *The Pearl-Fire Flag* (*Zhenzhu liehuo qi*), a production about Shuangyang Princess of the Shanshan, a kingdom located in the northeastern area of the Taklamakan Desert, two female characters perform a combat sequence with movement conventions for *wusheng* and *wujing* roles. Master performer Liu Xiurong confirms that it is a unique choice to portray the princess's ethnicity. Feng Jie, *Jingju mingxiu fangtan (xubian)* [Interviews with *jingju* masters (sequel)] (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2013), 287–88. Also, master performer Bai Yuyan uses acting techniques of *wusheng* roles in *Liang Hongyu*, a production about a woman general living during the twelfth century. In an interview, Bai clearly identifies this approach as an example for "exclusively unique techniques that a good performer can handle." Feng, *Jingju mingxiu fangtan (xubian)*, 50.

42. Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre*, 23.

power, “the counterrevolution” is in no position to maintain the balance between the masculine and the feminine in model *jingju*.

In the above discussion of the two aesthetic qualities, only principal heroes/heroines appear as examples. The reason is simple: the primary mission of model *jingju* is to create proletarian heroic models, therefore the principal heroes/heroines are portrayed as the absolute and best embodiment of beauty. The rigorous aesthetic protocol regulating these principal heroes/heroines is a deviation from traditional practices in which a set of aligned aesthetics are consistently required of, and applied to, all characters, and in which both positive and negative characters conform to the same aesthetic values. In traditional *jingju*, “the characters included in each of the several role types and subcategories may be good or bad, strong or weak, intelligent or stupid.”⁴³ Elements of costumes, makeup, music, acting, scripts, and other related artistic components, used for both positive and negative roles, are conventions serving the same aesthetic principles. Differences in stage presentation only exist in the level of sophistication, with the leading roles—both positive and negative—being presented on a comparatively grander level, which may include better fabrics for costumes, more elaborate decorations on costumes, and, more importantly, oftentimes by better performers.

Even though the emphasis on leading roles in model *jingju* is not at odds with the practice in traditional *jingju*, the inconsistency in aesthetic constraints applied to the principal heroes/heroines and the negative roles characterizes the imbalance of aesthetic expectations in model *jingju*. This is perhaps most obvious in the visual dimension. In traditional *jingju*, a makeup design, or facial chart, with asymmetrical designs may signal that a character is somewhat negative or is a good person with unattractive appearance. With standard colors commonly used for all facial charts and with a consistent abstract and exaggerating style, asymmetrical patterns—even those for negative characters—conform to the same overall aesthetic as other types of facial charts. In addition, positive and negative characters wear conventional headdresses, garments, and footwear from the same traditional wardrobe, and are presented in the same wash of light on stage. In model *jingju* however, negative characters are often illuminated with follow spot lights in cold colors, the color choices for their costumes are often dark and drab, and their makeup literally paints them gray and colorless. Together with acting that usually contains few songs, comparatively less dance-acting and combat, and limited space for characterization, negative characters as a group do not exhibit the favored aesthetic qualities in model *jingju*. Unlike supporting roles in traditional *jingju*, they perform their aesthetic responsibilities by providing contrast to the principal heroes/heroines: they are expected to set off the principal heroes’/heroines’ grandness, brightness, and loftiness by being treacherous, dark, and low in a literal, visible, and direct manner.

