THE PRE-LEFTIST ONE-ACT DRAMAS
OF TIAN HAN (1898-1968)

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of the Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

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1986
To My Husband,
Randy Bomer,
who gave me courage
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CHAPTER ONE
Tian Han and the Rise of Modern Chinese Drama

In 1968 one of the giants of the modern Chinese drama movement died unnoticed in prison, a victim of one of the many vicious purges against literary figures that was instigated by Jiang Qing and her cohorts during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Eleven years later, in a commemorative ceremony in Beijing, Tian Han's\(^1\) name was formally restored to honor, and his lifelong contributions to Chinese drama and theatre were acknowledged by the Chinese government and his surviving colleagues. Although the far-reaching effects of Tian Han's pioneering efforts

\(^1\)The pin-yin system of romanization, which is the official system of romanization used by the People's Republic of China, is the system that will be used throughout the dissertation. Pin-yin was developed by the Chinese in the late nineteen-fifties as a means of rendering Chinese pronunciation more accurately than the previously used Wade-Giles system of romanization. In August, 1977, pin-yin was adopted by the Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographic Names as "the standard international method of romanization for Chinese place names." Since that time pin-yin has also been adopted by most Western scholars, universities, and news agencies for Chinese romanization. See Frederic M. Kaplan, Julia M. Sobin, and Stephen Andors, Encyclopedia of China Today, Updated Edition (Fairlawn, New Jersey: Eurasia Press, 1980), pp. 249-50.
during the nineteen-twenties, when he first began to write dramas, have been applauded by Tian's countrymen, they have been merely noted by Western scholars, whose interests in modern Chinese drama have tended to focus more extensively on the relationship between political ideology and the performing arts in Maoist and post-Maoist China.

The goals of this study, therefore, are to expand the body of modern Chinese dramatic literature to which English speaking scholars and students have access by providing translations of nine one-act dramas written by Tian Han between 1920 and 1930 and to demonstrate wherein those works are significant and successful as adaptations of Western-style dramatic technique. The nine works under consideration, which include:

"A Night in a Cafe" (1920),
"The Night a Tiger Was Captured" (1921),
"Before Lunch" (1921),
"View of a Riverside Village" (1927),
"Night Talk in Suzhou" (1927),
"Tragedy on a Lake" (1928),
"Echoes of Ancient Pond" (1928),
"Shivers" (1929),
"Return South" (1929),

are characterized as "pre-leftist" because Tian completed them prior to joining the Chinese Communist Party and formally embracing Marxism as the guiding philosophy behind
his dramatic writing. The merit of the study can be demonstrated by placing Tian Han in the context of the history of modern Chinese drama, a survey of the scholarly work in English that addresses the subject, and a discussion of Tian's life and contributions to Chinese drama.

The history of modern Chinese drama can be roughly divided into four major periods. The first period, which lasted from 1790 to 1911, represents the establishment and subsequent development of what has come to be known in the West as classical or traditional Beijing opera. In 1790 the fourth Qing emperor, Qian Long (r. 1736-95), issued invitations to numerous regional acting companies to travel to Beijing and perform on the occasion of his eightieth birthday. The most popular of the traveling acting troupes, those from Anhui Province, excelled in acrobatics and popularized er-huang, a type of orchestration which is still used in Beijing opera. After the conclusion of the Emperor's birthday festivities, four Anhui companies, the San-qing, Chun-tai, Si-xi, and He-chun, remained in the capital city. By the 1820's all four were well established, and a fifth Anhui company, the Song-ju, had been formed. With the exception of the He-chun, which disbanded in 1850, the Anhui companies flourished and commanded substantial

followings until the demise of the Qing Dynasty. By 1911 when the Manchus were overthrown and the Chinese Republic was founded, the highly conventionalized Beijing opera or jing-xi, had matured fully. The system of dividing roles into sheng (male), tan (female), zhou (clowns), and qing (painted face) categories and complex sub-categories, detailed color symbolism, and formalized choreography and orchestrations were established. Although great actors, notably Mei Lan-fang, would make innovations in performing Beijing opera throughout the twentieth century, jing-xi is truly a product of the preceding era.

Although the second period started tentatively, it eventually became a time of intense, almost frenzied, activity and innovation. In 1907 a group of Chinese students in Tokyo founded the Spring Willow Dramatic Society (Qun-liu she) for the express purpose of performing Western-style huo-chu. In the same year the group's adaptation of Uncle Tom's Cabin, entitled The Negro Slave Sighs to Heaven, enjoyed a brief but successful run, first in Tokyo and later

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4 Literally, "drama of the capital."

5 A.C. Scott, Mei Lan Fung: Leader of the Pear Garden (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1959), pp. 63-4.

6 Literally, "talking drama" or "spoken drama." The term was used to distinguish Western-style drama from the operatic jing-xi.
in Shanghai. Thereafter, numerous short-lived companies tried their hands at performing the new drama or *wen-ming xi* but without much success. *Wen-ming xi* were invariably poorly written, "a torrent of yelling and complaint against social evils [followed by] the exposure and the cold but undramatic analysis of the social evil concerned, often in the form of a sermon." As a result of the badly conceived scripts, which were often merely scenarios upon which actors improvised, and the actors' notorious lack of discipline, Western drama was slow to achieve popularity.

Serious Western drama found an advocate, however, in Chen Du-xiu, the founder-editor of *Xin qing-nian* (New

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8 Literally, "civilized drama." According to James D. Lehman, the term was coined by sarcastic audiences as an epithet in response to productions that were often poor. The prominent Chinese playwright Cao Yu is said to have considered *wen-ming xi* to be "dramatic abortions." See Lehman, "The Rise of Modern Drama in China From Ou-yang Yu-chien to Ts'ao Yu," unpublished Master's thesis (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University, 1977), pp. 7-8. See also Ou-yang Yu-qian, "Dan wen-ming xi" ("On Civilized Drama"), *ibid.*., pp. 48-109.


Youth). From its inception in 1915 the magazine championed the adoption of a serious modern vernacular literature. During its first two years of publication Xin qing-nian featured translations of plays by Oscar Wilde as well as editorials by Chen in which he proclaimed Henrik Ibsen to be one of the world's greatest writers and predicted that realism would be the literary style of the future. By 1920 Xin qing-nian had published vernacular translations of A Doll's House, Enemy of the People, and Little Eyolf, as well as of plays by Chekhov, Strindberg, Gorky, Lady Gregory, and David Pinsky.

From 1915 until 1930 dozens of literary magazines similar to Xin qing-nian flourished. Some, like Min-duo (1916-1929), were fairly long-lived; others, like Chuang-zao ri (Creation Daily), lasted only a few months. Some supported Chen Du-xiu's championing of realism, and others were committed to romanticism as the wave of the Chinese literary future. All, however, were adamant in their demand for a modern Chinese literature that could proudly be compared to its Western counterpart in its capacity to reach and uplift the common people.

11 Chen was also the leader of the Marxist study group that became the Chinese Communist Party in 1921.

The men who would become China's important playwrights were returning to their homeland from their studies abroad as the literary renaissance was accelerating. Hong Shen arrived with an undergraduate degree from Ohio State University and a master's degree from Harvard, where he had studied playwriting under George Pierce Baker. Xiong Fo-xi returned to China with a graduate degree from Columbia University, where he had also studied drama. Ou-yang Yu-qian and Tian Han had both studied in Japan; Ou-yang graduated from Waseda University in Tokyo with a degree in literature, and Tian studied education at the Tokyo Higher Normal School. As their fellow novelists and poets had done, the youthful playwrights set about publishing periodicals devoted to drama, establishing theatre companies, teaching, directing, and introducing and implementing the theories they had learned abroad. Thus, they all fanned the flames of the literary enthusiasm then current.

The establishment of the League of Left Wing Writers in 1930 marks the end of the second period and the onset of the third, which was characterized by the development of leftist and ultimately Communist literature. The seeds of politically influenced literature had, of course, been sown during the preceding decade, and several left-wing literary figures had become active prior to 1930. In 1924, for example, Guo Mo-ro, the famous poet and dramatist, left the
"art for art's sake" romanticists in order to serve the Marxist literary cause, proclaiming, in the aftermath of his conversion, that all literature based on theories other than socialism was "trivial."\(^{13}\) During those early years, however, the choice to serve leftist politics was not foisted upon authors by social or political organizations. When a writer made a commitment to leftist literature, the decision was the outcome of that individual's personal choice.

The League of Left Wing Writers, founded on February 16, 1930, was similar to a writers' union. It was not, however, established in order to protect authors from unscrupulous publishers but was created for the sole purpose of promoting proletarian literature. Although the League met with some opposition, notably from a counter-organization called the Chinese National Literature Movement, most Chinese intellectuals supported the League and soundly trounced the opposition. In 1931 a sister organization, the League of Left Wing Dramatists, was established with Tian Han's assistance.\(^{14}\) The remaining years of the 'thirties were primarily given over to


squabbling amongst prominent Chinese writers as to the most appropriate slogan for their new literary cause. At one time or another, "National Defense Literature," "Mass Literature of the National Revolutionary Struggle," and "Literature for the Villages and for the Army" were all considered and used.

While the writers were bickering, the playwrights were producing. One historian estimates that over fifteen hundred plays were written between 1931 and 1944.\(^{15}\) Although the dramatists of the period were fruitful in terms of the sheer volume of works produced, most of their dramas were, nonetheless, limited in scope. Surveys of Chinese drama in the late nineteen-thirties and early 'forties reveal a preponderance of variations on the same theme as the writers struggled to keep their materials within the parameters of the political requirements of the day and the fashionable slogan of the moment.\(^{16}\)

In 1942 Mao Ze-dong's Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art cemented the relationship between the arts and politics permanently. The Talks were intended as a disciplinary measure to the numerous artists and writers who


\(^{16}\) Ibid.; see also Su Hsueh-lin, "Present Day Fiction and Drama in China," in Joseph Schyns, et al., 1500 Modern Chinese Novels and Plays, Reprint Edition (Hong Kong: Lung Men Bookstore, 1966), pp. XXXVI-LVI.
had fled occupied Shanghai and come to the revolutionary base at Yenan. Although many of those intellectuals paid lip service to Marxist ideology, the truth was that most of them had become spoiled by and accustomed to the comparatively lax literary atmosphere that prevailed in cosmopolitan Shanghai. They supported Mao's revolution in theory but assumed that they would retain the right to criticize the shortcomings of the Chinese Communist Party. Some, like Wang Shi-wei, Xiao Chun, and Ai Qing, went so far as to insist that art could and should exist independently of politics.\(^\text{17}\)

Without mentioning specific names Mao hinted that certain comrades, as a result of their "lack of elementary political knowledge," were harboring all manner of "muddled ideas,"\(^\text{18}\) such as the notion that literature should be based on an understanding of humanity. In what would become the Bible of Chinese artistic criticism, Mao posited the dictum, "there is no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes, or art that is detached from or independent of politics."\(^\text{19}\) Henceforth, the responsibility of revolutionary artists in the new Chinese state would be


\(^{19}\)Ibid., p. 25.
essentially twofold: first, to create a "pure" Chinese art for the workers, peasants, and soldiers by concentrating on the development of indigenous Chinese art forms rather than the importation of Western forms, and second, to expose and denounce "dark forces harming the masses," while simultaneously glorifying "the revolutionary struggles of the masses." 20

The Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art formed the basis for all subsequent artistic creation, criticism, and analysis in China. Interpretation and application of the Talks has ranged from comparatively liberal to ultra-orthodox, depending upon the greater political situation at the time. During the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing, Mao's wife and the driving force behind the revolution, demanded such strict adherence to the Talks that only seven model revolutionary dramas, the yang-ban xi, 21 could be performed. All other dramas, including classical Beijing operas and modern huo-chu, were swept from the stage.

After Mao's death in September, 1976, and the subsequent arrest of Jiang Qing and her confederates in

20 Ibid., p. 33.

21 For a brief discussion of the etymology of the term yang-ban xi (literally, "pattern-board drama"), see Hua-yuan Li Mowry, Yang Pan Hsi -- New Theatre in China (Berkeley, California: Center for Chinese Studies, University of California, 1973), Chapter II, "From Yang Pan T'ien to Yan Pan Hsi."
October of the same year,22 the fourth and most recent period of modern Chinese drama began. As of this writing, it is barely ten years old, and therefore no definitive conclusions can yet be drawn regarding the direction Chinese drama and theatre will ultimately take. Under pragmatists like Hua Guo-feng during his tenure as Chairman of the Communist Party (1976-1981) and Deng Xiao-ping, however, a process of liberalization is at least noticeable. Relaxation from the strict proletarian ethic demanded by Jiang Qing during the Cultural Revolution has been reflected in drama and performance in a number of ways.

Jiang's rigid interpretation of Mao's Talks had not only squelched criticism of the state but required that certain kinds of dramatic scenes, especially those depicting familial or romantic love, be banned as "revisionist"23 and symptomatic of "bourgeois sentimentality."24 Jiang claimed to have received enthusiastic support from theatrical workers while she personally oversaw the reworking of all seven yang-ban xi in order to eliminate all vestiges of decadence, down to the "last episode, aria, sentence, minor

22 The infamous "Gang of Four" included Jiang Qing, ideologue Yao Wen-yuan, Wang Hong-wen, a textile worker turned politician, and Vice-Premier Zhang Chun-qiao.


24 Ibid., p. 39.
movement, or even costume or makeup . . .". In the aftermath of her arrest in 1976, however, Jiang's supposed influence on theatrical production was violently repudiated by actors, critics, and audiences alike, some claiming that Jiang Qing had never so much as "designed a single plot, rewritten a line in the dialogue, or produced a single singing passage." The theatre of the post-Gang of Four period has continued to demonstrate its allegiance to politics in such popular works as the pro-Zhou En-lai melodrama Loyal Hearts and anti-Soviet works like Another Hope, the ongoing process of liberalization has made possible a renaissance of both traditional opera, previously banned as feudalistic and therefore harmful, and relatively apolitical works such as Lao She's 1958 drama, Teahouse.

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25 Ibid., p. 42; see also Roxane Witke, Comrade Chiang Ch'ing (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977), Chapter Sixteen, "Theatre of Revolution," and Chapter Seventeen, "Heroics in Song and Dance."

26 Chao Yen-hsia, "Chiang Ch'ing's Peach Picker Features as Viewed from the Birth of Shachiapang," Ren-min ri-bao (People's Daily), January 2, 1977; see also Witke, Comrade Chiang Ch'ing, pp. 476-7, and p. 526, 59n.-61n.


hitherto censored by Jiang Qing as a "poisonous weed."\(^{29}\) Even young playwrights who continue to rely upon politics as the focal point of their works have been permitted to present somewhat more objective analyses of the prevailing political atmosphere in China, a case in point being Zhao Zi-xiong's *The Future Is Calling*, a drama that openly attacks the ideological stultification effected by the era of the Cultural Revolution, and which was permitted to open without the official blessing of the Ministry of Culture.\(^{30}\)

Perhaps the most remarkable development in recent years has been the veritable explosion of interest in Western, particularly American, theatrical production, remarkable because it is unprecedented. The overseas Chinese students who founded the Spring Willow Society in 1907 were clearly influenced by Western theatrical and dramatic traditions, and in the nineteen-twenties writers contributed a plethora of translations from all manner of Western languages from English to Yiddish.\(^{31}\) Although Chinese playwrights turned to the West as their model upon which to base the new Chinese drama, reading and translating Western dramatists voraciously, they nevertheless preferred to conduct their


\(^{30}\)Ibid., pp. 6-7.

experiments independently of Western actors and directors. Productions of Western dramas with all-Chinese casts, such as Wang Zhong-xiao's less than successful 1921 production of Mrs. Warren's Profession in Shanghai,\(^{32}\) were ultimately abandoned in favor of Chinese plays on Chinese themes that utilized Western dramatic and theatrical conventions.

In 1980, however, an interest in contemporary American productions was signaled by Ren-min xi-ju's (People's Theatre) publication of articles devoted to Sam Shepard's Buried Child and Stephen Sondheim's musical adaptation of Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street,\(^{33}\) neither of whose subject matter can be said to tally very closely with the socialistic demands of the Talks at Yenan. The desire on the part of Chinese theatre professionals to gain first-hand knowledge and experience of the modern American dramatic experience also culminated in several landmark theatrical undertakings, notably Arthur Miller's 1983 production of Death of a Salesman at the Beijing People's Art Theatre,\(^{34}\) which was followed by a 1984 production of Anna Christie at the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing,

\(^{32}\) Hsiao Ch'ien, Etching of a Tormented Age (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1942), p. 33.


\(^{34}\) In Salesman in Beijing (New York: The Viking Press, 1984) Arthur Miller gives a moving and detailed chronicle of the production from its conception to its opening performance.
directed by George C. White of the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center. Both productions united American directors with Chinese actors and technical personnel in the production of seminal American dramas. The fervent enthusiasm with which those cultural imports were reportedly received is indicative of a genuine Chinese desire and need to abandon the cultural isolation that resulted in a stale, politically "correct" dramatic canon for a healthy theatre that will hopefully be enlivened by the continued transfusions of cultural exchange.

Although modern Chinese drama presents opportunities for diversified studies in the areas of dramatic literature, theatre history and criticism, scholarly investigations into the field have been relatively few. The works written in English that consider modern Chinese literary history far outnumber those works devoted to modern drama. Literary Debates in Modern China, 1918-1937, The Introduction of Western Literary Theories into Modern China, 1919-1925.

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The May Fourth Movement, The Hundred Flowers Movement and the Chinese Intellectuals, Literary Dissent in Communist China, and A History of Chinese Fiction, 1917-1957 are all works that are essential to a thorough understanding of modern Chinese literature. Each one, as its title suggests, addresses a specific aspect of Chinese literature in detail; all, however, either neglect drama and dramatists or make but passing references to them. In Literary Debates in Modern China, for example, Tagore mentions some minor literary societies that flourished in Shanghai between 1918 and 1937 but omits the major drama societies that made significant contributions to the literary discussions of the day, the Shanghai Dramatic Society and Tian Han's own South Country Society (Nan-guo she). McDougall's The Introduction of Western Literary Theories into Modern China is a thorough exegesis of the impact of Western literary theories primarily upon novelists and poets rather than playwrights.

As for drama, traditional Beijing opera and yang-ban xi have received the most scholarly attention. Dolby's A


History of Chinese Drama is a fine survey history, a thoroughly researched work, and a long-needed addition to the literature available in English on the subject. Dolby has devoted a brief chapter to Western-style drama of the nineteen-twenties and 'thirties in which he names the major playwrights of the period and briefly outlines the goals they hoped to accomplish.

A collection of essays edited by Colin Mackerras, Chinese Theatre: From Its Origins to the Present Day, brings together the work of seven recognized historians in the field of Chinese drama. Their work encompasses various manifestations of Chinese theatre from its beginnings through the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties. Two aspects of contemporary drama are analyzed: modern jing-xi and the political thrust of post-1949 drama and theatre.

Mackerras's two additional studies, The Rise of the Peking Opera, 1770-1870, and The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times From 1870 to the Present Day, are thorough histories of the Beijing opera. The first work traces the evolution


of jing-xi from its origins in the Song Dynasty through the second half of the nineteenth century. It includes analyses of the social and economic factors that assisted the rise in popularity of Beijing opera as well as accounts of important actors and companies and a detailed description of Chinese theatre architecture. Mackerras's second book, The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times, continues at the point at which the first study concludes. Following an historical survey up to Sun Yat-sen's 1911 Revolution, Mackerras chronicles the history of traditional opera through the twentieth century up to and including the Cultural Revolution. Although that part of the work in which Mackerras addresses the development of spoken drama during the first half of the twentieth century is rather scanty, the author nevertheless does not purport to consider all forms of modern Chinese drama in the study.

Other important studies of Beijing opera describe the complex color and motif symbolism that govern the opera's costume and make-up conventions. The Traditional Theatre of China,\textsuperscript{46} The Chinese Drama From the Earliest Times Until To-Day,\textsuperscript{47} The Essentials of Chinese Drama,\textsuperscript{48} and Chinese

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{47} L. C. Arlington, The Chinese Drama From the Earliest Times Until To-Day, Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, Ltd., 1930.

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Theatre, 49 all fall under that heading. The introductions to Traditional Chinese Plays 50 and Children of the Pear Garden 51 also offer descriptions of Chinese musical instruments and orchestration. Secrets of the Chinese Drama 52 provides notation for the conventionalized gestures of Beijing opera, and Peking Opera and Painted Face 53 depicts full-color make-up renderings for hundreds of roles in traditional opera.

Another popular area of study has been the relationship between ideology and the performing arts. Hua-yuan Li Mowry's short study, Yang Pan Hsi -- New Theatre in China 54 is useful for its exegesis of the process involved in creating a model revolutionary drama. Her background information on The Red Lantern, Shajiabang, Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy, Raid on the White Tiger Regiment, On the Docks, The White Haired Girl, and The Red Detachment of

52 Cecilia C. L. Zung, Secrets of the Chinese Drama, Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, Ltd., 1937.
Women, the operas and ballets which comprise the model revolutionary canon, is also valuable. Bonnie S. McDougall has edited a collection of essays, *Popular Chinese Literature and the Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, which addresses a broad spectrum of topics, including the ideological character of the theatre as it developed from its roots in the late nineteen-thirties and early 'forties, the era which paved the way for the politicization of all the arts in China. The collection is of special interest for its analysis of performing arts of such diverse characters as folk singing and comic dialogues. *Contemporary Chinese Theatre* discusses post-1949 regional and non-professional theatre, as does *Amateur Theatre in China, 1949-1966*. *China Onstage* is a popular approach to the same material; the author includes translations of *The Red Lantern, Shajiabang, Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, the libretto of *The Red Detachment of Women*, and a glossary of Chinese ballet terminology, in addition to recounting her experiences during a visit to the People's


Republic of China. Those studies and numerous articles also include "before and after" comparisons of the Beijing opera under the Manchu monarchs and Mao's dictatorship of the proletariat.

Scholarly interest has recently turned to the post-Gang of Four era and the effects of liberalization on the theatre in China. Colin Mackerras's *The Performing Arts in Contemporary China* provides a thorough analysis of the influence of the Gang of Four on the arts and the effects of their removal from power upon jing-xi, huo-chu, music, dance, and cinema.

The majority of Chinese plays that have appeared in English translation are either traditional operas or post-1930 dramas. The dramatic literature of the nineteen-twenties remains virtually untouched. In "Chinese Plays in English Translation, 1971-1967," Daniel S. P. Yang lists twenty-seven modern dramas in translation out of a total of one hundred and eight; all twenty-seven date from the post-

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1930 period. Of the thirty-one plays listed in A Bibliography of Studies and Translations of Modern Chinese Literature, three date from the 'twenties: "The Genius" and "Oppression," both of which are minor, and "The Greatest Event in Life," which is primarily important insofar as it is one of the earliest huo-chu. Although Tian's early period is not represented in Twentieth Century Chinese Drama, the collection provides translations of the previously unavailable dramas Yama Chao by Hong Shen and Ou-yang Yu-qian's Pan Chin-lien. Translations of Oppression and "The Greatest Event in Life" also appear in that volume, the rest of which is devoted to drama dating from the post-1930 period through 1979. Only two of Tian Han's plays have appeared in English, both of which were written during the


nineteen-fifties: Guan Han-qing,67 and The White Snake,68 a reworking of an old Beijing opera theme.

Western-style drama of the nineteen-twenties has received comparatively little scholarly attention, yet the brief era was an important one, representing the only time during the history of modern Chinese drama when playwrights were free to create, unhampered by either the conventions of Beijing opera or the dictates of Party literary policy. It was a time of experimentation, of innovation, and of conscious attempts to imitate Western dramatic styles and theatrical techniques. Because of their desire to popularize Western theatre in China, the authors of huo-chu created a body of dramatic literature that is potentially more accessible to Western scholars and audiences than the highly conventionalized Beijing operas or the ideologically foreign yang-ban xi.

In comparison with his contemporaries, Tian Han is the most representative of modern Chinese playwrights, with a career that spanned half a century and not only reflected but often directed the course of development of modern Chinese drama and theatre. A native of Changsha in Hunan

67 T'ien Han, Kuan Han-ch'ing, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1961.

Province, he attended Changsha Normal School where he displayed his early interest in drama by writing plays and performing in them during his teenage years. His earliest effort, *A Mother Teaches Her Son*, in which a young widow instructs her son to appreciate the legacy of his father, a soldier who died fighting for freedom in the 1911 Revolution, was published in the *Changsha Daily News.*  

Although Tian's father had died when Tian was a child and the family's fortune had rapidly declined thereafter, financial support from his maternal uncle, Yi Mei-yuan, made it possible for Tian to travel to Japan after his graduation in 1914, where he continued his education at the Tokyo Higher Normal School. It was Yi's hope that his nephew would enter the political arena upon the completion of his studies, but Tian's seven-year sojourn produced a poet instead of a politician. As early as 1919 he had published a two-part survey of Russian literary thought in the periodical *Min To* (People's Tocsin), whose other contributors included Shen Yen-ping, Zheng Zhen-dou, and Guo

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70 Tian Han, "Bai-mei zhi yuan de nei-wai" ("Around the White Plum Garden") in *Tian Han, Tian Han San-wen-ji* (Collected Prose of Tian Han) (Shanghai: Jin-dai shu-dian, 1936), p. 24.

Mo-ro, the future poet, playwright, novelist, and literary historian. That survey was followed by a lengthy exegesis of Tian's own theory of the poet's responsibility to society at large in "Shi-ren yu lao-dong wen-ti" ("Poets and the Labor Problem"), which was published in Shao-nian zhong-guo (Young China) in 1920.\(^{72}\) It cannot be said to shed much light on his approach to drama, but the article presages Tian's flights of romantic fancy in his plays as well as his commitment to realism as a dramatic style. He saw Chinese neo-romanticism as encompassing the "appreciation and revelation of new beauty, ... positive and uncompromising emotions, ... anti-formalism in poetry and speech, and the unbridled freedom of its spirit,"\(^{73}\) as essential to creating a new Chinese literature, while simultaneously advocating that a poet must be a human being above all else, a goal which might be accomplished by participating in labor with a socially desirable end.\(^{74}\)

Although Tian would continue to be interested in literary studies throughout his long career, the theatre was his first love. During his stay in Japan he was exposed to Ibsen, Chekhov, Maeterlinck, Strindberg, Lady Gregory,


\(^{73}\) Tian, quoted in McDougall, p. 96.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., pp. 104-5.
Synge, Goethe, Wilde, Hauptmann, Sudermann, and Hebbel. In a letter written to his friend Guo Mo-ro in 1920 Tian proclaimed his passionate desire to devote his life to drama and voiced his fervent wish to become "the budding Ibsen of China." When Guo, along with Chang Zi-ping, Yu Da-fu, and Cheng Fang-wu, all of whom were destined to become giants in the literary hierarchies of Republican and Communist China, established the Creation Society (Chuang-zao she) in Tokyo for the purpose of promoting new Chinese writing, Tian became one of the founding members. Upon returning to Shanghai in 1921, the five young men published the first edition of the society's journal, Creation Quarterly (Chuang-zao ji-kan), which carried two of Tian's earliest one-act dramas, "A Night in a Cafe" and "Before Lunch." The subsequent publication of "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" in the South China Bi-Monthly (Nan-guo ban-yue-kan), a periodical issued by Tian and his wife, Yi Shu-yu, secured his reputation as China's leading modern playwright, whose works "continued to serve as models throughout [the] early period." In addition to introducing his special brand of huo-chu to Chinese audiences, Tian also devoted time to

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translating major works such as *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, and preparing adaptations of Merimee's *Carmen*, Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, and Gorky's *Mother*.

The publication of the *South China Bi-Monthly* came to an end with Yi Shu-yu's premature death in 1923, and although Tian ceased to write for the theatre until 1927 when he unveiled his "View of a Riverside Village," he became enthusiastically involved in China's embryonic film industry. In 1925 he established the South China Dramatic Film Society (Nan-guo dian-ying-chu-she) in Shanghai, the aim of which was "to show through film the deep sadness of our people . . . [to] apply our collective strength and pure attitude to achieve this." Tian's debut film, entitled *To the People!,* was never completed due to a lack of production.

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77 Chen Shou-zhu, *Lun Tian Han de huo-chu chuang-zao*, p. 10.


funds, but the project led to his long involvement with the Chinese cinema.

The South China Dramatic Film Society became the South China Academy of Literature and Art, which, in turn, eventually evolved into the famous South China Society, an organization which was a moving force behind the promotion of contemporary theatre, film, and art throughout southern China. Several of the Society's accomplishments marked it as unique among the numerous drama organizations of the day; it was the first of its kind in the new Chinese theatre movement, devoted not only to the performance of the new drama but to the study and writing of modern Chinese dramatic literature.\textsuperscript{81} Secondly, the Society enabled young actors to eke out a living, however meager, while they perfected their newly learned craft under Tian's personal tutelage.\textsuperscript{82} Thirdly, the Society paved the way for the public acceptance of the Western practice of permitting female performers onstage with males in a sphere that had previously been dominated exclusively by men.\textsuperscript{83} Finally, the South China Society was instrumental in popularizing Tian's early works; by the end of the nineteen-twenties the company had performed "Night Talk in Suzhou," "Tragedy on a

\textsuperscript{81}Elizabeth J. Bernard, "T'ien Han," in Hsu Kai-yu, p. 766.

\textsuperscript{82}Tang Shu-ming, "Hui-yi nan-guo" ("Remembering the South China Society") in Tian Han, et al., pp. 139-46.

\textsuperscript{83}Roxane Witke, Comrade Chiang Ch'ing, p. 99.
Lake," "Echoes of an Ancient Pond," "Return South," and "Shivers" in Shanghai, Nanjing, Suzhou, and Hangzhou. Throughout the decade Tian also continued to pursue his teaching career in more formal arenas, serving at various times as Chairman of the Literature Department at the Shanghai College of Fine Arts and as Lecturer of Dramatic Arts at Jinan, Daxia, and Fudan Universities.

In 1930 officials of Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang Party, then the ruling force in Shanghai, disbanded the South China Society after viewing Tian's adaptation of Bizet's Carmen. The next year Tian secretly became a member of the Chinese Communist Party and helped to found the League of Left Wing Dramatists. No longer an advocate of romantic realism, he began to write dramas with decidedly leftist content, such as "Rainy Season" ("Mei-yu") in 1931, which depicted the economic privations of Shanghai's lower classes. He also rewrote "A Night in a Cafe" in 1932 to bring it more into line with the dictates of leftist literary policy. In the updated version of the play, the protagonist, Bai Qiu-ying, determines to throw in her lot with the proletariat rather than wallow in self-pity and

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84 Tian Han, "Nan-guo she shi-lue," in Tian Han, et al., pp. 130-8.
85 Jay Leyda, Dianying, p. 55.
pessimism. His cinematic endeavors included scenarios for the 1933 films Three Modern Girls and Existence of the Nation, which he also directed, and which was unique in the history of Chinese film during the nineteen-thirties for its reliance upon a relatively unknown ensemble rather than the more traditionally accepted star system.

In 1933 an unknown actress named Li Yun-ho, freshly arrived in Shanghai from Shandong Province, attempted to contact the Communist underground in that city by approaching Tian, who was by then foremost among the leading figures in Shanghai theatrical circles. His "salon," which was housed in an old tenement building, was a magnet for many young artists of the day, a place where they could meet to make contacts, discuss politics, and trade industry gossip. Tian did not take much notice of the young woman among the other devotees in his circle. He may not have been impressed with her acting ability, or he may have felt the need to be cautious about revealing his Party

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86 Tian Han, Tian Han Ju-zuo-xuan (Selected Drmas of Tian Han) (Beijing: Ren-min wen-xue chu-ban-shé, 1955), pp. 1-36.

87 Jay Leyda, Dianying, p. 86.

88 Ross Terrill, The White-Boned Demon: A Biography of Madame Mao Ze-dong (New York: Will Morrow and Company, Inc.), p. 84. Tian's "salon" must have been quite progressive for its time and location during the nineteen-thirties in Shanghai, which was quite the decadent urban center. The author Ding Ling once reported having been shocked at seeing loose women and transvestites at Tian's house (Ding Ling, quoted in Jay Leyda, Dianying, p. 381).
connections to someone he hardly knew in light of the anti-
Communist hysteria engendered in Shanghai by Chiang Kai-
shek. In any event, Tian apparently made little effort to
act as liaison between Li Yun-ho and the Party, and the
relationship between Li and himself might have faded into
historical oblivion as just another association between a
frustrated actress and a successful producer had not the
frustrated actress turned up years later as Jiang Qing, wife
of Chairman Mao and the doyenne of the Cultural Revolution,
a dangerous woman with a long and spiteful memory.

It was, however, to be nearly thirty-five years before
Jiang Qing would be able to wreak her revenge on Tian Han,
and those thirty-five years reveal his full and productive
career. Throughout the nineteen-thirties, Tian continued to
produce socialistic spoken dramas based on contemporary
political events, such as "Alarm Bell" (Luan-zhong, 1932),
which depicts the effects of the Japanese invasion of Mukden
on a group of young intellectuals, and the three-act Song of
Return to the Spring (Hui-gun zhi qu, 1935), about the
resistance of overseas Chinese to Japanese aggression.
Before his brief arrest for his association with the film
Victory Song as scriptwriter in 1935, Tian befriended a
young leftist composer by the name of Nie Er. They

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89 Roxane Witke, Comrade Chiang Ch'ing, pp. 73-4; Ross
Terrill, The White-Boned Demon, p. 52.

90 Jay Leyda, Dianying, p. 379.
collaborated on several film projects before Tian's arrest and Nie's accidental death by drowning in Japan in 1935, but their longest-lived creation was Nie's last song, entitled, "March of the Volunteers," for which Tian wrote the lyrics. Originally written as the finale for the 1935 film, *Children of Troubled Times*, the song was chosen in 1949 to be the national anthem of the People's Republic of China. By 1936 Tian was released from prison, and he continued to produce more anti-fascist dramas such as "Mother of Abyssinia" ("A-bi-xi-ni-ya de mu-qin," 1936), "Flood" ("Hong-shui," 1936), and "Lu-gou-qiao Bridge" ("Lu-gou-qiao," 1937). His work in the film industry also continued; *Youth on the March*, a film he not only wrote but co-directed, was released in 1937, and *Victory March*, for which he wrote the screenplay, was finished in 1940.

From the nineteen-forties until February 1, 1966, when the opening salvos were fired at him in the escalating conflict of the Cultural Revolution, Tian Han remained active in artistic and cultural affairs, both as an administrator and as a producer of theatre. In 1943 his plays were among 120 banned by the Nationalist Government's Central Commission for Censorship of Books and

91 Jay Leyda associates the anthem with that film (ibid., p. 369), but in a tribute written after Tian's death, Fu Hu claims that the lyrics were written for the finale of an opera entitled *Storm Over the Yang-zi River*. See Fu Hu, "Tian Han and His Immense Contribution to Modern Chinese Drama," *Chinese Literature* 10 (1979), p. 3.
Periodicals, but he rebounded in 1945 with his epic drama in twenty-one scenes, *The Song of the Beautiful Women* (*Li-ren xing*), about the nobility of three disparate women as they suffer through China's civil war. He also occupied himself with teaching and administering at the Si-wei Children's Dramatic School, an institution he had founded in 1943, and by 1946 he was editing two periodicals, *The News* (*Xin-wen bao*) and *Arts Month* (*Yi-yue*). In 1949 Tian wrote the scenario for what would be his final motion picture, *Martyr of the Pear Orchard*, a laundered version of a rather sensual film previously released during the Japanese occupation of Shanghai in 1943; thereafter, his commitment to the theatre appears to have demanded his time and energies. In October of 1953 he was appointed Chairman of the Union of Chinese Dramatists, a position he would hold until his arrest by Red Guards in December of 1966. He also served at various times on the national committees of the All-China Federation of Art and Literary Circles and the Union of Chinese Writers, as director of the Bureau of Dramatic and Operatic Improvement in the Ministry of Culture, and as Vice-Chairman of the All-China Dramatic

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92 Tian was in very good company; plays by the leading dramatists Cao Yu, Lao She, Ou-yang Yu-qian, Hong Shen, and Tian's old friend Guo Mo-ro were also censored by Chiang Kai-shek's accomplices. See Colin Mackerras, *Modern China: A Chronology from 1892 to the Present* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1982), p. 401.

Society from August, 1960 until his removal from power in 1966.  

As a practicing man of the theatre, he turned in the nineteen-fifties to experimenting with Beijing opera and historical drama. His adaptation of The White Snake, written in 1955, was one of a few plays that was given wide exposure in the mid-'fifties, and Song of the Beautiful Woman and his historical dramas Princess Wen Zheng and Ballad of the Ming Tombs enjoyed successful runs at the China Youth Art Theatre and the Beijing People's Art Theatre at various times between 1958 and 1962. Guan Han-qing, his 1958 drama about the popular Yuan Dynasty playwright's battle against corrupt forces in the Mongol government, was successfully produced by the Beijing People's Art Theatre and ran for most of the summer of the same year.

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97 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 17 (June 24, 1958); No. 18 (July 1, 1958); No. 19 (July 8, 1958); No. 20 (July 15, 1958); No. 21 (July 22, 1958); and No. 23 (August 5, 1958).
In 1961 Xie Yao-huan, an historical drama that was
destined to be Tian's last, was published in the periodical
Ju-ben (Drama). The play depicted the Empress Wu Ze-tian
(r. 690-705 A.D.) resisting the corrupting influences of the
aristocracy at the behest of Xie Yao-huan, her trustworthy
confidante and President of the Board of Rites. Together
the two female characters work to uphold the rights of the
common people who are suffering grave injustices in the
mismanagement of their lands at the hands of their wealthy
feudal overlords. The action of the play revolved around
the defense of the masses, but by casting an empress and her
minister in the roles of spokesmen for the people, a concept
which runs contrary to all tenets of Marxist dramatic
criticism as set forth by Jiang Qing and her cohorts, Tian
provided Jiang with the final nail she would triumphantly
pound into his coffin a few years later.

Jiang was, nevertheless, forced to bide her time. A
bout with cancer and liver disease during the nineteen-
fifties had left her physically debilitated,\(^{98}\) and she would
not be capable of consolidating her political power as the
ultimate arbiter of artistic and cultural taste until the
mid-sixties. In the intervening years between the
appearance of Xie Yao-huan and Tian's arrest in 1966, Jiang
was only beginning to make her presence felt in theatrical
circles. For the most part, Tian, as well as other

outstanding figures in the performing arts, including the playwrights Xia Yen and Yang Han-sheng and critic Zhou Yang, ignored Jiang's attempts to inflame their enthusiasm for "making revolution," as she phrased it, an insult she would not forget in the coming years. Sometime during 1964 Jiang made a final effort to reconcile her differences with Tian Han; she offered him the opportunity to adapt Liang Xin's screenplay for The Red Detachment of Women, originally released as a feature film in 1960, to Beijing opera form. Tian complied with Jiang's request, but she angrily rejected the libretto that he produced, claiming it to be "far worse than the original." 99

By 1965 Jiang Qing had skillfully maneuvered herself, with Chairman Mao's blessing, into her long-coveted position as the driving force behind the move to purify the arts and cleanse them of what she considered to be their stubborn bourgeois stains. However, her campaign, which ultimately exploded into the Cultural Revolution, and which was ostensibly ideological in nature, was as much a settling of old personal scores, as "each molehill of a setback she had ever received in the 1930's was now blown up into a mountain of revenge." 100 She was now, she believed, firmly ensconced

99 Jiang Qing quoted by Roxane Witke in Comrade Chiang Ch'ing, p. 311. The Red Detachment of Women was eventually turned into a model revolutionary ballet by the Ballet Troupe of the Central Opera and Dance Drama Academy and premiered in Beijing in 1964.

100 Ross Terrill, The White Boned Demon, p. 263.
in a position whereby she could make those who had slighted her pay dearly.

Tian Han was not the first playwright to fall under Jiang Qing's ax; he was preceded in 1965 by Wu Han, the vice-mayor of Beijing and author of the now-infamous play *Hai Rui Dismissed From Office*, an historical drama about a virtuous Ming Dynasty official whose position is terminated after he openly criticizes the actions of the Emperor.101 Politically, both Mao and Jiang interpreted the play as a veiled analogy of Minister of Defense Peng De-huai's blatant repudiation of Mao's implementation of the economically disastrous Great Leap Forward in 1958; personally, Jiang was of the opinion that Wu Han and his colleagues in Beijing had never given her the respect that was her due.102 The attack on Wu Han and his play in Shanghai's *Literary Gazette (Wen-yi bao)* on November 10, 1965, written by Yao Wen-yuan and revised by Jiang herself, signaled the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution.

Personal and political assaults on Tian Han soon followed, beginning with the publication of an essay in *People's Daily (Ren-min ri-bao)* early in 1966, in which Tian


was accused, among myriad transgressions, of predicting the overthrow of China's socialist regime, slandering the Communist Party, and siding with forces hostile to the interests of the masses of working people. As a playwright he was denounced for misusing one of the fundamental precepts of Maoist verisimilitude in dramatic writing: it was unthinkable for an empress to be represented as fighting for the rights of the common folk; according to Jiang Qing's line on literature and art, history and Empress Wu's economic status would preclude such a possibility, even in the realm of fictive writing. Thus, Tian was not only guilty of presenting a distorted view of history and of cosmeticizing ugly feudal realities, but of inculcating his public with seriously warped notions of class struggle and class relationships.

The February 1 article was merely the first in a series of attacks that were to bombard Tian steadily throughout 1966. At first the authors of the anti-Tian essays tended to confine themselves to criticism of Xie Yao-huan, reiterating ad infinitum the same politico-literary notions that had previously been expounded by Yun Song. As the year wore on, and as the Cultural Revolution began to pick up steam, the slurs became increasingly more personal and

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103 Yun Song, "Tian Han's Xie Yao-huan Is a Big Poisonous Weed," People's Daily, February 1, 1966.

104 See, for example, Ho Qi-fang, "On Xie Yao-huan," People's Daily, February 24, 1966.
less founded. The editorial department of *Drama News* (Xi-ju bao) published a lengthy invective accusing Tian of obstructing the development of modern drama and drama developed from indigenous art forms, and of being overly enamored of traditional plays that promoted dangerous bourgeois ideas. A five cardinal sin was said to be his refusal to synchronize his views with those of the workers, peasant, and soldiers, insisting instead upon recreating the world onstage according to his own personal vision. In April *Enlightenment Daily* (Guang-ming ri-bao) claimed that Tian had been plotting against "proletarian plays on contemporary revolutionary themes," and by June Tian had been publicly denounced as a "schemist" and "careerist" who had "perpetrated anti-Party and anti-socialist crimes" under the guise of speaking on behalf of the people. The fury that had been unleashed against Tian culminated in the *Liberation Army News's* (Jie-fang-jun bao) December 4 pronouncement that Tian had betrayed the Party to Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang government during the nineteen-thirties, and had even gone so far as to write anti-Party plays for the Guomindang, and in Jiang Qing's

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105 The article was reprinted in *People's Daily*. See *Xi-ju bao* Editorial Department, "Whom Does Tian Han's Play Advocate Serving," *People's Daily*, March 8, 1966.


107 Ibid.
denunciation of Tian Han as a public enemy from the balcony of the Gate of Heavenly Peace to a mass gathering of Red Guards in Beijing.\footnote{108} Eight days later Tian, along with a host of cultural figures who had long plagued Jiang Qing, including Zhou Yang, Xia Yen, and prominent propagandist Lu Ting-yi, were delivered by military escort into the hands of 10,000 Red Guards in Workers Stadium in Beijing. Their "crimes" were read aloud, and the offenders were made to large, heavy, wooden placards around their necks on which their names had been written and then blotted out with thick, black X's. 

At the age of seventy Tian Han died in prison on December 10, 1968.\footnote{109} The exact circumstances surrounding his death are unclear; the celebrated playwright Cao Yu testified after Jiang Qing's imprisonment that Tian had died

\footnote{108} Roxane Witke, Comrade Jiang Qing, p. 328. Jiang's hatred for Tian must have been all-consuming. Even after his death she forbade singing Tian's lyrics to the national anthem. Whistling or humming Nie Er's music for the anthem was permitted, but the lyrics were verboten. Jay and Linda Matthews, two prominent American journalists, report seeing films of actors mouthing the lyrics to instrumental soundtracks and hearing only the instrumental version played at rallies and state dinners even after the Gang of Four was purged in 1976. By 1978, however, Tian's lyrics were officially reinstated. See Jay and Linda Matthews, One Billion: A China Chronicle (New York: Random House, 1983), p. 288.

as a result of "persecution" at the hands of the Gang of
Four, 110 an ambiguous statement that could be taken to mean
that the privations Tian suffered in prison caused his death
or that he was actively tortured, even executed, a
possibility that is not altogether unlikely. He may also
have been driven to commit suicide, as Jay and Linda
Matthews have suggested, 111 a fate he would have shared with
countless other Chinese poets, playwrights, and novelists.
The official Party line appears to be that Tian's death was
cased by "illness" brought about by the Gang's mistreatment
of him. 112

On April 25, 1979, the verdict against Tian Han was
officially reversed at a memorial ceremony in Beijing at
which he was exonerated of blame and restored to honor. 113
No less a figure than Chairman Hua Guo-feng himself was
present, along with some two thousand other prominent
political and literary figures which included Deng Xiao-
ping, Cao Yu, writers Liao Mo-sha, Ai Qing, and Lin Mo-han,
actor Jin Shan and director Chen Bai-chen, and Zhou Yang,
Xia Yen, and Yang Han-sheng, who had managed to escape Jiang
Qing's wrath with their lives. Mao Dun, the eminent

111 Jay and Linda Matthews, One Billion, p. 289.
113 Ibid.
novelist who had replaced Tian as Vice-Chairman of the All-China Federation of Literary and Art Workers, gave the memorial speech in which he praised Tian as "a loyal and dauntless proletarian cultural fighter, a founder of China's revolutionary drama movement, and one of the first reformers of the traditional opera theatre, as well as an outstanding organizer and leader of China's early revolutionary film and music."\textsuperscript{114} Guan Han-qing and Xie Yao-huan, Tian's Beijing operas on historical themes that Jiang and her allies had contemptuously spurned, were reinstated as "the greatest of [Tian's] later creations," and Mao Dun exhorted the gathering of artistic figures to follow Tian's shining example as a loyal Party member whose life had stood for "revolution and militancy, ... an unceasing search for light and truth."\textsuperscript{115} That spring The White Snake was successfully revived by two theatres in Beijing. At the same time, an early full-length spoken drama by Tian entitled Death of a Famous Actor went into rehearsal at the Beijing People's Art Theatre, and a revival of the infamous Xie Yao-huan was prepared at the China Beijing Opera

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.; see also Fu Hu, "Tian Han and His Immense Contribution to Modern Chinese Drama," \textit{Chinese Literature} 10 (1979), p. 4.
Theatre. Tian had lost his life in the maelstrom of the Cultural Revolution, but his name had been cleared, his contributions acknowledged by his compatriots, and his dramas permitted to take their rightful place on the stage of modern Chinese theatre history.

The extraordinary tributes that were heaped upon Tian Han in the aftermath of his vindication might be interpreted as a means of further reducing Jiang Qing's reputation to ashes had not ample precedent been set for appreciation of Tian long before his demise during the Cultural Revolution. A brief survey of the Chinese historians and critics who have considered Tian's work will reveal a unanimous chorus of praise for the man who worked so tirelessly to adapt Western dramatic traditions to the Chinese stage. Tian's fervent commitment to the spoken drama movement and his extensive influence on other Chinese dramatists and on all areas of theatrical production have been enthusiastically

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acknowledged by the majority of pre-Cultural Revolution historians and critics. 117

As early as 1933 Tian's earliest dramas had been acknowledged by literary historian Wang Che-chuan as being not only rightfully successful onstage but rich in imaginative substance and deep in social significance. 118 That sentiment was echoed by the theatre historian Tian Jin, who called Tian the most productive man of the Chinese theatre, a playwright without equal. 119 Tian Jin also credited Tian with having been a sensitive poet whose early dramas accurately caught the peculiar pulse of the times in which they were written. 120


120 Ibid.; see also Lin Mang, Zhong-guo xin-wen-xue er-shi-nian gong-yuan 1919-1939 (Twenty Years of Modern Chinese Literature From 1919-1939) (Hong Kong: Shi-jie chu-ban-she, n.d.), p. 53 and pp. 119-21.
Western scholars have, with few exceptions, joined their Chinese counterparts in acknowledging that an understanding of Tian's work as a dramatist is paramount to gaining a thorough understanding and appreciation of modern Chinese drama. According to Elizabeth Bernard, no other playwright exerted as great an influence on modern Chinese drama or was so integral a part of its development. Boorman and Howard have cited Tian's introduction of new teaching methods and his unflagging efforts to modernize production techniques as major contributions, and Ross Terrill characterizes Tian as "a brilliant, opinionated man" who was invariably and comfortably involved in "a hundred projects simultaneously." But the highest praise from a Westerner for Tian Han comes from Roxane Witke, who believes that in a less sterile political climate Tian would have had the potential to become China's Arthur Miller, his hamartia


ironically being "genius linked to individualism and the courage to defend the combination."\textsuperscript{125}

In spite of such pronouncements that acknowledge and attest to Tian's preeminence as a modern Chinese playwright, studies considering his early works in detail, either in Chinese or in English, are few. Chinese historians tend to sweep Tian under the major heading of "new Chinese drama" in general outline studies of Chinese literature or theatre, while the Western preoccupations with traditional Beijing opera and the influence of Marxist literary theory on the arts have precluded thorough analyses of Tian's work as a young playwright during the nineteen-twenties. Two notable exceptions to the Chinese rule are the critic Liu Shou-song, who devotes more space than his colleagues to Tian Han in his general literary history,\textsuperscript{126} and Chen Shou-zhu, whose critical biography of Tian was published in 1961\textsuperscript{127} the same year that Tian's inflammatory Xie Yao-huan went to press. Thus, an analysis of Liu's and Chen's evaluations of Tian's early dramas will reveal a more detailed assessment of Tian's work by his peers than the perfunctory Marxist

\textsuperscript{125}Roxane Witke, Comrade Chiang Ch'ing, p. 386.


\textsuperscript{127}Chen Shou-zhu, Lun Tian Han de huo-chu chuang-zuo (On the Creation of Tian Han's Spoken Dramas), Shanghai: Wen-yi chu-ban-she, 1961.
choruses of approval that can be found in so many outline histories and general critical works.

Although Liu Shou-song admires Tian as being China's most diligent and meritorious playwright, he nevertheless maintains reservations towards Tian's early plays, which he sees Tian as having written during a politically immature phase of his life. He acknowledges that the plays exhibit, on the whole, embryonic characteristics of good socialist writing, but points out that the works tend to suffer from Tian's inability to break free of "the past," that is, the unhealthy lures of romanticism. As a result, the melancholy atmosphere that pervades the plays thwarts their potential value to be used as shining, encouraging examples to the masses, an end Liu believes is paramount to writing a legitimate piece of drama. The action of "A Night in a Cafe" comes close to demonstrating positive social attitudes towards social class differences and arranged marriage, but the play does not answer the very questions that it raises. When she is spurned by her wealthy lover for a woman of his economic class, Bai Qiu-ying, the waitress in the cafe, talks about making a new life for herself. Liu objects to the fact that Tian chose not to depict Bai actually carrying out her plans for a new life as a good socialist heroine.


129 Ibid., p. 185.
would do, choosing instead to end the play with Bai sliding into anguished drinking, thereby sacrificing a positive ending for a play that is "entirely distressful and decadent in atmosphere."\textsuperscript{130}

"The Night a Tiger Was Captured" fares less well in Liu's estimation than "A Night in a Cafe." Huang Da-sha, a poor, mad beggar who takes refuge under the altar of a local temple, longs to marry Lian-gu, the daughter of wealthy hunter Wei Fu-sheng, who has betrothed her against her will to a more socially and economically suitable young man. When the young lovers make their feelings public, Wei Fu-sheng, in a fury, beats his daughter into submission, and Huang commits suicide. Liu considers the play to be "a simplistic portrait of adolescence," the ending of which is "saturated in a most unhealthy spirit of romanticism."\textsuperscript{131} That Lian-gu is demonstrated to be completely dominated by her old father, who is representative of feudalism, shows that she is an excessively weak character and therefore unworthy of an audience's admiration and sympathy.

Liu saves his highest praises for "Before Lunch," Tian's story of the transformation of a religious girl who awakens to the call of revolution when her sister is murdered during a factory riot by government soldiers. The play is marred, according to Liu, only by Tian's insistence

\textsuperscript{130}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{131}Ibid., p. 188.
upon keeping the worker-soldier conflict offstage rather than enacting the actual confrontation and the workers' inevitable victory. The concept of the play in general, however, is found by Liu to be "flawless," and the dissolute qualities that were evident in the preceding works are completely eradicated.\footnote{132} Liu also applauds Tian's characterizations of "vivid and sharp" personnages whose roots in "real life" provide the play with its greatest strength.

Liu considers the late plays of the 'twenties, "Tragedy on a Lake," "Return South," and "Echoes of an Ancient Pond," to be so mired in "melancholy" and "aestheticism" that any socialistic characteristics those plays might have manifested are completely obscured.\footnote{133} He points to "Night Talk in Suzhou" as the clearest example of that tendency in Tian's writing. Liu's overwhelming objection to the play is its general structure: Tian combines comic and serious moments in his tale of an elderly painting teacher who is unexpectedly reunited with his long-lost daughter. That frivolous combination of elements is damaging to the central theme of the play, which Liu believes to be the pernicious influences of the war that caused the girl to be separated from her father in the first place.\footnote{134}
As a whole, Liu's analysis of Tian's work tends to suffer, not from his orientation as a leftist literary critic, but rather from a reliance upon assertions not supported by textual references rather than thorough evaluations of the works under consideration. For example, Liu criticizes a scene in "Night Talk in Suzhou" as being "comic," but he does not define the term "comic" nor does he cite specific reasons for the inherent inappropriateness of comedy to socialist drama. A further flaw in Liu's approach to Tian Han is his insistence on criticizing the playwright for the elements he omitted from the plays rather than wrestling with the political validity of that which is indeed present in the text. Liu objects to Tian's omission of the military confrontation at the factory in "Before Lunch" rather than analyzing the dramatic and theatrical implications behind the playwright's choice and confining his assessment to how well the action and dialogue of the play, as written, fall within the parameters of what is considered to be good leftist writing.

Chen Shou-zhu, on the other hand, is a critic who seems to be more adept at riding the twin horses of art and socialism and is able to provide a fairer, albeit primarily leftist, evaluation of Tian's early plays. Although Chen believes that Tian's revised 1932 version of "A Night in a Cafe" far outranks the 1920 script, he finds Tian's characterizations of Bai Qiu-ying and her lover Li Gan-qing
to be thoroughly realistic and well in keeping with socialist requirements for successful dramatic characterization. The son of a shady capitalist, Li Ganqing is possessed with thoughts of status and money, and, as Chen phrases it, love is no exception.\textsuperscript{135} Although the circumstances of the play drive Bai to turn to liquor as a means of escape, Chen finds her portrayal to be realistic and appropriately heroic.

As for "Before Lunch," Chen disagrees with Liu, reserving his praises instead for "The Night a Tiger Was Captured." While "Before Lunch" is particularly worthy of notice because, according to Chen, it was the first modern Chinese play to utilize the theme of the struggle of the working class, Chen acknowledges that its artistic deficiencies outweigh its political merits. In general, Chen considers Tian's understanding of socio-economic realities to have been insufficient when he wrote the play in 1921. Thus, Tian's political thought as exemplified in "Before Lunch" tends to be ambiguous rather than clear and definite.\textsuperscript{136} The cloudiness of thought in the play is further compounded by Tian's overdependence upon incidents that are narrated rather than enacted, such as the oppression of the workers. The play also addresses numerous


\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 20-1.
concerns, including imperialism, the false lure of Christianity, the capitalist classes, and the reactionary government, that Tian seems unable to unify into a single theme, instead allowing his thoughts to wander aimlessly and episodically. The combined effect of so many structural flaws, according to Chen, is a potpourri of unrelated ideas rather than a succinct political statement.\textsuperscript{137}

In "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," however, Tian, in Chen's estimation, created "the most remarkable play of [his] early period,"\textsuperscript{138} remarkable for the emotional impact it successfully combines with an appropriately socialistic theme: the exposure of pre-revolutionary China's corrupt feudal system and the call to engage in resistance against it.\textsuperscript{139} Unlike Liu Shou-song, Chen's leftist orientation does not preclude his ability to appreciate those characteristics of "Tiger" that Liu overlooked: Tian's ability to construct a realistic sequence of incidents out of a credible series of antecedents and consequences and to create sensitive portrayals of nonstereotypical characters.

Lian-gu's secret love, Huang Da-sha, inadvertently stumbles into a trap where Wei Fu-sheng's men, mistaking the youth for a tiger, shoot him. Although Huang's presence in the tiger trap appears to be coincidental, Chen credits Tian

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., p. 21.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., p. 25.
\end{flushright}
with having skillfully prepared the audience to accept the incident as being credible by providing Wei with three lengthy monologues in which he narrates a tale of a tiger hunt, establishing that, when stalking tigers, the unexpected becomes the probable.

Tian's portrayal of the heroine Lian-gu is, according to Chen, especially successful. By avoiding a stereotypical characterization of a gentle girl who is therefore weak, or a fearless girl who is therefore uncouth, and by combining seemingly opposite qualities in a single character, Tian created "a plain and simple yet wise and courageous character who leaves an indelible impression."\textsuperscript{140} If there is a flaw in "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," Chen believes it is only to be found in the "vestiges of sentimentality" in Huang Da-sha's diction, a quality that causes his characterization to pale next to Lian-gu's. Although Chen concedes that Huang's manner of speaking, particularly in his long monologues in the final scenes of the play, is potentially evocative of audience sympathy, he believes that the poetic excesses in Huang's speeches are more suitable to a sentimental poet than a country bumpkin.\textsuperscript{141}

For the most part, Chen is in agreement with Liu on the merits and deficiencies of "Night Talk in Suzhou." He considers the work, along with "View of a Riverside

\textsuperscript{140}Ibid., p. 26.
\textsuperscript{141}Ibid., pp. 27-8.
Village," to be valuable for its expose of the evils of warlordism in nineteen-twenties China, but believes that, although Tian was beginning to intuitively grasp the principles of revolution when he wrote the play, he nevertheless remained incapable of clearly discerning the issues at hand. Thus, "Night Talk in Suzhou" puts forth confusing ideas about wars and warlords. At one point during the course of the play's action, for example, the painting teacher laments the destruction of "beautiful things" as one of the inevitable outcomes of war. However, according to Chen, the evil effects of the militarists' battles were not merely related to the destruction of beauty, and Tian omitted to take a stand on other, more pressing, concerns by choosing that particular issue as a focal point. Tian also tended to focus on the personal concerns of the painter, his students, and his long-lost daughter at the expense of sufficiently expanding upon the theme of war, thus diluting the potential seriousness of the play.

Chen concludes his discussion of Tian's early plays by providing detailed plot synopses of "Tragedy on a Lake," "Return South," "Shivers," and "Echoes of an Ancient

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142 Ibid., p. 33.
143 Ibid., p. 35.
144 Ibid., p. 36.
Pond."\textsuperscript{145} As a group, he considers those works to be fundamentally lacking in realism and overly dependent upon romantic fancy, lyricism, and sentimentality. He finds "Tragedy on a Lake" to be especially troubling for its bizarre plot that lies beyond the realm of common sense and its reliance upon ghosts as a plot device.\textsuperscript{146} As for "Shivers," Chen contends that Tian does not sufficiently address the social issues that he raises in the play, namely, the mentally unbalanced son's fight against a corrupt social system that denies him his identity as a human being.\textsuperscript{147}

If Liu's and Chen's evaluations of Tian Han's works appear overly simplistic and naive, a brief description of the state of modern Chinese dramatic criticism will provide a rationale. The twenty-four year period spanning the formal introduction of modern Western drama in 1907 and the founding of the League of Left Wing Dramatists in 1931 represents the only time in modern Chinese history when playwrights and critics were free to work without undue influence from pressures external to drama. Twenty-four years, however, was not a sufficiently long period to allow critics time to become thoroughly familiar with Western-style huo-chu so that they could develop theories in an

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., pp. 32-4 and pp. 36-9.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., p. 36.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., p. 33.
atmosphere free of political constraints. As a result of the general political atmosphere in the early 'thirties and the activities of the Leagues of Left Wing Writers and Dramatists, drama and dramatic criticism were compelled to take a pronounced leap to the political left. The Leagues, however, merely paved the way for Mao's Talks at the Yenan Forum, which turned prescriptive dramatic criticism into government policy. The result has been a suffocating absence of free academic discussion which has produced a sterile body of dramatic criticism. The success of drama as propaganda is the only permissible criterion for its evaluation. Plot structure, characterization, and dialogue are judged, not by how well they serve a play under consideration or fulfill an author's intent, but by how closely they tally with Marx's theories on class struggle and Mao's pronouncements that drama is obliged to glorify the masses. In light of the arbitrary demands placed upon dramatic critics by propagandists and politicians, Chen Shou-zhu's tentative foray into the realm of assessing the effectiveness of "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" qua drama, for example, is an accomplishment indeed.

Despite general agreement amongst Western authors that Tian Han was a significant playwright whose work is worthy of scholarly attention, there have been as few studies of his plays in English as there have been in Chinese. Jarmila Haringova, a Czechoslovakian critic, has also approached
Tian's early plays from a Marxist perspective, and Constantine Tung, an American professor, has written two brief articles in which he considers Tian's work as reflections of the playwright's personal life and as Chinese versions of Ibsen's *Ghosts* and *The Lady From the Sea*.

In "The Development of T'ien Han's Dramatic Writings During the Years 1920-1937," 148 Haringova demonstrates Tian's maturation as a Marxist playwright. The standard by which she judges the merits of the plays is the degree to which socialist consciousness is achieved by the characters in them. As a result of her political bent, Haringova characterizes the general tenor of Tian's works in the 'twenties as sincere but confused, beginning with "A Night in a Cafe" and "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," followed by a strong period in which Tian produced "Before Lunch" and "View of a Riverside Village," after which the playwright's works declined noticeably in quality for the remainder of the decade due to Tian's overemphasis on romantic escapism at the expense of the analysis of realistic social problems. 149

Despite the play's melancholy overtones and pessimistic conclusion, "A Night in a Cafe," according to Haringova,


properly presents characters whose behavior is controlled by the economic classes to which they belong. Bai Qiu-ying is poor and therefore honest and courageous; as the son of a rich man, her lover Li Gan-qing is appropriately demonstrated to be "a selfish and bad character."\(^{150}\) As a whole, the play provides "effective criticism of the ruling classes and the rotten . . . social life of the old world founded on unscrupulous human relationships."\(^{151}\)

Haringova acknowledges the unusual features of "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," such as its picturesque setting, poetic force, and realistic portrayal of wealthy, conservative family life, as being assets to the play. The action is full of suspense and, even though the constant increase in dramatic tension is momentarily retarded by Wei Fu-sheng's monologues about the perils of tiger hunting, Haringova considers those monologues to be fascinating.

Although Haringova considers "A Night in a Cafe" to be, on the whole, an effective "love tragedy with social causes,"\(^{152}\) her primary objection to "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" is the gloomy outcome of its plot. She accounts for the depressing absence of hope for the young lovers, however, by suggesting that the forces that would have created a climate in which a more positive ending could have


\(^{152}\) *Ibid.*
occurred were non-existent in pre-revolutionary China. Thus, although the melancholy note upon which the action of the play concludes is the major defect in its construction, Haringova excuses Tian on the grounds of lacking proper real life role models as bases for his dramatic creation.

Haringova considers "Before Lunch" and "View of a Riverside Village" to be the strongest works of Tian's early period. "Before Lunch" is exceptional for its analysis, however elementary, of class struggle and its anti-feudal, anti-capitalist themes, especially its expose of "the reactionary effect of religious teaching [as] the opium for the oppressed." Along with "View of a Riverside Village," a short work about accidental fratricide which Haringova interprets as a metaphor for China's political situation in the 'twenties, "Before Lunch" proves that Tian was beginning to clarify his outlook on class struggle. According to Haringova, the ending of "Before Lunch," in particular, in which the religious sister awakens to the call of the revolution, demonstrates a marked improvement over "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," showing that Tian had become "sufficiently mature to see the correct way out of the crisis." Although the content of "Before Lunch" and "View of a Riverside Village" is decidedly more political in

153 Ibid., p. 142.
154 Ibid., p. 143.
155 Ibid.
nature than either "A Night in a Cafe" or "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," Haringova tends to be so enamored of Tian's apparent rise in social consciousness in those plays that she believes them to be worthy of unqualified praise. Thus, she overlooks other, more important and even Marxist considerations, such as assessing the effectiveness of Tian's dramatizations of social concerns.

"Night Talk in Suzhou" is, for Haringova, Tian's final worthwhile effort of the decade before slipping into the decadence and escapism of "Tragedy on a Lake" and "Return South." The play reiterates some of the progressive themes previously dramatized in "Before Lunch" and focuses on a problem then prevalent in China, that is, the "ivory tower" attitude of artists and intellectuals to politics.156 Nevertheless, the potential impact of the anti-war ideas in the play is diminished by Tian's excessive concern with what Haringova considers to be "a narrowly personal, almost superficial story of a few individuals."157 In "Tragedy on a Lake" Tian takes that error to its limit, squandering all of his creative energies on "describing [a] romantic adventure with all the morbidity of the mood and the diseased mental state of the main characters."158 As for "Return South," the play is so mired in lyric fantasy that

156 Ibid., p. 145.
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid., p. 146.
Haringova cannot consider it appropriate for the needs of a country so full of pressing problems. She also finds its depiction of "the longing of a dissatisfied individual for freedom from law and order" to be highly objectionable.\(^{159}\)

As a critic Haringova tends to make assertions that she does not document. She sees the changes in the painting teacher's attitudes in "Night Talk in Suzhou," for example, as being representative of the Chinese intellectuals' growing awareness of the urgency of China's political situation. However, though Liu Shu-kang, the painter, acknowledges too late his error in persisting in painting while bullets whizzed about his head rather than moving his family to safer ground, he has come to understand the futility of war and revolution and has returned to art as a means of finding fulfillment. As such, he simply does not fit Haringova's bill of the "enlightened intellectual" who tosses away his paintbrush in favor of devoting his life to unending revolution.

Like her fellow Marxists in China, Haringova fails to evaluate Tian's plays qua drama, choosing instead to assess their merits on the basis of how closely the plays conform to ideals that are external to the plays in particular and to drama in general. In other words, Haringova does not address the issue of the quality of Tian Han's works as they were written but as she wishes they were written.

\(^{159}\) Ibid., p. 147.
Constantine Tung's first short study, "T'ien Han and the Romantic Ibsen," presents Tian as a Chinese Ibsen by comparing similar incidents and other parallels between "Shivers" and Ghosts, and "Return South" and The Lady From the Sea.¹⁶⁰ That approach to Chinese drama has been a popular one in the West; Marian Galik and David Ch'en have written similar analyses comparing Hong Shen to Eugene O'Neill,¹⁶¹ and Joseph Lau has noted Cao Yu's debt to O'Neill and Chekhov.¹⁶² That type of comparative criticism, although indeed legitimate, tends, however, to overlook the merits of the Chinese dramatic works in and of themselves; the playwrights are treated as pale reflections of Western authors and their plays as Chinese copies of Western originals.

Tung limits his analysis of "Shivers" as an imitation of Ghosts to noting the similarities between the protagonist of Tian's play and Oswald Alving: both young men suffer physically and spiritually as a result of sexual


transgressions committed by one of their parents. In "Shivers" Second Son likens himself to a desiccated weed growing at the foot of a wall, deprived of the sunlight he so desperately needs for nourishment, a sentiment that Tung sees as an echo of Oswald's plea for the sun at the conclusion of Ghosts.

Tung's comparison of The Lady From the Sea with "Return South" is more thorough, and he makes a more conclusive argument for a direct line of influence from Ibsen to Tian by means of careful textual documentation. In Tian's love triangle involving the farmer, Chun, and the Wanderer, Tung sees a reiteration of the relationships among Dr. Wangel, Ellida, and the Stranger in The Lady From the Sea. He attributes the differences between Ellida's longing for the sea and Chun's desire to be free to the "differences of experiences and mind between Ibsen and T'ien Han at the times when they were writing." Whereas Ellida's ultimate rejection of the Stranger is symbolic of Ibsen's acceptance of the impossibility of recapturing his past, Chun's final pursuit of her Wanderer represents Tian's search for freedom, excitement, and originality.163

Tung continues to use a similar approach to Tian's early plays in his second study in which he analyzes the works as manifestations of Tian's personal fears and

frustrations at the time of writing. The primary thrust of the article is that Tian drew heavily upon himself in the creation of the melancholy male protagonists of his early dramas. Tian's ability to capture the frustration and despair of the young, urban, Chinese intellectual of the 'twenties, as demonstrated, for example, by Lin Zi-qi, the alcoholic student in "A Night in a Cafe," was, according to Tung, directly related to Tian's overwhelming infatuation with his cousin Yi Shu-yu, with whom Tian would share a brief but passionate marriage. In "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," Huang Da-sha is the dramatic equivalent of Tian Han himself, a loner alienated from society and separated from family. Again, the theme of true love versus marriage for convenience, as exemplified in the doomed relationship between Lian-gu and her poor, mad cousin, is interpreted by Tung as a dramatization of Tian's desire for Yi. Finally, in Liu Shu-Kang, the lonely painting master of "Night Talk in Suzhou," Tung perceives Tian as recreating himself onstage as evidenced by a number of parallels between Tian and Liu: both men are artists, outcasts from society who have been forcibly separated from their families, Liu by war and Tian by the death in 1923 of his beloved wife. According to Tung, Tian shared with Liu the need to bury his overwhelming loneliness in affection for and devotion to his

students. Liu Shu-kang seeks a romantic relationship with Yang, his favorite protege; Tian is said by Tung to have written the role of Yang Xiao-feng for Tang Shu-ming, a young actress of whom Tian was especially fond.\textsuperscript{165} Although "Night Talk in Suzhou" has the outward trappings of an anti-war drama, Tung believes that upon closer examination the play is revealed to be one in which the playwright "laments his own disillusionment [as exemplified by his] close identification with his suffering protagonist."\textsuperscript{166}

Tung does not include analyses of "Before Lunch" and "View of a Riverside Village" in his study, probably because of those plays' politically oriented contents. As for Tian's final plays of the decade, Tung does not interpret them so much as dramatic referents for specific events in Tian's life as symbols of Tian's continued search for a lost dream.\textsuperscript{167} "Tragedy on a Lake," Tian's tale of two star-crossed lovers who have been doomed by time lost to be parted eternally, conveys Tian's longing for his deceased wife and his realization that the past, once gone, can never be regained. The ultimate escape from the intense loneliness that Tian experienced throughout the decade is

\textsuperscript{165}Both Tian and Tang Shu-ming agree, however, that Tang played the painter's daughter, not Yang Xiao-feng. See Tian Han, "Nan-guo-shi shi-lue," pp. 130-1, and Tang Shu-ming, "Hui-yi nan-guo," p. 143, in Tian Han, et al.

\textsuperscript{166}Contantine Tung, "Lonely Search Into the Unknown," pp. 48-9.

\textsuperscript{167}Ibid., p. 50.
implied in the conclusion of "Echoes of an Ancient Pond," in which a young woman, imprisoned in a tower by her poet-lover who desires only to protect her from the licentiousness of the material world, drowns herself. Below her balcony is an ancient pond, the immeasurable depths of which "contain all the mysteries and beauties of the unknown," and the young woman cannot resist the temptation to explore its secrets.

Although Tung's biographical orientation to Tian's works is different from the other critics whose work has been discussed, both Chinese and Western, his analyses also rely to a great extent upon assertion rather than on detailed textual documentation to support his evaluations of Tian's plays. In several cases the documentation that he does use simply does not validate the biographical data in his criticism. For example, Tung's contention that both Liu Shu-kang, the hero of "Night Talk in Suzhou," and Tian devoted their lives to the pursuit of goals that ultimately betrayed them as being false and empty is questionable. Tung cites the soldier's life as proving to be the great disillusionment for Liu, a fact that is not borne out by the action of the play, and draws a parallel to Tian's life, claiming that Tian came to understand the ultimate emptiness of art. Tian, however, devoted his entire life to the theatre and to film, enjoyed great popularity in China throughout the 'twenties, indeed, for well over fifty years.

168 Ibid., p. 52.
and undoubtedly would have continued to function actively as a producer of theatre had his imprisonment during the Cultural Revolution not abruptly ended his career and his life. In his discussion of Tian's use of a happy ending for "Night Talk in Suzhou," the only play written by Tian during the period to make use of an upbeat conclusion, Tung suggests that that turn in Tian's writing signaled a change in his dramatic interests to the "wish-fulfillment of fantasy, a form which was to become dominant in his later plays."\(^{169}\) However, of the plays to which Tung is referring, that is, "Tragedy on a Lake," "Return South," "Echoes of an Ancient Pond," and "Shivers," none are fantasies nor do any exhibit conclusively happy endings.

Another somewhat frustrating flaw in Tung's approach to Tian's dramas is his tendency to stop short of thorough analyses of potentially fascinating assumptions. He comments, for example, on the Chekhovian undertones of "A Night in a Cafe" and remarks on the similarity between that play and Uncle Vanya but fails to provide a detailed exegesis of his statement. Again, Tung's description of the final scenes in "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" as being "positively poetic" improvements over "A Night in a Cafe," which Tung considers to be mundane by comparison, is unspecific. Finally, his intriguing description of the action of "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" as "an

\(^{169}\text{Ibid.}, p. 50.\)
interweaving of major and minor keys,"\textsuperscript{170} would have been validated by a thorough explanation of how that interweaving actually operates throughout the structure of the play. Nevertheless, given all the flaws in his approach to evaluating Tian Han's works, Constantine Tung's criticism is a breath of fresh air in an area that is dominated by musty Marxist analyses.

The accolades that have been bestowed upon Tian Han, even by critics like Liu Shou-song who are less than completely enamored of his writing style, create a natural expectation on the part of readers that the early plays will be outstanding examples of dramatic writing, even by comparatively sophisticated Western standards for spoken drama. Tian Han's early one-act dramas nevertheless appear to be simple, some even quite trivial, the work of a young, inexperienced playwright who fancied himself a more skillful dramatist than he actually was. In some cases, Tian even takes questionable risks in constructing his dramas, for example, writing entire scenes that take place offstage, as in "Before Lunch." His plots revolve around straightforward conflicts, usually the thwarting of a love interest by the patriarchal forces in Chinese society that tend to be hostile to the notions of true love and free marriage.

The Marxist critics who have considered Tian's early plays and found his political philosophy to be clumsily

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., p. 46.
conceived and executed are not altogether incorrect; the political sentiments that are expressed in "Before lunch" and "View of a Riverside Village" are the thoughts of an inexperienced political thinker who has only an elementary understanding of the concepts he is attempting to dramatize. For the most part, Tian uses standard quantitative plot structure as a means of organizing dramatic action, and he tends to cling to basic melodramatic structure, eschewing the moral contemplation that might have produced a tragedy or the joyous celebration in man's foibles and follies that would have made it possible for him to write an effective comedy. Given these considerations, the academic validity of translating and critically analyzing such seemingly slight works must rightfully be questioned.

The outwardly simplistic qualities of Tian Han's early dramas can mislead a reader into overlooking the enormous impact that Tian had upon the development of modern Chinese drama and theatre. In order to fully appreciate the extent of his influence he must be seen against the backdrop of the state of spoken drama in China during the formative years of the nineteen-twenties. Although his contributions might appear insignificant in light of the contemporary state of Western theatrical art, they are monumental when placed in the perspective of the early Chinese spoken drama movement.

The Spring Willow Society had formally introduced Western spoken drama to Chinese audiences in 1907 with its
adaptations of Uncle Tom's Cabin and La Dame aux Camellias, but Tian Han was the first Chinese playwright to use Western dramatic form and conventions to create indigenous Chinese scripts. He may, as Constantine Tung has suggested, have been influenced by Ibsen, but the scripts he produced were original dramas that revolved around uniquely Chinese concerns and themes, not translations or Chinese reworkings of Western scripts. Unsophisticated as they may seem, those original dramas spoke to a generation of young Chinese intellectuals for whom Tian Han was an unquestioned dramatic spokesman.

By organizing the South Country Society and touring his dramas throughout the major cities of southern China, Tian was also instrumental in developing an audience for what was essentially a new art form. No similar experiment has been tried in the United States, but if a young, unknown playwright living in New York during the nineteen-twenties, enamored of Beijing opera and working from translations of translations, as Tian himself probably did, decided to organize a troupe of completely inexperienced actors and write Beijing operas on American themes for the company to perform, and then took that fledgling company on tour to all the major cities along the Eastern Seaboard, popularizing

his brand of hybrid Beijing opera and capturing audiences until his dramas were as popular as standard Broadway fare, the American theatre world might have had its own equivalent of Tian Han.

Tian's introduction of realism to the Chinese stage was his greatest and most far-reaching contribution to twentieth century theatre and drama in China. His scripts call for detailed interiors that are often arranged to provide more than a single playing space and require the use of non-essential properties and furniture pieces that function as realistic set dressing, a practice previously unheard of in a country where centuries-old theatrical conventions dictated the use of a bare stage for all dramatic action upon which actors would indicate locale, time, and set changes by means of stylized choreography and symbolic properties. Tian's plays call for practical windows, swinging doors, and even stoves upon which real food is cooked; thus, he almost singlehandedly transformed Chinese staging from the fluid, Elizabethan-like style of the Beijing opera to the nineteenth-century style of theatrical realism in the West that began with the introduction of the box set (circa. 1825-30) and climaxed in the scenic innovations of Irving and Tree.

Tian Han's experiments with realism were not confined to the transformation of staging conventions but extended to his style of dramatic writing as well. Structurally his
early plays departed from the established practices of the Beijing opera in the extreme, substituting plain, vernacular Chinese for the high-flown, often incomprehensible, dialogue of the opera, and using characters with whom his urban audiences could readily identify: disaffected Bohemians and students, alienated artists and poets, and star-crossed lovers rather than the fantasy characters, emperors, and princesses who peopled the Beijing opera. Considering his limited experience with Western dramatic form, his ability to structure a dramatic action so that it takes on the appearance of a series of realistic incidents interrelated by a network of cause and effect relationships rather than an artificially constructed piece of writing, is remarkable. Although Tian would never be as skillful at manipulating theatrical reality or write with as much depth as the great Cao Yu, whose finest Western-style tragedies were written in the nineteen-thirties after Tian had turned to Marxism for literary inspiration, Tian Han paved the way for Cao with his fledgling experiments in the arena of dramatic and theatrical realism.

Tian Han's initial stabs at dramatic writing during the nineteen-twenties are characterized by his departure from

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established Chinese dramaturgical traditions, which resulted in self-conscious attempts to imitate Western style theatrical and dramatic realism. "A Night in a Cafe" (1920), which depicts the unfortunate outcome of a love affair between a working girl and a young gentleman of the upper class, was followed by "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" (1921), a portrayal of the ill effects of arranged marriages on Chinese youth. Both works feature characters drawn from modern Chinese life who are caught in the throes of peculiarly contemporary dilemmas rather than the historical and often mythical beings that peopled traditional Chinese drama. Tian created detailed, realistic settings for these new dramas, calling for numerous properties and set pieces, and realistic sound and lighting effects. Thus, he pioneered the use of design elements as a visual and aural means of creating stage environments that had readily identifiable referents in daily Chinese life, and thereby reinforced the stylistic unity of his dramas.

The shortcomings that are evident in "A Night in a Cafe" and "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" are characteristic of Tian's dramatic writing style throughout the decade to come. In both plays Tian constructs action such that it unfolds as much by means of narration as by enactment. He struggles, sometimes unsuccessfully, to disguise coincidental occurrences so that they assume of a guise of credibility. Often he overemphasizes the pathetic
aspects of the action, including superfluous details that weaken the play rather than strengthen it. Such structural flaws are indicative of Tian's relative inexperience as a writer and lack of concentrated exposure to Western dramatic literature. Nevertheless, the strides that Tian Han made in successfully introducing an essentially foreign dramatic form and style to the Chinese stage overshadow the deficiencies in his technique.

In "Before Lunch" (1921), his third play of the 'twenties, Tian continued to present characters and situations that were drawn from contemporary life to Chinese audiences. Although he had no formal political affiliations at this stage of his career, and would not until 1931 when he joined the Chinese Communist Party, "Before Lunch" signals Tian's interest in the socio-political implications of current events as materials for drama. The play, as Chinese critic Chen Shou-zhu has noted, was a remarkable achievement, if only for being the first modern Chinese drama to depict the plight of the working class.\textsuperscript{173}

Although "A Night in a Cafe" and "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" touched on the social considerations of romantic love versus expedient marriage, both of those plays were primarily love stories. The love interest in "Before Lunch" is tangential rather than pivotal to the plot. The play, which revolves around a poor, working class family and the

\textsuperscript{173}Chen Shou-zhu, p. 19.
eldest daughter's transformation from dutiful Christian to zealous revolutionary, is Tian's first attempt to write a thesis drama. The ideas as they are dramatized in the play, including the inherent evil of Christianity, the issue of inequitable working conditions, and the futility of the lives of the poor, are the thoughts of an inexperienced socio-political thinker. The significance of the play lies not so much in its execution, however, but in its conception; in "Before Lunch" Tian introduces the lower class to the Chinese stage and makes a valiant attempt to depict social and political issues that were timely and of immediate importance to his audiences.