43. Wichmann, *Listening to Theatre*, 7.

Deep Roots of the Imbalance in Aesthetic Expression

The aesthetic qualities and features discussed above—specifically, the imbalance in gender representation and aesthetic expectations in communicating the beauty of the sublime and the beauty of masculinity—have deep roots in the overarching directive for creating model *jingju*, the Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism (2RR in Combination). As introduced in Chapter 4, the 1966 “Summary” stipulates that important manifestations of Revolutionary Realism include characters and stories portraying proletarian workers, peasants, soldiers, and themes focusing on the continuous revolution led by the CCP and Mao Zedong Thought. At the core of Revolutionary Romanticism is idealism and, in particular, heroism and optimism. Many scholars have offered vigorous criticism of the 2RR in Combination. Some delve into its essence, exploring model works’ political aesthetics. For example, Li Song proposes a sharp interpretation of Revolutionary Realism: that it is “fabrication,”⁴⁴ because of its ignorance of “the logic in daily life, human psychology, and true feelings.”⁴⁵ Li further highlights three critical manifestations of Revolutionary Romanticism in model works: creations both originating from and in service of subjective political intentions, prescribed focus on the ideal in writing, and admiration of prevalent ideology that possessed a fervent passion for a utopian society.⁴⁶ Some, associating the relationship between theatre and reality with China’s surge toward modernity in the twentieth century, pinpoint the 2RR in Combination as the centralized prescription under which the pursuit of modernity is replaced by the pursuit of revolution. For example, the introduction of *History of China’s Contemporary Theatre: 1949–2000* concisely summarizes, “During the majority of these fifty years [1949–2000], theatre has been subservient to politics, its functions as a political instrument overpowering its artistic aesthetics and its ‘humane’ orientation either completely or partly deprived for its ‘political’ orientation.”⁴⁷ In this argument, “reality” as reflected in these theatre—including model *jingju*—is portrayed via the approach of “Pseudo-realism,”⁴⁸ thus negating the modernity in theatre created under the 2RR in Combination as the creative principle.⁴⁹ Some comb through the underrepresented genealogies of literary theories in the PRC, with special attention to the birth of and debates around the 2RR in Combination. For example, Hong Zicheng contextualizes Chinese literature from the 1950s to the 1970s within the process of cultural unification—instead of cultural diversification—with the May Fourth Movement as the beginning of the unifying tendency, and analyzes the “straightforward aestheticization of politics,”⁵⁰ namely,

44. Li, “*Yangbanxi*” de zhengzhi meixue, 195.

45. *Ibid.*, 198.

46. *Ibid.*, 198–203.

47. Dong Jian and Hu Xingliang, eds., *Zhongguo dangdai xiju shigao, 1949–2000* [History of China’s contemporary theatre: 1949–2000] (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2008), 17.

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*

50. Hong Zicheng, “Guanyu wushi zhi qishi niandai de Zhongguo wenxue” [On Chinese literature from the 1950s

“to treat ‘what it should be’ the same as ‘what it is in reality’”—embedded in the 2RR in Combination—as a primary feature of the radicals’ approach to literature from the late 1950s to the 1970s.⁵¹

Obviously, how to combine the 2RR was imperative, both to the theory itself and to practitioners. The most direct, practical advice in the 1966 “Summary” is that, “while depicting the cruelty of war, we must not exaggerate or glorify its horror. While depicting the arduousness of the revolutionary struggle, we must not exaggerate or glorify the suffering involved.”⁵² But it did not answer the question of how to accomplish the task. As the above excerpts reveal, the examinations of the 2RR in Combination as manifested in model works have paid close attention to script-based textual analysis and thematic concerns, with some reference to artistic aspects, though only treating these last as isolated topics. In this context, I propose that a three-dimensional approach—that is, how model *jingju*’s performance text works based on interactions among all artistic aspects, with each of them embracing the 2RR in Combination—will offer further insights into the intricate relations between the overarching creative method and aesthetic features of model *jingju*.

In explaining the 2RR in Combination, Zhou Yang, generally acknowledged as the most authoritative interpreter of Mao Zedong’s cultural theories, rhetorically asked in his 1960 report to the Third National Congress of Literary and Art Workers, “Is it not precisely because he is inspired by noble ideals that a proletarian revolutionary fighter braves all dangers with resolute fortitude? To us there is no limit to the task of transforming the world; today’s ideal is tomorrow’s reality.”⁵³ The focus of this approach, as Walter J. Meserve and Ruth J. Meserve argue, is that “the expression of the *ideal* which the Chinese communists believed would, by necessity, become the *real*.”⁵⁴ Both Hong Zicheng and Li Yang have noticed the significant role that symbolism plays in model works. Hong describes a “tendency of transformation from ‘to write about the reality’ to ‘to symbolize’” in the “expression, rhetoric, or, in other words, literary style” during the 1950s–1970s: “a romantic imagination of the ideal society,” which is realized through “symbolic (accompanied with passion) ‘creation’ of the imagined society, the interactions among people in this society, and the psychological states and behavioral manners of the new people in this society [the ‘proletarian heroic images’].”⁵⁵ Li, with the same identification of this transforming tendency in Chinese literature from the 1950s to the 1970s, with a growing emphasis on symbolism, links it to *jingju* being “a symbolic art,”⁵⁶ by

to the 1970s], *Wenxue pinglun* [Literature Criticism] 2 (1996): 70.

51. *Ibid.*, 71.

52. “Summary,” 36.

53. Zhou Yang, *The Path of Socialist Literature and Art in China: A Report Delivered to the Third Congress of Chinese Literary and Art Workers, on July 22, 1960* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1960), 36–37.

54. Walter J. Meserve and Ruth J. Meserve, “Revolutionary Realism: China’s Path to the Future,” *Journal of South Asian Literature* 27, no. 2 (Summer, Fall 1992): 36.

55. Hong, “Guanyu wushi zhi qishi niandai de Zhongguo wenxue,” 73.

56. Li Yang, *Kangzheng suming zhi lu: Shehuizhuyi xianshizhuyi (1942–1976) yanjiu* [A journey of fighting against fate: A study of Socialist Realism (1942–1976)] (Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe, 1993), 298.

which Li refers to *jingju's* nonrealistic style.⁵⁷ The attention to *jingju's* style is quite necessary. In artistic creation, the 2RR in Combination caused the greatest aesthetic challenge in model *jingju*, because a convincing portrayal of the *ideal* has to be somewhat *real* on the *jingju* stage. This requires that major artistic aspects need to remain somewhat true to the aesthetic principles of *jingju*—conventionalization, stylization, and synthesis—and this is the essence of maintaining the *jingju* style. However, the major artistic aspects of model *jingju* align with each of the aesthetic principles in different fashions.

Conventionalization, stylization, and synthesis are the foundation of traditional *jingju* aesthetics. “Together, these principles provide the basic fabric of Beijing opera performance—the overall patterns (*guiliu*) that characterize each aspect of Beijing opera performance, as well as the relationships among them.”⁵⁸ In model *jingju*, these principles established parameters within which innovative approaches took place. The following discussion first addresses conventionalization, the principle closely related to the most specific units and elements of practice. It then moves on to stylization, the principle that invites explorations in styles on a more comprehensive level, and finally ends with synthesis, the principle drawing special attention to the interrelationship among the various aspects of the performing art.

Jingju practices are systemized through the conventionalization of basic units for each aspect, and conventions are the most basic units of its visual, aural, and physical language. Dance-acting is based on conventions regarding the movement of hands, eyes, body, and steps, as well as those that govern the use of costume pieces such as beards, feathers, wigs, and water-sleeves in movement. Combat includes conventions of hand-to-hand fighting, the usage of weapons such as swords and spears, and acrobatic leaping and jumping. Musical accompaniment and composition deal with conventions governing the use of modes, metrical types, and percussive patterns. Dressers handle conventions of headdresses, garments, and footwear. Character portrayals are often based on role-types that are conventional categorizations. Through professional training, traditional *jingju* practitioners acquire both the knowledge of conventions in acting, music, makeup, and wardrobe, and the principles of sequencing these conventions in performance: they are then able to further rearrange these conventions in developing a character.

In creating model *jingju*, the innovative approach to traditional conventions is crystallized in Jiang Qing’s directive “Use conventions, avoid conventionalization.”⁵⁹ This directive is manifested in all major artistic aspects, and an overall pattern can be discerned: the deconstruction of the traditional system of conventions, and the liberty of selecting appropriate traditional elements and fusing them with new ones, be they borrowed from other performing arts or newly created. In practice, as discussed in Chapter 6, on the one hand, it requires a certain extent of stylized

57. *Ibid.*, 298–311.