After the publication of "Before Lunch" in 1921, Tian ceased to write drama until "View of a Riverside Village" (1927). The untimely death of his beloved wife Yi Shu-yu in 1923 aroused such intense feelings of despair and futility in him that he withdrew entirely from the theatre. When he emerged from his period of mourning, it was not immediately as a playwright but as a teacher and administrator at various institutions throughout southern China, including Shanghai University. His subsequent involvement with China's fledgling film industry was also instrumental in his lengthy absence from the theatre.

174 Tian Han, "Li-xiang de zi-wei" ("The Feeling of Being Away From Home") in Tian Han Dai-biao zuo (Representative Works of Tian Han) (Shanghai, n. pub., 1933), p. 226.
Tian's brief drama "View of a Riverside Village," a play with pronounced political overtones, marks his return to writing for the theatre. The action of the play, which is a metaphor for the warlordism that was rampant in China at the time of its writing, revolves around the accidental acts of fratricide committed by two brothers who have pledged loyalty to opposing warlords. The work, although fragmentary in the extreme, can be seen as a continuation of the trend Tian established with "Before Lunch" in its adaptation of current events to the stage. Significantly, Tian does not manipulate the action of the play in order to convert the audience to any specific political ideology, a characteristic that would mark all of his leftist works written after he joined the League of Left Wing Dramatists in 1931. In "View of a Riverside Village" Tian seems instead to be pleading for pacifism in general rather than commitment to a particular political doctrine.

Tian's preoccupation with socio-political issues in "Before Lunch" and "View of a Riverside Village" results in a loss of the fully-fleshed out characterizations he was so successful in creating in his earliest dramas. The characters in "A Night in a Café" and "Before Lunch" were multi-faceted dramatic agents whose combinations of good and evil qualities often caused them to be torn between equally strong but opposing viewpoints. Although the characters Tian introduced in "Before Lunch" and "Riverside Village,"
lower class peasants, workers and modern-day soldiers, were new to the stage, his creations tend to be personifications of single traits whose purpose is to serve as mouthpieces for specific points of view or function as pawns that can be moved so that the plot can reach its required conclusion.

Tian's next play, "Night Talk in Suzhou" (1927), is a transitional work that bridges his recent interest in political concerns to a return to the more personal, contemplative works that follow it. The play is comprised of two nearly distinct, practically independent one-act dramas. The first half of the play, which depicts a group of bantering art students, signals a return to the fullness of characterization that Tian has not used since "The Night a Tiger Was Captured"; in the second half of the play, which focuses on the coincidental reunion of an aging art teacher and his long-lost daughter, Tian combines narration instead of enactment with two-dimensional caricatures of human beings to create a work that clearly manifests a line of influence from "Before Lunch" and "View of a Riverside Village."

Tian followed "Night Talk in Suzhou" with four plays in which he refrained from political commentary to do his most successful formal and stylistic experimentation. "Tragedy on a Lake" (1928), which was similar to Tian's earliest love dramas, "A Night in a Cafe" and "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," became one of his most popular works. The action
of the play is essentially realistic like its predecessors, however, "Tragedy on a Lake" manifests heavy romantic overtones in dialogue and atmosphere that are not evident in those previous plays. Tian's attention to the emotional effects of lighting and sound as means of establishing and reinforcing the mood of a play was a characteristic of the early plays that was not as pronounced in his pseudo-political dramas. The lighting and sound effects in "Tragedy on a Lake," however, demonstrate his continuing and growing sensitivity to the potential of visual and aural effects to function as integral elements of dramatic action. Finally, Tian abandoned the caricatures of his most recent works for more fully formulated characters whom his young, urban audiences could readily identify as being theatrical manifestations of themselves.

Tian's successful experimentation with romanticism in "Tragedy on a Lake" was followed by an attempt to incorporate symbolism into "Echoes of an Ancient Pond" (1928), in which Tian also made his only attempt to depart from standard dramatic structure. Tian's usual method of organizing dramatic action is to establish exposition in the opening scene by means of a series of questions and answers among characters. A discovery follows, which somehow reverses the expectations of at least one of the characters involved in the exposition. After a series of complications in which the protagonists are given the opportunity to
explain their various motivations at some length, Tian provides a brief denouement. The use of a monologue to comprise fully half the action of "Echoes of an Ancient Pond," therefore, is unique indeed.

Before "Return South" (1929), his final work of the decade, Tian wrote a brief play entitled "Shivers" (1929), which depicted an illegitimate son's transformation from a dangerous neurotic to a healthy, mature individual. Tian breaks neither new structural nor stylistic ground in this brief drama that recalls "View of a Riverside Village" in its extreme attenuation and didactic qualities. Falling as it does after two successful experiments with dramatic structure and style and before a play for which Tian wrote his best poetic dialogue, "Shivers" is an anomaly. In it all of the weakest tendencies of Tian's writing become apparent: a thin plot in which the manipulation of coincidence is obvious, skeletal characters who function as mouthpieces for ideas, a tendency for those characters to speechify, the overdependence upon narration at the expense of enactment. Yet, despite its obvious structural flaws, "Shivers," which introduces the subject of mental illness to the Chinese stage, is indicative of Tian's abilities to glean new dramatic material from contemporary life while continuing to call attention to the realistic dilemma of the young Chinese intellectual of the 'twenties, who, caught between the demands of Chinese tradition and the lure of
Western culture, found himself torn between two equally strong, equally imposing civilizations.

Although several of his previous works manifested Tian's interest in and ability to write poetic dialogue, from his earliest attempts in "A Night in a Cafe" to his most recent use of poetry in "Echoes of an Ancient Pond," "Return South" represents Tian's most successful experiments with the incorporation of poetic structures into an outwardly realistic action that also functions as a metaphor for a referent beyond itself. Unlike the thesis plays that Tian wrote in the middle of the decade, "Return South" attempts to dramatize complex ideas for which the playwright provides no simple answers. The pat morality of "Before Lunch," "View of a Riverside Village," and "Night Talk in Suzhou" is absent from this play; instead Tian presents an action that has disturbing implications for the future of Chinese youth. To the young woman awaiting the return of her savior, a Wanderer who belongs to no one but himself, the Wanderer's rootlessness represents freedom; ironically, however, the Wanderer sees his unending journey as a painful, desolate burden. "Return South," Tian's final work of the decade, demonstrates the developing sophistication in his dramatic technique that sadly would be lost from his work when he embraced Marxism in the early nineteen-thirties.
In the translations that follow, I have tried to preserve, inasmuch as possible, the structure, syntax, punctuation, and spirit of Tian's original dramas while attempting to render his dialogue into a smooth, theatrically workable English equivalent. These are the first English translations of Tian's early plays to be made available to English-speaking readers, therefore, few liberties were taken in the translation process and, wherever possible, free substitutions were eschewed in favor of literal translations and annotations of words, expressions, or place names that could not be comfortably rendered into English. Above all, the translation process was governed with the idea in mind that these lines were written for actors to say aloud on a stage in the presence of an audience, not for a lone reader to absorb from a book; thus, the theatrical quality of the English was kept on an equal footing with the need to render Tian's language faithfully from the Chinese. Stereotypical translations of Chinese honorific forms of address, such as "Most Honorable Father," were not used, nor were literal translations of Chinese first names, such as "Autumn Petal Bai" for "Bai Qiu-ying" of "A Night in a Cafe," or "Little Phoenix Yang" for "Yang Xiao-feng" of "Night Talk in Suzhou." Such literal translations evoke memories of the racist stereotypes promoted by old Hollywood "B" movies, and I felt them to be inappropriate to a fair and faithful rendering of
Tian Han's plays. Where Tian used slang or deliberately colloquial expressions, an effort was made to find an English equivalent that would not call up associations in a reader's mind of specific Western time periods or fads; instead an attempt was made to find English expressions that were similarly common in nature to their Chinese equivalents. It is my hope that the translations contained herein will help to fill in part of the void for English-speaking scholars and students of a period of Chinese dramatic literature that was, for a brief time, free of the fetters of political ideology and established traditions.
CHAPTER TWO

Preface: "A Night in a Cafe"

Tian Han wrote "A Night in a Cafe" in 1920 while he was still residing in Japan and studying education at the Tokyo Higher Normal School. He believed the play to be one of the significant works of his "apprentice period" for "its depiction of adolescent sentiments and anxieties"\(^1\) and considered it to be his "debut work" in spite of the fact that "Cafe" was preceded in 1919 by a full-length drama about the humiliating lives of sing-song girls entitled Violin and Rose, a play that was apparently never produced and with which Tian was never completely satisfied.\(^2\)

In 1932, after having become a founding member of the League of Left Wing Dramatists, Tian revised "A Night in a Cafe" with an eye toward bringing the script more into line with leftist literary doctrine. Appropriately proletarian


\(^2\)Tian Han, Tian Han Xi-qu-ji, Di-yi-ji (Collected Plays of Tian Han, Volume I) (Shanghai: Xian-dai Shu-dian, 1933), "Preface," p. 2.
sentiments are sprinkled throughout the revised script; both Feng and Lin proclaim, "The hand of a rich man can never clasp that of a poor man," and, when Zheng discovers Bai grieving over the loss of her lover, he chides her, saying, 

I want you to take a look at this motherland of ours. Look at the bitterness of the people and think of them, and our personal pain and suffering cannot be considered. ... Miss Qiu, don't let your tears infect other people. You should know that crying is no way to ever settle any problem.

The play concludes with a determined Bai, who, having proudly refused to take Li's hand upon saying farewell to him, squares her shoulders and resolves to face whatever life will bring her:

... It will be busy in here again in a moment. Yes, crying is no way to solve a problem. I must pluck up my courage and go on living. (She rises and begins to arrange things in the cafe as the sounds of new customers arriving begin to swell).

Although Tian kept sketchy production records for his works that were produced by his South China Society later in the decade, he does not mention productions of "A Night in a Cafe" in his writings, and production records for the play are practically non-existent. Chinese theatre historians and literary critics, who approach dramatic writing almost exclusively as literary propaganda, have overlooked the

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3 Tian Han, "Ka-fei-dian zhi yi-ye" ("A Night in a Cafe"), in Tian Han Qu-zuo Xuan (Selected Plays of Tian Han) (Beijing: Ren-min wen-xue chu-ban-she, 1955), p. 8 and p. 32.

4 Ibid., p. 34.
importance of production history and thus have neglected to maintain records of production in their writings. A single reference to a production of "A Night in a Cafe" comes from Yuan Mu-chi, a member of the Xin Yu Drama Society which performed in Shanghai during the nineteen-twenties: "Yuan Lun-jen['s] melancholy mood and performance in 'A Night in a Coffee Shop' achieved extraordinary success." Apparently Yuan Lun-jen played the role of the alcoholic student, Lin Zi-qi. Yuan Mu-chi, however, gives no date for that performance nor does he provide any other pertinent production information.

A number of explanations can be offered for the dearth of contemporary production records for this and other of Tian's dramas. During the nineteen-twenties China experienced a period of almost frenzied literary and journalistic output; a plethora of newspapers and periodicals devoted to the arts went in and out of business with incredible speed, some lasting a mere issue or two. The sheer volume of material, much of which was edited and

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6 Yuan Mu-chi quoted by Constantine Tung, "Lonely Search into the Unknown: T'ien Han's Early Plays, 1920-1927," Comparative Drama, 2, 1 (Spring, 1968), p. 44.
published by private individuals and amateur organizations, may have resulted in the simple loss of production information that may have once existed.

Production procedures themselves might also have inhibited the possibility of keeping accurate production records. Small, usually amateur, touring companies and university groups oversaw production of the new, Western-style dramas, rather than large, permanent theatres with established record-keeping procedures. In the heat of the excitement over performing Western-style dramas, the youthful members of the amateur touring companies were perhaps more taken with the idea of promoting the new drama than with maintaining accurate records of where the new plays had been performed and specifically by whom. With details like performers' names, theatres, and rehearsal procedures being relegated to the memories of the performers, it is not surprising that so much potentially valuable and enlightening production history was lost.

Finally, if any records did exist, it is entirely possible that they were destroyed or lost during the Japanese bombings of Shanghai and other urban centers during the nineteen-thirties and 'forties. It may not have been politically expedient for Tian Han and his contemporaries to have made an effort to reconstruct those records. Considering the bizarre twists of twentieth century Chinese political history that resulted in the playing out of bitter
personal vendettas, it would not be overly paranoid to consider the possibility that some production records may have even been deliberately destroyed.

Although Tian Han yearned to be thought of as China's Henrik Ibsen, "A Night in a Cafe" is clearly the work of a fledgling playwright. The play is not without structural weaknesses, which are indeed distinct. Tian has difficulty manipulating the element of chance so that it assumes an air of believability, as is demonstrated by the fortuitous, and most convenient, appearance of Li Gan-qing and Miss Chen on the very night and at the very cafe where Bai has received news of her lover from Feng. The playwright introduces thematic concerns that he does not develop; Lin's brief musing about the dichotomy between the spirit and the flesh, for example, is potentially philosophically insightful but turns out to be nothing more than a non sequitur. Tian's attempts to reconstruct the patterns of conversation as spoken in daily life often result instead in a clumsy organization of characters' thoughts in which characters contradict themselves or fail to effect smooth and logical transitions from topic to topic. He also utilizes repetition as a means of intensifying the emotional impact of the characters' predicaments. Bai narrates the story of her past three times, and, although she embellishes her tale each time she retells it, Tian does not effectively get any further mileage out of the pathos he has initially aroused.
for the girl. Instead, her story becomes redundant, often weighed down by superfluous details. Nevertheless, the weaknesses inherent in "A Night in a Cafe" notwithstanding, the play demonstrates that Tian Han made not only enormous but significant strides in adapting Western realism to the Chinese stage.

Neither Chinese nor Western critics and historians have sufficiently acknowledged the specific contributions Tian Han made to modern Chinese drama through his adaptation Western staging techniques. Although Tian's general contributions to the introduction and subsequent establishment of realism as the prevailing theatrical style in China have been duly noted, a number of important innovations that were to have permanent effects on staging in China can be inferred from the text of "A Night in a Cafe," particularly in the areas of setting and lighting.

The setting for the play, described by Tian as "the interior of a small, tidy cafe," is unlike anything the Chinese had ever previously seen. Beijing opera convention required staging to take place on a bare stage devoid of realistic scenic elements with minimal use of hand properties which, when used, were highly symbolic rather than literal. The efforts of the Spring Willow Society, beginning in 1907, introduced the first formal attempts at scenic realism, but the scripts which comprised the Society's repertoire were not Chinese in origin: Hot Blood,
the Society's version of La Dame aux Camellias, and Black Slave Cries to Heaven, its reworking of Uncle Tom's Cabin, were adaptations of European and American works.

For "A Night in a Cafe" Tian gives a thoroughly detailed description of the interior of a realistic "cafe," which includes requirements for practical doors and properties which are tangible and realistic rather than imaginary and symbolic. His delineation of the stage space demonstrates his ability to divide the stage area such that a single location can provide more than one specific playing space. The cafe requires a large playing space which Tian places at stage left and a smaller playing space in which Lin Zi-qi can conceal himself during Bai's confrontation with Li Gan-qing. The specific arrangement of the playing areas as described by Tian provides a different playing space for each of Bai Qiu-ying's three encounters in the cafe: with the three inebriated customers, with Lin Zi-qi, and, finally, with Li Gan-qing.

Properties are also used innovatively: some are non-essential props that serve as realistic set ornamentation, neither required by the action nor ever used by the actors. Certainly Tian's requirement for real food and drinks, including the stage direction that calls for Bai to serve Lin a plate of ham and eggs, would have been innovative. Other realistic properties are integrated into the plot:
the charcoal heater, which also functions as an indicator of season, and Bai's cherished love letters and photograph.

Tian's description of wall ornamentation in the cafe and his placement of the swinging door at stage left, which is presumably set into a "wall," also suggests another landmark innovation, that is, the introduction of the box set. Though contemporary photographs suggest that a box set may have been used for the Spring Willow Society's production of *Hot Blood*, the "Cafe" box set would have been the first to have been conceived for an original Chinese script. Thus, Tian's innovations in the area of staging represent a far cry from the Beijing opera empty space, which was similar to the more flexible, Elizabethan approach to the utilization of stage space.

Tian also pays remarkable attention to the production element of lighting, the technology for which must have been rudimentary in Republican China even by contemporary theatrical standards. The use of lighting as a dynamic scenic element would have been an entirely new concept for Chinese theatre artists; Beijing opera lighting does not utilize lighting changes at all. Any need for a change in lighting, for example, a shift from day to night, would be

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7 See frontispiece in Tian Han, *et al.*; the accompanying photographs indicate that the practice of using box sets was established and accepted as standard theatrical practice by the end of the nineteen-twenties.
indicated by choreography rather than a realistic change in stage illumination, and the stage would remain fully lit.

Tian's use of artificial, indoor light from the gas lamp represents a significant breakthrough in Chinese theatre history: the source of illumination is visible and realistic for the period being enacted. His use of the gas lamp as mood lighting in the final scene of the play, in which the dimmed lights function as visual metaphors for Bai's emotional state, demonstrates a sophistication that is remarkable for a young man who was such a newcomer to the traditions of Western visual realism and also shows his sensitivity to the potential emotional effects of lighting in performance.

Tian's attention to realistic detail also extended beyond the physical trappings of realism to include a concern for structural characteristics of the style. In realistic plot structure, the playwright must shape the artificial construct of dramatic action such that it takes on the appearance of a "real" event, confining himself to a scheme of probability that gives the illusion of being controlled by the logic of "real" life as the audience experiences it. In most cases, Tian is able to shape events in "Cafe" such that they form a believable sequence of events. One example of the manner in which he accomplishes this is by the use of foreshadowing to create a scheme of probability. Feng is suspicious of Li Gan-qing's real
intentions towards Bai, and Bai prepares herself early in the play for the eventuality that Li will not want to lose social face by continuing in a relationship with an uneducated girl who works in a cafe. Tian's most sophisticated use of foreshadowing and irony in "Cafe" comes from Bai's first urging Lin to refrain from drinking. Later in the play it is Lin who must keep Bai from indulging in drink, and the reversal of that initial situation is especially deft in that it grows logically out of the demands of the plot. Tian is also successful at providing a logical chain of antecedents and consequences. The letter burning scene, for example, is a surprise, but it is not illogical, for Tian has gone to great pains to establish previously that Bai Qiu-ying is a young woman who is capable of acting independently.

Another example of Tian's attempts to incorporate important aspects of twentieth century Western realism into his writing can be found in his approach to characterization. The characters in "Cafe," though direct descendants of Beijing opera stock types and first cousins to the Western melodramatic hero, heroine, and dastardly villain, are carbon copies of neither. Instead, Tian's characterizations are accomplished with greater subtlety. Rather than the monochromatic, motiveless embodiments of simple traits that might be expected from a novice's attempts to write a simplistic melodrama, Tian has created
believable characters who are neither wholly good nor wholly evil. The characters in "Cafe" have motivations for their actions, and, while those motives are not always complex, they demonstrate a basic grasp of human psychology. Bai is a naive girl who has unwittingly abetted her own downfall through a series of impulsive choices; Li is a scoundrel for taking advantage of Bai's love and trust, but he is a victim of the old Chinese society.

"A Night in a Cafe" also demonstrates Tian's ability to handle thematic concerns that were of interest to contemporary audiences and to integrate those concerns into a plot. The theme of ideal love thwarted by the cold restrictions of Confucian propriety was one to which Chinese youth responded overwhelmingly. It was a theme to which Tian returned in his later dramas, for example, in "Tragedy on a Lake," and it was an idea that inspired other Chinese writers as well.\(^8\) Lin Zi-qi and Li Gan-qing are both typical Chinese youth caught between the old demands of filial piety and the modern lures of new social and sexual mores. Both succumb to the old ways, but interestingly, Bai, the only woman, is capable of opposing her father and standing on her own two feet.

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\(^8\) See C. T. Hsia's discussions of Ling Shu-hua (pp. 78-80), Mao Tun (pp. 148-53), Lao She (p. 172-3), Shen Ts'ung-wen (pp. 201-3), and Pa Chin (pp. 237-55) in *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, Second Edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).
Constantine Tung has noted the reflection of contemporary disaffected Chinese youths in Tian's early plays, and the theme of life as a vast desert is one that would have evoked a heartfelt response in Tian's youthful viewers. The theme provides Tian with opportunities to make his first experiments with poetic diction, and he creates beautiful imagery for Lin Zi-qi in his long speeches about the loneliness of traveling through an enormous desert without a kindred spirit to quench his thirst for companionship. After Li has left Bai forever, Lin reverses his desert imagery in his sad attempt to paint a picture of a brighter future for Bai. Thus, Tian was capable of successfully using heightened language even within the confines of realistic action and to reverse the image as the circumstances of the plot required.

Perhaps Tian's potential to become a master of his craft is most clearly demonstrated by his use of Kerensky, the blind Russian poet, as a dramatic device. Though the guitar-strumming poet, who is never seen onstage, could be seen as an early indication of Tian's later revolutionary interests, that interpretation would be somewhat simplistic. Kerensky is used as a reflection and control of the level of emotional intensity onstage. Both Feng and Lin empathize with the sadness that Kerensky's music evokes; only Li is

9 Constantine Tung, "Lonely Search Into the Unknown: T'ien Han's Early Plays, 1920-1930," Comparative Drama, 2, 1 (Spring, 1968), p. 44.
not given an opportunity to respond to the Russian's melancholy music. Thus, Kerensky also functions as a measure of the level of character sensitivity. Although Feng and Lin can respond to the music, it is Kerensky's relationship to Bai that is most significant. Both are orphans, essentially free wanderers who must learn to pay the price of pain and loneliness for their freedom. Both are challengers of old, established orders; Kerensky is a revolutionary, Bai defies her father and her lover. Kerensky can move Bai to the same extremes of joy and grief as can Ti, and she feels that she can intuitively understand Kerensky through his music despite the language barrier that separates them.

The final scene of "Cafe" combines all dramatic elements to bring out the emotional power of the play. Bai's change in fortune is manifested by her reversal in behavior; after urging Lin to refrain from alcohol, she gives in to its temptations. The melancholy sound of the solo guitar offstage musically underlines the visual metaphor for Bai's life to come: she is alone for the first and only time on a stage that is but dimly lit. Thus, Tian demonstrates himself to be capable of utilizing changes in character and plot direction to the accompaniment of emotional manipulation of music and spectacle in order to achieve not only a desired, but a logical, emotional dramatic effect.
"A Night in a Cafe," then, serves as proof of Tian Han's daring to challenge his audiences by making dramatic and theatrical innovations that represented, in their time, sharp departures from long-established traditions. On the whole, despite its weaknesses, the play represents a strong start for a twenty-two year old playwright with limited familiarity with Western dramatic form, styles, and traditions.
"A Night in a Cafe"

Cast of Characters

LIN ZI-QI, a university student, twenty-one years old
ZHENG XIANG-CUN, Zi-qi's friend, twenty-two years old
LI GAN-QING, twenty-two years old
MISS CHEN, twenty years old
BAI QIU-YING, a waitress at the cafe, nineteen years old

CAFE OWNER

Three CUSTOMERS at the cafe

Time

1920, the beginning of winter

Place

A cafe in a certain large city

1Tian Han lists the dramatis personae for the play as translated rather than using the more common Western method of listing the cast in order of appearance. The Messenger, who appears briefly towards the end of the play, is omitted by Tian from the cast of characters.
Setting

The interior of a small, tidy cafe. The room is divided by a hanging screen that is perpendicular to the audience, such that the stage left area takes up two-thirds of the stage and the stage right area takes up one-third of the stage. At up center is a counter in which glasses, cups, and various other drinking paraphernalia are stored. A large framed mirror hangs on the upstage wall. In front of the mirror is a cabinet on top of which is coffee, milk, and tea caddies, along with miscellaneous cups and dishes. A large flower vase stands at stage left. To its right is a serving table. Next to the serving table is the door through which one passes to get to the kitchen and other inner rooms; it is concealed by a cotton curtain. At stage right there is a round table on which is a potted house plant. There is a small sofa or love-seat on the side of the table closest to the hanging screen. On the other side of the table are one or two chairs with arms. A larger sofa sits at stage left. There are also a couple of long tables placed parallel to the footlights surrounded by several more chairs with arms. A pot of pretty yellow and white daisies has been neatly arranged underneath a gas lamp. Paintings and commercial prints hang on the walls, which are green. At far stage left is a swinging door. It is an early winter’s night. The CUSTOMERS at the stage left table are talking loudly and drinking heartily. The fire in the charcoal heater burns brightly as BAI QIU-YING, the waitress, pours a drink for each of them.

CUSTOMER #1
(With his drink in his hand.)

Ah . . . tonight, let's drink and be merry. (To CUSTOMER #2.) Hey, old Chen, aren't you drinking anymore?

CUSTOMER #2

No, I'm not, if I drink any more, I'll have a hangover.

CUSTOMER #1

No way! (Drains his cup with one swallow.) Miss! Pour me another. (BAI pours him another drink, and CUSTOMER #1

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Chen is not necessarily old in years. The Chinese use "lao" (lit., "old") as a prefix to names in the same way that Americans say "old," as in "old buddy."
points to #3.) You'd better have another drink. As Li Bai\(^3\) used to say, "If your life is happy, enjoy it well. Never let the reflection of the moon fall upon your golden cup." If you marry a good wife this year, then it will be a fine time to enjoy life. Alright, then, have another. Miss, fill his glass to the brim.

CUSTOMER #2
(To #3, in a very soft voice.)

Jian-xun, don't drink anymore.

CUSTOMER #1
(Half-irritated.)

Ol' Chen, it's one thing for you to quit drinking, but why are you telling him to quit? I ought to break your neck!

CUSTOMER #3
(Smiling.)

It's just that I can't drink anymore. Ask Chen here, I never used to be able to drink at all. He's so happy tonight, so I've joined you in a couple of rounds. But if I drink any more, I'll get drunk.

CUSTOMER #1

So what if you get drunk! Big deal! You're both worthless!
(To BAI.) Hey, miss! You're O. K. You join me in a drink.

BAI
(With a small smile.)

Oh, sir, I can't drink liquor. One mouthful and I'll be drunk.

CUSTOMER #1

Well, then, just take a sip.

BAI

Alright. Thanks a lot, mister.

\(^3\)Another name for Li Po, Tang poet (701-762 A. D.)
CUSTOMER #1

Ha, ha, this is a delightful young lady. Say, miss, how old are you? When did you start working here? It doesn't seem as though I've seen you here before.

BAI

I'll be nineteen this year. I came here in September, so it's going on three months.

CUSTOMER #1

From the way you talk, it sounds like you're an Easterner, right?

BAI

Yes.

CUSTOMER #1

I'm an Easterner myself. What county are you from?

BAI

Qing-hua County.

CUSTOMER #1

Qing-hua County? Ah! Where?

BAI

Teng-luo Village.

CUSTOMER #1

What is your surname?

BAI

Bai.

CUSTOMER #1

Would you be related to Mr. Bai Rep-shan?

BAI

He was my grandfather.
CUSTOMER #1

What? You are Bai Ren-shan's granddaughter?

BAI
(Nodding her head.)

Yes.

CUSTOMER #1

I heard that your family has had some hard luck these past few years. After your grandfather died, the household was split up. Then I heard that your father died last year. (Suddenly feels that he has said something hurtful.) Uh . . . it's a good thing you've come to the city! Nowadays the world has gotten bigger. Why, away from home you can plan an independent life, and that's good, too!

BAI

And what is your surname? How is it that you knew my grandfather?

CUSTOMER #1

Feng's my name. I used to teach in Qing-hua County, and I knew your father well. I came to the city the same year your grandfather died. My daughter goes to school here now. We live three blocks down, on the other side of the street at Number 143. I'd like to take you there sometime.

BAI

Thanks a lot, old Uncle. If I get the time, I'll come to see you. But, I wonder, old Uncle, if you might happen to know where Mr. Li Ming-shu and his family live?

CUSTOMER #1

Li Ming-shu? Not that Fatso Li who deals on the black market? (BAI blushes.) What kind of relationship could you have with him? Oh, I'm sorry, I don't mean to offend. I heard he got rich with a shipping factory and moved to Shanghai.

BAI

Did his whole family go?

______________________

4 A familiar form of Chinese address.
CUSTOMER #1

They all went. But I heard he has a son who goes to the university here.

BAI

Is it the young master?

CUSTOMER #1

Yes, that's Gan-qing. After he graduated from the Nan-hua School, he transferred here.

BAI

Ai-ye! How could I be so stupid! He's gone to college! What is he studying? I'm sure it's law. Old Uncle, how is he?

CUSTOMER #1

(After looking at BAI with a small smile.)

He's still well. Why are you interested in what he does?

BAI

We went to high school together.

CUSTOMER #2

I don't think it's so simple as "old school chums."

BAI

When he was at Nan-hua we often wrote to each other.

CUSTOMER #3

Well, then, you two sure must have an interesting romance going on.

CUSTOMER #2

You haven't run across him since you've been in the city?

---

5"Ai-ye" (or "Ai-ya") is a common Chinese exclamation; it is similar to the American, "Oh, my God," or "Oh, jeez."
BAI

When I was living in the countryside, he wrote me, saying he
wanted me to come to the city and go to school. He said
that he was about to graduate, and then he would come here
and help me. Then, after Father died, I came here without
even thinking about it. Since I didn't have any friends or
relatives to depend on in the city, I came to this cafe to
settle down temporarily and wait for Master Gan to return.
Old Uncle, that's wonderful! Master Gan has already come to
this city. Even though I haven't run into him, he'll sense
where I am, and he will surely come for me. Dearest old
Uncle, how Master Gan could have held himself back from me
'til now . . . but if he knew I was in a place like this it
would make him angry, wouldn't it?

CUSTOMER #2
(Interrupting.)

If he loves you, how could he be angry?

CUSTOMER #1

It doesn't matter. Miss Bai, it's not so bad here. In an
atmosphere like this, you get to see all kinds of people,
high and low, so why still go to school? Ai! I've said too
much, I'm forgetting my drink. Miss Bai, pour me another
one. And you join me in a drink, too.

BAI

Oh, I can't drink anymore. Besides the taste of whiskey is
too bitter. I can only take a little wine.

CUSTOMER #3

I like wine, too.

CUSTOMER #1

You only know how to drink the sweet stuff. You don't know
how good whisky is. (Drains his cup.) Ah . . . delightful,
delightful. (Sees the clock on the wall.) Ai-ya, it's nine
o'clock. (Takes out some money.) Miss Bai, figure out how
much it is.

BAI

Five dollars altogether.
CUSTOMER #1

Here's ten dollars, bring back the change.

CUSTOMERS #2 & #3
(Together.)

Here's some, I've got some money here.

CUSTOMER #1
(Puts away his money.)

If you two have money, then you two can pay. (CUSTOMER #2 blushes as he really does not have any. CUSTOMER #3 feels in his pockets but does not come up with anything.) Not enough? Well, allow me to be the host. Ha, ha.

(BAI exits. At the same time a pale youth enters. He is obviously in a hurry. After a moment BAI re-enters from offstage.)

BAI

Have a seat. (Faces CUSTOMER #1.) Thank you, sir. (Gives him five dollars.)

CUSTOMER #1

No, keep it for yourself.

BAI

Old Uncle, I can't take it, please take it back.

CUSTOMER #1

How can you say no? Don't you know that if an older person gives you something, you cannot refuse? How dare you refuse?

BAI

Well, then, a thousand thanks. I didn't think I'd meet someone from home tonight. What good luck, and to hear good news about Master Gan besides! Dearest old Uncle, you must come here often. Seeing you is like seeing family.

CUSTOMER #1

I'll come. I'd like to take you to my home to relax, but it's too late tonight. We've got to go. You be patient.
It's nice here, and you like this life. I don't think you need to go looking for Master Gan.

BAI

Alright, but I won't go looking for him because he will surely come for me.

CUSTOMER #1
(With a slight smile.)

Maybe he'll come to look for you... But I really like the atmosphere in cafes like this. Miss Bai, you must understand how corrupt your "uncle" has become over these past few years. (Sighs.) Yes, indeed, corrupt, better to say that one always wants more than life can give. So I started smoking and drinking, searching for the object of my desires. I'm like two different people, if you compare me to what I was like when I was teaching in Qing-hua, I'm afraid you would not want to call the kind of man that I've become your "uncle."

BAI

It doesn't matter, you are still a most loveable uncle.

CUSTOMER #1

Miss Bai, you really are a lovely girl. Except for the kind of life you lead, I most envy the life of that blind Russian poet who lives in the inn next door. Do you know him?

BAI

Do you mean that Kerensky who wandered in there last month?

CUSTOMER #1

Yes.

BAI

He is the most fascinating gentleman. The rich students at the school have brought him here to drink lots of times. His hair is as yellow as gold. When he speaks, he always wears a little smile, but whenever people see it, it makes them feel desolate. Naturally I don't understand anything he says. But when I hear his voice it sounds so gentle, it's like hearing the voice of a fellow countryman in a
strange land. He can play a kind of foreign pi-pa. One evening he was so happy -- he'd come here with someone and brought his pi-pa with him. And he came right up to me and played. He played and sang. First he sang a song of the Russian Revolution. He sang so passionately, so wonderfully, even I wanted to run out and throw bombs!

CUSTOMER #1

Ai-ya!

BAI

Then he sang a ballad; they said it was a sad song about the Volga River. It was like the story of a princess's love suicide. The tone was so mournful. I listened to him singing by himself with the tears flowing fast out of those sightless eyes. They said he'd been separated from his mother and brothers from the time he was small, and he'd drifted all alone to so many places. He had been to Burma, Siam, India, to Japan, and wherever he went, none of the governments mistreated him or drove him away, but everywhere youths heard him, they sympathized with him and loved and honored him.

CUSTOMER #1

The life of a poet is a lonely song; so pitiful, but so desirable. You see this blind, exiled poet, carrying his guitar, wandering in a strange country. It is a beautiful poem, is it not? Uh-ya, I've said too many drunken words this evening, Miss Bai has been laughing at me.

BAI

You are talking nonsense, Uncle.

CUSTOMER #1

Alright. Get your hat, ol' Chen, we're leaving. Take care.

---

6A pi-pa is a plucked string instrument that resembles a lute. The "foreign pi-pa" to which Bai refers is a guitar.

7Here Tian uses the Chinese characters, pronounced "ji-ta," a Chinese rendition of the English "guitar."
CUSTOMERS #2 & #3

Take care.

BAI

Take care, take care. Don't forget your walking stick, Mr. Chen.

CUSTOMER #2

Oh, thanks a lot. (CUSTOMERS exit.)

BAI
(Notices LIN.)

Uh-ya! Mr. Lin, please, please forgive me. I just had to spend some time talking with that gentleman who's from my home. I forgot all about you. Please excuse me.

LIN

It's nothing. What you were talking about was interesting. I got so caught up in listening that I forgot what I wanted to order.

BAI

Alright. Let me set this place, and I'll get you some coffee. (She exits to fetch LIN a plate and cup and is gone for a moment. Then she returns.) Mr. Lin, I'm sorry you had to wait so long. Did you get home alright last night? You drank so much all by yourself that I was worried about you.

LIN

I was so drunk last night that when I returned to my dorm I went to the wrong door. I also walked right into a telephone pole. But it doesn't matter. Even though drinking makes one feel blurry in the heart, it's still a good thing.

BAI

How come you didn't come with your friend Zheng this time? You two always used to come together.

LIN

We'll come together again sometime. Tonight I wanted to come by myself and sit here. His constitution is stronger
than mine. I feel so oppressed. When he's with me, it's not easy to express my feelings. Whatever romantic dreams I have he ridicules in his peppery way. My spirit is so weak. Even if you touch me tenderly I'll bleed, so how can I bear up under his mocking laughter? They often say that I wear my heart on my sleeve. So I think that I can let my feelings out when I'm by myself. Miss Qiu, I don't want to drink coffee. Bring me a bottle of whiskey.

**BAI**

Lin, drink some beer instead. Whiskey will burn your throat. I just drank some, and now I feel a little sick.

**LIN**

Bring it. Are you afraid I can't afford it?

**BAI**

Don't say such things. I just see that you're not the kind of person who can drink a lot.

**CAFE OWNER**

(Lifts aside the bamboo screen.)

Qiu-ying! If a customer wants beer, bring him beer; if he wants whiskey, bring him whiskey. Don't talk so much.

(Lets the screen drop.)

**BAI**

Alright. (She fetches the whiskey.) Come and have a drink, Lin. Do you want something to eat, too?

**LIN**

No, I don't want anything. Qiu, if you could chat awhile with me, I would be so grateful.

**BAI**

But what would you want me to talk about? I'm just an ordinary girl. I don't know the first thing about literature and art.

**LIN**

Just because Qiu doesn't understand things, just because Qiu is an unsophisticated girl, so I am willing to chat with her, alright? Come and drink a cup with me. (He drains his own cup and makes a face as though the drink is bitter.)
BAI

Thank you very much, but I really can't drink anything. You ought to drink a little more slowly. (LIN urges her to drink again.) Lin, I have something to tell you that I have some doubts about.

LIN

What kind of thing could cause Qiu to have doubts? I must know about it.

BAI

Lots of things. The first thing is that I really don't understand you young gentlemen. Wouldn't you be better off studying and working? But instead you'd rather come here and throw away your lives drinking. When you drink you feel happy enough, yet after you drink you look as though you're tasting bile, so miserable. (LIN sits gloomily without saying a word.) Oh, I've said the wrong thing, please forgive me. I've seen so many young men drinking like you. I have a lot of questions to ask about it. I know why you drink so much, it's because you're hiding something. Since I cannot understand what you're hiding, I'm asking you.

LIN

Qiu, wait until I can't feel anything anymore, and then I'll give you your answer. At the moment, my heart is broken.

BAI

Why are you so sad?

LIN

Qiu, please don't ask me that.

BAI

Lin, what's making you so unhappy? Can it be that you are disappointed in love? Most of these young drinkers talk about being hurt in love. I can't believe that Lin has this problem, too. (LIN does not answer her.) Oh, Lin, please don't be sad.

LIN

I don't know what it is to be unhappy in love. I only know that I am a man who wants to love but cannot. (BAI looks as
though she is carefully thinking this over.) And so I have become like a child who has lost his way.

BAI

I won't ask you about it anymore, Lin. I'm afraid that talking about it just makes you unhappy. I'm just trying to encourage you to find your own path in life soon. Young people like us can't go on living such sorrowful lives for long.

LIN

You want me to discover my own path in life? This morning I received a letter from my friend Zheng, and he says the same thing. Ah, Qiu, I am so miserable that I don't know how to find my way. And I don't know if it's what the gods intend or if it's a prank Fate is playing on me, but it is very difficult for me to find that way. Oh, I am so miserable! I am so very lonely! And I don't know if this will last forever or only for a brief moment, or if the spirit is better than the flesh.

BAI

But can't you think of some way for both of those to be harmonious?

LIN

In my friend's mind there is a way, but for me -- no. My life is just as he said it was: a life without order. Spirit -- flesh. Flesh -- spirit. I've been in this state for awhile. I am not at peace even for a moment. It's like being in hell, this unhappiness, and it seems as though a fire is roaring in my heart, roasting it. Lately I've often been tempted by Death. I have felt Death several times, spreading his black wings and calling to me.

BAI

(Gasps.)

Ah!

LIN

Don't be concerned for me, Qiu. No matter how often he calls, it wouldn't be easy for me to go. Besides, I am such a weakling, so I come here to drink instead. Oh! Whiskey, whiskey, whiskey. You know, Qiu, I used to tell people not to drink, but now I've come to understand the advantages of liquor. (He drinks again.)
BAI

But you must also know its drawbacks.

LIN

Bai, don't pay any attention to me. I understand your kind intentions, but I'm a complete waste. You can't help someone like me. Leave me alone, alright?

BAI

Why should I leave you alone, Lin? When you see a person at the side of a well, do you not pull him away? If a flower in a vase withers day by day, we know we must water it to revive it. Why, then, when I see you growing thinner day by day, shouldn't I be willing to help you? You don't know how thin and pale you've become, Lin. Remember how it was when you and Zheng used to come in here together? But now your face has become jaundiced. And your spirit has become corrupted. I saw how you were wasting your life drinking last night, and I thought that if you were my brother, how sad I should be. If I saw my brother sitting in a cafe and drinking like that with the waitress sitting next to him chattering away, pouring cup after cup and encouraging him to drink, oh, how I should despise her! And how in your sister's eyes, I would be that hateful waitress. I don't know how many times I have seen such despicable girls. Whenever I think of this I want to leave the cafe right away. And each time I see a fine young gentleman like you, Lin, I want to think of him as my own brother and talk to him about his troubles. But not one of those fine young gentlemen will treat me as a sister. They'll only talk to me about things that don't matter. Who would be willing to let me see his true feelings? As for the disrespectful customers, they treat me like a sex object, sometimes even insulting me more than I can bear, forcing me to weep in secret more tears than I can count. I used to long to live the interesting life of working in a cafe, and just now there was an elderly gentleman here who said he loved this kind of life, too. He said that in an exciting atmosphere like this a person could experience all different kinds of people. But when I watch carefully, I see that, except for people paying for food and drinks and chatting and laughing after they pay up, there is nothing to see. What a thrilling cafe, why, it's clearly nothing more than a bleak desert! And the desert is not only in the cafe; I see that society is a vast desert, too. My mother passed away a long time ago. After Grandfather died, my Father and his brother fought over how to divide up the estate. When Father died this year, we didn't have a bit of property. My uncle was worried that I would stir up trouble in his house, so he was
anxious to marry me off. That's what forced me out of that small desert at home and made me flee to the great desert of society. I truly don't understand what goes on between people. Why do they persist in such coldness towards each other? Why can't they love each other, why can't they comfort each other? Ah! (She sighs.) People in this world are too solitary!

LIN

What you're saying is true, Qiu. I really feel that being alive is like traveling through a great desert. One day a sandstorm blows up and buries you, and you don't even feel it. Or a vulture circles you, and you're not conscious of it. Nor are you aware of the day your horse is stolen, nor the day your water has dried in its bowl. I am surrounded by desolation -- heaven and earth. If I look behind me I don't know if what I see is my native land. If I look in front of me I don't know if what I see is a strange country. At times like this, with neither relatives nor friends, even an enemy would be alright because he and I would have to band together to sustain each other. How else could we cross this vast desert? But Qiu, the way it is now, I am like a man traveling through the desert all alone. The water in my bowl is dried up. I am so very thirsty. There is not even the shadow of a tree. I am so parched, I will go mad. At a time like this, if I happened upon a fellow traveler, and we suddenly became friends, and I gave him a mouthful of cold water to drink, can you imagine how he would shed grateful tears? But such a traveler is difficult to meet. In this ungrateful life, there is no one who sheds tears. I am completely exhausted. My strength is too fragile for a world like this. And so lately I've come to feel more and more hopeless about life. Still, even in the midst of such despair I have been given a thread of hope that there would be one in this desert who would give me a sip of cold water, Qiu. And it has been you. I'm so grateful. (He rests his head in BAI's lap and weeps.)

BAI

(Gently helping LIN up.)

From now on, Lin, no matter how unfortunate we are, let's console each other, and when our luck is good, we'll rejoice together. It seems I heard Zheng say that they want you to return home to be married or else they won't send you any more money. Is it true? (LIN bows his head.) If that's the case, then it's very easy to resolve, isn't it? Since you are unwilling, why don't you write to your parents and explain everything to them? Surely they love you. How could they force their son into a lifetime of sorrow?
LIN

Qiu, if it were so simple, would I be so unhappy? Just bringing up the subject makes me miserable. Last year I was supposed to graduate from industrial college, but halfway through the year I got expelled. Later I got back into school, but my graduate date was delayed, so I changed my major from engineering to literature, thinking that literature would be a great comfort to me. But now that little fantasy of mine has been destroyed. Literature alone cannot comfort me. Instead it puts even more of a weight on my shoulders. (Pauses.) . . . When summer vacation came this year, I was too lazy to write home. I only just wrote them -- finally! Ai-ya! Who knows what part that letter will play in deciding my fate! Although I regret writing it now, I really didn't have any other choice. My mother died a long time ago. I have a stepmother now, and my father is putty in her hands. That's how my marriage contract and my future were decided for me. Because of these complicated relationships my father was forced into forcing me into this bitter marriage. At the time I had already expressed my own feelings about it, but my younger brother Ze-mao and I were studying here, far away from home, and we were dependent upon them sending us our monthly allowance. On the one hand I pitied my father, and on the other hand I pitied my brother. I felt we shouldn't take advantage of Father's good nature. I was forced to acknowledge the inevitability of the marriage they'd arranged for me. But then I began to think about it carefully. In the end, my nature couldn't bear up under such miserable conditions. I'd been away from home for the past few years and have had lots of opportunities to experience women and love. But as soon as I think of my fate, I know that to have been loved by so many women is a great sin. To make a long story short, I don't have the capacity to love anyone anymore. If I had a strong nature, I would speak out like a demon, it wouldn't matter what social restrictions I'd smash, and I'd love whomever I wanted. But as one human being, I am forced to love someone I don't love at all. So I'm miserable in every possible way. And I will be depressed forever. Is it my fate, Qiu, this eternal anxiety? (He sighs.) Ah!
Depression forever and ever!

BAI

I understand your sorrow completely, Lin. But what words can I say that would comfort you? I've often heard people say that sorrow is a kind of faith, and I've seen the kind of people who haven't received baptism in sorrow. Contrary to what you'd expect, it is they who are the most unfortunate people in the world. I suppose that I am just this kind of unfortunate girl. Although I've encountered
unhappiness in my family several times, I don't think of myself as playing out a role in a tragedy. I live such a superficial life. I haven't ever felt particularly hopeless about life, but I can't feel overly happy about it, either. (She pauses.) ... But Lin! Something happened tonight that has made me so happy, and I haven't told you about it yet! If I can share your sadness, can you not take part in my joy?

LIN

Of course! Of course I can be happy with you, perhaps I can be even more happy than you. What is it? Hurry up and tell me so that I can feel happy, too.

BAI

Lin, remember when you first came in awhile ago, and I was in the middle of a conversation with another gentleman? Something he told me is making me so happy. His name is Feng, and he's from home. He and my grandfather used to be good friends, and he knew my family. Tonight he told me that Li Gan-qing will be here within a month, and he's going to start school!

LIN

Who is this Li Gan-qing? ... he's going to start school?

BAI

Ah! He's going to start college, he's just graduated from the Nan-hua School. Wasn't I just saying that society is like a vast desert? He is the only breath of spring in this desert. From this tiny breath of spring infinite hopes and endless courage have burst forth for me. I dared to cast my family aside and come to the city to live on my own without relatives. It is all because of my spring. Now I can hope that if he knows where I am, he'll surely come for me. He'll hear that I'm not at the girls' school and will certainly have pity for me. If he knew my hardships here, there's no telling how sad he'd be for me.

LIN

What? That's terrific! This calls for congratulations. There are still lucky people like you in this world. That's what we melancholy ones have to depend upon to comfort us. Qiu, I bless your love forever. (He is about to take another drink.)
Lin, why are you starting to drink again? Don't use my happiness as an excuse. You already told me you'd quit.

Alright, I can stand not drinking. But Qiu, why haven't I heard you talk about Li Gan-qing's family before? Has he written you any letters since you came here?

No, he hasn't. He doesn't know where I am.

Why haven't you told him?

At the time, I was afraid he wouldn't approve. His family is rather particular about saving face. If they knew I'd come to a place like this, it wouldn't make things easy. I just thought I'd get a little money saved up and put myself through school. Then I'd be able to face him. But now that he's coming here already, he'll surely come for me and give me tuition for school. It won't be necessary for me to save my money little by little.

But Qiu, how do you know that he'll know where to find you and come to get you?

I'm sure he's coming for me!

How can you just believe in him like this?

How could I not believe in him? Isn't there already a strong bond between us?

Strong bond?
BAI

You don't believe me, Lin? I have a letter from him I'll show you. (She pulls a small envelope from her shirt.)
Lin, I haven't shown this letter to anyone. Because you are an elder brother to me, I'll show it to you. This is the picture he gave me, too.

LIN
(Reads it.)

... Ah, yes ... Qiu ... it's strange, you believing in him like this.

(The sound of footsteps from outside is heard. BAI quickly grabs her letter and picture and puts them away in her pocket.)

LIN

I don't want to drink anymore. I'm starving. How about bringing me some ham and eggs?

BAI

Alright, ham and eggs! Oh, it's ten o'clock already! The theatre behind the cafe will be closing.

(More sounds of footsteps from outside, along with talking and laughter. The door bursts open, and a young man sticks his head inside. His face is half covered by a silk hat and a fur collar so that it cannot be seen.)

THE YOUTH
(Addressing someone outside.)

This place is pretty secluded. Come on in.

(An elegantly dressed and made-up woman follows him in. She crosses to the center table and sits down.)

BAI
(Entering with a plate of hot food.)

Please sit down. It's so cold outside.

---

8"Ham and eggs" is in English in the original.
THE YOUTH

Oh, yes, it's very cold. Could you bring us a couple of cups of coffee?

BAI

Alright. (Exits.)

THE YOUTH

(Takes off his hat and scarf.)

Would you care for some wine?

THE GIRL

(Smiling attractively.)

I don't drink.

THE YOUTH

How about a glass or two of grape wine? Some red, beautiful, sweet wine?

THE GIRL

Well, alright. What did you think of the play tonight?

THE YOUTH

That first act with the love scene in the garden was the best. Just my kind of thing.

THE GIRL

I think so, too. And the young actor was excellent.

THE YOUTH

The young actress wasn't bad, either.

---

9"The Girl" here is the character named Miss Chen in the cast of characters. In the script Tian uses "The Girl" rather than the character's name.
BAI
(Entering with two cups of coffee.)

Sorry it took so long. (She serves THE GIRL first and then THE YOUTH. She gasps.) Ah! Master Gan!

THE YOUTH
(Also gasping.)

Ah! Bai! ... (Immediately tries to pretend that he is very composed.) Miss Bai, you've come here, then?

BAI

Oh ... (She has turned ashen. Quietly and as though without strength, she crosses to a corner of the room and sits down.)

THE GIRL

Who is that girl? How do you know her?

THE YOUTH

She's ... oh, never mind. Just some poor girl from my village back home. She lived near my family. We used to know each other when we were kids.

THE GIRL

Oh, alright. Why don't you two chat for a little while. I'm going home.

THE YOUTH

No reason for that, she and I are just acquaintances. Oh, it's getting late, I'll take you home.

(He hastily puts on his hat, throws his scarf round his neck, puts some money on the table, and hurries out with the THE GIRL. BAI stares after the two as they leave and, as if awakening from a dream, quickly runs to the door. Then she returns as before and sits down on the sofa. A bell rings

---

10 Bai is practicing what the Chinese call "ke-gi" (lit., "politeness") by apologizing for taking so long when in fact she has only been offstage for a moment or two.
offstage. She slowly rises once more, as though sleepwalking. She brings LIN's ham and eggs to him.)

BAI

Sorry it took so long. (She leans against the chair and begins to weep quietly.)

LIN

Qiu! Was the the Li Gan-qing you were talking about before? Tell me! (BAI, sobbing, bows her head.) That animal! (BAI covers his mouth with her hand.) Since you have taken me for your elder brother, I must get him back for you. (He is about to dash off.)

BAI

(Stopping him.)

Brother, this is the fate Heaven intended for me, and there is no way to resist it. I have nothing to say right now. I forgive him, and so must you.

LIN

A man like that cannot be forgiven! A young woman's love is sacred, it's not something for such a scoundrel to play around with.

BAI

But after all, how can I know how things are now? He came in here tonight with someone else, and there was no way we could talk. He can't be the kind of person you're saying he is.

LIN

I'm not so sure.

BAI

Anyone who read his letters could not think he was like that.

---

11 Bai has previously entered with "a plate of hot food" for Lin; thus, this stage direction repeats an earlier direction. The error is in the original text.
LIN

Bai, you've trusted him too much. You can't believe anyone in this world. But wait a second, Qiu, I've thought of a way out now. Just wait until the time is right.

BAI

But what is it?

LIN

He sent you lots of letters, didn't he? You've stored up those letters, right? Well, you write him a letter, and tell him you're not worried if he won't marry you. If he's engaged to someone else, you'll show everyone his letters, and then you won't have to wait for their marriage to break up. Qiu, don't worry, I'm resolved to help you from now on.

BAI

But . . .

(LI GAN-QING runs in. BAI notices that another customer has come in but does not see who it is.)

BAI

Please sit down. (She sees that it is LI and gasps.) Ah!

LI

Qiu! (BAI is silent and does not answer him.) I was horrible just now. Miss Chen and I came in together, so I couldn't talk. I've put her on a bus, so I've returned. (BAI still does not answer him.) Qiu, please don't be angry. There is still a lot I want to talk to you about.

BAI

If we're "just acquaintances," how can we have anything to talk about?

LI

You're joking. You can't be angry. Let's sit down and talk it out, shall we?

BAI

We don't want you sitting down here!
LI

Alright, alright, don't be angry. We haven't seen each other for a long time, and we must talk about what happened since our parting.

BAI

But you and I are "just acquaintances." Who wants to hear you talk about what's happened since we parted?

CAFE OWNER
(Lifts the curtain and talks to BAI.)

Qiu-ying! If a customer came in, ask him to sit down.

BAI

Yes. . . . A customer! Excuse me, please sit down. (LI and BAI sit in their original places, and the OWNER drops the curtain.)

LI

Please bring me another two cups of coffee.

BAI

Yes, sir. (She exits to get the coffee. LI appears to be thinking deeply about a decision. BAI re-enters.) Here we are, sir. Sorry it took so long. (She sets the coffee down in front of him.)

LI

Qiu, sit down, and we'll drink together.

BAI

Thank you very much.

LI

I could not have guessed that I would meet you here tonight. After I graduated from Nan-hua, I immediately thought of returning to find you. I thought you were still in the village. Did you get my letter instructing you to come to the city?
BAI

I received it. You wanted me to come here to continue my studies.

LI

I had hoped that your father could send you to school in the city. That way our love could be perfect. Then I heard that he died. And you came here.

BAI

Because I believed what you said.

LI

But Qiu! You were reckless, too. I only told you to come to the city so you could go to school, I didn't tell you to come to a cafe and be a waitress. My father and I are both men who are seriously concerned about how things look to people, you know that, don't you? You know very well that I wanted to come here to go to college. But you were bent on coming to be a waitress in a cafe. If people were to know this, how could I show my face at school? I would be willing, but would my father?

BAI

Master Gan. I am so sorry. I received your letter. You wanted me to graduate from the Girls' Middle School. But my father became ill. We didn't have enough money to pay the doctor for medicine, so how could we have enough money for school? At that time, you didn't send me any money. I really had no other way. Then I lost my father, so I left. When Father was about to die, he called me to him as he wept and held my hand in his, and said to me, "Qiu-ying! Your father has had a lifetime of suffering and toil, and all that he has are a pair of empty hands. Forgive me for not being able to finish giving you a higher education." After he died, I had no one left to protect me. My uncles didn't know about us and wanted to marry me off right away. I got scared, so I ran away to the city. I was all alone here without any relatives, so I couldn't even think about continuing school -- I didn't even have a place to rest my head. So at first I stayed with a neighbor, Auntie Shen. Even though they were sympathetic to me, they were very poor, and I didn't want to trouble them. And it just so happened that this place advertised for a waitress, so I came here. I thought I'd settle in here for awhile and save up a little money so I could go to school. You said that you would be coming to college here next April. I thought
I'd wait till then to tell you about this place because by that time I'd have finished my fourth year at middle school. I never guessed that you would return so soon . . .

LI

It's because I transferred into a preparatory course here to make up some credits.

BAI

I couldn't know that you and I would meet here . . . and, what's more, that I would become a waitress. And that you would come here as a customer. And I never, ever thought I would see, with my own two eyes, you and your girlfriend in here and snuggling up to each other over a cup of coffee!

LI

I understand your pain. But I also have a right to know why you've done what you've done.

BAI

(Not paying attention to LI, she continues talking.)

I have imagined this in my heart. I thought that if one day you were to come to this cafe out of nowhere and we two were suddenly to meet, only then would everything begin to be alright. At first, you would be shocked to see me waiting tables here. I imagined how I would tell you about my pain since we parted. Once you heard how brave and determined I was in escaping from my uncles' control and struggling here to save money, hoping to go to school, surely you would praise my courage and pity my suffering. And I would rest my head on your chest and weep . . . but what am I talking about? I'm not imagining anything now! Who will praise me? Who will pity me? Master Gan, I am speaking very seriously, you know how serious I am. In your heart, you must be praising me, pitying me. But you are unwilling to show your feelings too easily, isn't that so? Master Gan. How I have dreamed of meeting you. Sometimes I've mistrusted you. And even hated you. I know that I had no good reason. I know I must change. Didn't you say so in your letter? (LI does not say anything.) I have long since become disillusioned by the atmosphere in this cafe. Today a fellow villager named Feng was in here. I asked him if he knew whether you'd already come here to go to school. I said that if Master Gan knew where I was, he would surely come to get me. Master Gan, you just said that you're afraid your father won't approve. Our business is our business, isn't it? If you are willing, surely your father will be willing, too.
LI

He surely cannot be willing. Qiu, you must know that things aren't the same as they were. Father is about to become Chairman of the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce. How could he be willing to have a cafe waitress for a daughter-in-law? (BAI does not speak.) And as for me, I too . . .

BAI

Master Gan! Are you also unwilling? (Pauses.) Do you know that our love was the only thing my father never approved of?

LI

He didn't approve?

BAI

Ah. (She sighs.) . . . he always despised the kind of person your father is. He said that . . . naturally he opposed me marrying into your family. But I would always say to him, "I don't care what kind of person his father is, I only love Master Gan." And so there was nothing for Father to do. And now you're against it because I'm a waitress in a cafe, and you're ashamed of it?

LI

(His face is red.)

I really don't have anything against your waiting tables, it's just that you've been doing it near the university for so long. If I were to marry you, first of all, I would surely be the laughingstock of everyone at school. And second of all, it would be sure to hurt my relationship with my father. After running into you here tonight I just came back to apologize and also to settle matters once and for all. In a word, if you don't love me anymore, then it's all very simple. If you still love me, well, in that case, you ought to sympathize with my hardships. Qiu, naturally I feel for the pain you've suffered over the past few years. (Takes out a leather wallet.) Just today Father sent me twelve hundred dollars. I will give one thousand of it to you.

BAI

(Hesitates.)

Give it to me to do what?
LI

Qiu, I'm giving it to you so that you can go to school and continue your studies.

BAI

Oh, Master Gan, thank you, I'm so very happy. (She takes the money.)

LI

When you run low on money, I can give you some more. And in the future, after you graduate, I'm sure you'll find a husband who is ten times better than me.

BAI

Master Gan, what are you saying?

(From outside a MESSENGER pushes the door open and sticks his head into the cafe.)

MESSENGER

Master Gan, the young lady wishes you to return right away.

LI

I'm coming. You go on first. (MESSENGER exits.)

BAI

Are you already married?

LI

Not yet, but look, Qiu, I can't deceive you any longer about the way things are now. I'm about to firm up my engagement to the young lady I came in with before. I'm living at her parents' house now. The person who just told me to return is one of their servants. When we left the theatre tonight we'd no idea how unlucky we would be in coming here. She's upset because I recognized you and on the street just now, she almost broke up with me. Qiu, you are a good-hearted person. If you love me, then you must want good fortune for me. So please, wish us both good fortune.

BAI

Oh! Then go to your good fortune! Why are you wasting time talking nonsense with me?
LI

Qiu! If we are to have good fortune, I must ask you on your honor to keep quiet about us. I wrote you a lot of letters before, right? And don't you still have a picture of us together? Please, give them all back to me. However much money you want for them, I'll give it to you.

BAI

Ha, ha, like father, like son. Both of you can really do business,

LI

What kind of business are you talking about?

BAI

Your father's illegal smuggling business, and your business of buying love letters.

LI

Qiu, you're joking.

BAI

Who would joke with you? And who is your Qiu? I thought I knew you, and it turns out that I really don't know you at all. I used to think that you were a fine young man in spite of the fact that your father was evil. Now I know that you are your father's son after all. I'm sorry I didn't listen to my father. (Her tears are falling like rain.) My poor, suffering papa!

LI

Miss Bai, I have pain of my own, too. In a word, I am deeply regretful. I forgive you for everything. I'll leave now. Give me the letters and the picture before I go. In any event, Qiu, they are of no use to you.

BAI

That's right, they're of no use to me. I'll give them all to you. (She takes a packet out of her secret pocket.)
LIN
(From behind the screen at stage right.)

Stop! Not so fast! Don't give them to him! (He crosses angrily to LI and BAI.) Qiu, don't give them to him!

LI
(Startled.)

And who are you?

LIN

Me? My name is . . . Lin!

LI

Lin, old buddy, I don't believe I know you, so mind your own business.

LIN

People who don't know each other had better mind each other's business. Qiu, don't give them to him!

BAI

Lin, what use can they be to me when I can get money for them?

LI

That's true, Qiu.

LIN

Stop! You should call her "Miss Bai." Where do you get off calling her "Qiu"?

LI

Alright, "Miss Bai." After all, they are of no use to you. It'll be much better if you can give them to me. I'd be willing to give you all of this extra two hundred dollars just for pocket money.

BAI

Good! Give it all to me.
Qiu, how can you want his money? You can't want it!

I have a use for it.

Yes, Miss Bai has a use for it. What do you know about it?

(He gives her the money. BAI first takes the one thousand dollars, then the two hundred dollars that LI has offered her. One by one she throws all of it into the brilliant glare of the charcoal burner. In a moment, LI's twelve hundred dollars turn into a small ray of light and are destroyed.)

Ah! (Stupidly; he does not know what to say. LIN bows his head.) Miss Bai, you've burned twelve hundred dollars. And what about those letters? Is it possible that you're thinking of not giving them to me?

Sure, I'll give them to you. What use is my having them? (She pulls out the love letters and the photo from her pocket.) Ah! Master Gan, here are the letters you sent me. You don't know how happy it made me when I received them. I was so happy the excitement made my heart pound. My hands and feet fairly danced for joy. Do you see the blurred red flowers on this paper? You see, it looks like several wet clouds. Those are the places I so often kissed with my lips. Here is the last letter you sent me. And these few pages are also drenched with red flowers. But those are not wet with kisses -- they are soaked with my tears. You wanted me to come to the city and go to school. If I could not get a diploma from the Girls' Middle School, it seemed that I was not good enough to marry you. At that time my family was so poor, and I could see I had no hopes of graduating. You see how upset I became? I don't know how many tears I've shed over this. But from now on, I will no longer weep such silly romantic tears! I never want to be good enough for you. Why should I strive for the qualities to marry someone who is a "mere acquaintance?" (She picks up the small fragments of the letters with her fingers and tosses them into the fire.) Here is a picture of us together. I really don't know how I could be so stupid, so simple. To treat someone who acts as if he doesn't know me
at all as my ideal lover, to want to have my picture taken with him! Look, we are still holding hands and smiling a little. At that time, even my fingertips, even the toes on my feet were filled with happiness! And you also look so very happy. I remember when you took me by the hand to go have our photograph taken, and you whispered to me, "Qiu-ying! Our two hands will never come apart, they will be tightly clasped together forever." Now these words still echo in my ears, our image is still imprinted on my eyes. But our hands have long since been separated forever. Ah! A person comes into the world by himself, and by himself he also dies. Master Gan! I've awakened from my dream. (She tears up the photograph and throws it into the fire.) You can be at peace.

LI

Qiu! (It sounds as though he is crying.)

BAI

Alright. What else do you want?

LI

Qiu! I don't dare speak a word in defense of myself. But you cannot say that I am completely without a conscience. . . . you must pity me, too. It's because I am such a weakling, my soul is so blanketed by the shadow of the old society that even a ray of light cannot pierce it. But I have no way out, either, so I am begging you to wish us well. My heart is breaking, too.

BAI

Well, what do you have to be sad about? Alright! I'll be on your side now. (LI bows his head without saying anything, but it seems as though he has a request.) Well, what is it?

LI

Even though I've done wrong by you, couldn't you just hold my hand, in memory of our short time together as friends? I cannot marry you. But I will always remember my concern for you. (BAI reaches out her hand and grasps his.) Farewell, Miss Qiu.

BAI

Good-bye, Master Gan. (LI staggers quickly offstage. BAI feels compelled to address LII.) Lin, I thank you very
much. Please, sit down. (She crosses to the small table at stage right and cries. LIN stands at her side for a moment without speaking, also weeping softly, then quickly moves the charcoal burner to her feet. BAI is weeping and sobbing. She tries to control herself, but old feelings have come flooding back to her, and she cannot stop crying.) Ah, life! It is so very lonely.

LIN

Qiu, I remember how you treated me tonight with deep gratitude. Since you have decided your affair with him is over once and for all, you needn't grieve.

BAI

(Without a word, suddenly sits up and takes a cup of whiskey that is on the table)

Lin, would you give me this drink?

LIN

Qiu, you have some coffee. Better yet, how about a cup of tea? I'll go and get you some.

BAI

Ha, ha, Lin, no matter how we talk about being brother and sister, I ask you for just one drink, and you're not willing to let me have it.

LIN

It isn't that I'm not willing. I'm just afraid that you can't handle liquor.

BAI

What do you mean, I can't! (She takes a coffee cup and fills it up with whiskey. LIN seems surprised and touched; he pities her. BAI pours another cup and takes a swallow.) Lin, I've come to an important realization this evening.

LIN

What's that?

BAI

(Swallows another big gulp; the taste is harsh.)

I finally know why it is better for us not to bother studying. And why we are bent on coming here to throw our
lives away drinking! I used to be a teetotaler, in fact, I'd never even tried drinking. Tonight that old Feng wanted me to take a sip. I thought it felt very strange in my throat, but now I know that wasn't so. Now I know the advantages of liquor.

LIN

But you must also know its disadvantages.

BAI

I don't care. Lin, I know you're a good-hearted fellow. So why don't you let me drink?

LIN

How can I let someone go on this way? How could I watch someone go hurtling toward an abyss of melancholy and not save them? Qiu! A moment ago I was howling in that selfsame abyss, so to speak, and you treated me like your own brother, me, a reckless fool who was throwing away his own life, you did everything to help me. If you have met with the same bad fortune as me today, how can I not treat you like my sister and protect you? I don't want you to be just like some common, vulgar person. So I will treat you like my little sister. And you must treat me like your elder brother.

BAI

And if I treat you as my elder brother, then what?

LIN

Then you'd better put the cup down and consult your brother about matters in the future.

BAI

Alright, my brother, I won't drink.

LIN

That's my girl! Little Sister, we shall go on living. We will be human beings even though we can't escape depression, even though our appetite for life does not flourish, still we will not sink into anguish. Yes! We will go on living fully! We will grab this opportunity to bid farewell to that shallow, lukewarm life! Ah! Our consciousness will be ignited! My spirit's strength is erupting! Little Sister, together we will start our new life from the bottom up.
BAI

Where are we going together, Brother? I said already that society was like a great desert. We two will be like desert travelers.

LIN

And what will we travelers find in the midst of the desert? It will be completely covered with roses, vultures will transform themselves into yellow orioles, and horse thieves will change into knights of old. When we're thirsty, there will be clear springs everywhere. And what will we have to sadden us or be frightened of?

BAI

If you will be my lifelong companion, then I won't be sad about loneliness or afraid of danger anymore.

LIN

No matter what, I will never leave you. So how do you feel, not as bad as before?

BAI

It's nothing. I'm so warm I feel as though my heart is on fire.

LIN

I told you not to drink whiskey. That's what it is, having its effect on you. I'll go and get you a cup of cold water.

BAI

I don't want any. Listen!

(From offstage comes the sound of someone playing the guitar and singing. The sound is extremely mournful. The two turn to listen, and BAI brushes away her tears.)

LIN

Who's playing the guitar at this hour?

BAI

It's the blind Russian poet who lives in the Ya-dong Inn next door.
LIN

Kerensky?

BAI

Yes, every night about this time he sits by the window and plays. When I hear it, I feel so sad.

LIN

(Turning to listen again; he feels sad, too.)

Perhaps he's thinking of his family. Ai! The grief of artists! How difficult it is to travel through life!

(A young man pushes the door open and enters.)

YOUNG MAN

Zhai-qi!  

LIN

Who's that? Oh, Brother Xiang.

BAI

Zheng! Please come in.

ZHENG

Zhai-qi! What are you still doing here at this hour? I went to your dorm room, but you weren't there. I asked your little brother, and he said you'd come here. I came running over and, sure enough, here you are. I see you haven't gone anywhere else to drown yourself in drink.

LIN

A little decadence isn't anything to get excited about. Don't worry about it.

ZHENG

You have the type of personality that I really do have to worry about, Zhai-qi. It's late. The dorm is about to close. Hurry up and come on back.

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^12Lin's given name is "Zi-qi"; "Zhai-qi" is Zheng's pet name for him.
LIN

I want a word or two with Qiu, then I'll come back.

ZHENG

Haven't you talked out all your distress by now?

LIN

Brother Xiang, of all the people in this world, who is as lucky as you?

ZHENG

Don't talk like that. C'mon, let's go back. If you want to come back here tomorrow, I'll come with you. (To Qiu.) Qiu, you should let him go at such an hour.

(BAI smiles, a small smile.)

LIN

(To BAI.) If I don't go back, ol' Zheng here will have a fit. I must leave. (He takes out a couple of dollar bills from a paper wallet.) Here's some money, you can give me the change tomorrow. Little Sister! You take good care of yourself. It's very late, you should be in bed, anyway.

BAI

Yes, Elder Brother.

ZHENG

What's this? Have you pledged to each other as brother and sister?

LIN

Yes, we have, and so Qiu is your Little Sister as well.

ZHENG

What made you decide to make this pledge?

LIN

It's a long story. I'll tell you while we walk. Alright now, so long, Little Sister.
ZHENG
(Smiles.)

So long, Little Sister.

BAI

My two Elder Brothers, good night.

(LIN and ZHENG exit together. BAI gently closes the door behind them. She turns the gas lighting down. She sits by herself at the stage right table and finishes the last several drops of whiskey, savoring it. At that moment, the sound of the guitar, still wavering in the wind, falls on her ear.)

CAFE OWNER

Bai-ying! Figure the bills!

BAI

Alright. (But she sits quietly without moving. She sighs softly.) Oh, loneliness . . . I must go on living.

(The curtain falls slowly.)
CHAPTER THREE

Preface: "The Night a Tiger Was Captured"

In 1921, shortly after he returned to Shanghai from his studies abroad in Japan, Tian Han wrote "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," which he subsequently published in the second edition of his periodical, the Nan-guo ban-yue-kan (South China Bi-Monthly). Though Tian is characteristically reticent regarding his own works, a few hints about the play can be gleaned from several of his prefaces and in the works of other authors. By 1957 Tian conceded that the script could have been improved by a certain amount of reworking, although he never attempted a major revision of the text as he did for "A Night in a Cafe." He believed that the outcome of the play was too depressing and thought that he should perhaps have hinted at a more positive outcome.¹ Writing about "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" eleven years after its initial publication in 1921, however, Tian had asserted that the suicidal Huang and the oppressed Lian-gu

were thoroughly realistic in their reflection of the masses' struggles and failures to "find their own way."\(^2\) Whether or not Tian was sincere when he made any of those assertions is, however, questionable indeed since his attitudes seem to reflect the political atmosphere that prevailed when he made his assessments. As the winds of Communism began gathering force in nineteen-thirties China, Tian seems to have been re-examining his earlier works for the purpose of emphasizing anything that could be interpreted as a leftist theme, and his later admission that the play is too depressing fits neatly into the post-1949 literary dogma which demanded that fictive literature depict the triumphs of the masses over dark and sinister forces.

Like the production records for "A Night in a Cafe," the records for "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" are practically non-existent. Tian Han makes no mention of any productions of the play in his writings. In her brief memoirs of the South China Society, Tang Shu-ming, one of Tian's young proteges, mentions productions of several of Tian's one-act dramas, but "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" is not among them. Jarmila Haringova, whose article on Tian's early dramas is said to be based upon interviews with Tian Han himself, refers to "many witnesses" who could

\(^2\)Tian Han, Tian Han xi-ju ji (Collected Plays of Tian Han), Vol. III (Shanghai: Xian-dai shu-dian, 1933), "Preface," p. 4.
attest to the play's "rapid and unusual popularity," but she does not identify those witnesses. The critic and historian Liu Shou-song also claims that the play was performed numerous times, but where, when, and by whom, Liu does not say.4

"The Night a Tiger Was Captured" is a more finely crafted work than "A Night in a Cafe" and is quite possibly Tian's best play of the decade. A line of development connecting the two dramas is clearly discernible, however; in this play Tian has, with few exceptions, eradicated those flaws that were evident in the earlier work. He made noticeable progress in his writing technique and in his use of visual and aural effects, which he incorporated into a tighter, more cohesive whole than he had been able to do previously.

"The Night a Tiger Was Captured" takes place amongst the tiger hunters living in the mountains of Hunan Province, a setting which, though native to China, provided an appropriately romantic background against which the tale of the two star-crossed lovers could be played. Tian continues to utilize realistic properties and furniture as he did in

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"Cafe," including a hearth for a "fire pit" which is in continuous use throughout the play. A notable innovation in "Tiger," however, is Tian's requirement for specific properties that are used to depict realistic violence or to portray the results of violence onstage, a major departure from the established Chinese theatrical tradition of indicating violence by means of elaborate, stylized choreography. By depicting what would have been considered at the time to be graphic violence, Tian made a daring and apparently successful move in challenging his audiences. In this play Tian calls for stage blood for Huang Da-sha's wound which is said to be bleeding profusely. Fu-sheng uses a whip to beat his headstrong daughter, an action which ultimately moves offstage but which commences in full view of the audience. Huang Da-sha stabs himself with Fu-sheng's hunting knife, which is particularly significant in that it demonstrates Tian Han's ability to make realistic and symbolic use of a stage property occur simultaneously.

Tian's approach to lighting for "Tiger" also demonstrates a development in his ability to recognize the potential of that element of scenic design. He continues to require the use of artificial and visible sources of light: the action of "Tiger" is lit by lamps, lanterns, and the light that emanates from the fire pit, all of which provide general stage illumination and warmth, and visually reinforce the play's exotic atmosphere. However, Tian's use
of light in this play is especially notable for the manner in which he ties it into the plot. As Huang Da-sha describes it towards the end of the play, the glow of the firelight acts as a powerful magnet to which he is attracted, like a suicidal moth, night after night, in his pathetic attempts to assuage the pain he feels from being separated from Lian-gu. The quality of light onstage is thus essential to the movement of the plot; it is actively intertwined with the characters' motivations and causes them to take action rather than functioning solely as illumination or as an indicator of mood.

Tian uses sound effects in the play in similar fashion. Offstage sound continues to signify an expansion of space beyond the immediate stage, as it did in "A Night in a Cafe," suggesting that the visible space is not isolated but is part of a larger space that extends beyond the audience's vision, a fundamental tenet of stage realism. Sound effects are, however, also used as an integral part of the action. In "A Night in a Cafe," the major sound effect, Kerensky's guitar playing, is used similarly to a film score, that is, it passively underlines the ongoing action, reflecting the emotional states of the characters onstage. The sound effects in "Tiger" function more actively: changes in sound result in emotional changes for characters, and sounds cause characters to take action. At the conclusion of the scene between Lian-gu and Hu-shi, the girl and her grandmother
hear the sounds of the hunting party as it carries the tiger to the Wei household. Tian calls for a cacophony of human shouts, footsteps, and barking dogs, and notes that the sound of the crowd crescendos as it draws nearer to the main gate. The offstage racket builds to a roar, simultaneously functioning as an aural metaphor for the tumult in Lian-gu's heart and as a catalyst for her growing apprehension. The sound of Fu-sheng's whip as it descends upon Lian-gu similarly effects action onstage. Upon hearing the fury with which Fu-sheng beats Lian-gu, Huang Da-sha finally realizes the utter futility of his situation and plunges Fu-sheng's knife into his heart. The sounds of offstage action are thus essential in effecting the climax of the play.

Tian Han's writing techniques also demonstrate a marked improvement over "A Night in a Cafe." The weaknesses in the play seem to be characteristic of Tian's style throughout the nineteen-twenties. For example, the exposition in Huang's lengthy monologue, in which he recounts facts of which everyone onstage would, realistically speaking, have been cognizant, is clumsy and self-conscious. The exaggerated lengths to which Tian goes to arouse pathos for Huang in the same speech tends also to be redundant. Nevertheless, the writing is, on the whole, dramatically efficient and effective.

In "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" Tian establishes exposition more subtly than he did in "A Night in a Cafe" by
revealing it through a combination of statement, action, and visual support rather than allowing characters to regurgitate masses of exposition all at once that they subsequently repeat. He also releases information slowly, according to the changing needs of the plot rather than adhering to an arbitrary quantitative plot structure wherein exposition is disposed of at the onset of dramatic action. That intermittent release of information facilitates the arousal of false expectations for both the characters onstage and the audience. For example, when the play begins, Fu-sheng believes the affair between Lian-gu and Huang Da-sha to be a thing of the past, noting with pleasure that his daughter appears to be "back to normal" again. Tian is careful to maintain the ruse by having Huang-shi assure her husband that Lian-gu has indeed put Huang Da-sha out of her mind. A potential conflict is thus made to appear to have been resolved when in fact it is not. Throughout the play, Tian continues to "fill in the blanks" about characters and conflicts gradually, thereby allowing suspense to build and unexpected, but logical, surprises to occur.

Coincidence in the play is cloaked in a disguise of believability, a notable improvement over "A Night in a Cafe," in which Li and Miss Chen conveniently and inexplicably appear in the right place at the right time. The obvious coincidence in "Tiger" is that it is Huang Da-
sha, the man for whom Fu-sheng feels the most enmity, who inadvertently stumbles into the trap intended for the tiger. Although Fu-sheng claims early in the play that he is waiting for the villagers to quiet down for the night before setting up his guns for the shoot, and that most people are aware of the potential dangers on the mountain, Tian carefully prepares the audience to accept the chance occurrence as probable by having several characters remark that only a madman would risk his life wandering on the peak at night. When the fool Huang is carried in, a logical and carefully crafted reversal of audience expectation occurs: the men ought to be bearing a tiger's corpse but Huang's unexpected appearance lies well within the realm of possibility.

One of the structural features of "Tiger" that facilitates Tian's ability to manipulate the element of chance effectively is his choice of a relatively early point of attack, as early a point of attack as he will use in any of the dramas he wrote during the 'twenties. The obvious advantage of structuring action in that manner is that it allows Tian to construct action so that it can unfold at a more leisurely, realistic pace than in, for example, "View of a Riverside Village" or "Night Talk in Suzhou," in which the late point of attack forces the playwright to squeeze all manner of improbable coincidences into a tightly telescoped time frame. In "Tiger," however, events can be
crafted so as to occur slowly and logically with sufficient time provided to demonstrate a believable progression of antecedents and consequences. More time is also given over to develop characters, which in turn allows for greater emotional involvement amongst characters and between audience and action, thus providing a potentially more emotionally satisfying experience for the audience.

A further advantage of allowing dramatic action to unfold at a more leisurely rate is that major complications need not occur steadily. The resultant action permits Tian to create incidents that might be structurally episodic but, nevertheless support his use of realistic convention. The brief exchange between Li and Fu-sheng regarding Tu Da might be classified as a truly episodic break in conversation, but it demonstrates Tian's attempt to approximate "real" conversation, certainly a novel undertaking in Chinese dramatic literature. Moreover, the transitions that bridge topics both between and within speeches are indicative of Tian's success at rendering dialogue in such a way that it flows naturally. More significantly, Tian constructs breaks in conversation that are thematically connected to and supportive of dramatic action. When Li, Huang-shi, and Hu-shi recount tales of the village elders, their conversation seems to be tangential to the action of the play. In fact, it harkens back to the main plot by demonstrating a comparative relationship between older and younger
generations in the village, a relationship that is socially
crucial in which the younger generation is expected to defer
to the older, as Lian-gu is expected to defer to her
parents. Although the old ones' abilities to outrun and
outlift middle-aged offspring provide an amusing reversal of
social expectations, references to that fact indicate that
the older generation remains physically vital and is to be
respected. The short scene in which Tu Da and Zhou San
return from the mountaintop provides comic relief in like
fashion: they are clumsy hired hands who cannot afford to
be wed, and, to the amusement of everyone onstage, joke and
roughhouse with each other about making a match with a pig.
Nevertheless, even their broad humor demonstrates the
importance that the institution of marriage holds within
their social unit and the appropriateness of the match one
makes with a lifetime mate. Fu-sheng is propelled into
conflict with his daughter and the fool when those hapless
lovers flout those fundamental precepts.