58. Wichmann, *Listening to Theatre*, 3.

59. Shanghai *Jingju* Tuan *Zhiqū Weihushan* Juzū, “Yuanyu shenghuo gaoyu shenghuo,” 56.

refinement and an opposition to naturalistic stage presentation; on the other hand, it calls for vivid portrayals of specific dramatic actions and opposes a formalistic approach. Decisions were made on a case-by-case basis. In some cases, to deconstruct meant to destroy, and led to abandonment. In other cases, deconstruction led to breakthroughs and nurtured innovative and alternative practices. If we compare and contrast the practices in the five major artistic aspects discussed in Chapters 5–9, it is not difficult to see that, with the prioritized task of keeping a palpable *jingju* flavor, music and acting in model *jingju* embraced significantly more elements absorbed from traditional conventions than did playwriting, design, and directing.

The varying degree of traditional convention usage in different aspects of model *jingju* corresponds to the different levels of stylization among the major artistic aspects. As Elizabeth Wichmann says, “Stylization refers to the divergence between the behaviors of daily life and their presentation on the stage—that is, the representation of those behaviors in performance, within a particular style.”⁶⁰ In traditional *jingju*, all parts of performance harmonize with each other, and the prerequisite for this harmony is a similar degree of stylization in each part. In Chapters 5–9, we have already seen that the representation of daily life is indeed uplifted and refined in each aspect of model *jingju*—playwriting, acting, music, design, and directing. Yet, when compared, they present different degrees of stylization: among them, music, the most abstract by nature, is probably the most stylized; design, with information and elements necessarily specific to particular scenes and characters, and therefore much closer to daily life, is the least stylized; playwriting, acting, and directing (in particular the use of group characters and space) fall somewhere in between.

The combined use of roundness, straight lines, and angles in performance may help illustrate the “half stylization” in acting and directing. Roundness is generally identified as “the most basic physical, visually perceived characteristic of stylization” in traditional *jingju*.⁶¹ As Ouyang Yuqian maintains, “We can say that not a single dance movement in *jingju* is not round . . . and it is an art of drawing circles.”⁶² Elizabeth Wichmann further comments that “roundness applies to posture and movement, both of various parts of the body in isolation and of the entire body in or through space. Straight lines and angles are to be avoided; positive aesthetic value is perceived in the presentation of a three-dimensional network of circles, arcs, and curved lines.”⁶³ In model *jingju*, while roundness is applied to a large portion of posture and movement, the radii of the arcs are generally longer, and the radii of the arcs in female characters’ posture and movement are similar to those of male characters. More importantly, postures and movements, including those in and through space, are sometimes connected with straight lines and angles. For example, in the group skiing dance in *Tiger Mountain* (see Figures 9.1–9.5), traffic

60. Wichmann, *Listening to Theatre*, 4.

61. *Ibid.*

62. Wang Shiyong, *Xiqu danhang shenduan gong* [Movement vocabulary techniques of female characters in *xiqu*] (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2003), 18.

63. Wichmann, *Listening to Theatre*, 4.

patterns are a combination of circles, arcs, curved lines, straight lines, and angles. In general, the bigger curves, straight lines, and angles in performance help to portray the decisiveness and bravery of the characters, an urgent situation, or the swiftness of stage actions.

In model *jingju*, we see the result of synthesis—similar to that in traditional *jingju*—in which “song and speech in performance occur simultaneously with the dance-like movement of the performer; dance-acting and combat are interwoven on the stage with melodic and/or percussive accompaniment.”⁶⁴ When major artistic aspects are put together in model *jingju*, however, their interrelationship becomes a multifaceted, complex issue. The artistic aspects do not interact with each other in a consistent fashion.