Finally, Tian uses narrative technique in monologues
differently and more successfully than he did in his
preceding work. The "Tiger" monologues are not repetitious
nor is one monologue merely an embellishment of the previous
one, as are Bai Qiu-ying's in "A Night in a Cafe." Each
speech grows out of the needs of the plot and imparts new
information as demanded by the circumstances of the action,
and, with few exceptions, Tian successfully avoids the
inclusion of superfluous details that characters onstage would already know.

Haringova notes that the narrative monologues in "Tiger" are the only parts of the play that "break the rapid rise in tension," and, while it is indeed possible that Tian intended the monologues to function as "brakes" on the plot as it moves toward its climax, the speeches fulfill other vital functions. Fu-sheng's first monologue, in which he describes the success of a recent tiger hunt, establishes him as a clever hunter, a man not only to be despised for his brutal treatment of his daughter, but to be admired for his strength and ability. That portrayal of an otherwise unsympathetic character is part and parcel of Tian's attempt to create characters who are fully developed human beings rather than caricatures. Fu-sheng's subsequent monologues further accentuate the romantic flavor of the script with their descriptions of the picturesque lives of the Hunan tiger hunters, and they serve to support thematically the action that ensues. Fu-sheng's saga of Deaf Yi-si resembles a folk tale in the manner in which it is told around a glowing hearth at night, its remoteness in the time and place of its setting, and its use of characters with descriptive names who are capable of performing feats of unusual strength. As one Western critic points out, in a

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5 Haringova, p. 142.
tale, what ought to happen, possible or not, does in fact come to pass, and it is ironic that, in the world of the play, what ought to happen, that is, the union of Lian-gu and Huang Da-sha, does not in fact occur. The tale also reveals significant parallels between Deaf Yi-si and Fu-sheng. Both are men who devote their lives to capturing and killing that which is by nature free. Both are fathers of only children; Yi-si's son is mauled by a tiger, and Fu-sheng perceives his daughter's life to be threatened by a creature ensnared in a tiger trap. The determination with which Yi-si pursues his tiger, a quest that continues even after his death, presages the fury with which Fu-sheng reacts to his daughter's insistence on maintaining a relationship with a "tiger" and Huang Da-sha's ultimate destruction.

Huang Da-sha's monologue, though flawed by an overdependence upon the inclusion of unnecessary pathetic details, nevertheless represents a progression in Tian's ability to write effective dramatic diction. By establishing the lonely Huang as a fool, Tian creates a character who would logically speak differently from those around him and be capable of expressing his vision in a heightened style. The monologue is filled with imagery, which is not only beautiful for its own sake, but is

peculiarly appropriate to the character who speaks it. Huang's images of desolate loneliness and his description of himself as a man who wanders forth at night only after other creatures have returned to their nests, mark him as an outsider in a community that abhors aberrations from the norm. As Constantine Tung has noted, the light that pours through Lian-gu's window symbolizes hope to Huang. But Huang's impressionistic image of the blurred light that shimmers through the "fine rain" and recalls the glimmer of fireflies that he and Lian-gu caught as children also represents the potential relationship between Huang and Lian-gu and, by extension, between Huang and family and village, the social unit, relationships that Huang can no more catch in his hand than the light that radiates from Lian-gu's hearth through the soft mist. Huang's monologue thus operates poetically in a manner that Fu-sheng's, appropriately, does not. Although its evocation of pathos and reliance upon imagery renders it superficially similar to Bai's and Lin's monologues in "Cafe," Huang's speech, particularly in terms of the imagery that Tian assigns to him, is a natural extension of the plot. The monologue represents a poetic underscoring of a dramatic action previously demonstrated to the audience and borne out

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further by the ultimate end of the action: Huang's suicide, committed in solitude.

Tian's poetic use of diction marks him as a pioneer in the world of twentieth century Chinese drama. He uses non-political, beautiful language for its own sake, and in this play, he connects the language to the action and to the character who utters the words.

"The Night a Tiger Was Captured" stands as Tian's most solid dramatic accomplishment of the nineteen-twenties. The play demonstrates his developing skill in adapting Western staging techniques and ability to integrate those techniques into a cohesive plot. His approach to characterization continues to utilize the complexity in character motivations that he initially approached in "A Night in a Cafe." The play culminates in a desperately unhappy ending, a radical and realistic departure from Beijing opera plots and later Chinese political dramas which portray ideal systems of conventionally accepted morality. The play also manifests Tian's increasing proficiency in organizing incidents in such a way that they assume a resemblance to real events. He manipulates chance occurrences so that they appear to be logical and probable while maintaining an element of surprise. The characters' thought progressions are, for the most part, logical and clear, and the incidence of characters making arbitrary statements simply for the sake of exposition is greatly reduced. Conflict is enacted
rather than discussed, and narrative technique is used to greater effect.

Given the brief length of time that elapsed between the writing of "A Night in a Cafe" and "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," Tian's progress as an imitator of Western drama writing in a realistic style is remarkable. The success of "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" is the strongest argument for Tian's ability as a playwright, and stands in high relief next to several other of Tian Han's efforts.
"The Night a Tiger Was Captured"

Cast of Characters

WEI FU-SHENG, a wealthy hunter

WEI HUANG-SHI, FU-SHENG's wife

LIAN-GU, FU-SHENG's only daughter

WEI HU-SHI, FU-SHENG's mother and LIAN-GU's grandmother

LI DONG-YANG, the village headsman, a neighbor

HE WEI-GUI, LI's relative, a farmer

HUANG DA-SHA [THE FOOL], LIAN-GU's older cousin, a poor mad beggar

TU DA and ZHOU SAN, hired hands in the WEI household

Time

A winter night in a certain year sometime after the Revolution of 1911

Place

A village in eastern Changsha, Hunan Province

Setting

The "fire room" in WEI FU-SHENG's house, the room where country folk go to rest after meals, receive their guests, and sit round an open hearth in the floor to keep warm during the wintertime. When the curtain rises, WEI FU-SHENG is seated near the hearth, smoking a water pipe while his elderly mother, HU-SHI, sits smoking a tobacco pipe in an
armchair. HUANG-SHI, FU-SHENG's wife, is making tea. LIANG-GU, their daughter, an obedient girl of eighteen or nineteen, is dressed in the manner of the mountain folk; nevertheless, the bulky clothing cannot conceal her beauty. She offers tea first to her grandmother, then to her father. Then she puts the tray up on her shoulder and carries four cups out of the fire room to give to the hired hands. FU-SHENG watches her leave and then speaks softly to his wife.

FU-SHENG

When Lian-er\(^1\) marries into the Chen family, she'll be the finest daughter-in-law they'll have. There are many daughters-in-law in that family, and I've seen them all. Everyone says there's not one of them who can come close to our Lian-er.

HUANG-SHI

(With maternal pride.)

No doubt about it. A couple of days ago Big Luo said the very same thing. But I can't even begin to tell you how careful I've been and what a fortune I spent preparing her dowry. It's not enough for her just to be pretty. If her dowry is too small, her sisters-in-law will look down on her.

GRANDMOTHER

We must also give thanks to the gods and goddesses. How else could the family finances have been so good these past several years? And to have just killed two tigers to boot! Without the gods, would things have gone so smoothly for you?

HUANG-SHI

Did you set up the guns yet?

FU-SHENG

A long time ago, but I still haven't put the wicks in. I'm waiting till it just starts getting dark tonight, then I'll take care of it. Tonight will be just the right time.

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\(^1\)"-Er" is the Chinese diminutive suffix; similar to "y" or "ie" in English, as in "Bobby" or "Pattie."
HUANG-SHI

When you get another tiger, our Lian-er can have an even bigger dowry. I still want to go into town and get her a decorated satin quilt and embroidered bed curtains. It won't be but a few days till she gets married, and I'm worried I won't have enough time to do that.

FU-SHENG

If I nab me a big one this time, I won't even have to carry the prize into town. The best thing would be to skin it right here and make the hide into a blanket for Lian-er. Then she'll really seem like one of us hunters. When I killed the first tiger I meant to do that. Lian-er, you -- (He turns to address LIAN-ER but does not see her.) Why hasn't Lian-er come in?

HUANG-SHI

She probably heard us talking about her, so she got embarrassed and went to her room.

FU-SHENG

She seems to be back to normal. Before, when she wouldn't listen to a thing I said, she really infuriated me.

HUANG-SHI

And how could I not be angry, too? When I heard her crying the way she did into the night, I hated it. And I pitied her, too... is that madman still in the temple?

FU-SHENG

Mmmmm-hmmm, still in the temple. Lives under the altar. I've thought of running him out of there, but all everyone around here can see is that he's young and weak, without a mother or father. And he acts like such a simpleton that they all think he's really harmless. So no one is willing to see things my way and help me out, and so I've quit saying anything.

HUANG-SHI

But I haven't seen him coming around here lately.
FU-SHENG

Probably doesn't dare to after the last time I beat him up. If you just yell a little at a madman like that, he won't be scared at all.

GRANDMOTHER

But he's such a pitiful child. It was enough that you yelled at him to quit coming around here. Why did you have to beat him up, to?

FU-SHENG

Old One, you've got to understand that the child seems to be quite mad, but he's not a bit insane around Lian-er. At first I thought he was crazy, so when he and Lian-er used to play together I didn't give him a second thought. Then, when they grew up, he still came around every day looking for Lian-er so they could chatter and laugh together. Then it seemed Lian-er must always be with him to be happy, otherwise, she's miserable. Finally I understood that this was no laughing matter. Well, at that time, his mother hadn't been dead very long. So I said to him, very nicely, that I would recommend him to one of the farmer families in the valley, the Tians. But he said he didn't want to go so far away and, not only that, he refused to leave Xian-gu Peak even though he didn't have a home. He's passed his days underneath the temple altar ever since. It is pitiful, truly pitiful. But as soon as I think how he can harm our Lian-er, how she refused to get married because of him, then I despise him.

HUANG-SHI

Alright, but you don't have to hate him anymore. Actually it's because of him that we chose a husband for our Lian-er from such a fine family right here in our own village.

FU-SHENG

(A thought suddenly occurs to him.)

Hey, where did Lian-er go yesterday?

HUANG-SHI

Down to Li Da-ji the Weaver in Huan-bei with that girl from down the way, the Changs' Second Daughter. I wanted her to
take several catties\(^2\) of tiger meat to him and ask if our material was finished yet or not.

**FU-SHENG**

From now on, I want Uncle Tu Da to take her. Young girls shouldn't be running around outside. I thought I saw her walking around up on the mountain ridge.

**HUANG-SHI**

Why are you asking about this?

**FU-SHENG**

It's been a long time since Lian-er went out. I'm worried that she'll go running back to that temple.

**GRANDMOTHER**

What does it matter if she goes to the temple and pays her respects to the bodhisattvas?\(^3\)

**FU-SHENG**

Well, of course, it doesn't matter at all, if that's what she goes for. I'm just afraid she'll go to meet that madman.

**HUANG-SHI**

If the Changs' daughter goes with her, that surely won't be a problem. Besides, ever since Lian-er's been betrothed, she's forgotten all about the madman.

**FU-SHENG**

Well, that's all right, then.

(At this moment the sound of voices can be heard from offstage. LI DONG-YANG has brought HE WEI-GUI along for a visit with FU-SHENG. TU DA welcomes them in.)

\(^2\)Chinese unit of weight measurement; roughly equivalent to one and one-third Western pounds.

\(^3\)In Buddhism, a being who attained enlightenment but refrains from entering Nirvana so as to help others; a Buddhist saint.
TU DA
(Offstage.)

Ah, Master Li is here. Please, come in.

LI
(Offstage.)

Uh, Da Si-wu, is Fu-sheng home?

TU DA
(Offstage.)

He's sitting in the fire room. Please come in. (TU DA enters.) We have guests. (He exits. LI and HE enter, and FU-SHENG and the others rise to greet them.)

LI

Master Wei!

FU-SHENG

Ah, the village headsman is here. Sit down, sit down. Who is this?

LI

This is my kinsman, He. He's from the country.

FU-SHENG

So, Elder Brother He, how long have you been here in the valley?

HE

Just since this afternoon.

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4The character whom Li addresses as "Da Si-wu" is known to the other characters (and to the audience thus far) as "Tu Da" (lit., "Big Tu), "Tu" being the character's surname. Here, Li addresses him as "Da Si-wu" or "Big Si-wu"; "Si-wu would be Tu Da's first or given name.

5In the original text, there follows at this point a note from the playwright explaining that, in the dialect the characters speak, they use two different words to delineate between a field in the countryside ("duan") and a valley in the mountains ("kun").
LI

He just got here. His family's been farming the countryside for generations, and they've hardly ever come up here to the mountain valley. He's my elder brother's son. Last time I went to the countryside on village business I stayed overnight at their house. He thought my stories about the valley were so fascinating: the abundant firewood, the fine fields on the hillside, the roaring of tigers and leopards in the night. I can't tell you how excited he was. And then, I started telling how your family recently killed two tigers and carried one of the prizes to town but kept the other locked up at home for everyone to see. No one in his family had ever seen a tiger, and they all wanted to come take a peek at this one. This young fellow was especially restless -- all he wanted was to come along with me. But his father said things would be busy around their house for a day or two and wanted him to wait. So we've finally come today! I've returned from Chun-hua Village at last.

HE

(Suddenly hears an animal's cry; grabs his uncle's hand quickly.)

Is that a tiger howling?

FU-SHENG

(Laughing; to the others sitting in the room, who are laughing with him.)

That's no tiger -- it's the pigs in the pen behind the house!

HE

How come mountain pigs sound different?

LI

Mountain pigs and country pigs sound just the same. I think your ears are playing tricks on you. . . . The second tiger you killed, did you carry it into town?

FU-SHENG

Four or five days ago.

LI

You didn't go, too?
FU-SHENG

No, I wanted Lao-er to take it for me so he could oversee some purchases on his way. I had some things to look to here at home.

LI

Well, Wei-gui, you just so happened to come here at the wrong time. You wanted to see a tiger so badly that you even traveled all this way to the valley, and here the tiger's been carried off.

HUANG-SHI

(As she offers tea to each guest.)

That's right. If you had come five or six days sooner, Elder Brother He, you could have seen it. Ai-ya, I don't know how many people came in to look at it before we carried it off. Even two and three days after it was gone people were still crowding in here, asking to see the tiger. When they finally realized the house was empty, they left at last. The funniest one was the new Third Wife in the Zhou household. She drew near to the cage and stood next to it. As soon as she heard the tiger roar, she ran to hide behind someone, and she beat her hands together so hard that she smashed the jade bracelet she was wearing into pieces!

HE

Ai-ye, that's terrible!

LI

(Smiling.)

The news of your family seizing the tiger has spread far and wide -- they even know all about it in Chun-hua Village. All the wives there want to come take a look. Too bad you've taken it to town already.

FU-SHENG

It's not important. If we're lucky we'll get another one tonight. I don't think we'll be able to nab a live one, though.

LI

Why? You set another trap, didn't you?
FU-SHENG
It's not the trap -- it's the guns. Right now I'm waiting for folks to quiet down a little, and then I'll load them.

LI
Where are you going to lay the trap?

FU-SHENG
Behind the peak.

LI
No one goes around up there, do they?

FU-SHENG
Who'd want to run around up there on a night like this? Besides, everyone around here knows we tried to catch a tiger last night and were already shooting off rounds up there.

LI
Well, then, I congratulate you -- tonight you will kill a big one for sure. And tomorrow I'll expect to get an invitation to drink a toast at the wedding feast.

FU-SHENG
But of course! Naturally I'll invite my headsman to the wedding feast. My Lian-er will be married any day now. If we get a tiger tonight, we'll have a big wedding feast, and I'll invite my headsman to drink toast after toast.

LI
Oh, that'll be wonderful. I heard that Miss Lian was about to get married. I still haven't prepared a little gift for the bride's family.

HUANG-SHI
Ai-yuh, don't go to a lot of trouble over it, Master Li. Why, the day before yesterday your Grandmother sent over a bolt of cloth and two quilts, which we already do not dare to accept.
LI

Oh, it's nothing. You should, you really should. When is the wedding?

HUANG-SHI

First of the month.

LI

You've made a perfect match. They are really so well suited to each other, in every way. It goes without saying that there's no other match so perfect in the whole village.

TU DA

(Entering.)

Master, we can go and get the guns ready now.

FU-SHENG

(The lamps in the room have been lit some time ago, and the firewood glows brilliantly in the hearth. FU-SHENG rises and crosses to look out the window.)

Go ahead. Just be careful, all of you!

TU DA

I understand. (Exits.)

LI

This Tu Si-wu of yours is really a good man.

FU-SHENG

(Grunts; then:)

He's dependable, all right.

HUANG-SHI

In a word, he's really the most well behaved fellow. He's been a hired hand in our house for five or six years, and in all that time he's never given us any problems. . . . Oh, speaking of weddings reminded me of something else. It won't be long before your Second Daughter gets married, too, will it?
LI

Mmmm-hmmm, we've planned her marriage to the Ho family in Jin-ji-po Village for the third month of next year.

HUANG-SHI

The Ho family! What a fine family! There are over thirty people living in that household, and they have seven or eight hired hands. If your Second Daughter marries a young man from a family like that, she'll really live a life of ease.

LI

Mmmmm. I don't think the girls are as well off as all that, but at least they won't go hungry. It's well known how hard the daughters-in-law have to work. They have to get up early, and they don't get to sleep till late. And they spend all their time spinning thread, serving tea, cooking, and washing clothes, not to mention having to plant yams up on the hillside and harvest the fields. They work so hard all year long that they almost drop. It doesn't matter whether they give birth to boys or girls -- it's still a hard life for them.

HUANG-SHI

Still, such a husband is a good one. The harder a family works, the more prosperous it'll be.

LI

Right. That's why I wanted my Second Daughter to marry into that family. But her mother adores the girl, and when she

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6 Chinese marriage tradition dictates that, when a young girl marries, she leaves her father's home forever and becomes a member of her husband's family. Although she may visit her parents' home, she comes only as a visitor, not as a daughter (at least, in theory). Thus, the Chinese attitude that boy babies are more valuable than girl babies: eventually a girl will be given away while a boy is a permanent investment. When a young Chinese bride gives birth to a male child, she is often pampered and treated well, particularly if the child is the first male heir in her household. If, however, she gives birth to a female child (and woe to the wife who continues to bear girl babies!), she will be treated poorly by all of her in-laws.
heard that the prospective husband was of the Ho family, at first she refused to sign the "red papers."

GRANDMOTHER

Fu-sheng, tell Second Uncle Hu⁸ to go to the woodshed and bring some dry firewood. If you get a tiger tonight, you'll be so busy with it later, you won't have time to look after the fire.

FU-SHENG

I'll go myself. (He rises and exits.)

LI

Old Grandmother, you really are full of vim and vigor.

GRANDMOTHER

Ai, listen to Master Li! I'm too old anymore; I don't seem to be as tough as I used to be.

HE

And how old are you this year, Old One?

GRANDMOTHER

Take a guess.

HE

Let's see ... about the same age as my Grandmother?

HUANG-SHI

And how old is that ancient lady?

HE

Seventy-five this year.

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⁷ Chinese betrothal announcements would be written on red paper because red, the color of good fortune, is also the color for weddings (and other auspicious events in the life cycle, such as the birth of a son).

⁸ Although he is mentioned, Second Uncle Hu does not appear in the play.
HUANG-SHI

Well, then, she's a year younger than my Grandmother. 9

LI

His Grandmother is in good shape, too. When I was at their house a few days ago, I saw her still embroidering a dou-du 10 for one of her grandsons.

HUANG-SHI

My Grandmother's eyes aren't as good as they used to be, but she's still got the strength in her legs. Why, the old woman can still climb up Xian-gu-dian Mountain, and you know how steep that is. From halfway up the mountain to the palace on top there are 120 stone steps, right? That Old One can get to the top in a single breath, without wasting a bit of energy. Not like me: I get so winded -- I start panting so that I can't even walk anymore.

LI

Us younger ones aren't as hardy as those old ones, that's for sure.

HUANG-SHI

That's right.

GRANDMOTHER

Oh, we're nothing. You never saw your husband's father. When that Old One was alive, there wasn't anybody who didn't marvel at his health. When he was eighty he made a bet with a bunch of young men that he could haul two dan 11 of grain up the mountain.

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9 Strictly speaking, the woman to Huang-shi refers to as "Grandmother" is her mother-in-law. She is calling her "Grandmother" as a sign of respect for the woman's age.

10 A dou-du is a piece of infant apparel somewhat like an undershirt, which covers a baby's chest and stomach, and ties in the back.

11 Dan are buckets that are hung from two ends of a pole which is then carried on the shoulders of the bearer.
HE

Ai-ya, I could never do that.

GRANDMOTHER

Ah, you eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds are just like the tigers up on the mountain. When you are really strong, there is nothing you can't do.

(FU-SHENG enters, carrying firewood. He places it in the hearth.)

FU-SHENG

What are you all talking about?

LI

We were just saying that the younger folks aren't as strong as the old ones.

FU-SHENG

That's the truth. Just take our hunters, for example. They're not as strong as they used to be. But then, the weapons are made better and methods are more skillful, so they don't really need to be that strong anymore.

HE

Master Wei, how did you catch those two tigers, sir?

FU-SHENG

Now that you bring it up, I'll tell you -- it's really fascinating. We caught several tigers last year, but it wasn't as easy as catching the two that we got this year. The first one was especially easy. For that one, we just made a good tiger trap, but we didn't carry it up the mountain and set it up there. Instead we placed it behind the pigpen and left the door to the trap open. At first I'd just hoped to catch a small wild animal or two. I don't think we'd even been asleep for half the night when, all of a sudden, we heard all kinds of commotion from the pigs in the pen, followed by loud growls that sounded like the pulling of a saw. We crept outside, carrying guns and pitchforks and, when we held up our lanterns and looked behind the pigpen, we saw a fierce tiger, small, like a calf, running around inside the cage. That tiger had walked past the side of the house where our rooms were, heard the pigs grunting in the pen, and thought he would eat some of
them. He had no other way to get in but to make a hole in
the trap and then use his claws to rip his way into the
pigpen. But what he hadn't figured out was a scheme for
going out, and when the door locked behind him he would
never be able to figure out another way out. The next time,
we made another trap, stronger and more ingenious than the
first. This one we carried up to the mountain peak. We hid
it in a grove of tangled trees, concealing it on all four
sides and leaving only one way to get in. Then we took some
pigs, sheep, chickens, and ducks, put them behind the trap,
and tied them up by their legs. There we let them oink and
squawk and quack and make all kinds of noise. The tigers,
who are always so hungry during the wintertime, could hear
the hubbub as they stalked along the mountain peak. So what
tiger wouldn't go looking to find the food? The upshot was
that, on the evening of the third day, we got a tiger once
again, the very tiger we brought as our prize to town five
or six days ago.

HE

Is getting a tiger that easy?

FU-SHENG

Oh, no, I just got lucky. Usually you spend all your energy
constantly dealing with the fact that you just might get
killed yourself. Have you seen that field on the far side
of Xian-gu Peak? It didn't used to be the magnificent field
it is now -- originally it was a deep forest. Because the
people who lived nearby knew there were tigers' dens in the
forest, none of them dared go in there to chop their
firewood. And so the woods became so thick and deep that
you couldn't see the sky when you were in it. And since no
one would chop firewood in the forest, they never had any
accidents with tigers. Gradually, though, the tigers grew
larger and larger in number, and often they would snatch
pigs and chickens from the homes nearby. They howled
continuously in the night, and no one dared to sleep
peacefully. Then, I might as well tell you straight out,
Deaf Yi-si, the most famous hunter of our village -- his son
was mauled on the hillside. This one son was all he and his
wife had. He had just returned from town, and when he heard
his son had been mauled by a tiger, his heart ached so that
he wanted to die. And so he swore he would kill the tiger
from the hillside. His friend, Yuan, another renowned
hunter, whose nickname was Bull's-eye Yuan, also wanted to help rid the area quickly of its fierce threat. So every day Deaf Yi-si went searching up on the hillside, all the while carrying a shotgun on his shoulder and a knife in his hand. One day he actually happened upon the path that led to the tiger’s den. Right away he noticed that the mother tiger wasn't there, but she had left her four baby tigers in the den. They were tumbling around and pouncing on each other, and Deaf Yi-si could see how much they loved to play. But when he looked again more closely, he saw the remains of little children's heads and legs nearby. When Deaf Yi-si realized how many children had been eaten, his hatred for the tiger took hold of him. As soon as he saw the remains of the children, he raised his knife and killed all four of the baby tigers in the den. He knew that when the mother tiger returned and saw what had happened, she would certainly come searching for her enemy. The next day, Yi-si asked Bull's-eye Yuan and all the other hunters to surround the mountain. That day, the mother tiger returned, and when she saw her babies had been killed, she howled and roared all through the night in her fury. On the second day after they had surrounded the mountain, she sat in her den, waiting. (Suddenly the shouts of a band of hunters can be heard. TU DA and two or three of his companions have returned from up on the mountain. TU DA and ZHOU SAN enter.) Did you get them set up alright?

TU DA

Perfect.

FU-SHENG

Anyone wandering around up there?

TU DA

What kind of fool would be walking around on a mountain peak like that at this hour?

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12 In the original text Yuan's nickname is "Yuan Da-tong," which translates literally as "Yuan the Blunderbuss" or "Yuan the Musket." Because both of those expressions are clumsy for an actor to say, and because the point (and irony) of the nickname is that Yuan is a crack shot, "Bull's-eye Yuan" was chosen in place of a literal English rendering of "Yuan Da-tong."
HUANG-SHI

Uncle Tu Da, Uncle Zhou San! Come quickly and warm up your hands. It's so cold out.

ZHOU SAN

It's not so bad.

(HUANG-Shi throws some dry wood on the fire, and it burns brightly. TU and ZHOU both warm themselves.)

LI

Uncle Tu Da, your sleeve is ripped.

HUANG-SHI

I wanted him to give it to Lian-er yesterday so she could mend it for him, but he didn't want to.

TU DA

Oh, why should I bother Lian-er with mending my clothes? Anyway, mountain folks don't imagine that it's even possible to wear nice clothes. If you wore something nice, and you ran up the mountain just twice, well, even armor would get torn up.

LI

I advised Uncle Tu Da a long time ago to get himself a woman, but he never listens. That's why your clothes are torn, and you never have anybody to mend them for you, right?

TU DA

Mr. Headsman, you've got to have a little sympathy for my situation here: I can't even afford to feed myself, so how could I support a wife?

LI

Even so, you should keep on looking. I've never seen a bachelor get rich on his own, and I've never seen a poor

---

13 Tu Da and Zhou San are not related to Huang-shi; among Chinese country folks, "Uncle" is simply a familiar form of address.
married man starve to death. Why, I could still be your matchmaker.

ZHOU SAN

I'll be a matchmaker for you, too.

TU DA
(Laughing at ZHOU SAN.)

What kind of match would you make for me? Have you got any sisters for me to marry?

ZHOU SAN

Well, since we've been talking about it -- no one's said anything, but everyone knows about her. There's a lady who lives out back -- she's got a big girl for you.

TU DA

There's a lady who lives out back?

(FU-SHENG and HUANG-SHI have been laughing together during the above exchange.)

ZHOU SAN

That's right -- Old Lady Pig and her big daughter!

---

14 Like any other language, Chinese has its puns, made all the more difficult to render in English by the fact that the Chinese language abounds in homophones. In this instance, Zhou San is making a play on words by using the syllable "zhu" spoken with a high tone. A New Practical Chinese-English Dictionary (The Far East Book Company, Ltd., 1960), for example, lists fifteen different characters that are pronounced "zhu" with a high tone. The conversation in the original text actually reads as follows:

Zhou San: Well, since we've been talking about it -- no one's said anything, but everyone knows about her. It's the Eldest Daughter of Mrs. Zhu (lit., "vermilion") who lives out back.

Tu Da: There's a Mrs. Zhu (朱) who lives out back? (Fu-sheng and Huang-shi have been laughing together during the above exchange.)

Zhou San: That's right -- it's the Eldest Daughter of Mrs. Zhu (lit., "pig")!
TU DA
(Hitting ZHOU SAN.)
You little rotten egg!

FU-SHENG
Hey, Uncle Tu Da, you'd better get all the guns ready. It won't be long before you'll be using them.

TU DA
Alright. Uncle Zhou San, hurry up and sharpen a knife for me. (TU DA and ZHOU SAN exit.)

LI
You'll be a rich man tonight, no doubt about it.

FU-SHENG
Ha, ha, in this business you've just got to get lucky. You're always scheming, but whether or not your schemes will lead you to anything, who can say?

HE
And so what happened the second day, Master Wei?

FU-SHENG
(Starting suddenly, he touches his head.)
The second day? The second day what?

HE
The second day they surrounded the mountain. Did they catch the tiger or not?

FU-SHENG
Ah, you're asking about that story I was just telling, about Deaf Yi-si killing the tiger. Alright, I might as well finish telling you. The second day, when Deaf Yi-si, Bull's-eye Yuan, and all the other famous hunters from the area went and surrounded the mountain, Yi-si and Yuan bravely scaled the peak first, leaving the others to encircle the mountain behind them. Deaf Yi-si let Bull's-eye Yuan act as his back-up man, and he went on ahead, back to the path he'd discovered the day before. Step by step, he closed in on the tiger's den. He waited until he was ten feet away. From there he could already make out the mother
tiger behind the trees, grinding her teeth, sharpening her claws, waiting for him. Without waiting for her to advance first, he took aim and shot right at her head. When she heard the shot and saw the gun smoke, she leapt up at him. Deaf Yi-si had planned for her to spring up, and he was waiting with is knife poised to stab her in the stomach, but even so, it was too late. The tiger sprang at his head. He dropped his gun and knife and took advantage of his chance to grab the tiger around the waist. He pressed his head firmly against her throat and braced both his legs against her hind paws. And he bore his injuries and died without ever putting her down. Now Deaf Yi-si's dear friend Bull's-eye Yuan and all the other hunters could see what was happening, but they couldn't save Yi-si because he was holding on so tightly to the tiger that no one could get a clear shot at her. Bull's-eye Yuan was fairly close, so he climbed a tree, took aim at the tiger, and shot twice. She fell right away, but on his third shot, she rolled over on the ground, and the bullet hit Deaf Yi-si's leg instead. The shot wasn't fatal, but it was enough to blow part of the leg off, and Yi-si's head rolled backwards. The tiger took advantage of that second. In a fury, she turned around, and with a great roar she bit Deaf Yi-si's head in half. Then, freeing herself from his grip, she leapt up and bounded away from the surrounding hunters. None of them dared block her path. Even though Bull's-eye Yuan shot off round after round, it was too late for him to save his friend. As he gathered up his friend's remains, he swore to take revenge on the tiger for his friend's sake. From that moment on, Bull's-eye Yuan spent most of his time alone, his gun on his shoulder, searching for that tiger. But although he killed many tigers, he never got the one that had mauled his friend to death. Yuan had a son named He-er, who was fourteen or fifteen years old at the time. Yuan was afraid that he would die before he could avenge his friend, so often he would describe the tiger to He-er and tell him that, when he grew up and became a hunter, he was to search for this tiger, kill her, and take her skin and show it to his friend's spirit as a sign of filial respect. And so He-er grew up feeling that tiger in his heart and seeing her in his eyes.

HE

And did his son ever get the tiger?

FU-SHENG

Listen: two years later, in the second month of spring, He-er and a few other neighborhood children went mushroom hunting among the maple trees on the hillside. Since no one had chopped trees there for such a long time, the woods were
very deep, and the ground was thickly covered with fallen leaves, so every year the mushrooms grew more plentiful on that hill than anywhere else. The more mushrooms they picked, the more the children wanted; the more they had, the happier they were; and as they grew more and more excited, they paid less and less attention to possible dangers, and they wandered deeper and deeper into the forest. They were having a wonderful time when one small child suddenly took such a fright that he lost his voice; but he lost no time in trying to drag the others out of there as fast as he could. When they asked him what was wrong, all he could say was, "There's a tiger!" As soon as the children heard that, they all ran, dropping their mushrooms on the ground and trampling them to a pulp. They ran so fast that nothing could have caught them. At last they looked back to see if there was indeed a tiger. But there wasn't a single sound of anything moving. They were all astonished. The bravest ones, Yuan He-er among them, ran back into the forest to investigate. Looking among the thickly clustered trees, they saw a little clearing. And sitting in that little clearing was the same ferocious tiger that had just frightened them into running away. Something was in its mouth that it had been chewing. Its eyes were open wide -- big as teacups -- and as it gazed at the children, they felt their legs grow weak. At first glance they were scared, but when they looked closer, they realized that not only wasn't the tiger moving, it wasn't even growling -- not at all! And when they listened carefully, they couldn't even hear it breathe. Yuan He-er, more courageous than the others, found a rock and then gently tossed it on the tiger's tail. Still, it didn't make even the slightest movement. Yuan He-er knew that there was no tiger so good-natured as this one in the whole world. And when he saw the two scars on its head, he knew in his heart that this was the tiger of which his father had so often spoken. He told his little friends that none of them should dare to get close to the tiger. And then, He-er himself ran up to the tiger and gave her a shove. With a thunderous crash she fell over. It was the same tiger that had bitten Deaf Yi-si and run from the hunters. Deeply wounded, she had hidden in the clearing so she could die. Now she was only skin and bones, for her meat had long since rotted away. Half of Deaf Yi-si's skull was still clenched in her mouth.

HE

But why was it still sitting up?  

FU-SHENG

Don't you know? That's what they mean when they say, "Even dead, a tiger is still a threat." Then He-er returned to
his father and shouted for him to come look. Sure enough, it was the right tiger, alright. Bull's-eye Yuan took the half of Deaf Yi-si's skull bone and gave it to his family to be buried together with Yi-si's remains. He used the tiger's skin as a sacrifice to Deaf Yi-si's spirit, and the weight was lifted from his soul at last... (As soon as FU-SHENG finishes speaking, gunshots can be heard coming from the mountain. FU-SHENG gasps.)

TU DA
(Offstage.)

Gunshots! Boss! We're going!

LI

Fu-sheng, when it comes to making money, you have all the luck. This time you've gotten yourself a big one.

GRANDMOTHER

If it is a tiger, then Lian-er's dowry will be even bigger.

FU-SHENG

I just hope it's a tiger, and then that load will be lifted from my mind. If it's just some little animal, that'll be terrible.

(TU Da enters, carrying a gun and a pitchfork.)

TU DA

No way, it's a big tiger for sure. Little animals don't use that path.

FU-SHENG

I think so, too.

HE

We'll go along and watch.

FU-SHENG

If Elder Brother He wants to go have a look, that's all right.

LI

I'll come, too.
FU-SHENG
(To HUANG-SHI.)

Hurry and boil a pot of water now so we won't have to think about it later when we're so busy.

HUANG-SHI

I've already prepared it.

ZHOU SAN
(Offstage.)

Hey, let's go!

FU-SHENG and TU DA
(Towards the sound of his voice.)

Let's go. (They exit, each one carrying his weapons.)

HUANG-SHI

Grandmother, dear, it's time you went to sleep.

GRANDMOTHER

I want to sit up for a little while. I'll go to sleep after they've brought the tiger back. We'll be very busy before long, so it would be good for me to keep the fire burning here.

HUANG-SHI

Ai-ya, the water pot is empty. Lian-er!

LIAN-GU
(Offstage.)

Coming. (She enters.) What is it, Mama?

HUANG-SHI

Go fill up the water pot. As soon as the men get back, they'll all be wanting to drink some tea.

LIAN-GU

Alright. (She takes the pot offstage and, after a moment or two, re-enters with a full pot. She returns it to its place over the fire in the hearth.) Ma, have they killed another tiger?
HUANG-SHI

Uncle Tu Da says it's a tiger for sure. Other animals don't use that path. And besides, it couldn't be a person because the villagers were warned yesterday to stay away, weren't they?

GRANDMOTHER

If it is a tiger, your Papa will be thrilled. He said if he got a tiger this time, he wouldn't take it into town for money. Instead he wants to skin it and make a bedspread for you and use the tiger's meat for your wedding feast.

HUANG-SHI

The day is getting closer. You'd better hurry up and finish off those shoes.

LIAN-GU

I'm not going to.

HUANG-SHI

Silly child, why not?

LIAN-GU

I'm not going to wear them.

HUANG-SHI

And why not?

LIAN-GU

I don't want to live. (She breaks down and weeps.)

HUANG-SHI

Why don't you want to live?

LIAN-GU

If Mama and Papa surely want me to marry . . .

---

15 In some provinces it is customary for the bride to embroider the shoes she will wear to her wedding in order to show off her talents with needle and thread.
HUANG-SHI

Don't you like the Chen family?

LIAN-GU

It isn't that.

HUANG-SHI

You don't like the Chen's Third Son? (LIAN-GU shakes her head.) Then why are you unwilling to go?

LIAN-GU

(Pauses; then:)

... I just don't want to.

HUANG-SHI

My dear child, you've already agreed; how can you back out on a promise? A marriage like this is really nothing to get upset over now, is it? His parents already sent us a gift, and now you say you won't go. But what about what I want? What about what your father wants? And the Chens -- you think they'd go along with this? You must try to understand. You're not a little two- or three-year-old girl anymore. If you won't accept a young man like the Chens' son, what kind of a fellow do you think you'll get?

GRANDMOTHER

That's right. This Young Chen is one of the best catches to be had in our village. His family is willing to have you as a daughter-in-law, and your eight characters match just right.\(^\text{16}\) If you won't marry into that family, what finer family could you expect to marry into? If there is a better fellow, he doesn't want you, and all this fuss is for nothing.

LIAN-GU

I don't want any man. I'll stay home and take care of my Grandma and Mama.

---

\(^{16}\)The eight characters representing the year, month, day, and hour of a person's birth are used by matchmakers to determine how appropriate a marriage match is.
HUANG-SHI

That's nonsense. How can you stay home and wait on us like some old maid? Listen to my advice, and stop being so wishy-washy. Just hurry up and finish those shoes. I'm almost done preparing the rest of your trousseau. If you Papa has killed a tiger this time, he'll make the skin into a blanket for you, and he'll get Second Uncle in town to buy embroidered bed curtains and brocade blankets, and you'll be a properly married woman. I think you're just talking like this to upset me. Soon you'll get married, and what will your Ma be able to do for you? Just wait, and don't upset your Papa. If he heard you talking like this, well, you know what his temper is like.

GRANDMOTHER

That's right. If your Papa heard you say you refused to get married, you've seen how angry he can get.

LIAN-GU

I don't care if Papa gets angry or not. I'm not getting married, and that's all there is to it.

HUANG-SHI

Alright. Just wait and say that to his face. I'm in no mood to talk to you. I'll be in the kitchen.

LIAN-GU

(Crosses to her GRANDMOTHER.)

Grandmother, I . . .

GRANDMOTHER

(Comforting her.)

Foolish child. What are you crying for? Isn't your life better than your Mama's or your Grandma's?

LIAN-GU

No, Grandmother, my life is so bitter.

(From outside come faint sounds of men shouting and hunting dogs barking.)

GRANDMOTHER

Listen. Your Papa and Uncle Tu Da are bringing the tiger back. When you get married, you'll bring an even bigger
dowry with you all the sooner to the Chens', and you'll be blessed with joy and wealth. Come quickly to the door and take a look.

LIAN-GU

No, I don't want to see it. I am afraid of this tiger.

GRANDMOTHER

You've just seen a tiger. What is there to be frightened of? Last time they brought a live tiger home, and you weren't frightened, so there's no need to be afraid of the dead one they're bringing home this time.

LIAN-GU

Why shouldn't I be afraid? It is bringing my life to an end all the sooner.

GRANDMOTHER

I see. You're as crazy as Huang the Fool!

LIAN-GU

Yes, Grandmother. I am as crazy as he is. I have so often feared I would become that crazy.

GRANDMOTHER

The more you talk, the more foolish you sound. How can a good girl be so crazy? (The sounds of the men and dogs draw closer.) Alright. (She stands up. Amidst the hubbub of the crowd comes the headsman's voice: "Carry it on in, carry it on in.") Listen, they carried the tiger up to the doorway already. Hurry, go take a look at it.

LIAN-GU

No, I don't want to see it. Once the tiger has entered this house, it means that I must leave it.

(From offstage comes a cacophony of footsteps, shouting, and barking.)

TU DÀ

(Offstage.)

Uncle Zhou San! You hold open the front door! Hold it open!
FU-SHENG
(Offstage.)

Put a plank of wood on the floor in that central room, and we'll lay him down.

LI
(Offstage.)

Hold the feet carefully. Bring him on in.

GRANDMOTHER

Lian-er, they're bringing the tiger in. Go look at it, quickly now.

LIAN-GU

No, I don't want to see it.

(The sounds of men and their footsteps come closer.)

FU-SHENG
(Offstage.)

Carry him into the main room.

LI
(Offstage.)

No, the fire-room.

FU-SHENG
(Offstage.)

How can we carry him in there?

LI
(Offstage.)

It's freezing out -- we'd better get him in there. Hurry up and find some place to put him down.
(The door to the fire-room opens. LI ER enters. He moves the things that are lying on the big bamboo bed next to the stage left wall, including a store-bought cotton mattress. Then he rolls up some clothes to make a pillow. Headsman LI enters and moves the stool off to the side. LIAN-GU and her GRANDMOTHER are amazed to see FU-SHENG and TU DA enter next, half-carrying, half-dragging what should be a large tiger, but what turns out to be just a seventeen- or eighteen-year-old youth dressed in rags. He has been shot in the leg, and it is soaked with fresh blood. He is unconscious. They carry him to the bamboo bed as though he is a corpse, and they lay him down.)

GRANDMOTHER

What happened? You shot a man?!

FU-SHENG

(Sighs.)

Ai, what can I say?

LI

Old One, you hurry and get the fire going. It's really cold in here. Fu-sheng, you go quickly and get a doctor.

FU-SHENG

Where am I going to look for a doctor at this hour? The Liangs' Sixth Son has gone into town.

LI

No, go right now and get someone. His wound is serious. Killing someone isn't anything to fool around with.

Li-er is not listed among the characters in Tian's cast. The character that signifies the second syllable of his name, "er," is not the same character as the "er" of "Lian-er," which means "Little Lian." His "er" means "the Second." Thus, he is "Li the Second" or "Second Li." The character "Li" in his name is the same as Li Dong-yang's. Although Tian does not indicate his exact identity in the text, the character Li-er may be another of the hired hands in Fu-sheng's household who has gone to help with the tiger's capture, or he may be the headsman's second son and had, as a village member, joined in the tiger hunt.
Then Uncle Tu Da, you go the the Wen family down in the valley and ask their Ninth Son if he could come tonight. Uncle Li Er, could you go with him and help him carry the sedan chair?

(TU DA and LI ER exit immediately. HUANG-SHI hurries in.)

HUANG-SHI

You shot a person? Who was it?

FU-SHENG

You want to know who it was? My rotten luck! (HUANG-SHI and LIAN-GU turn to look at the face of the rag-covered youth.) He's passed out. (Suddenly his attention focuses on LIAN-GU,) Lian-er, get out of here now. I don't want you in here.

(LIAN-GU's eyes remain fixed; she continues to stare at the destroyed, ashen-faced youth as though she had not heard her father speak. Suddenly, as though she cannot believe her eyes, she rubs them and moves closer to look.)

LIAN-GU

Ai-ya, it's Elder Brother Huang, isn't it? Elder Brother Huan! (She begins to cry.)

HUANG-SHI

It really is him. Look how thin he's gotten. (She rises to get the hot water.)

FU-SHENG

Shameless! What Elder Brother Huang is he of yours? Get out of here before you make me boil.

GRANDMOTHER

(Rises.)

Is it really him?

FU-SHENG

If it's not that idiot, who else would want to go running around up on the peak at this hour, risking his life? Unlucky for us, having to cross paths with this unlucky fool!
GRANDMOTHER

Where was he shot?

FU-SHENG

Hit him in the thigh. A little higher and the idiot wouldn't be alive.

LI

It's still pretty critical: he's losing too much blood. Until we got right up to him up there and looked carefully, we hadn't realized it was him writhing around in the trap.

FU-SHENG

Even though he was wounded so seriously, as soon as he saw it was me, he offered me wedding congratulations! Stupid son of a bitch!

GRANDMOTHER

Hurry, stop the bleeding. Call him so he'll come to. The poor child, he's already a madman -- we don't want him to become a cripple to boot.

FU-SHENG

(Kneels by the youth's feet and attempts to stop the bleeding.)

We're going to have to try something else. The blood isn't stopping easily. I'll go on down and see if I can at least get Barber Li to come. Master Headsman, please stay here and take my place for a little while. I'll be back before you know it.

LI

I can handle it. Go on, I'll help out here.

LIAN-GU

(Moves close to the youth and inspects the wounds on his body.)

Ai-ya, such deep wounds! (She touches the blood on his hand.) So much blood! Ai-ya, how dreadful! (She starts to cry but suddenly realizes that tears are useless now. She rises quickly and exits. The sound of cotton being torn can be heard offstage.)
LI
(To HE WEI-GUI.)

You came to see a tiger tonight, but I'll bet you didn't expect to see a tiger like this. You go on home now. I'm going to wait here awhile before I return. (Takes HE to the doorway.) Go out the front door and walk straight until you come to that big camphorwood tree. Turn there and go through the long field and then you'll see our house. Can you see it? Take a torch with you.

HE

No need, I can see it all right.

ZHOU SAN

I'll bring Elder Brother home. It'll be right on my way down to the Li's new house. I'm going to ask them if they've got any medicine.

LI

Fine. Tell Great-grandmother that I'm waiting up here for awhile, and then I'll come on home.

(HE and ZHOU exit.)

LIAN-GU

(Enters, carrying some plain white cloth and a roll of cotton; she crosses to the youth and sits next to him. She washes off his bloodstains and binds up his wounds. The youth moves slightly and moans. LIAN-GU listens carefully to his breathing.)

Elder Brother Huang! Elder Brother Huang!

YOUTH

(From amidst his moaning comes the sound of a painful answer.)

Mmm . . .

LI

The water's boiling in the pot. Hurry, give him a little something to drink.

(HUANG-SHI pours some hot water into a bowl, waits for it to cool down a little, and crosses to the YOUTH with it. GRANDMOTHER takes a pair of chopsticks, opens the YOUTH's mouth with them, and gently gives him a drink.)
LI

Good, now he’ll have something in his stomach.

GRANDMOTHER

Such evil fortune!

LIAN-GU

(With a tiny sob.)

Elder Brother Huang, Elder Brother Huang.

YOUTH

(His voice is slightly louder.)

Mmmmm, ai-yeh.

GRANDMOTHER

Poor child, he's unconscious.

YOUTH

(Through his groans, some confused words can be distinguished, as though he is talking in a dream.)

Ai-ya, Lian-gu. It hurts.

HUANG-SHI

The boy still has not forgotten Lian-gu, even in such pain.

LIAN-GU

(Comforting him.)

Yes, Brother Huang, I know how you hurt.

YOUTH

(Opens his eyes and looks all around.)

Ai-ya, how did I get here? What was I doing asleep here?

LI

You were shot up on the mountain just now, so we carried you here. Feeling a little more clear-headed now?

YOUTH

A little. Ai-ya, Master Li! Ai-ya, Auntie, Grandma, Miss Lian. Miss Lian, how could I have seen you just now on the
mountain? I thought I was still up there, ai-ye. (Rubs his eyes.) Miss Lian, are we dreaming?

LIAN-GU

No, Brother Huang, we're not dreaming, it's real. You are lying on the bamboo bed in my family's fire room.

YOUTH

Real . . . (Pauses.) but I never thought I would see you once again tonight. You're getting married. I've heard people talking about it, saying you'd be married within the next few days. I wanted to congratulate you, but I didn't have the nerve to come to this door. I just thought . . . I just thought that on your wedding day the Chen family would surely need a beggar to come and wave the marriage banner. I thought I would beg for the banner on that day so I could wave it and so pay my insignificant respects at last . . . (Pauses.) Is today the day? Has it already been decided?

LIAN-GU

Brother Huang . . . (She weeps, unable to look up at him.)

FU-SHENG  
(Hurries in.)

Barber Li isn't home. All I found was an empty house. Has the blood stopped a little?

LI

Yes, Miss Lian has made it better for him.

FU-SHENG  
(Sees LIAN-GU.)

Lian-er, you're still not gone! Get out! (She hesitates.) Still not leaving? You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

LIAN-GU

Papa. Let me watch over him for this one night. A girl can beg her papa for this one thing in her life.

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18 Wealthy families would often hire beggars to wave a marriage banner in front of the bride's sedan chair as her wedding procession made its way from her parents' house to her new home with her husband and in-laws.
FU-SHENG

What is he to you? Why must you watch over him? He's wounded, so naturally I will think of a way to take care of him. I don't want you to concern yourself. Now get out of here before I lose my temper.

LI

Oh, you might as well let her help out a little. Sick folks always need young girls to make them feel better.

FU-SHENG

Master Headsman, you don't understand the situation here very well. (Pauses.) . . . I've decided I don't want my girl helping him. First of all, I'd just like to know what he was doing, running around on a mountain like that at this hour and taking his life in his hands?

LI

He's crazy, that's all it is.

FU-SHENG

Not so. You may say he's an idiot, but sometimes he says things that aren't the least bit crazy. I just don't understand why he's always looking to make trouble in my house.

YOUTH

Uncle, from now on, I will never trouble you again, sir. I will never come to your home again. This will be the very, very last time. I never expected I would come to your house tonight, sir. And, more than that, I really never expected I would be wounded up there like some wild animal. I just thought I would hide up there behind the mountain, and from there I would barely be able to see the fire glowing in this room. And that would have been enough for me.

FU-SHENG

Why did you want to see the firelight in my house tonight?

YOUTH

Uncle, it wasn't only tonight. Except for the past couple of nights, I came practically every night. Ever since I took shelter under the altar in the temple, it's been every night. Even on those fearful nights in the howling wind and
the pouring rain, I never stopped coming. I just wanted to see the firelight in this room, for it felt like seeing loved ones, and I would completely forget all my bitter pain.

GRANDMOTHER

Ai! Poor, poor child, without any parents!

FU-SHENG

Since you thought about my family like this, wouldn't you have been better off explaining all this to me?

YOUTH

I guess it would have been better, sir, but you don't want me coming here to your home. Besides, sir, you had beaten me and cursed me so much, I was afraid to.

FU-SHENG

I beat you and cursed you to teach you a lesson. Who told you not to listen to me? I wanted you to go study carpentry -- you didn't go. To study to be a tailor -- you didn't go. Then I recommended you to the Tian family in the valley as a shepherd -- and you still didn't go. You would rather stay here and beg for food. No wonder I was furious.

YOUTH

Yes. I was willing to stay here and beg. I was willing to sleep alone under the temple altar. But I was not willing to leave this place. Even if you'd have tried to get rid of me by reporting me to the authorities, me, a poor, homeless child, I'd still have refused to leave.

FU-SHENG

I was worried that you weren't doing an honest man's work. That's why I finally ran you off. If you had learned your lesson, would things have turned out like this?

YOUTH

(Sighs.)

People always drive poor children away. But, sir, you weren't really worried that I wasn't doing an honest day's work. You were just scared I might harm your Miss Lian.
FU-SHENG

All of you, do you hear? I knew all along he was just faking madness.

YOUTH

Uncle, I really am an idiot, for I understand clearly that I am not good enough to love Miss Lian, but I cannot give her up. What else could I be but a fool? From the time we were very small she and I have been together. In those days all was still well with my family, and you, sir, you used to joke about how we two little ones would grow up to make such a good pair. Actually, sir, we hadn't waited for you to speak. Even as children we had felt confused stirrings in our hearts for a long, long time. Then unfortunately my father passed away, and the family debts were enormous. But by then, sir, you had already grown so cold. We sold off all our fields, but we still couldn't pay off our debts. And then my mother died, too, and the house burned to the ground. Naturally my opportunities to continue my studies were gone. The question of the trade I would study -- others wanted to decide that for me. One day you told me I should become a tailor, but I refused, and after you beat me I ran away. The next day you demanded that I become a carpenter. (Pauses.) ... By then I had known for a long time that Miss Lian was no longer mine. Early in the morning, on the day I was to leave to study carpentry, I wanted to find her so I could just say a word or two to her, but you forbade it, sir. I despised my life, and even though I tried so many times to stop thinking like that, how could I? Then the Chens' Eighth Son from up the way felt sorry for me and asked me to go with him to the city and learn a trade. I thought moving away could make me forget Miss Lian. But he and I were only several li² away from the city on the road to Hu-ji-du Village when I turned around and came back all by myself. I cannot forget Miss Lian. I cannot live anywhere away from her. I was lucky when Wang the Monk took pity on me and let me take shelter under the altar in Xian-gu Temple. I would often do odd jobs for him and, when he saw I didn't get any food by begging, he would also give me leftovers from his own meals to ease my hunger. Thus I passed my days for a little more than a year. (LIAN-GU weeps.) A child without a mother or a father, without brothers, without relatives or friends, well, it's unbearable enough in the daytime. But when the night comes, and a person must sleep all alone under the temple altar -- it is so much more desolate, fearful. If I

²A li is a Chinese mile; it is roughly equivalent to one-third of a Western mile.
lit a fire, all I would see was my own solitary shadow; if I heard singing or crying, it was just the sound of my own solitary voice. I finally understood that in the whole world the most fearful thing is not wolves or tigers, nor is it devils or ghosts -- it is being deserted, alone! (LIANGGU cries even harder.) I was so alone, what else could I do? Each night, when the sun had set and the birds on the mountains had all returned to their nests, then, all alone, I would slowly make my way to my place behind the mountain and gaze at the firelight in this room, and especially the firelight that came through Miss Lian's window. When I would see the light in that window, then it was as though I was a child of five or six once more, blessed by good fortune, safe in the circle of my parents' embrace. It would take me back to those times when I would come over the mountain every day and call for Sister Lian to come play with me, to the times when I would pick every flower on the mountain and give them to Sister Lian to wear in her hair. I don't even have the words to describe how much joy, how much comfort I felt. And especially on those nights when the fine rain would pelt down, blurring the glow of the fire in the window so far, far away -- it looked just like all the fireflies I'd catch on autumn days, and Sister Lian would take them and put them inside eggshells -- how lovely they looked. Like a fool I would stand there, looking, lost in my thoughts, and every night the raindrops would beat down on me until I was soaked through, but I never felt it. I would wait until the firelight went out and Sister Lian slept, and then, all alone still, I would return to my place under the altar and sleep. (LIANGGU sob.)

GRANDMOTHER

Poor child, and you didn't catch cold?

YOUTH

Catch cold? With no one to take care of him, an orphan had better not catch cold. Besides, the loneliness was more fearful than the possibility of falling ill. All I wanted was to escape the lonely ache in my heart for a brief moment, so I didn't care about catching a cold. After suffering the cold and hunger for more than a year, I was already getting weaker, anyway. Over the past few days I've gotten a little worse, so it's been two nights since I came to watch the window. I fear the time for my mother and father to hold me once more is not far off. I've heard the talk about Miss Lian marrying into the Chen family in a few days, so I especially wanted to come over the mountain tonight and gaze upon the firelight that I had missed for two nights and that I probably will never see again. I didn't expect to trip over a rope and get shot. (Pauses.)
didn't expect to trip over a rope and get shot. (Pauses.) . . . how I longed for the shot to kill me so I could escape a few more hours of suffering. But instead I have seen Miss Lian once more, against all my hopes and dreams, so the shot was well worth the pain. And if I die, my death will be well worth dying. Sister Lian! My wound is serious, and I'm sick, besides. Help me for a little while. One touch from your fingers for just a moment, and my pain will disappear, for I will be able to forget it. Miss Lian, watch over me, just for tonight. That's all I will ever ask of you.

LIAN-GU

Yes, Brother Huang, of course I will watch over you.

LI

If Miss Lian takes care of him, his wound will heal quickly for sure.

GRANDMOTHER

Poor child, I had no idea he loved Lian-er so.

HUANG-SHI

I can see that it was because of his love for her that he was wounded. Poor, sick thing, to have been wounded so deeply. If his mother was alive, I can't imagine how her heart would break.

LIAN-GU

(Caressing the YOUTH's hand.)

Brother Huang, sleep now. I will watch over you tonight.

YOUTH

(Greatly comforted.)

Ah, thank you so . . .

FU-SHENG

(In a furious tone of voice.)

You cannot! Lian-er, get out of here now! I will take care of the situation in here. Don't concern yourself with it. You already belong to the Chen family -- how can you look after him? You cannot!
LIAN-GU

How can I belong to the Chens?

FU-SHENG

I have promised you to them, and so you are a Chen.

LIAN-GU

But I have already promised myself to him, and so I am a Huang.

FU-SHENG

You stupid thing, what are you saying! How dare you talk like this to my face! (He sees LIAN-GU still grasping the YOUTH's hand tightly in her own.) You still won't let go of him! You're about to make my blood boil. Get out! Now! You will not take care of him!

LIAN-GU

Father, you can beat me till I die, but I will not let him go.

FU-SHENG

(Pauses, then changes his tone of voice to one of gentle, paternal concern.)

Lian-er, think carefully now. Your Papa betrothed you to the Chen family because he loves you so much, didn't he? All his life your Pa has slaved and toiled and suffered, and you are all he's ever had, an only daughter. So I couldn't think of tossing you away to just anyone. It posed great hardships for me, but I searched among so many, many men, and at last I chose a fine husband for you from the Chen family. I worried that the Chens might not approve of us being hunters and wouldn't want to accept you. But when they saw you, they consented to the marriage. I only hoped that you would be content to marry into the Chen family, that your life would be filled with happiness, that you would give birth to sons and daughters. And that they would return here to my home and call me "Grandpa." What a lucky man I would be, me, a man who has never fathered a son. I never dreamed that you would make excuse after excuse to get out of the marriage. Foolish thing, you just don't understand about anything! But after your Mother and I have a talk with you, you'll come around once and for all, and give your consent with your own mouth.
HUANG-SHI

Yes, Lian-er, you will consent to it yourself.

LIAN-GU

I have no other choice but to give in because you have tried to force me over and over again. I used to think about grabbing any chance I could to talk to Brother Huang about running away somewhere together before the wedding could take place.

FU-SHENG

Ah-ha, so you thought of running away after all!

LIAN-GU

Yes, I thought of running away -- I've thought of running away for a long, long time. I just didn't get the chance. That first time we killed the tiger, and the house was filled with all those people who came to look at it, I thought of doing it then. But I was halfway down the mountain when I ran into Uncle Tu Da, so I had to turn back. Then, as the wedding day came closer, Father, you refused more and more to let me out. A couple of days ago I was permitted to take some tiger meat to Xian-gu Temple to be blessed. But I couldn't ask about Brother Huang at the temple because the Changs' Second Daughter came along with me. And so I couldn't find him.

FU-SHENG

And if you had found him, what then?

LIAN-GU

We would have set a date for running away together.

HUANG-SHI

And where would you have run to?

LIAN-GU

The city.

HUANG-SHI

Who would you meet there?
LIAN-GU

The Chang's Eldest Daughter -- she'd have introduced me at the mill so I could have gotten a job.

FU-SHENG

Hmph.

LIAN-GU

And don't think I haven't found him at last. But instead he has come to me, to my home, first. Carried, like a wounded tiger, to my house. So thin, so weak. Such a large hole torn in his leg ... his blood flowing so heavily. Brother Huang, poor Brother Huang, from now on I will never leave you again. If you live, if you die, I will never leave you.

FU-SHENG

I want you to leave him. I haven't betrothed you ... you have no respect for your parents, do you! (He tries with all his strength to tear their hands apart, but they hang on to each other just as strongly.)

LIAN-GU

Papa!

GRANDMOTHER

(At the same time.)

Fu-sheng!

LI

(At the same time.)

Fu-sheng!

HUANG-SHI

(At the same time.)

Ai-ya! Lian-er, let go!

LIAN-GU

No! I'll die before I let go. No one in the whole world can tear us apart.
FU-SHENG

I can! (In a thunderous fury, he exerts all of his brute strength and succeeds in tearing their hands apart; drags LIAN-GU into the other room.) You animal, you shameless beast, I'll beat you senseless! (Continues dragging her into the other room from which come sounds of his whipping his daughter and LIAN-GU's cries of resistance.) Ha! Still talking back? Still out of your mind? Still crying for Brother Huang? Will you persist in angering me to death? What? (Each time he asks her a question he strikes her again.)

HUANG-SHI, GRANDMOTHER, and LI
(All at the same time.)

Fu-sheng, Fu-sheng, ai-ya, don't beat her.

(They all crowd together in the back room. The YOUTH is left onstage by himself, just a heap of dead bones lying on the bamboo bed. From inside he can hear the sounds of LIAN-GU's beating and, together with his loneliness and his wound, he feels the weight of his pain from within and without.)

YOUTH

Ai-ya, I cannot bear it any longer. (He holds his wounded leg and tries to turn and rise, but he cannot. He picks up the hunter's knife that is lying within reach of the bed.)

Miss Lian, I precede you by one step. (Stabs himself in the chest and dies.)

(From offstage FU-SHENG continues to yell, "You still won't listen? Still want Brother Huang? Are you a Chen or not?" He is accompanied by the sounds of the bamboo whip, useless cries of "Brother Huang," weeping, and voices begging him to calm himself.)

--CURTAIN--
CHAPTER FOUR

Preface: "Before Lunch"

After Tian Han returned to Shanghai from Japan in 1921, he wrote the play "Before Lunch,"¹ which was first published in Chuang-zao ji-kan (Creation Quarterly), along with "A Night in a Cafe." Although the appearance of "Before Lunch" in the same issue of Chuang-zao ji-kan as "A Night in a Cafe" suggests that the play predates "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," which appears to have been published slightly later, evidence seems to point to the two plays being written so closely together as to render specific chronology insignificant. "Tiger" was initially published in Nan-guo ban yue-kan (South China Bi-Monthly), a periodical which Tian and his wife, Yi Shu-yu, began publishing at about the same time that "Cafe" and "Before Lunch" appeared in print. In writing about "Before Lunch," Tian concedes that the play is an unsophisticated and immature work of dramatic

¹According to Chen Shou-zhu, the play was initially published as "Before Lunch," and its title was subsequently changed to "Sisters." Liu Shou-song claims that "Sisters" was the original title of the play. Tian Han, however, mentions no alternate titles for "Before Lunch." Chen Shou-zhu, Lun Tian Han de huo-chu chuang-zao, p. 19; Liu Shou-song, Zhong-guo xin-wen-xue-shi chu-gao, Vol. I, p. 185.
literature, even somewhat of an "embarrassment" to him, but that he "could not give it up because ultimately it had greater social significance than 'The Night a Tiger Was Captured.'" Furthermore, a direct line of influence seems to connect "Café" with "Tiger," thus warranting a consideration of those two plays in sequence. "Before Lunch," on the other hand, bears greater resemblance to Tian's subsequent works.

The play seems never to have been performed. Although hints of productions of the preceding works have survived, similar indications for "Before Lunch" do not exist. Neither Tian nor Tang Shu-ming, his enthusiastic student and follower, recorded production data for the play. The high incidence of lapses in logic in the dialogue are further indication that the play was not performed; had the play been in production, in all likelihood the actresses playing those scenes would have noticed the discrepancies in the dialogue during rehearsal, and Tian would have made the necessary revisions.

Tian not incorrectly attributes the weaknesses of the play to his superficial understanding of the issues he was attempting to dramatize. Although he admitted, as he did with his preceding dramas, that the script would have been improved by major revisions, he never rewrote "Before

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2 Tian Han quoted in Liu Shou-song, pp. 185-6.
Lunch," maintaining that "a good production with talented performers would have a significant impact upon an audience."³

In writing "Before Lunch" Tian was inspired by current events and real personalities, a characteristic which distinguishes the play from his other works written during the period. He based the character of Mama on an elderly widow named Granny Zhang whom he had known as a child in Changsha. Like Mama, Granny Zhang was a widow who was financially dependent upon the continued employment of her three daughters at a local factory. The theme of social struggle was suggested to Tian by the murder of a young man named Huang Ai, with whom Tian had been personally acquainted, and Huang's friend Pang Ren-chuan, by the warlord Zhao Heng-ti at the Hua-shi Cotton Mill in Hunan Province. Finally, contemporary debates regarding the validity of religion prompted Tian to cast Elder Sister as the advocate for Christianity and Second Sister as her opponent.⁴

In "Before Lunch" Tian continued to utilize the same visual and aural techniques as those which he had previously employed to good effect in "A Night in a Cafe" and "The

³Tian Han quoted in Liu Shou-song, p. 186.

⁴Tian Han, "Introduction," Tian Han Xi-ju-ji (Tian Han's Collected Plays), quoted in full by Liu Shou-song, pp. 186-7.
Night a Tiger Was Captured." "Before Lunch" is distinguished from Tian's other dramas, however, by the decidedly unusual manner in which the action of the play extends beyond that part of the stage which is immediately visible to the audience.

In his earlier plays Tian used offstage space effectively, creating visible settings that were parts of larger, unseen wholes. Offstage action heralded the arrival of new characters, thereby providing expository information, as well as functioning as a control of the emotional atmosphere onstage. However, in "Before Lunch" Tian takes an apparently pointless gamble by leaving the stage empty while setting entire scenes offstage. Those invisible scenes are indeed curious and certainly unprecedented effects in Chinese dramatic literature, and they are problematic in terms of Tian's theatrical intentions because they seem to serve no discernible dramatic purpose.

In Western drama it is rare to find entire scenes that are written to transpire offstage while the area that remains visible to the audience remains devoid of both actors and some form of ongoing action. Usually, although the dramatic impact of offstage action is meant to be significant, its length is kept to a minimum, and at least one character remains visible. Audience response to the offstage action is regulated by the responses of the visible characters as, for example, the hyperbolic reactions of the
visible characters to ludicrous offstage behavior in Michael Frayn's *Noises Off* or the horror and disbelief that are suggested by the characters' reactions to the offstage gunshots that conclude *The Seagull* and *Hedda Gabler*.

When compared to the aforementioned examples, Tian Han's use of offstage action in "Before Lunch" seems decidedly peculiar; his scenes need not have been written to transpire offstage in order to fulfill their dramatic functions. The humor inherent in the thought of spectators staring, nonplussed, at an empty stage as they contemplate the sounds of disembodied voices is obvious; nevertheless, the problems created by Tian's method must be considered.

It seems unlikely that Tian Han, as a practicing man of the theatre, could have been oblivious to the potentially deadening effects of moving entire scenes offstage. Nevertheless, his stage directions and dialogue make it clear that three scenes in "Before Lunch" take place beyond the audience's range of vision. In the Chinese text Tian indicates that an actor is speaking offstage by using the stage direction, "zai nei," literally, "inside" or "offstage." When the speaking character becomes visible, either by re-entering or approaching the up center window, Tian drops the stage direction altogether or indicates the character's visibility with a new stage direction. Moreover, the onstage characters' actions and dialogue further indicate when characters who are speaking offstage...
are not visible. Tian's motivation for choosing to stage scenes in such a fashion is not as clear, then, as the fact that that is exactly what he intended to do. No doubt his hands were technologically tied when it came to staging the scene in which Third Sister and Zhang climb a plum tree, but the specific act of tree climbing is not instrumental to the overall action of the play, and the two youngsters might have been engaged in another activity that could have been more readily staged.

The rudimentary state of stage lighting technology at this juncture in Chinese theatre history might also provide an explanation for the second and third offstage scenes in "Before Lunch." Although tree climbing may have been difficult to stage, the events that transpire in Mama's bedroom are simple and could have been staged with ease. Certainly Tian understood how to delineate floor plan requirements, as his description of the set for "A Night in a Cafe," with its two separate but simultaneously visible acting areas, clearly demonstrates. The detailed description provided for the "Before Lunch" setting further indicates that Tian could be specific in his requirements for and placement of furniture properties and acting areas. Thus, it seems unlikely that, had he visualized Mama's bedroom functioning as an independent and visible acting area.

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5A. C. Scott, Mei Lan-fang, Leader of the Pear Garden (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1959), p. 54.
area, he would not have noted that requirement in his stage directions. In all likelihood, Tian discovered that his ability to create two separate acting areas that were not simultaneously visible, was impeded by the limitations of his lighting equipment which was simply incapable of alternately illuminating two halves of a set. The result was that he opted to write Mama's bedroom scenes so that they took place entirely offstage.

The manner in which Tian handles the curtain scene in "Before Lunch" further indicates that he deliberately visualized Mama's bedroom as being invisible to the audience. The stage is empty after Third Sister, Elder Sister, and Zhang rush to the factory, and the resultant stage picture, as Tian describes it, resembles a still life painting with sunlight streaming through the open window as cooking utensils and food lie strewn about the room. Slowly, the curtain falls to the accompaniment of Mama's feeble cries for water which grow gradually fainter. If Mama was visible, audience focus would naturally shift toward her bedroom and away from the scene as Tian has described it. By keeping her offstage, Tian effectively arouses sympathy for the helpless old woman while maintaining visual focus on the living area, which, in a shambles, functions as the visual equivalent of the lives of these characters.
Nevertheless, the offstage scenes in "Before Lunch" represent, for the most part, unnecessary concessions to dramatic realism. Tian risks losing audience interest when the offstage scenes could have effectively fulfilled their intended purposes by transpiring onstage. By delaying the use of an empty stage until the end of the play, Tian would also have avoided diluting the visual impact of the final scene.

The weaknesses that were evident in Tian's preceding plays are more pronounced in "Before Lunch." Tian's reliance upon narration almost to the exclusion of enactment, for example, is noted even by Liu Shou-song and Chen Shou-zhu, neither of whom are critics who typically remark on the structural features of Tian's dramas. Indeed, "Before Lunch" might be characterized as a play in which every crucial incident occurs offstage and is described to the audience in the form of dry, straightforward reportage.

The potential impact of the play is further hampered by Tian's characterizations, which he handles with less finesse than he did previously. Tian attempted to people "A Night in a Cafe" and "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" with characters who, by virtue of being torn between equally powerful and irreconcilable forces, were fully fleshed-out

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6Liu Shou-song, p. 186; Chen Shou-zhu, p. 21.
human beings. In "Before Lunch," however, Tian seems to have lost his touch for psychology, creating caricatures who are distillations of single traits. Although Second Sister exhibits the most potential for complex characterization in her deep disillusionment with the futility of life, her quiet sense of desperation is unfortunately but a tantalizing crack in the veneer of an otherwise flawless revolutionary ethos.

In "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" Tian proved his ability to write dialogue that flowed naturally while simultaneously relaying information efficiently and succinctly. The dialogue in "Before Lunch," on the other hand, sounds stilted and self-consciously theatrical. Characters state information of which other characters would logically be cognizant, as for example, when Mama narrates the family's history to her daughters. Unnecessary details with neither precedent nor consequence are sprinkled throughout conversations, such as Second Sister's abrupt reference to her friend Liu Bing. Overt discrepancies suggest that Tian may have written "Before Lunch" in record time. Elder Sister, for example, protests against Second Sister's opinion that "it is wrong to think of love as a religion,"\(^7\) yet nowhere in the text does Second Sister make

\(^7\)Tian Han, "Wu-fan zhi-qian" ("Before Lunch"), Chuang-zao ji-kan (Creation Quarterly), Vol. I (1922), p. 67.
that claim, suggesting that perhaps Tian meant to include a line to that effect but somehow neglected to do so.

Finally, neither of the two major themes that run throughout the play, the inherent evils of Christianity and the proletarian struggle against capitalism, are effectively dramatized, a problem of which Tian himself was aware. Although Second Sister's antipathy toward Western religion reflects contemporary Chinese attitudes, her rationale is arbitrary, and Tian's implication that the unscrupulous Yis' are proof positive of the inherent corruptness of Christianity is tenuous at best. Both Liu Shou-song and Chen Shou-zhu criticize Tian's sketchy understanding of economics as it is manifested in the play, and their charge that Tian's immaturity as a revolutionary hampered his ability to dramatize socio-politically significant events, is not entirely without basis. However, Tian's inexperience with "flesh and blood" revolution did not confound him in writing effective propaganda so much as did his limited intellectual grasp of the fundamental issues he chose to dramatize in "Before Lunch."

Tian Han thus made an initially strong start with "A Night in a Cafe" and "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," but failed with "Before Lunch" in his efforts to write a successful realistic drama and to create an effective piece

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8Liu Shou-song, p. 186; Chen Shou-zhu, p. 21.
of propaganda. Although the weaknesses that are manifested in "Before Lunch" will resurface in later dramas, particularly those in which Tian writes with a socio-political bent, several of the later works have more to commend them than this, one of Tian Han's earlier and rather disappointing efforts.
"Before Lunch"

Cast of Characters

MOTHER, 56 years old
ELDER SISTER, 24 years old
SECOND SISTER, 22 years old
THIRD SISTER, 15 years old
GIRL, 16 years old, a neighbor
BOY, 15 years old, a neighbor

Setting

At stage right is a door leading to the outside. Opposite, at stage left, is the door that leads to the rest of the house. At up center is a window, in front of which is a desk. On the desk are books, a make-up mirror, and other articles. To the left is an iron stove and to the right is a bed and a chest, a wardrobe, and so forth. The sunlight streams in brightly through the window. THIRD SISTER sits in front of the window, mending clothing. Some medicine is simmering on the stove. The girl's eyes are slightly red, as though she has passed the night without sleeping. Suddenly from outside comes the sound of someone calling, "Third Sister! Third Sister!" The girl runs to the window and looks out.

1 Chinese herbal medicine must often be cooked to release its curative powers.
THIRD SISTER

Who's there? How come I can't see you? Oh, Miao! What are you doing hiding out there? I know you're out there. C'mon inside, and we'll have some fun.

MIAO

(Offstage.)

I can't, I've got things to do. Is your Mama feeling a little better?

THIRD SISTER

She was this morning. She's sleeping now.

MIAO

Is your Elder Sister at home?

THIRD SISTER

No, today's Sunday. She's gone to church. Only Second Sister is home. Where are you going today, so dressed up?

MIAO

Guess!

THIRD SISTER

To your grandmother's?

MIAO

No.

THIRD SISTER

Into town to visit relatives?

MIAO

No.

2 Although Tian designates this character only as the "Neighbor Girl" in the Cast of Characters, he refers to her by name throughout the text.
THIRD SISTER
Well, then, where are you going?

MIAO
Alright, I'll tell you. I'm going to Xian-gu Temple to see a play. There's a really good one on there today. Chen Xi is going, too; so is Zhang Xing. Do you want to go? How about the two of us going together, what do you say?

THIRD SISTER
(Momentarily excited but her happiness quickly fades, and she seems depressed.)

Sounds nice, but I'm afraid I can't.

MIAO
What do you mean, you can't? Oh, your Mama being sick and all. Well, tomorrow we're going to town to see the circus. We'll come by early to get you.

THIRD SISTER
I don't think I can go tomorrow, either.

MIAO
Third Sister, you haven't come out with us to have a good time in so long. Come with us tomorrow morning to see the circus! What difference will it make? Why not? Didn't you say your Mama was feeling a little better?

THIRD SISTER
I want to, but I . . .

MIAO
Are you worried that you don't have anything to wear? That's no big deal. Fix up that outfit your Elder Sister gave you, and it'll be just fine.

THIRD SISTER
I was just in the middle of doing that. (Holds the dress up to the window to show MIAO.) Look! How do you like it?

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3 Itinerant acting companies often performed in front of or nearby Chinese temples.
MIAO

Great, great. You hurry up and finish it. Look, the play is going to start any minute. I'll let you off the hook this time, but I've got to go.

THIRD SISTER

Alright, go ahead. Hey, could you remember to buy some dumplings and pancakes for me?

MIAO

Alright, I'll remember! (She exits.)

(THIRD SISTER sits at the window as before, concentrating on her mending. Before long SECOND SISTER calls her from offstage left.)

SECOND SISTER

(From inside.)

Third Sister!

THIRD SISTER

Yes?

SECOND SISTER

Is the medicine ready yet?

THIRD SISTER

It's ready.

SECOND SISTER

Then bring some in. Mama's up.

THIRD SISTER

Oh, Second Sister, why don't you help Mama up so she can come in here and sit for awhile. It's been a long time since she's gotten out of bed.

SECOND SISTER

(From inside.)

Mama, how about sitting in the other room for awhile? It's full of sunshine.
MAMA
(From inside.)

Alright. But I don't know if I can walk or not. Help me out there, and I'll give it a try.

THIRD SISTER
(Crossing to the door.)

Mama, you seem to be in much better spirits today than you were yesterday. (Quickly sets the table in order.) Hurry, hurry. (Crosses to the desk; she suddenly gets an idea.) Oh! (Quickly exits off right. SECOND SISTER helps MAMA into the room.)

MAMA

Oh, this room is full of light. I've stayed so long in that dark room that even my heart had clouded over. Ah-ya, such pretty sunshine! Open the window so I can take a look outside.

SECOND SISTER

Now, Mama, you're not all that much better. I don't want you to go catching a cold.

MAMA

Who cares, with such beautiful sunshine.

SECOND SISTER
(Opens the window.)

The weather really is beautiful today. It almost seems like springtime.

MAMA

Where is your Third Sister?

SECOND SISTER
(Standing by the window.)

Third Sister! Third Sister!

THIRD SISTER
(Offstage.)

Yes?
SECOND SISTER

Where are you? What are you doing? Come on back now.

THIRD SISTER

(Offstage.)

Coming.

SECOND SISTER

Are you out there picking plum blossoms? Don't go up there! Be careful not to slip and fall. It's enough for you to pick the flowers at the bottom.

NEIGHBOR BOY

(Offstage.)

Hey! Don't pick those plum blossoms off my tree! Who's doing that over there? Who is it? You've got a lot of nerve.

THIRD SISTER

(Offstage.)

It's me.

NEIGHBOR BOY

(Offstage.)

Who? Oh! Third Sister! Watch out, don't go up there. Wait for me -- I'll pick them for you. How many do you want?

THIRD SISTER

(Offstage.)

Just one.

NEIGHBOR BOY

(Offstage.)

Alright, you come on down and wait while I climb up. Is this one alright?

THIRD SISTER

(Offstage.)

Yes.
NEIGHBOR BOY  
(Offstage.)

Third Sister, this flower is awfully pretty.

THIRD SISTER  
(Offstage.)

Alright, thanks a lot.

NEIGHBOR BOY  
(Offstage.)

Oh, but smell how fragrant this one is.

THIRD SISTER  
(Offstage.)

Elder Brother Zhang! You've already picked enough.

NEIGHBOR BOY  
(Offstage.)

Just take a sniff. Doesn't it smell wonderful?

THIRD SISTER  
(Offstage.)

Naturally.

NEIGHBOR BOY  
(Offstage.)

That blossom really smells good.

SECOND SISTER  
(Turning from the window to face her mother and laughing.)

They're really interested in each other, those two.

MAMA  
(With a small smile.)

So I can hear. Their happy voices make me forget how sick I am.

THIRD SISTER  
(Offstage.)

Elder Brother Zhang! Don't pick anymore! Thank you, but I already have enough. If you pick anymore, your Papa will yell at you.
NEIGHBOR BOY
(Offstage.)

Don't worry. Just these two more, and then I'll come down.

THIRD SISTER
(Offstage.)

Careful! Ai-ya! You don't even care how you scare me! You're going to come falling down in a second.

NEIGHBOR BOY
(Offstage.)

There! If I can climb that big tree on the hill, why shouldn't I climb this little one? Give me the flowers, and I'll carry them home for you.

THIRD SISTER
(Offstage.)

No, I can manage getting them back by myself. Thanks a lot.

NEIGHBOR BOY
(Offstage.)

Third Sister, you're not going to Xian-gu Temple to see the play?

THIRD SISTER
(Offstage.)

I can't. Mama still isn't doing so well.

NEIGHBOR BOY
(Offstage.)

I'm going into town. Do you want me to look for some medicine for you?

THIRD SISTER
(Offstage.)

I'll be asking you to get some tomorrow.

NEIGHBOR BOY
(Offstage.)

How about something for you?
THIRD SISTER
(Offstage.)

You could bring me a couple of lead pencils, alright?

NEIGHBOR BOY
(Offstage.)

Alright. I've got to go now.

THIRD SISTER
(Offstage.)

Thanks a lot, Elder Brother Zhang! (She appears at the window, holding a large bunch of plum blossoms.) Second Sister! Look how pretty these plum blossoms are!

SECOND SISTER

Oh, don't they smell lovely!

THIRD SISTER
(From outside the window.)

Mama! Oh! (Hurries to enter through the stage right door and crosses to her MAMA.) Mama! Look at these pretty plum blossoms! They smell so good, they make everyone fall in love.

MAMA
(Smiling as she strokes the petals.)