The opposing notions regarding the interrelationship between acting and design in Scene 5 of *Tiger Mountain*, as introduced in Chapter 8, address the issue of compatibility between the two artistic components. In this travel scene, Yang Zirong, on his way up to Tiger Mountain, performs dance-acting sequences with movement vocabulary drawn from traditional *jingju*, military movements, folk dance, and refined horse-riding movements. In an empty space occupying approximately two-thirds of the stage, his performance takes place in front of a two-dimensional soft flat with a painting of a forest; on the cyclorama are the projected still images of the sky and the faraway mountains. For some critics, the realistic images of mountains and forests aesthetically conflict with the stylized dance movement sequences on stage. But for designers, this scenery does not conflict with acting because ample space is purposefully left for the travel scene. The opposing arguments, as Chapter 8 points out, highlight two different aspects of scenic design in model *jingju*, whose overall purpose was to ensure both a realistic impression and ample performance space for the actors. But the real question goes beyond the one specific scene: with ample space for acting granted by the scenery, can the close-to-realistic scenic style allow a *consistently neutral aesthetic* space that embraces the more stylized acting throughout the production? I argue that the answer is no, because the interaction between acting and design in *Tiger Mountain* varies in degree throughout the production.

In scenes with mostly indoor action, such as Scene 3 and Scene 7, in a small log cabin in the former and at Li Yongqi's home in the latter, the close-to-realistic stage designs do not do much more than allow the actors to inhabit convincing portrayals of the characters' locales. In Scene 5, however, the design accomplishes more functions. The visual experience of observing the still images on the cyclorama—the sky and the faraway mountains—and the two-dimensional soft flat with a painting of a forest directly reinforces the setting (locale, season, and environment) noted in the script (see Plate 8.2). More importantly, even though an audience member may not consciously relate the images to romanticism, the scenery visually conveys nature's

64. Ibid.

grandness. There is no doubt that these images specify and clarify the dramatic spirit of the scene, and also offer an identifiable—and circumscribed—aesthetic space on stage.

And, in Scene 8, the stage design has even more significance and consequence. Yang Zirong delivers the production's core aria at the beginning of this scene. Alone at the enemy's headquarters, the principal hero is under a severe time constraint, yet an unforeseen situation warns him that a trap has been set. In this impossible situation, Yang is cautious, calm, and determined. The enemies are tricky, but he will push on with courage and wits. The task is extremely dangerous, but Yang handles it with extraordinary bravery. The path is long, but the future is bright: the principal hero convinces us that the task will be successfully fulfilled, and that nothing and no one can stop him. After a short opening section, which is quoted in Chapter 5, the protagonist continues singing:

(Changes to "kuai san yan.")

I must never forget to be bold yet cautious,
And succeed through courage and wits.
The Party's every word is victory's guarantee,
Mao Zedong Thought shines forever.

(Changes to "yuan ban.")

Tiger Mountain is indeed heavily fortified
With forts above and tunnels below.
The leadership's decision to use strategy is right,
A direct attack would mean heavy losses.
After seven days here I know the disposition well,
I have the secret report concealed on my person.
Now at daybreak, pretending to take a stroll, I'll send it out . . . (Notices
something.)

Why have the guards suddenly been increased?
Something's up.
This message—
If I don't get this message out,
I'll miss the opportunity and ruin our attack plan,
And let the people and the Party down.

(Changes to "er liu.")

Lunar New Year's Eve is fast approaching.
I mustn't hesitate, I must push on,
Though the grass be knives and the trees swords,
Down to the foot of the slope.
What though the mountain be tall?
Standing in the cold and melting
The ice and snow, I've the morning sun in my heart.⁶⁵

65. "Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy" Group of the Peking Opera Troupe of Shanghai, *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, 39–40.

In the Chinese language, “morning” and “sun” are the last two written-characters of the aria; the melody of these written-characters alludes to the song “The East Is Red” (“Dong fang hong”), “arguably the most famous hymn on Mao Zedong.”⁶⁶ Barbara Mittler vividly describes the stage presentation of this moment: “The phrase culminates into a rising glissando in strings and winds concluding with the ascending, more and more transcendent sounds of the glockenspiel. Mao’s apotheosis in musical terms is further underlined by Yang’s wide-open shining eyes and the reddening of the sky in the background.”⁶⁷ Instrument schedules and electrician’s cue sheets indicate that the effect of “reddening of the sky” involves at least ten major lighting instruments. With a swift intensity change within the short time frame of the song’s last two written-characters, two instruments project a rosy, morning glow on the cyclorama, and the rest of the instruments project light smoothly on the principal hero, the stage, and the scenic pieces.⁶⁸ At this moment, the principal hero’s inner world is externalized. In addition to the aural experience of the “The east is red; the sun is rising” melody, audience members witness the morning sun in Yang’s heart made manifest through the visual effect produced by lighting instruments. Here, stage design goes far beyond regulating the aesthetic space on stage—it dominates.