What lovely flowers. When I first got sick, that plum tree still hadn't blossomed. It's only been ten days since then, and look at the lovely flowers that have opened. (Without hesitating, she snaps off a blossom and puts it in her THIRD DAUGHTER's hair.) Hurry now, and put the rest of those in a vase.

SECOND SISTER
(Having already poured out the medicine.)

Mama, I've poured out your medicine. This'll really be good for you.

MAMA

Alright, but it's too bad it's so expensive. Anyway, after these three doses, it shouldn't be necessary to get anymore.
SECOND SISTER

Didn't Dr. Chen say you were to take at least six doses?

MAMA

Yes, but even so, we just can't afford such expensive stuff. It's like they say, "When you're rich, money can protect you, but if you're poor, only life can protect you." If I'm lucky, I'll live.

SECOND SISTER

Oh, Mama, are you going on like that again? How could the three of us girls just let you be ill and not do everything in our power to get you medicine?

MAMA

Since I've become ill, I've used up most of your wages. Because of me, none of you has had a single carefree day. You can't know how it breaks my heart.

SECOND SISTER

Mama, don't you think that us using our wages to nurse our Mama back to health is a source of happiness for us?

MAMA

But your Mama's heart is still heavy. I always feel that I've wronged you three because I am so useless!

SECOND SISTER

Oh, Mama, it's nothing. Mama, you slaved so hard to nourish us so that we could grow. Shouldn't we three combine our efforts to support our Mama?

MAMA

(Sighs.)

If only the three of you had gotten good educations. You'd have married fine husbands. Then I could have visited you any time, and that would have made us all so happy. But Heaven wasn't willing. When your father died he left me with hands full of air to bring up the three of you. At the time a lot of people advised me to marry you off as second
wives.\footnote{When times were hard, female children, who were generally not as highly valued as males, were often married off as second wives or as concubines. Thus, they did not enjoy the same privileges as a first wife and, more often than not, would find themselves at her mercy. Nevertheless, the girls would be provided for, and it was preferable to be married off than to be sold into slavery or prostitution, as was done in extreme or desperate cases.} But I refused. I said, "My daughters are not to be married off as lightly as that." They all laughed at me and said, "Oh, will your girls then be married off to aristocrats?" And I said, "They may not marry aristocrats, but at least they can marry someone who loves them." And so then I put all my strength into educating the three of you. But even though I had studied a little at home, what kind of knowledge did I really have to teach you? And this on top of your father, who suffered so much of his life, dying in that unfortunate accident! From then on, you three couldn't marry well, but I refuse to let you marry beneath you. So can you see why your Mama worries so much about you?

SECOND SISTER

Mama! Don't you worry about a thing. We girls are grateful to you, and we don't resent you -- not even a little! You taught us to have high morals. And because we got that kind of education from our Mama, we still refuse to take the easy way out, no matter how poor we are. Even though our father had nothing to leave us, the way he died nourished our spirits, and isn't that inheritance enough? All three of us will always be grateful to our parents.

MAMA

But you still don't have husbands, and I can't stop worrying about it.

SECOND SISTER

Mama, are you so anxious for your daughters to get married and leave you?

MAMA

Well, naturally I wish you could live with me always. But you can't stay here forever and turn into old maids. Besides, when I see the three of you wasting the best years of your lives working in that factory, it makes me think about how much better things were when I was a girl, and I
want to weep for you! It upsets me even more than being sick does.

SECOND SISTER

Mama, there's no need for you to worry about us. You are getting so much better now. When we find someone to love, naturally we'll get married. But since we don't even have boyfriends yet, we don't need to talk about it. And just because I might love someone, it doesn't mean I have to marry him. And if I don't fall in love with anyone, or if no one falls in love with me, it isn't as though I can't go on living.

MAMA

That's true -- but marriage is still important!

SECOND SISTER

Mama, I think that we should be more concerned with getting by day to day than with marriage! What we need to worry about is where our next meal is coming from and how to save up enough money to nurse you back to health. Wait till you're better, and then we'll discuss marriage with you again. Meanwhile, the medicine has cooled off. Third Sister, bring it to me so that Mama can take it.

MAMA

(As she takes her medicine.)

Why hasn't your Elder Sister come home yet?

THIRD SISTER

She didn't even eat any breakfast before she went to church.

MAMA

Why did she leave so early this morning?

THIRD SISTER

She said she wanted to stop by and see Reverend Yi's wife on her way.

MAMA

Hmph! The pastor's wife has always been good to her.
THIRD SISTER

But that eldest son of theirs is really hateful.

MAMA

How is he hateful?

THIRD SISTER

The time I went with Elder Sister to their house, he stood at the door with that face of his, leering at Sister. I sat down for a second, but then I started trying to drag Sister out of there. I complained to her about wanting to come to such a household. She told me not to say such mean things and said that even though their son was evil, the pastor and his wife were still rare people. But if you ask me, everyone in that house is obnoxious.

SECOND SISTER

And I not only despise all missionaries, but I completely disapprove of Elder Sister's being so religious. That time those priests came preaching at our factory, me and Third Brother Lin were the first to oppose them.

MAMA

But it's not at all strange that your Elder Sister is so religious. Her character isn't strong like yours is and, besides, she went through that heartbreaking affair before. The night before she had arranged to be baptized, she came to me in tears, saying that if she didn't take Jesus's hand, she couldn't go on living. So I did not stop her. (Sneezes and then begins to cough.)

SECOND SISTER

Ai-ya! Mama, don't you catch cold! Go back into your room and try to fall asleep. Third Sister, hurry up and spread out the blankets. I'll help Mama in.

(From outside comes the sound of the gate opening and closing.)

THIRD SISTER

Ah, Elder Sister is back. (She exits quickly and re-enters with ELDER SISTER.)
ELDER SISTER

Mama, I'm back. What are you doing sitting out here?

MAMA

I just got up to take my medicine, and these two insisted that I sit in here for awhile. The weather is so beautiful today, and I also seem to feel much better.

ELDER SISTER

Well, thank God for good fortune. For the past few nights I just didn't know how to pray for you. (SECOND SISTER is about to help MAMA offstage to her room.) Ma, sit for a moment, alright?

MAMA

I've sat too long already. Besides, I think I'm catching a little cold.

ELDER SISTER

Well, then, you'd better get some sleep. (They all help their mother offstage together.)

MAMA

(Offstage.)

I've just talked so much that I'm all worn out! Alright -- you go on now. Let me sleep for awhile.

ELDER SISTER

(Offstage.)

Third Sister, shut the window.

THIRD SISTER

(Offstage.)

Alright.

(ELDER SISTER and SECOND SISTER re-enter together. ELDER SISTER sinks down at the desk in low spirits and seems about to cry.)

SECOND SISTER

(In a soft voice.)

Elder Sister, what's the matter? Were you unable to borrow the money?
(ELDER SISTER, even more miserable and closer to tears, holds them back because she doesn't want MAMA to hear her crying. THIRD SISTER enters.)

THIRD SISTER

Elder Sister! What is it? (She kneels next to ELDER SISTER and looks up at her. SECOND SISTER wrings her hands while ELDER SISTER weeps quietly.)

SECOND SISTER

Elder Sister! What is it? If you couldn't borrow the money, it's not important. I'll think of something.

ELDER SISTER

If it was just a matter of not being able to borrow the money it wouldn't be all that important . . . Ah! I don't know why all my life I've trusted people, and they always deceive me.

THIRD SISTER

Elder Sister! What happened? Who has mistreated you?

ELDER SISTER

You needn't ask. God is using this to test me.

SECOND SISTER

Elder Sister, tell me what happened. If I know who deceived my Elder Sister, I'll make him sorry for it.

ELDER SISTER

Don't be angry at me, Second Sister. Those people don't understand Christ's teachings. I have already forgiven them.

THIRD SISTER

But why did you say someone deceived you, Elder Sister?

ELDER SISTER

Because it made me so sad.

SECOND SISTER

But Elder Sister, who has deceived you?
ELDER SISTER

You must say that you forgive them, that is the only way I will tell you.

SECOND SISTER

If it's something that can be forgiven, then naturally I'll forgive them.

ELDER SISTER

Then I still won't tell you. I have caused both of you to feel hatred in your hearts. Better for me to store up this pain in my own heart.

SECOND SISTER

Alright! I'll go along with what you say about forgiving them. You'll tell us what happened then?

ELDER SISTER

We've used up all our earnings, and Mama still hasn't gotten any better. And with everyone preparing for New Year's, we can't even afford to pay the rent. There was no way out, so I thought the best thing to do would be to go to the minister's wife and ask her to loan us the money. She had said she would give me the money today, so on my way to church I stopped by at her house. Both the minister and his wife had been more than willing to give me the money, but today they refused. The wife said, "I understand how hard it's been for your family. But the three of you girls working to support the family just hasn't worked out. Your mother depends on that Chinese doctor to cure her when she must go to the Western hospital. And your younger sisters must go to school."

SECOND SISTER

And what did you say, Elder Sister?

ELDER SISTER

I said, "I think so, too, but the way the family's financial situation is right now, there is no way that can happen." She said, "God feels the most compassion for such pitiful people as your family. Now the time has come for you to give thanks to God."
SECOND SISTER

What else did she say?

ELDER SISTER

That she and the minister had discussed this with each other. They want to send Mother to Yale Hospital for treatment and Third Sister to the Yi-zhi School.

THIRD SISTER

But that's wonderful! Oh, she really is a good person, after all. I as wrong to blame her like I did.

SECOND SISTER
(To THIRD SISTER.)

Listen! (To ELDER SISTER.) So, how do things stand, Elder Sister?

ELDER SISTER

In return, she just wanted me to do a small thing for her.

SECOND SISTER AND THIRD SISTER
(Together.)

What is it?

ELDER SISTER

She wants me to marry her son!

THIRD SISTER

You mean that brazen-faced slob who was sneaking looks up and down at Elder Sister, is that him?

ELDER SISTER
(Nodding her head.)

Yes. She said that this was the only way she could help us. She bragged to me about his fine character and how well educated he is, and then she said she was afraid that the only thing keeping him from being successful was not being married to me. And then my mother could get well, and
Little Sister could get a new style\textsuperscript{5} education. But for this, I needed to make a sacrifice. The great lesson of Jesus was that of sacrifice. He was nailed to the cross with those two robbers in order to atone for the sins of mankind.

SECOND SISTER

Well then, will you make this sacrifice, Elder Sister?

ELDER SISTER

I am agonizing over that very question.

THIRD SISTER

Elder Sister! Elder Sister! No matter what, you will not go to that hateful family. I would gladly spend my whole life being unable to read a single foreign letter. Whatever happens, you mustn't fall for their tricks.

SECOND SISTER

I think so, too. Better for her never to be able to read a single foreign word than to sacrifice our Elder Sister for such education. Though Mama must remain completely ignorant of all this since it's her illness that has cost us all our earnings, if she did know, she too would be opposed to sacrificing her beloved daughter.

ELDER SISTER

I've thought about this sacrifice, too. To make such a sacrifice would be miserable, but to accept a sacrifice from someone else would be just as miserable. And when I start looking at it like this, I see that the minister and his wife were only so good to me before because they were planning this all along. When I think of how bitter my life has been and how I have been deceived, it makes me so angry that I start crying. I didn't say a word about borrowing the money; I came running home instead. Since I became a

\textsuperscript{5}From wen-ming, literally "civilized." During the early part of the twentieth century the expression wen-ming came to mean, "new-fangled," "modern," or "fashionable." The earliest spoken dramas (as opposed to Beijing operas, which were sung) were called wen-ming xi, that is "new style" or "Western style" dramas. Thus, Elder Sister is referring here to a "Western" education as opposed to a traditional Chinese education, which, for women, often meant little or no education at all.
Christian I have not felt such unrest in my soul as I did today. But now peace has been restored to my soul, and I forgive them completely.

SECOND SISTER

It's monstrous that such people can go among common folks! How can he be a missionary, a minister? Elder Sister, you forgive him, but me, never!

ELDER SISTER

Second Sister, you promised to forgive them, didn't you?

SECOND SISTER

Ail! I see that all this will come to nothing anyway because of my Elder Sister's doctrine of non-resistance. It doesn't matter whether we forgive them or not. Mama has used up her medicine. Tomorrow the landlord will come and harass us for the rent. We haven't any money to give him, so he won't get a penny. And Elder Sister, we've still got to go to the factory today.

ELDER SISTER

We've used up all our wages already?

SECOND SISTER

Naturally we've used up all our wages. But at each year's end, the factory advances a couple of dollars to the workers in honor of New Year's. If we can get an advance, that'll be three or four dollars, won't it?

ELDER SISTER

But we can't count on that. Besides, the last time a crowd of people went to ask for their New Year's advances, Manager Peng said that there hadn't been enough profits this year, so he wouldn't be able to distribute any money.

SECOND SISTER

Well, obviously he just said that to trick everyone. With the price of cotton so high, how could there be no profits?

ELDER SISTER

Well, all I have to say is, it's best for us to believe what the people said.
SECOND SISTER

Elder Sister, haven't you already been deceived enough? You still want to trust people? Chen Chun-ge deceived you, and you still wanted to trust him. The minister deceived you, and you still want to trust him. Now the capitalists are deceiving you, and you still want to trust them?

ELDER SISTER

Second Sister! Why can't you think about how I feel when you talk? Even though Chen Chun-ge wasn't good to me, I still believe that his spirit is good and that he will surely repent one day. And one day he will return to me. And although the minister and his wife deceived me, they really don't have a true understanding of Jesus's teachings. But I can't say that Christianity is evil. I will always believe that Jesus is the savior of mankind's soul. I say it's better for us to believe what the people said, and that's not believing the capitalists' tricks. Because if we don't believe them, then everyone will have to get together and go ask for money again. And if they refuse, then we'll have to strike. Suppose we strike for ten days or half a month -- no doubt the capitalists will sustain serious losses, but the suffering that we poor folks'll feel will be far worse. We cannot go hungry in this house. It doesn't matter to us, but how can we let our old, sick mother go without food?

SECOND SISTER

Elder Sister, we'll just have to have the courage to strike for a month, and find other ways to work and get by. Mama will certainly not go hungry with us. If we must go without food for a few days, we'll do it for everyone's benefit and because there will be no other way. Even though the factory profits may not be as much as we thought, they can't be as low as management claims. According to the custom, we'll ask for a few dollars for the end of the year, which isn't anything out of the ordinary. If you don't struggle with them, they won't care if you have nothing to eat today!

ELDER SISTER

But Little Sister, we don't have to depend on food to live. Besides food, we should have something more precious to support our lives.

SECOND SISTER

Elder Sister! I'm not saying we don't need spiritual food in order to go on living. I'm just saying that first we
must have food to eat, and then we can go after something more precious. When we're really starving, who cares about spiritual life? Who cares about speaking such noble sentiments when you're so poor you can't hold your head up in the street? I've often faulted Liu Bing for degrading herself the way she does, but it's because she was never brought up right. How could she have the self respect that we have without ever having been taught? But when hunger comes, there is no other way. When we girls go hungry, we have only two options. We can sell our strength, or we can sell our bodies. Now the price for our labor is so low, and life is more precious than ever, and so of course it's harder to sell our strength than to sell our bodies. The one thing that makes us stronger than Liu Bing is our willingness to work hard.

**ELDER SISTER**

And isn't our willingness to work hard proof that we have spiritual lives? It seems to me that no matter what kind of pain we must experience, we cannot feel hatred in our hearts. Because no one in the world pities us in our suffering, there is someone in heaven who pities us. We know we shall die of our hardships, but afterwards our Heavenly Father shows us his face to soothe the painful wounds on our bodies, to wipe away our grievous tears. When he sees our hunger, he nourishes us with Holy Communion. When he sees we are cold, he gives us clothes to wear. How can we still feel bitterness?

**SECOND SISTER**

I really wish I could believe you, but I just think it might lead to misfortune.

**ELDER SISTER**

(Cheering up.)

Second Sister! If you want to believe in Jesus, then this is your good fortune. More than that, it is fortunate for our whole family. Jesus is truly the savior of poor unfortunates like us. Second Sister, you don't know how full of joy your life would be if you'd accept Jesus. You can't know how much love you will be blessed with. Second Sister! Our new life, our eternal life has begun! Oh, God! Accept your servant's praise!

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6 Apparently a friend of the sisters heretofore not mentioned in the script.
SECOND SISTER

I hate it that I can't think like you. Although we come into this bitter world by accident, since we come into it, we ought to have our share of food to eat and clothes to wear, and happiness. But the world not only denies virtuous people like us a little happiness, it even deprives us of food and clothing. And we've got to risk our lives in battle with this irrational world. And the world never changes for the better, so there's no way I can discuss love or peace with you. When someone slaps me on my right cheek, I cannot offer him my left. I cannot love my enemies. Our father, who was so trustworthy, so honest, our father was murdered by his enemies. Our mother, who has maintained her moral integrity even in the face of her suffering, has been hounded to sickness by enemies, and she has no medicine. Our only darling baby sister has spent her youth without a single piece of decent clothing because of enemies, and what does she get? Stitched-up hand-me-downs from Elder Sister! Must we go on listening to the teachings of Jesus, to love our enemies? I cannot demand to live forever, but it would be enough for me not to waste the life I have. I often say that our lives are good for nothing but work. The thing that studying is good for is to make us better at working. And working is worthless, too, except as a way to pass through life. When we can no longer work, our lives are finished. I can remember being eighteen or nineteen years old -- didn't I always confide in you about things that I thought were so complex? I wanted to become a nun, what about that? When I think of those words now, they make me laugh! Not only do I not believe that unless we hold Jesus's hand, we can't go on living, I think that all this religious chatter is just the blather of wealthy young ladies who can afford to talk this way. From now on, all I can worry about is how to get through life day to day until I am worn down. If I must take care of Mama, I will. If I must help my sisters, I will. If I must join the labor movement in a strike, I will do that, too. And though all these things will wear me down till I am broken, it is only by doing them that I will be able to hold my head up with a clear conscience.

ELDER SISTER

(Quietly, with her head bowed down.)

Second Sister! Is this really what you must do to clear your conscience? What a bitter decision you have made, to pass your life this way. I used to think like that, too, but I could not bear such miserable desperation, and that was what finally made me run to Jesus and take his hand.
SECOND SISTER

Elder Sister. How is it I have felt the same desperation as you, but I would rather die than run?

ELDER SISTER

But you have good reason not to run, Sister! After all, you are luckier than me. You've just said it's wrong to think of love as a religion, but isn't it just possible that you really have the strength to love, so it is unnecessary for you to rely on religion for strength?

SECOND SISTER

Elder Sister, so even you suspect me of being in love with Third Brother Lin? Just because he and I have a lot in common and share the same principles, and we enjoy chatting, that doesn't make it love.

ELDER SISTER

(With a little smile.)

You have a lot in common, you have the same ideas, and you talk all the time, and love still hasn't grown out of that?

THIRD SISTER

(Clapping her hands and laughing.)

Yes . . . yes, yes! Second Sister's ears are red.

SECOND SISTER

Third Sister, don't be such a busybody! We ought to be cooking some food for today! Instead we're chattering away about religion and love, aren't we? We two will go to the factory and ask for our New Year's wages, and when we get back we'll get lunch ready. What do you say, Elder Sister?

ELDER SISTER

Second Sister, I'll borrow some rice for supper from the neighbors. No matter what, it would be better for you not to go.

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7 Second Sister has not said that it is wrong to consider love to be a religion. The discrepancy here is in the original text rather than in the translation.
SECOND SISTER

Elder Sister! If you don't want to go, I'll go by myself.

THIRD SISTER

Wouldn't it be better for you to eat some lunch before you go acting on your conscience, Second Sister? I'll make you something to eat right now.

SECOND SISTER

No! Third Brother Lin agreed to go before noon. I've got to go, no matter what. Alright! Elder Sister, you and Third Sister stay home and help Mama. I'm going by myself.

ELDER SISTER

Second Sister, if you must go, come home as soon as you can. But if they refuse to give you the money, it's not that important. We can think of some other way out. Don't get into a fight with them. You must understand how worried we'll all be about you!

SECOND SISTER

I understand, but I must go. (She crosses to the mirror to fix her hair, then crosses to the stage left door to look in on her mother; to her two sisters:) Mama's still sleeping. I don't want to wake her, so I'll be going. (Exits.)

ELDER SISTER AND THIRD SISTER

Hurry home!

MAMA
(Offstage.)

Ah! Don't go! Eldest Daughter, don't go. (Sounds of crying can be heard.)

ELDER SISTER

I'm here, Mama, what is it?

THIRD SISTER

What is it, Mama? (They both quickly exit stage left.)
ELDER SISTER
(Offstage.)

Mama! What's the matter? I'm here!

MAMA
(Offstage.)

Ai! I was dreaming! Ai-ya! I'm so frightened, my whole body broke out in a sweat.

THIRD SISTER
(Offstage.)

Mama! What kind of dream were you having?

MAMA
(Offstage.)

I dreamt that our house had been surrounded by many, many soldiers. I had hidden both of you, but you came out of your hiding places. You had to come out, even though I told you not to, you came out anyway. As soon as I saw you, those soldiers seized you and took you away, and I began to weep.

ELDER SISTER
(Offstage.)

Oh! Mama, you're remembering what happened year before last.

THIRD SISTER
(Offstage.)

Ai-ya! Mama's forehead feels hot!

ELDER SISTER
(Offstage.)

No doubt she caught a chill from sitting in the other room just now.

MAMA
(Offstage.)

Where is your sister?

THIRD SISTER
(Offstage.)

She's just left for the factory.
ELDER SISTER
(Offstage.)

Ai-ya?! Mama's body feels very hot, too. Third Sister! You look after Mama. I'm going to look for Dr. Chen.

MAMA
(Offstage.)

Eldest Daughter! It's not necessary. I've just caught a little cold, nothing to get yourself all excited about. You two better let me sleep for awhile. Have you had something to eat yet, Eldest Daughter?

ELDER SISTER
(Offstage.)

Yes, I've eaten.

MAMA
(Offstage.)

Then help your little sister fix up those clothes. It's a shame the way she has nothing to wear year after year. Your father's wool scarf is still hanging up in that cupboard -- you could make her a pair of shoes out of it. If I wasn't so sick, I'd have done it myself a long time ago.

ELDER SISTER
(Offstage.)

Now, Mama, you go back to sleep. I'll make the shoes for Third Sister. (After a moment, ELDER SISTER and THIRD SISTER re-enter, one after the other.)

ELDER SISTER
(As she cuts the wool.)

Third Sister! Take these two coppers and hurry to the store and buy some brown sugar.

THIRD SISTER

For cooking ginger soup?

ELDER SISTER

Yes! Mama hasn't gotten any better, and now she's caught this chill. That's serious. Some soup will help break up the cold. Do we have any of that old ginger left?
THIRD SISTER
We still have a little.

ELDER SISTER
(Giving two copper coins to her sister.)

Hurry now and get that sugar.

THIRD SISTER
(Taking the money and exiting stage right.)

I'm going.

ELDER SISTER
Hurry back. (She stops cutting the material and sits, deep in thought. She becomes so sad that she is on the verge of tears. Then she kneels down to pray.)

MIAO
(Offstage.)

Third Sister!

THIRD SISTER
(Offstage.)

Ah, Sister Miao, are you just coming back from the play?

MIAO
(Offstage.)

Mmmm-hmmm. I'm coming home for lunch. Third Sister, the play today was good. Too bad you couldn't go. Where are you off to?

THIRD SISTER
(Offstage.)

The store, to get some brown sugar.

MIAO
(Offstage.)

Who's caught a cold?

THIRD SISTER
(Offstage.)

Mama.
MIAO
(Offstage.)

Oh, Third Sister! I bought you these cakes and steamed buns. (Their voices have gradually moved closer to the window.)

THIRD SISTER
(Offstage.)

Ai-ya! Thank you, thanks a lot!

MIAO
(Offstage.)

Has your Elder Sister come back?

THIRD SISTER
(Offstage.)

Yes, but Second Sister's gone off to the cotton mill now.

MIAO
(Offstage.)

Oh! I heard that there was some big trouble at the cotton mills today.

ELDER SISTER
(Runs to the window.)

Ah! Has Sister Miao returned?

(From outside the window, MIAO laughs as she answers, as though she is trying to change the subject.)

MIAO

I just got back from the theatre, Elder Sister! Are you back, too? When I came by after breakfast, I heard you'd gone to church.

ELDER SISTER

Yes, I went to church. Was it a good show today?

MIAO

Very good. That song --
ELDER SISTER

Sister Miao, did I just hear you say there was trouble at the cotton mills? What do you know about it?

MIAO

While I was watching the play, I heard a lot of people talking, who had come from near the cotton factory. They were saying that a crowd of workers went to the factory today to ask for their New Year's wages. The manager refused to pay them, so the workers beat him up. They're still fighting and can't come to a solution. There were a lot of people at the theatre who couldn't watch the play, so they all went to the factory to watch the commotion.

ELDER SISTER
(Alarmed and becoming excited.)

Ai-ya! How awful! Sister Miao, did you see my Second Sister on the road or not?

MIAO

No. When I saw such a mob watching at the factory, I got so scared that I ran home by myself.

ELDER SISTER

Come in and sit down.

MIAO

No, some other time. I've got to get home and eat something. Good-bye. (She starts to run off.)

THIRD SISTER

Sister Miao! Thanks for the snacks.

MIAO

That's alright, I'll see you later, Third Sister. (Exits.)

THIRD SISTER

Sorry you couldn't come in for awhile. (She enters through the stage right door.) Elder Sister, come and eat some of these.
ELDER SISTER

Third Sister, we have no idea where your Second Sister is or what's happened to her. How can you have the heart to eat?

THIRD SISTER

Elder Sister, what can we do?

ELDER SISTER

I didn't want Second Sister to fight, but she was bent on going. Alright, now there's trouble brewing, so how can it be good? Ai! I'm just afraid that if she's in trouble at the factory this time, they could fire her. That Lin is no good for her -- he's destroying her.

THIRD SISTER

Elder Sister, what can I do?

ELDER SISTER

Shhh! Talk softly! I don't want Mama to hear us. I think your Second Sister is the kind of person who understands things, and she could never do anything to upset her mother and sisters. First, I'll cook up a little home remedy to feed Mama. Then I'll make lunch, and we'll wait for her to come home so that we can all eat together. You boil some water while I chop up this ginger.

THIRD SISTER

(Boiling water.)

Elder Sister, I've felt nervous all day today. If trouble starts and the soldiers begin shooting, then Second Sister might get killed, and then what?

ELDER SISTER

(Chopping ginger.)

Don't worry, Third Sister. That can't happen. How can all the factory bosses lack consciences? Who would dare be so cruel? Besides, our mother is so good to people, and she doesn't even have a son, just three daughters. God has no reason to take one of us away from her.

(From far away comes the sound of gunfire.)
THIRD SISTER
(Frightened, holding on to her ELDER SISTER.)

Elder Sister! Gunshots!

ELDER SISTER

Quiet! (There are no more sounds.) Don't make such a fuss! You'll frighten Mama. I'm afraid she's gotten much worse. You'd do best to put your faith in God. He will not let us lose hope.

(Again come the sound of gunshots.)

THIRD SISTER

Listen! More shots! (ELDER SISTER goes pale, and she attempts to calm herself. She kneels down to pray. THIRD SISTER hugs her.) Elder Sister, what are we going to do?

ELDER SISTER

Don't be frightened! First of all, Mama hasn't heard anything. You have only to trust in God and, I assure you, Second Sister will come home to eat. Hurry up and boil some water. Get lunch ready.

THIRD SISTER

Elder Sister, I just can't stop feeling so uneasy. Ai-ya, my Second Sister! (She crosses anxiously to the window and looks out. Pause.)

NEIGHBOR BOY
(From outside the window.)

Third Sister!

THIRD SISTER

Ah! Elder Brother Zhang! Come over here! Hurry!

NEIGHBOR BOY

I've brought you your pencils.

THIRD SISTER

Thanks, thanks. Listen, have you heard any talk about there being trouble at the cotton factory?
NEIGHBOR BOY

Third Sister, I've just come to tell you about it. Ai-ya, it's horrible.

ELDER SISTER AND THIRD SISTER

What is it?

NEIGHBOR BOY

As soon as I arrived in the city today, I heard everyone saying that the cotton factory workers were going to demand their New Year's wages or else they would go on strike. When I was about to leave town, I saw a bunch of people running toward the factory. I asked some bystanders about it, and they said that the trouble at the factory had gotten worse, and that government soldiers were being sent in to suppress it. I ran with those people to the factory to see what was happening and when I got there, I heard people saying that the workers' representative this time was a man named Lin!

ELDER SISTER AND THIRD SISTER

Ah! And then what?

NEIGHBOR BOY

When they all surrounded the office to demand their wages, the factory manager ordered his bodyguards to open fire, and they shot Lin and killed him!

ELDER SISTER AND THIRD SISTER

Ah!

NEIGHBOR BOY

Shooting a worker! So the workers were furious. They surrounded the office tightly, and just then a girl worker ran in from outside. When she saw that Lin was dead, she embraced his body and wept. Then she rose and gestured to all the workers, men and women, to attack the office. Manager Zhu came out and worked out an agreement that satisfied the workers temporarily, but then Manager Li ordered the soldiers to open fire on the girl with the corpse and kill her, too!

THIRD SISTER

Ah! Second Sister!
ELDER SISTER
(Covers THIRD SISTER's mouth quickly.)

Oh! Heaven! Can it be her?

NEIGHBOR BOY

I heard them describe the way the girl was dressed, and I suspect it was your Second Sister.

THIRD SISTER
(Clutching her ELDER SISTER.)

Elder Sister, how can this be? Ah! My Second Sister!

ELDER SISTER

Second Sister! Are you really gone? How can this be? How can this have happened? Oh, God! You seized our father, and now you've even torn our sister away from us! Mother is so good, and she will starve to death for sure, God! Can you teach me to believe in you? How can you teach me to have peace of mind? Ai! (As though having a vision, she continues.) Are you calling on me for revenge? Are you calling me to fight for truth? For me to risk my life for righteousness? Good! Second Sister! Your Elder Sister is coming.

THIRD SISTER

Elder Sister! What about Mama?

ELDER SISTER

Let God watch over her. (As though in a dream, she stumbles to the stage right door and runs off.)

THIRD SISTER

Elder Sister! Are you going to look for Second Sister? I'm going with you. (She follows ELDER SISTER out the stage right door.)

NEIGHBOR BOY

Third Sister! I'll go with you, too.

(The stage is left empty. The water boils over in the pot, the sugar lies on the table, and the ginger remains on the floor.)
MAMA
(Offstage.)

Ah, it's cooked already! I'm so thirsty! Third Daughter! Make me a cup of tea! If we don't have any tea, I'll just drink a cup of water, and that will be fine. Didn't you hear me? Eldest Daughter! Pour me a cup of tea! Pour me a cup of tea! Has Second Sister come home yet? Second Daughter! Second Daughter! Your Mama is so thirsty, ai-ya! It's so hot! I feel faint, I'm so hot! Good daughters, pour me a cup of tea, quickly now! Second Daughter! Is Second Daughter still not back? Ai-ya! (Her cries gradually get softer.)

--CURTAIN--
CHAPTER FIVE

Preface: "View of a Riverside Village"

Throughout the second half of 1927 Tian Han served as Chairman of the Literature Department at the Shanghai College of Fine Arts. During his tenure there the Yu-long Association, a student drama group, performed a program of one-act works in progress which included Tian's "Night Talk in Suzhou," "Death of a Famous Actor," a play he would later rewrite as a full-length drama, and "View of a Riverside Village." Tian remembers several of the actors' performances as being more noteworthy than his scripts, which were still in draft form and "full of problems."  

1 Tian remained at Shanghai College for one school term, leaving at the beginning of 1928 to head the drama department at the South China Academy of Literature and Art. Chen Shou-zhu, Lun Tian Han de huo-chu chuang-zao (On the Creation of Tian Han's Spoken Dramas) (Shanghai: Wen-yi chu-ban-she, 1961), p. 30.

2 Tian neglects to include an exact date for the performance. Tian Han, "Nan-guo-sha shi-lue," ("A Brief Chronicle of the South China Society") in Tian Han et al., Zhong-guo huo-chu yun-dong wu-shi-nian liao-ji, 1907-1957 (Source Materials From Fifty Years of the Spoken Drama Movement in China, 1907-1957), Reprint Edition (Hong Kong: Wen-hua zi-liao gong-ying-she, 1978), p. 120.

3 Ibid., p. 121.
Neither Tian, his protege Tang Shu-ming, nor the Chinese critics and historians who have evaluated the body of his work, mention subsequent performances of "View of a Riverside Village," although the other dramas that were performed by the Yu-long Association, "Night Talk in Suzhou" and "Death of a Famous Actor," became two of Tian's most oft-performed plays in the remaining two years of the decade. If "View of a Riverside Village" was indeed never performed again, a distinct possibility exists that it was never revised and that the published version of the play is not a final manuscript but a rough draft of what Tian may have intended to be a longer, more fully fleshed out work. The script is not only exceedingly brief, but Tian's normal attention to such concerns as production elements and characterization is conspicuously absent. When viewed as a draft, the script, which could be said to be glaringly flawed were it in its final form, can be interpreted more positively as a preliminary demonstration of Tian's methodology in process.

The materials that form the basis for the conflict in "View of a Riverside Village" represent an early attempt on Tian Han's part to cast a serious moral subject in dramatic form: two brothers who have not seen each other since childhood unwittingly stumble into circumstances that cause them to commit fratricide. The play touches on issues which would have struck intensely responsive chords in the
audiences who were forced to confront similar crises in their daily lives as the country was overrun by the warlord armies and bandit gangs in the political and military free-for-all that was nineteen-twenties China: the futility of civil war and the tragedy of brother turning against brother, the disintegration of the family in a family-centered culture, the impact of war upon the masses of poor peasants, and the harshness of an economic system that forced its young men into professional soldiering as the only feasible means of supporting themselves and their families. As Jarmila Haringova notes, the play is a metaphor for the greater situation in China at the time it was written.  

A play that revolves around such timely and meaningful ideas ought to exert a significant emotional and intellectual impact on an audience. In this draft of "View of a Riverside Village," however, the potential for that impact is diminished by the discrepancy between the seriousness of the issues that the play addresses and the length of time allowed by the plot to address them. Tian so attenuates the action that he does not permit himself sufficient time to explore fully the implications of those deep concerns that he raises. On the other hand, the play

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is so skeletal in form, the bare bones of its plot so exposed, that Tian's manipulation of the chain of events that must transpire so that the action can arrive at its inevitable conclusion is laid bare and can be easily examined.

Taken solely as an example of a method of constructing a sequence of incidents, "View of a Riverside Village" clearly reveals the playwright's early attempt to craft a plot so that the events moving toward the climax of the play are governed by the logic of probability accompanied by a sense of inevitability. In order to render the outcome of the play not only believable but necessary, Tian created a precise sequence of antecedent action, shaping a series of logical and interconnected coincidences not unlike those, for example, that conspire against Romeo and Juliet. To that end Tian effectively uses false discoveries in conjunction with carefully crafted lapses in timing, techniques he had not made extensive use of in previous works.

The characters in "Riverside Village" are given limited information about other characters which causes them to arrive at false conclusions about each other. Tian establishes that Elder Son, for example, has been absent from home long enough to be a complete stranger to his siblings. His Mama, in a state of maternal excitement and relief over her unexpected reunion with her long-lost child,
neglects to caution him of Daughter's imminent return and Second Son's arrival. As a result of their lack of complete information, the brothers undertake action which appears to them to be appropriate but which the audience, whom Tian consistently maintains in a state of full cognizance of the facts, knows to be in error: Elder Son makes inappropriate advances to Daughter, whom he cannot recognize as his sister, and Second Son challenges a man whom he perceives to be a dangerous stranger to a fight that culminates in both of their deaths.

Of the four characters in the play only Mama is knowledgeable of all the information that could save her unwitting offspring from each other. She therefore cannot be onstage when her children initially confront each other if the action is to reach its necessary end. Likewise, Daughter's presence is required in order for Tian to be able to establish exposition at the outset of the action, but she must be absent when Elder Son enters if his subsequent scene with her is to be rendered believable. Tian therefore combines the characters' false discoveries with careful choreography of the order of their entrances and exits, all of which are specifically and believably motivated, in order to draw the characters further into an inextricable web of circumstance. Second Son is expected for dinner; Tian accordingly has Mama send Daughter to purchase provisions as a means of clearing the stage so that Elder Son can be alone
with Mama. Conversely, when the demands of the plot are such that Elder Son must be alone with Daughter, Tian provides Mama with a logical motivation for her temporary exit: alarmed that her son will be discovered by the Southern soldiers who govern the region, she leaves him momentarily while she searches for a change of clothing for him. Tian skillfully telescopes dramatic time so that an acceptable interval elapses between the disappearance of a character and his or her reappearance or the appearance of a new character.

Though the play is not entirely free of lapses in logic, Tian accomplishes the construction of an essentially believable and internally consistent sequence of events while simultaneously demonstrating his growing awareness of the value of incorporating a sense of necessity into his plot structure. Tian's initial establishment of expository information is typically clumsy; he interrupts a graceful exchange between Mama and Daughter, which is reminiscent of the natural flow of his dialogue in "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," with self-consciously theatrical speeches that are clearly present primarily for the audience's benefit rather than arising out of the plot. After establishing the foundation needed for the audience to comprehend subsequent action, however, Tian effectively manipulates a chain of antecedents and consequences so that the characters are brought to their ultimate ends.
If there is a flaw in the sequence of events, it is not, as Chen Shou-zhu suggests, in Elder Son's failure to inquire after his siblings upon his return home.\(^5\) Early in the play Tian establishes that Elder Son was kidnapped from his childhood home as a boy of twelve; it is thus not unlikely that sixteen years later he would fail to recognize his younger brother, and he could never have known of his sister's existence since she was born after he left home. It is instead the manner in which Tian chooses to dramatize Elder Son's reaction to the girl when she returns, relegating the explanation for his behavior to a stage direction to which only a reader or an actor, not an audience member, would have access: upon laying eyes on the girl, "Elder Son relapses into the trained beastliness that comes from having lived the soldier's life for so long."\(^6\) Until that moment Elder Son, though morally worn down by the expedience of fighting for whichever warlord can buy his loyalty, has demonstrated himself to be a filial son, concerned for his mother's well-being and determined to make her a wealthy lady. His sudden, essentially unexplained reversal in attitude, in which he automatically assumes that the young woman who enters his mother's home is sexually

\(^5\)Chen Shou-zhu, p. 34.

\(^6\)Tian Han, "Jiang-cun xiao-jing" ("View of a Riverside Village") in Tian Han ju-zuo xuan (Tian Han's Selected Plays), Beijing: Ren-min wen-xue chu-ban-shui, 1955), p. 77.
available, is inconsistent with the characterization that has been previously established, and Tian's attempt to justify the change in Elder Son by means of a stage direction is not an effective use of dramatic form.

Although "View of a Riverside Village" is indicative of Tian's increasing skill in manipulating a sequence of events, his emphasis on the strict organization of incidents to the exclusion of all other dramatic considerations leaves holes in this brief draft, which could be held up as significant flaws were the play indeed in its final form. The features that marked "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" as distinctive in terms of Tian's growing skill as an imitator of Western style drama are missing from this play: the carefully differentiated characters, the sensitivity to the potential emotional impact of production elements, the use of imagery assigned to appropriate speakers, and the attempt to develop thematic concerns fully so that the action appears significant rather than accidental.

Nevertheless, in a draft as attenuated as "View of a Riverside Village," the absence of the refinements and subtleties of effective realistic dramatic writing should come as no surprise. When the primary consideration is plot construction, a playwright can only be expected to ride so many horses at a time. Although Tian can be faulted for an examination of philosophical and moral implications of the action that is perfunctory at best, as a work in progress
"View of a Riverside Village" reveals the manner in which he came to grips with the requirements of plot qua plot. "View of a Riverside Village" clearly exposes the techniques he chose as means of shaping the action of the play so that the manner in which it reached its outcome manifested an air of necessity: limited information leading to false assumptions coupled with logically motivated and carefully timed entrances and exits of characters. Perhaps in a more thoroughly developed version of the script Tian might have attempted to create more fully formulated characterizations and to delve more deeply into the significance of the questions his play raised. As written, "View of a Riverside Village" stands as an example of Tian's approach to plot construction in its developmental stage.
"View of a Riverside Village"

Cast of Characters

MOTHER

DAUGHTER

ELDER SON

SECOND SON

Time

1927

Place

A small village on the Long-tan River near Shanghai

Setting

MOTHER and DAUGHTER are in their house, chatting as they sew together.

DAUGHTER

Ma, next month I'm definitely going to Nanjing with Second Brother so that I can go to school.

MOTHER

Look, are you talking about that again?