Synthesizing acting and music was another major aesthetic challenge in creating model *jingju*. It was raised as an urgent issue during the creative process resulting in the first five model plays. As *Tiger Mountain*’s production team stated, “*Jingju* is a comprehensive art. In this complex of practices, dance and music (including song and orchestra) are the closest to each other. . . . In [our] creation and practices, a frequent problem is their order of priority and how to serve this order.”⁶⁹ Their strategy was to give the highest priority to song: “Among song, dance, and orchestra, dance and orchestra are secondary to song, and orchestra must accompany song and dance, instead of dominating a performance.”⁷⁰ Even though the production team explained this strategy in the context of revealing the inner world of proletarian workers, peasants, and soldiers, their order of priority—with song being the first, dance the second, and orchestra the third—was faithful to that in traditional *jingju*.

The five productions designated as models during 1973 to 1976—*The Red Detachment of Women*, *Fighting on the Plain*, *Song of the Dragon River*, *Azalea Mountain*, and *Boulder Bay*—evidence vigorous attempts to synchronize aural and physical components in performance. An overarching musicality, synchronizing song, speech, dance-acting, and combat, as well as governing interactions among characters, became the primary strategy by which to refine performance. In 1976,

66. Mittler, “Cultural Revolution Model Works and the Politics of Modernization in China,” 66.

67. *Ibid.*

68. Shanghai *Jingju* Tuan *Zhiqiu Weihushan* Juzu, *Geming xiandai jingju Zhiqiu Weihushan (1970 nian 7 yue yanchubun)*, 363–74.

69. Shanghai *Jingju* Tuan *Zhiqiu Weihushan* Juzu, “Yuanyu shenghuo gaoyu shenghuo,” 57.

70. *Ibid.*

Boulder Bay's production team proposed the concept of “the normalization of performance” (*biaoyan guifanhua*). The normalization encompassed four components: strengthened musicality in rhymed vernacular speech, increased dancing in movement patterns, uniform rhythms in stage presentation, and orderly, well-structured stage compositions.⁷¹ As Yang Jian states, “These four aspects, to put it straightforwardly, are to emphasize musicality in ‘speech,’ dance in ‘dance-acting,’ rhythm in ‘performance,’ and symmetry in ‘composition’; overall, it is to strengthen song and dance in performance.”⁷²

During normalization, a musicality that goes beyond music—combined vocal and instrumental sounds—becomes the soul in performance. As discussed in Chapter 5, rhymed vernacular speech allows smooth transitions between speech and song. In *Boulder Bay*, this particular speech pattern is treated as arias in rehearsals.⁷³ In practice, rhymed vernacular speech, mostly in couplets and with similar rhetorical devices, and nearly identical metrical rhythm in each couplet, allows a consistent musicality throughout the production. This consistency further facilitates increasing the dance in the movement accompanying speech and song. With physical movement for dance, dance-acting, and combat created and arranged with a consistent musicality, multiple characters appearing in the same scene may apply a uniform rhythm in performance. As discussed in Chapter 8, the overall directorial approach in *Azalea Mountain* was “all characters move onstage in the same rhythm.”⁷⁴ While following the same rhythm in performance, in *Boulder Bay*, positive supporting characters often collectively follow leading characters’ performance but with smaller stage-steps and simplified gestures, and negative characters often use movements in opposite directions—usually downward—to set off leading characters. Yang Jian colorfully designates the former as “the form of a myriad stars surrounding the moon” (*zhong xing peng yue shi*) and the latter as “the form of the enemies overpowered by the heroes” (*di fu wo yang shi*).⁷⁵

At this point, if we revisit Jiang Qing’s 1965 comments on *Tiger Mountain*, quoted in the first section of this chapter, we see that the “normalization in performance” proposed in 1976 offered theorized solutions to most of the challenges that creators faced a decade earlier. However, the paradoxical consequence is that, based on the deconstruction of traditional *jingju*’s convention system and the avoidance of conventionalization, the four components of normalization gave birth to a new set of conventions. Yang Jian comments that “from modern plays to [the first group of] model plays, then to the second group of model plays, it is a process

71. Shanghai Jingju Tuan *Panshiwan* Juzu [Shanghai *Jingju* Troupe *Boulder Bay* Production Team], “Nuli gesong renmin zhanzheng, suzao minbing yingxiong xingxiang” [Strive to praise people’s war; portray militiamen’s heroic images], *Renmin wenxue* [People’s Literature] 2 (1976): 26.

72. Yang Jian, “Cong ‘geming xiandai jingju’ kan chuantong xiju de zhuanxing” [Observations of the transformation of traditional theatre through “revolutionary modern *jingju*”], *Xiju* [Theatre] 3 (2003): 53.

73. Shanghai Jingju Tuan *Panshiwan* Juzu, “Nuli gesong renmin zhanzheng, suzao minbing yingxiong xingxiang,” 26.

74. Gao Mukun, personal interview, Beijing, 4 April 2005.

75. Yang, “Cong ‘geming xiandai jingju’ kan chuantong xiju de zhuanxing,” 53.

from [random] experience to [forming] patterns, from [forming] patterns to [summarizing] principles, and [finally] from [summarizing] principles to [normalizing new] conventions.”⁷⁶

In 1966, Jiang Qing assigned modern *jingju* the revolutionary task of storming the “most stubborn of strongholds” of the feudal culture: traditional *jingju*. By 1976, with the concept and theory of normalized performance, a new, solid stronghold had been established by model *jingju*. The creative experience of *Boulder Bay* was published in February 1976, eight months before the Cultural Revolution abruptly came to an end. Thereafter, there was no further development or manifestation of this performance theory. What might have happened to model *jingju*? In a discussion of Revolutionary Realism as “China’s path to the future,” Walter J. Meserve and Ruth J. Meserve offer an intriguing reflection on Tian Han’s *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* (*Shisanling Shuiku changxiangqu*), a play composed with the combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism:

The last scene is a fantasy of the Ming Tombs Reservoir when the Chinese people will be living in a communist society. The shores of the reservoir are a big garden of leafy trees and flowers. A group of Young Pioneers are listening to a woman who is telling them how she and hundreds of thousands of others did their bit in building the reservoir. But the children find it hard to understand why carry-poles and baskets had to be used to move earth when, as they well know, such work is always done by machines. Not far from the reservoir there are palatial rest homes and a station for launching rockets in which people can travel to the moon. In the communist society where everyone is living a happy life even the old men seem to become young again.⁷⁷

Walter J. Meserve and Ruth J. Meserve pinpoint a fundamental paradox here: “Tien Han’s [Tian Han] children in this scene are his projection of that future ‘communist utopia,’ doomed to the failure that has plagued all utopian societies: stagnation, i.e., the failure to generate an understanding of the past to inspire the present ‘utopia’ to maintain its existence when there are no more goals to reach and no future.”⁷⁸ In model *jingju*, the normalized performance in 1976 certainly indicates a stabilized form, with gradually conventionalized practices. Would it have led to stagnation if the Cultural Revolution—and the revolution in *jingju*—had continued? On the one hand, I beg to differ, because I have learned not to underestimate the creativity of *jingju* practitioners; on the other hand, I cannot but agree, because the overarching directive and fundamental principle of this revolution were the very obstacles that hindered its progress.

76. Ibid.

77. Meserve and Meserve, “Revolutionary Realism,” 37–38.

78. Ibid., 38.

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