DAUGHTER

And why shouldn't I? He's already promised to take me.
MOTHER

He's already promised you, has he? He's just a soldier. How could he make enough money in one month to send his little sister to school? I tell you again: let him save up a little money so he can get married and give me some grandchildren. My advice to you is to wait patiently here in the country and study your needlework. Soon we'll find you a husband from a good family, and you'll have a lifetime of happiness.

DAUGHTER

But I don't want to live in the country.

MOTHER

Young folks are always thinking about going to live in the city, but really, what's so wonderful about going there? You know the Xus' Eldest Daughter? Today she wants to go to the city and earn a living, tomorrow she wants to go to the city and earn a living. And before too long, she returns home from the city, and what did she earn there? A big belly, a kid without a father, that's what!

DAUGHTER

How could I possibly do what she did? I'm not going there to earn a living.

MOTHER

And what happens when Second Brother can't help you anymore, won't you have to go to work then? Do you think people will just buy books for you for no reason? It'll be a long time before poor folks can go to school. (Her DAUGHTER sighs regretfully.) Talking about this just makes you that much more unhappy with your life. You know, your Elder Brother would have been twenty-eight years old by now if he hadn't disappeared as a child. He was so clever -- he could have handled anything and made all these decisions. Ah well, your Second Brother will get married and, if things aren't too difficult you'll go to school.

DAUGHTER

You said he was kidnapped, didn't you?

MOTHER

Oh, yes. He loved to watch magicians; as soon as he would hear their gongs outside, he couldn't sit still. One day he
chanced upon a troupe of magicians from Jiangbei,\(^1\) and they made off with him. I haven't heard anything about in such a long, long time. I don't know if he's dead or alive. Remember last month when I was so deathly ill, and your Second Brother was assigned to Pang-fu\(^2\) and couldn't return home? I thought, "Here I have two sons, and can't even one of them be home to bury me?" Do you remember how I cried, laying there in the bed?

DAUGHTER
(Disgusted.)

At least you have a daughter to bury you, don't you? But girls aren't people!

MOTHER

Yes, they are. That's why, if you went off to the city and you didn't want your Mama anymore, then I really would become a lonely old ghost.

DAUGHTER

Oh, Mother, you say such things.

(From outside comes the sound of gunfire.)

MOTHER

What do you mean, "such things?" In a world like this, who knows whether or not we'll be alive tomorrow?

DAUGHTER

It's from Second Brother's barracks. They're testing their guns over there.

MOTHER

Mr. Zhou told me yesterday that a bunch of them showed up at his house and beat him up. Ai, it's always violence, coming and going, and I don't know when we'll pass any days in peace. That's why I burn incense every night. All I want is for you and Second Brother to be by my bedside when I die, then I'll die satisfied.

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\(^1\) An area in northern Jiangsu Province, north of the Yang-zi River.

\(^2\) A city in Anhui Province.
DAMIRER
(With girlish curiosity.)

Ma, what is Elder Brother like?

MOTHER

He's much bigger than your Second Brother. That's right, you weren't even born yet when he was taken away.

DAUGHTER

Suppose he came home -- do you think he'd recognize the family?

MOTHER

He ought to. He wasn't so small when he left -- he was fully twelve years old.

DAUGHTER

Four years older than Second Brother.

MOTHER

Yes. Oh, your Second Brother arranged to come home tonight for supper. You hurry up and get to the market. Buy a little meat and some wine.

DAUGHTER

Alright. (She rises and fetches a basket.)

MOTHER

He's really a good child, that Second Brother of yours. Yesterday he even gave me a couple of dollars.

DAUGHTER

He gave me a dollar, too.

MOTHER

Well, you save it up, and soon you'll have a small dowry for yourself.

DAUGHTER

No, I'm going to buy books with it.
MOTHER

Well, that's alright, too, child. But hurry and go now so that you can come back quickly. It's not safe out there, so you better be careful.

DAUGHTER

I understand.

MOTHER

Oh, and if you can, buy a little soy sauce and some pepper.

DAUGHTER

Alright. (She takes the basket and exits. The old woman sits and sews as before. Presently a knock on the door is heard.)

MOTHER

(Continues her sewing.)

Who's there? (As she picks up her sewing, a young man in a soldier's uniform enters.)

SOLDIER

(In a Northern accent.)

It's me.

MOTHER

(Stares at him for a moment.)

Who are you looking for?

SOLDIER

I'm looking for the old woman of the house. Is this the Zhong household?

MOTHER

Yes, this is the Zhongs' house.
SOLDIER

Is Zhong Lao Tai-tai\(^3\) at home?

MOTHER

My surname is\(^4\) Zhong, but I don't understand what "Zhong Lao Tai-tai" is.

SOLDIER

Ai-ya, mother, you've grown so old. (He embraces the white-haired woman and weeps.)

MOTHER

(Amazed, trying to pull away from him.)

Who are you?

SOLDIER

Mother, don't you recognize me? I'm your Elder Son, Zong-you!

MOTHER

You are Zong-you? The Zong-you who was lost when he was little?

ELDER SON

Yes, it's me, Mother

MOTHER

Really?

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\(^3\) "Tai-tai" is a term of respect generally applied to mature women; it is usually translated as "Mrs." but can also be translated as "Madame" or "Lady." The literal meaning of "lao" is "old," but "Old Lady Zhong" would not have the derogatory connotation in Chinese that it would have in English. A traditional translation of the expression might be "Honorable Lady Zhong" or "Honorable Madame Zhong."

\(^4\) Tian is emphasizing the northern flavor of Elder Son's speech here. "Zhong Lao Tai-tai" would be a Northern expression that a Southerner like his Mother might not understand.
ELDER SON

How could it not be so, Mother? Look, see this mark that's still on my hand? That's from that time I wouldn't listen to you, and you took a bite out of me; have you forgotten?

MOTHER

(Looks him up and down.)

It really is you, Zong-you, ai-ya, my child! (Embraces him and weeps.) How could you have been gone for sixteen years without ever writing a single letter to your mother?

ELDER SON

Oh Mother, it's really too hard to tell you about it all in one word. (He has let go of her and helps her to sit down.) At first, I didn't even think of home. Then when I began thinking of home, I just didn't feel like writing.

MOTHER

There's no reason for you not to write. But how can your mother scold you? Where did you go with those magicians? To listen to your accent, well, you've simply become a Northerner, my child.

ELDER SON

Who could deny it? Sometimes I just forgot that I am a Southerner. I ran off with the magicians to the North. At first I enjoyed just playing around, but before long they wanted me to learn magic. I wasn't good at it, so they beat me and wouldn't give me anything to eat.

MOTHER

Ah! (She strokes her son.)

ELDER SON

I thought about running away, but when I would try to escape they would catch me and beat me again. When we got to Hunan I finally got away from them. A man named Zhao, his parents took me in and took care of me. They asked me to help work the fields. So I was able to manage pretty well for several years. But then there was always a war going on, and there were bandits everywhere, so there was no way to till the soil anymore. Zhao's parents were killed as bandits by soldiers who were launching attacks against bandits. By then I had already turned eighteen. After running into a recruiter, I decided to go be a soldier myself since I
couldn't make a living any other way. Shandong, Beijing, Fengtian -- I've seen them all. First I helped Wu Pei-fu beat Zhang Zuo-lin, then I helped Zhang Zuo-lin beat Wu Pei-fu.

MOTHER

Child, how could you not have stood for any principles? You & should always help the good ones and fight against the evil ones.

ELDER SON

At that time I didn't understand anything, and besides, I couldn't even read, so how could I have stood for anything? All I understood was having food to eat and a battle to fight. I say again: Wu Pei-fu was alright, and Zhang Zuo-lin was alright, too. They're all the same -- you can't tell who is good and who is bad. Mother, look at this big scar on the side of my face. That's from the time a bullet grazed me in the first Feng-zhi War -- it almost killed me. See, I'm missing a finger here on my left hand. I lost it in the Second Feng-zhi War.

MOTHER

Ai-ya child, how could you go be a soldier, to throw your life away, to die for nothing, and all for someone else?

ELDER SON

Mother, if I hadn't become a soldier, I would have starved.

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Elder Son is referring to the rather complex internal politics of China during the nineteen-twenties. The First Feng-zhi War, known to Western historians as the Zhili-Fengtian War, after the two military cliques involved in the battle, was fought in 1922. As a result of that war, Wu Pei-fu, a powerful military leader, was able to install a member of his Zhili clique, Cao Kun, in power as the fifth president of Republican China. In 1924 Wu became enmeshed in a struggle with the warlord Zhang Zuo-lin to unify China; that struggle came to be known as as the Second Feng-zhi War. Wu was routed by Zhang's army and was forced to flee. See Ssu-yu Teng, "A Decade of Challenge," in F. Gilbert Chan and Thomas H. Etzold, eds., China in the 1920's, (New York and London: New Viewpoints, 1976), pp. 1-14.
MOTHER

And what about the future? Have you made any plans at all for a career?

ELDER SON

When I was under Wu Pei-fu I was a commander, but at Hanyang in Hubei the other side defeated us, so we were scattered.

MOTHER

Well, why didn't you come home then? And if the ranks were scattered, why are you still dressed like a soldier?

ELDER SON

We returned to Shandong, and we ran into Sun Quan-fang there. He said he needed soldiers and asked us to fight in Nanjing, so I became a commander again. We've come to take Nanjing this time, Mother. And we'll have everything, we'll win the battle and your son'll win another promotion and be rich. Then you, Mother, will be a high-class lady.

MOTHER

(Very surprised.)

Ai-ya child, did you cross the river today?

ELDER SON

Yes, and Sun rewarded me with fifty silver dollars. He said it was for the victory and that there are still more rewards to come. I started thinking of home here and even though I couldn't remember the way clearly, I came looking for it.

MOTHER

Of course I'm overjoyed that you've returned, child, but isn't your coming back here dangerous? Around here soldiers were sent out a long time ago to protect the area against your army.

Sun Quan-fang, a Japan-educated militarist whose seat of power was located in Zhejiang Province throughout the nineteen-twenties, made repeated attempts to take Nanjing and Shanghai in 1927. See Donald A. Jordan, "Provincialism Within the Chinese National Revolution: The Case of Chekiang, 1926-1927," in Chan and Etzold, pp. 127-46.
ELDER SON

Don't be scared, Mother. We've crossed the river, and the world is ours. We have fifty thousand men altogether, so what can a couple of Southern soldiers do to frighten us?

MOTHER

But I'm worried, child. They've been checking very thoroughly for the past several days, and you are wearing a Northerner's uniform. If anyone got a look at you, I can't imagine what would happen. You sit here for a second and don't go out. I'll run over to Auntie Zhang's house and borrow some civilian clothes for you.

ELDER SON

Oh Mother, what are you afraid of? If a Southern soldier shows up here, my pistol will take care of him.

MOTHER

No. Now child, you haven't had to listen to your mother's words in the sixteen years since you've been racing around outside, but today you must listen to me. I'm going to go borrow some clothes for you to wear. You can't just be running around, looking like a stupid Northern soldier. And I don't want my children to get promotions or get rich. If I could just have you all by my side, I'd be happy to even beg for food to feed you. Good child, sit for a little while and don't go out. Nowadays there's always some terrible search going on. (She exits abruptly.)

(ELDER SON looks all around the room. It gives him a warm feeling, and he sits down on the bed.)

ELDER SON

Ah, how comfortable it is. It's been over ten years since I slept in a bed under a roof. Hey, isn't this the bed I was born in? Twenty-eight years and it's still not a bad bed. The wood in it is really fine.

(Suddenly DAUGHTER enters the room; she does not notice him there. ELDER SON relapses into the trained beastliness that comes from having lived the soldier's life for so long. He trips her, and she almost falls down. When she sees a man dressed like a soldier, she is astonished and very frightened.)
DAUGHTER

Ai!

ELDER SON

Hey, come here, you whore. What's your name?

DAUGHTER

I . . . I . . . I -- where did you come from?

ELDER SON

Over by the river. Don't be afraid.

DAUGHTER

(On the verge of running away.)

Ai! You're a Northern soldier!

ELDER SON

Don't be afraid! (Chases her and blocks the door.)

DAUGHTER

Ai-ya, please don't kill me!

ELDER SON

(Smiles at her.)

I'm not going to kill you, so what are you screaming about?

DAUGHTER

Please don't kill me! Please don't kill me!

(At this moment, SECOND BROTHER, a soldier in the Southern army, returns home, armed.)

SECOND SON

(Hears her cries for help; unlocks the door.)

What's going on here?

DAUGHTER

Ah, Elder Brother! This man just called me a whore!
SECOND SON

Where did he come from?

DAUGHTER

North of the river. He's a Northern soldier!

SECOND SON

A Northern soldier?

ELDER SON

That's right. We serve under Sun Quan-fang. What are you going to do about it?

SECOND SON

You've got some gall. Where do you get off, running across the river so you can insult the virtuous daughter of a good home?

ELDER SON

So what? When we open up Nanjing, I won't want a whore like this one anymore.

SECOND SON

Animal! (He takes out his pistol.) Put your hands up in the air!

ELDER SON

Ha, ha, you think I'll just hand over my gun? (He skillfully kicks SECOND SON so that the pistol falls to the floor. The two begin wrestling with each other.)

DAUGHTER

Ai-ya! (She runs out.)

SECOND SON

You dare to come in here? Get ready to die!

ELDER SON

Tomorrow Nanjing will be ours! (The two scramble for the pistol.)
SECOND SON

You Northern dog!

ELDER SON

Southern cur!

SECOND SON

Die, you son of a bitch!

ELDER SON

Bastard! You resist me! (He grabs the pistol and shoots SECOND SON in the stomach. SECOND SON fights death long enough to grab ELDER SON around the waist. He pulls his gun out and points it at him.)

SECOND SON

You animal!

(MOTHER, with clothing in her arms, and DAUGHTER enter quickly.)

MOTHER

Stop fighting! Stop fighting! You are brothers! You are brothers! You are brothers! (SECOND SON's gun discharges, ripping a hole in ELDER SON's breast.)

ELDER SON

Animal! (He falls.)

MOTHER

Ah! You are brothers! (Sees that they have already fallen.) Ah, Zong-you, Shi-cheng! My poor children. (She collapses, weeping.)

DAUGHTER

He couldn't have been my Elder Brother, could he?

MOTHER

(Lifting up her old, tear-soaked eyes to gaze at her oldest son.)

Yes, he is your Elder Brother. He was born in that very bed, and he's been gone -- away from home -- for sixteen
years. Now he has returned and died in the same bed he was
born in. I bore two sons, and neither one can bury me. I
never thought I would bury both of them instead. My
daughter, you cannot go to the city now. If you must go,
wait till I die. You won't have long to wait -- the day of
my death will soon be here.

DAUGHTER

Mother, don't be sad, I won't go. I'll protect you forever,
Mother.

(From outside the sound of gunshots is like firecrackers.
Cries of, "The Northern Army has crossed the river," "The
battle has begun," and "Run for your life!" can be heard.)

DAUGHTER

Mother, we must run for our lives!

MOTHER

Child, where can we poor folks run to? Ah, Zong-you, Shi-
cheng! Come back and take your mother with you, my
children.

DAUGHTER

(Weeping.)

Mother!

--CURTAIN--
CHAPTER SIX

Preface: "Night Talk in Suzhou"

Among the dramas that premiered in 1927 as works in progress at the Shanghai College of Fine Arts during Tian Han's tenure as Chairman of the Literature Department was "Night Talk in Suzhou," which Tian called, "a tragedy in one act." Of the play's first public performance Tian recalls little, save that Tang Shu-ming's performance was exceptional and that his script, which was as yet unfinished, was laden with problems. ¹

At the beginning of 1928 Tian left Shanghai College to head the South China Academy of Literature and Art where he continued to write, stage, and tour his plays. The next recorded performance of "Night Talk in Suzhou" was given in Hangzhou on April 17, 1928, where it was scheduled to be part of a program of one-act dramas that also included

¹Tian does not indicate which role Tang took in the production, but Tang says that she played the Flower Seller, a role that both Tang and Tian agree she always portrayed in subsequent productions. See Tian Han, "Nan-guo-shi shi-lue," ("A Brief Chronicle of the South China Society") in Tian Han et al., Zhong-guo huo-chu yun-dong wu-shi-nian liao-jh, 1907-1957 (Source Materials From Fifty Years of the Spoken Drama Movement in China, 1907-1957), Reprint Edition (Hong Kong: Wen-hua zi-liao gong-ying-shu, 1978), p. 120, and Tang Shu-ming, "Hui-yi Nan-guo" ("Remembering the South China Society"), in Tian Han et al., p. 138.
Tian's "Tragedy on a Lake." Objections from leading educators in Hangzhou, offended by Tian's encouraging young people to pursue acting careers, nearly resulted in a last minute cancellation of the programme by the authorities. Only the intervention of some "prominent Hangzhou citizens" on behalf of Tian's company convinced the Bureau of Public Security that the performance ought to be allowed to go on as scheduled. As a result of the controversy, however, the Bureau arranged for police to be present at the performance in the event that order might need to be maintained. Chen Zhong-ming, a colleague of Tian's who kept the Academy's daily records, recalls that the performance progressed very smoothly indeed.²

In 1928 Tian reorganized the South China Academy of Literature and Art as the South China Society, an experimental school which included painting, literature, music, film, and theatre departments. "Night Talk in Suzhou" was performed for the public after "eight or nine trial runs"³ by the school's acting company in Shanghai in December of 1928; the company subsequently toured the production to Nanjing in January of 1929. Once again Tang Shu-ming was cast in the production, portraying the Flower

²Ibid., pp. 128-9.
³Ibid., p. 131. Tian does not specify whether the "trial runs" were open rehearsals or performances of the play as a work in progress, thus, their exact nature is a puzzle.
Seller, she was joined by Tang Huai-qiu as the painting master, Liu Shu-kang. One of the few surviving production photographs from this period of Chinese theatre history is a production shot showing Tang Shu-ming and Tang Huai-qiu embracing during the final moments of the play.

In her brief memoirs of the South China Society Tang Shu-ming, the young actress and devotee of whom Tian was said to be quite fond, remembers another performance of "Night Talk in Suzhou," which was given in Suzhou. The play was included on the programme when the South China Society toured to that city and was later revised there. Tang continued to play the Flower Seller, and Tang Huai-qiu recreated his role as Liu Shu-kang. A new actress, Ou Xin-fang, replaced Yao Su-zhen in the role of Yang Xiao-feng, but Tang offers no explanation for the change in casting.

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4 Ibid., pp. 130-1. The role of Yang Xiao-feng was taken by an actress named Yao Su-zhen. The art students were played by Liu Zhu-an, Xu Xian-ren, Zuo Ming, and Zhang Hui-ling.

5 Ibid., p. xiv. The caption beneath the photograph does not indicate where the photo was taken.

from the previous Shanghai and Nanjing productions. Tang's recollections of the Suzhou performance are the romantic musings of a young, idealistic actress: "When I spoke the line, 'My enemies? One is war, another is poverty . . .' it evoked powerful hatred in the pits of the audience's stomachs. My weeping caused the audience to weep, and when the curtain fell, the combined sounds of applause and sobbing were like a symphony."

Although Tang's memories of the overwhelming audience response to "Night Talk in Suzhou" cannot be taken as objective critical evaluations of either the production or the play, her writing is, nevertheless, significant because it reveals valuable information about the birth of Tian's acting company and its organization, as well as recording the popular response to Tian's plays. Spurred on by the success of the Yu-long Association's performances at Shanghai College, Tian Han decided to establish the South China Academy of Literature and Art, an experimental school which in turn provided the foundation for the South China Society. The Academy, in spite of its impressive sounding title, was housed in a small, unassuming, one-storied

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Yao Su-zhen was probably unable to join the company on its tour to southern China. Tang also recalls that the students were played by art students who were enrolled in the South China Society. They may or may not have been the same actors as in previous productions; quite possibly Tang was unable to recall their individual names.

building at the end of La-du Road in Shanghai. The building, which Tang recalls was surrounded by vegetable gardens, scattered grave sites, and manure piles, was chosen only because the rent was minimal. It was refurbished largely through the efforts of the students with the help of Xu Bei-hong, the painting instructor, and Tian Han himself. Tian's acting students, most of whom were desperately poor and lived hand to mouth, were devoted to the enthusiastic playwright they had first met while studying at Shanghai College. When Tian founded his own school, a number of young men and women left Shanghai College to follow him in his new venture. Most of Tian's followers remained with him until the South China Society disbanded in 1930, although their wages were so minimal as to be non-existent. Tang Shu-ming, for example, was not the only student to attend Tian's school tuition-free, and Tian somehow managed to provide her and others with many of their meals.

Tian invited the prominent dramatists and actors Hong Shen and Ou-yang Yu-qian to join him in teaching drama at the Academy, the curriculum of which included the plays of Ibsen as well as traditional Beijing opera technique. The students were also exposed to the technical aspects of theatrical practice in the person of Tian's younger brother, Tian Hong, who served as a technical director and a one-man backstage crew, running lights, gathering props, and building scenery.
In addition to studying drama, the acting students at the Academy formed the core of the South China Society, a performing company that eventually toured to the major cities of southern China. An evening's performance by the company would typically consist of several one-act plays in which the same actors would play various roles. Tang Shuming, for example, remembers playing the Flower Seller, Meng-mei's Little Brother in "Tragedy on a Lake," and the aged mother in "Shivers" in a single evening. Once cast in a particular role an actor tended to keep that role, although casting changes were necessitated when actors left the company. Tian also enlisted the actors' aid in revising his scripts by gathering them around and reading the play aloud, a procedure Tang claims he applied to "Night Talk in Suzhou."

Throughout their tours the actors and actresses of the South China Society were true vagabonds, staying by turns with whoever offered them a night's shelter. While performing in Suzhou they lodged at a temple; during the tour to Nanjing they stayed at a small teacher's college. It is small wonder that conservative educators objected to Tian and his band of foot-loose Bohemians when they arrived in Hangzhou to perform "Night Talk in Suzhou." However, no

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9 Tang Shu-ming, "Hui-yi Nan-guo" in Tian Han, et al., p. 142.

10 Ibid., p. 143.
matter where the company traveled, according to Tang's reports, their performances were enthusiastically received by the audiences that were primarily composed of young intellectuals like themselves.

Tian himself typically confines his remarks about "Night Talk in Suzhou" to the political content of the play, saying that he wrote it in hopes of inspiring the oppressed classes to unite and engage in struggle to liberate themselves from their feudal landlords. He acknowledges the failure of the play as a socialistic call to arms, which he attributes to the lack of clarity in his own mind as to the concepts he intended to dramatize. Although they cannot be entirely discounted, Tian's evaluations of his dramas are nevertheless difficult to accept as objective assessments of his work. His comments, usually written years after the plays, seem more like concessions to the more repressive political climate than honest appraisals of his own writing. The plays themselves, along with his earlier scattered references to them, speak more plainly for Tian Han.

Tian considered "Night Talk in Suzhou" to be a "tragedy in one act" in its first draft, but by the time the play had been incorporated into the repertoire of the South China Society, he was calling it a "tragicomedy" (bei-xi-ju),

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which implies that a certain amount of revision occurred between the play's debut and its 1928 Shanghai production. That Tian, who was not given to writing formalistic studies on dramatic genre, gives no indication of his understanding of the term, should come as no surprise. What is significant is that Tian uses distinctly Western terminology to describe what is to him a new kind of drama,¹² and that, of all his early plays, he applies the term only to this play.

"Night Talk in Suzhou" is the first play in which Tian deliberately alternates comic effects with serious concerns. No other of Tian's early works utilizes comic elements to the same extent as this one; in previous plays, Tian used humor sparingly as a means of providing comic relief to dissipate dramatic tension. "Night Talk" is also the only early play in which the action concludes on a happy note. Tian's other early dramas end desolately; "Shivers," the conclusion of which might be better described as bittersweet, might be considered the lone exception.

Tian concentrates much of the humor in "Night Talk" in the first scene of the play in which he establishes the relationships amongst the art students and their attitudes toward their instructor, Liu Shu-kang. The topical nature of many of the students' jokes, for example, Chen's reference

¹²Beijing operas are classified according to content rather than form: wu-xi are "military plays" and wen-xi are "civil" or "domestic plays."
to the Nodding Rock of Suzhou,\(^{13}\) is especially appropriate for art students who would pride themselves on the breadth of their intellectual knowledge. With the exception of Zhu, who is somewhat bland, all of the students have clearly delineated excesses of harmless characteristics that cause them to appear amusing: Chen, the fat painter, Zhao, the clever prankster, and the ridiculous Zhuang, whose clumsy efforts to court Yang results in a free-for-all jeering session in which no one, including the venerable Liu Shu-kang, escapes unscathed. Zhao's mock dramatic recitation of an improvised poem is followed by a classical comic situation: the unnoticed entrance of the painting teacher who arrives just in time to overhear one of his pupils label him an "old fart."\(^{14}\)

Disarming and amusing though they may be, the students' subsequent disappearance raises important questions about the function of the first scene in "Night Talk in Suzhou" in relation to the second half of the play, which revolves around the discovery of Liu Shu-kang's long-lost daughter. At first glance, the general structure of "Night Talk" seems to resemble "A Night in a Cafe": the action of both plays commences with a group of "generic" characters who ultimately exit en masse and do not reappear. In "Cafe,"

\(^{13}\)Tian Han, "Su-zhou ye-hua" ("Night Talk in Suzhou") in Tian Han, Du-mou xi-xuan (Selected One-Act Plays by Tian Han) (Hong Kong: Xiang-gang xi-yi-she chu-ban, 1978), p. 4.

\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 7.
however, the information that Feng imparts to Bai is instrumental in plot comprehension. The drunken customers also serve to demonstrate the seaminess of life in the cafe, making probable Li's ultimate rejection of Bai.

The relationship of the student scene to the rest of "Night Talk in Suzhou" is less clear, although Tian most probably intended the scene as a means of underlining Liu Shu-kang's isolation. The students form a social circle from which Liu is naturally excluded by virtue of his age and his status as their teacher. It is a circle into which Liu, driven by his need for love, longs to break but cannot, and what he perceives to be indifference from his pupils pains him deeply. Nevertheless, the students' teasing of Liu is more mischievous than deliberately malicious, and thus Liu's self-pity seems to be more a case of hypersensitivity than justified anguish.

Liu Shou-song objects to what he considers to be another comic episode in "Night Talk in Suzhou": the scene between Liu and Yang in which the elderly painter agrees to accept his young protege as his adopted daughter. The inclusion of that kind of scene, according to Liu, damages the central theme of the play by undermining its potential educational value as a statement about the destructive influences of war and poverty.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{15}\text{Liu Shou-song, Volume II, p. 382.}\)
Although the "love scene" between Liu and Yang may be read as humorous, it does not seem logical that Tian Han intended the scene to be evocative of laughter. According to Constantine Tung, the play was completed barely minutes before it was performed in 1928, which would seem to be a logical explanation for the inclusion of the scene, which, if not comic, is clumsy at the very least. A number of elements in the scene conspire together to create amusing effects: Liu's repeated misinterpretation of Yang's bashfulness, her hesitation to express herself clearly even when she sees the response she arouses in him, and his jangled nerves. However, because the subsequent action clearly demonstrates that Tian intended to portray Liu Shukang as a pathetic victim of circumstances, it is difficult to believe that Tian also intended the audience to have a good laugh at the expense of the same character behaving like an aging lecher. It thus seems more probable that the "love scene" is not a deliberate attempt at comedy but a flaw in the construction of the plot that may have resulted from the speed with which the play was written.

The happy ending of "Night Talk in Suzhou" is another characteristic that distinguishes the play from Tian's other works of the period. Constantine Tung, who considers the

16 Constantine Tung, "Lonely Search Into the Unknown," p. 49. Since Tian had actually completed his first draft of the play some six months earlier, the script to which Tung refers must have been a revision.
joyful reunion between the Flower Seller and Liu Shu-kang to be a flaw in the play's structure, suggests that the ending may have been a last-minute addition or a concession to the ubiquitous happy endings of traditional Chinese drama but most probably signaled "a change in [Tian's] dramatic interests ... [toward the] typical ... wish-fulfillment of fantasy, a form which was to become dominant in his later plays."\(^{17}\)

Actually none of Tung's suggestions seem likely. The history of the play suggests that Tian deliberately chose the happy ending, deciding to keep it after not one but several performances. Although the initial draft of the "tragedy" performed at Shanghai College may have utilized an unhappy conclusion, the published text of "Night Talk in Suzhou" still concludes with the reunion scene after having been revised at least twice, once by Tian for the South China Society's debut performance in Shanghai and later by Tian with the acting company during its stay in Suzhou. Although an error in dramatic construction can be attributed to oversight in an early draft, when the playwright includes it after several revisions, the inclusion must be acknowledged as deliberate. Secondly, there is no reason to assume that, after writing four plays with devastatingly unhappy conclusions, and before writing four more with similar endings, Tian suddenly and inexplicably decided to

\(^{17}\)Ibid., p. 50.
imitate the contrived happy endings of Beijing opera. Finally, "Night Talk in Suzhou" cannot accurately be said to herald a shift in Tian's concerns from realism to wish-fulfillment type fantasies; his succeeding plays, none of which are fantasies, conclude on melancholy notes. A more probable explanation is that Tian, whose preceding attempts at writing plays tended to be unremittingly serious, was self-consciously experimenting with a form of drama that was new to him, tragicomedy. Thus, if he approached the hybrid form somewhat tentatively, it should come as no surprise. "Night Talk in Suzhou" demonstrates Tian's attempt to utilize alternately humorous and serious material to come to an uplifting conclusion. If the play fails in effectively accomplishing that end it is not because the conclusion itself is inherently poor but because Tian falls short of writing effectively in a realistic vein.

The successful construction of a sequence of artificial events cleverly cloaked in the verisimilitude of actuality and simultaneously manifesting causal relationships among the events so that a sense of dramatic significance is bestowed on them is absent from "Night Talk in Suzhou." Tian had proved himself equal to the task of creating such a plot in "Cafe" and in "Tiger," and even to some extent in "Before Lunch" and "Riverside Village." The comparatively haphazard structure of "Night Talk in Suzhou," however,
suggests that Tian composed his early drafts quickly and that audiences, caught up in the pathetic tales of Liu and the Flower Seller, thoroughly enjoyed hearing about the characters' victimization and were not at all troubled by the obvious contrivances of the plot; if Tang Shu-ming's memory is to be trusted, the roar of the spectators in response to her performance is a fairly good indication of their willingness to suspend their disbelief.

Although "Night Talk in Suzhou" is marked by a number of flaws in its structure, including Tian's typical over-reliance upon narration instead of depicting action, his overemphasis of pathetic and often superfluous details, and his failure to incorporate the element of chance so that the events that transpire in the play seem to be at least within the realm of possibility, several of the play's characteristics save it from being a mere tempest in a Chinese teapot. Tian must be credited with being the first modern Chinese playwright to attempt experimentation with the tragicomic form and for his successful attempt to capture the spirit of his day on the stage in his enthusiastically received dramatization of the effects of warlordism on the populace. His portrayals of the incorrigible art students and his choice of characters in general demonstrates his ability to target potentially interesting and unusual dramatic personnages: the emancipated female art student traveling unchaperoned in the
company of five unmarried men, her desperately lonely teacher teetering on the verge of old age, and a rough, unmanned girl of the streets. Had Tian Han been given to revising his work more thoughtfully, he might have realized the full potential for "Night Talk in Suzhou" to have been the first successful modern Chinese tragicomedy.
"Night Talk in Suzhou"

Cast of Characters
LIU SHU-KANG, an elderly painter
YANG XIAO-FENG, a female student
FLOWER SELLER, a teenage girl
Male art students:
CHEN
ZHU
ZHAO
ZHANG¹
NEWSPAPER VENDOR

Time
The present

Place
A small, pretty room in a certain inn in Suzhou

¹In the original text, Tian designates the male art students as "Student #1," "Student #2," and so forth. In the dialogue, however, the students address each other by their surnames.
Setting

The inn at which LIU SHU-KANG and his apprentices are staying while visiting Suzhou. The elderly painter has brought his apprentices here to paint pictures of Suzhou life. When the curtain rises, the four male students and YANG XIAO-FENG have just returned from a trip to the outskirts of Suzhou, which has left everyone in high spirits. There are four partially painted canvases onstage. CHEN is at stage left. ZHU enters through the door at up center; both face their portable easels and paint enthusiastically. MISS YANG sits by herself near the down right footlights. She is the only girl among the students and thus is the center of attention in this group of men who show off incessantly for her. She sits very contentedly with her legs crossed, recovering from the day's fatigue. In her hands she holds a book about Suzhou, and is intently researching the historical background of the scenic spots and landmarks that she saw on today's trip. ZHAO is at stage right, washing his face and applying face cream. ZHANG, who is standing near the down right footlights, smugly combs his hair straight back and then attempts to tie his necktie. He cannot tie it properly and looks at MISS YANG, hoping to catch her eye so that she will tie it for him. It is too hard for him to come right out and ask her, so he decides upon a "sneak attack"; first he asks ZHAO, who is busy primping with his facial cream.

ZHANG

Hey, ol' Zhao, would you tie this for me?

ZHAO

(Holds up a pair of cream-covered hands.)

Can't you see I'm busy right now? Ask Miss Yang. She's not doing anything.

ZHANG

(This is just what he had hoped for. He very ardentely crosses to MISS YANG.)

Miss Yang!

YANG

(Looks up from her book.)

Yes?

ZHANG

Would you tie this for me? I always do it wrong.
YANG

Sorry, I can't. (She goes back to reading her book as before.)

ZHANG

No? (Trying to manipulate her feelings.) Oh well, it doesn't matter. Just because you tied Old Chen's for him this morning. (He points to another student who is sitting nearby and correcting a detail on a painting.)

ZHAO

(Completing his face cream; to ZHANG.)

I'm done, I'll do it for you.

ZHANG

Miss Yang could do it.

ZHAO

Hey, ol' buddy, don't be stupid. Miss Yang ties ties just like she looks in those books of hers for pictures to paint: she's got to be a little picky. Otherwise why would she come all this way to paint Tiger Hill Pagoda when she could just stay home and paint the water tower behind our school?

ZHANG

What do you mean! Are you making me out to be like that water tower?

ZHU

(Laughing heartily; he stops painting.)

But you're not at all alike. Look how big your head is and how little your body is. If you're not like a water tower, then what are you like?

ZHANG

Well, it's no wonder. You can all see how ol' Chen's head comes to a point on top and how fat his body is. What else could he look like but that pagoda on Tiger Hill?

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2Tiger Hill Pagoda, built in 600 A.D., is one of the famed Seven Pagodas of Suzhou. It stands near the grave of Ho Lu, the first ruler of Suzhou and affords a fine view of the city.
CHEN  
(Laughing with MISS YANG while he talks.)

If I'm like Tiger Hill Pagoda, then you, sir, are about as witty as that hunk of rock by the pond where Master Liu lectured today. Hey, did you all see how Master Liu used that rock for a podium for his lecture on life and nature and then suddenly gave it a hug?  

YANG  
(Laughing.)

Mr. Zhang, I'm going to give you a name, alright?

ZHANG  
(Sincerely.)

It doesn't matter what it is. If you give it to me, it must be a good one.

YANG

Alright, you're just not going to be called Jun-shi anymore; we'll change it to Blockhead, what do you say?

CHEN, ZHU, ZHAO  
(Together.)

Excellent. (They applaud and laugh loudly.)

ZHANG

Thank you. I may be a lowly Blockhead, but one touch from you could make me live forever, my dear. (YANG, speechless, does not answer him.)

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3 The rock to which Chen refers is known as "Nodding Rock" and is located nearby Tiger Hill Pagoda. According to Buddhist legend, a noted Buddhist missionary named Sheng Gong was lecturing on law at the site. His words were said to be so eloquent that this stone nodded to him in recognition of his message.

4 "Jun-shi" (君士) is Zhang's first name. The name that Yang bestows upon him, pronounced "Wan-shi" (完士) in Chinese, is a play on words; the second syllable of both names is written with two different characters, but both are pronounced "shi" with a low tone.
ZHU

I didn't see this before, but I think I know what's going on now. You're in love with her.

ZHAO

Let's not have a performance of Dream of the Red Chamber. Hey, how about we take advantage of Master Liu not being back yet? We can go out and play around, eh?

ZHANG

Alright, let's go.

ZHAO

Hey, ol' Zhu, don't paint anymore, we're going out.

ZHU

Wait a second.

ZHAO

(Grabs ZHU's paintbrush.)

Wait for what? If we keep waiting like this, we'll wait a whole lifetime with nothing to look forward to. Let's hit the street.

ZHU

(Looking at CHEN.)

Well, ol' Chen, you have to come, too.

CHEN

(Wholeheartedly involved in his painting.)

I'm not going.

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Dream of the Red Chamber, which dates from the eighteenth century, is acknowledged to be one of the great works of Chinese fiction. A novel of enormous scope and carefully rendered detail, it depicts the lives of over four hundred members and servants of the Jia family of Beijing. Chinese audiences would know that Zhao is referring to the "star-crossed lovers" of the novel, Bao-ju and Dai-yu. The director of a Western production of the play might consider substituting "Romeo and Juliet" for "Dream of the Red Chamber."
ZHANG

Then you come with us, Miss Yang.

YANG

(Massaging her toes.)

No, my feet hurt.

ZHANG

(With a noise of disgust.)

Who told you to wear high heeled shoes to climb a mountain?

ZHOU

This is no good; at least ol' Chen has to go.

CHEN

This morning I went out too early and caught a little chill. I've got a headache right now.

ZHOU

Her feet hurt, and your head hurts. What a lucky coincidence. But if neither of you come along, we'll all be worrying about you the whole time.

ZHANG

Let's go, come on! (As though reciting a poem.)

Let's go out into the street,
Out into the Suzhou night.
Suzhou nights are filled with delights:
You can see the moon over the top of the city wall,
like in Rome,
And you can see streets of water, like the ones in Venice.
You can see the gondolas,
And on the gondolas, gypsy girls can be seen.
The boat girls are fragrant like flowers,
And from ancient times till eternity, such beautiful, willing women are the stuff of which dreams are made.

6 Like Venice, Suzhou is a city of canals, six of which run north and south and six of which run east and west. The city, with its gondola-like boats, is often compared to Venice.
Where can I quench my longing thirst?
In nearby Jin-chang with some fine green tea!

CHEN

Right, we'll join the poet and go drink some tea.

ZHANG

Let's go.

ZHOU

Alright, we'll go, but wait for me to put on some clothes.
Ol' Chen here will go, too. (At this moment, the old
painter LIU SHU-KANG enters, unnoticed by the students.)
C'mon ol' Chen, we're going to drink tea. Suzhou tea is the
most famous of all.

CHEN

I don't want to drink tea.

ZHANG

Then we'll go and drink some wine.

ZHANG

Oh! Wine, women, and song! We'll drink a little wine,
listen to the Suzhou sing-song girls, c'mon, there'll be
pleasure enough for everyone. (One by one the students
realize that their old teacher has come in; they stand in
awed silence. ZHANG is the only one who does not notice
him.) C'mon, let's go, how can we stick around here? If
we're going to go, let's hurry up and go. Don't wait for
that old fart to come back. He'll make us sit around and
listen to his advice on life and love. Over the hill, but
he still gives love advice.

CHEN

(Tugs on ZHANG's sleeve with a tiny movement.)

What? You're not going, are you, Mr. Poet?

(CHEN suddenly notices that LIU is not at all horrified.)

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7 In English in the original.
LIU
(Taking his time and carrying himself with dignity.)

When I brought you all to Suzhou at first, I wanted you to study hard. I didn't tell you to come here and just play around. "Studying is like sailing a boat against the current: you must constantly forge ahead, or the boat will just drift downstream." From the time we poor students arrived here, I have asked you to call up your strength for the long struggle. Don't always be longing greedily for wine and tea. I spoke to you about this today, didn't I, at Tiger Hill. I said that if the people of Suzhou spent less time drinking tea, Suzhou would surely be a much more beautiful place. (The STUDENTS listen silently together. YANG has put down her book.)

ZHANG
(Mischievously.)

But sir, what if we don't go out to drink tea or wine but only to take a look at some women; would that be alright?

LIU
(Hesitantly.)

Women? Women are evil things; Suzhou perished in the arms of a woman several thousand years ago. Didn't I speak to all of you about this when we visited Liang Yan Mountain? Those lutes, those moonlit ponds, the courtyards, the fragrant paths -- they're all vestiges of the evil that a woman left behind!

ZHAO

But sir, Xi Shi wasn't evil, she just got in the way of Prince Wu's progress. Anyway, it wasn't her fault if he fell in love with her.

LIU

True enough. The men of Suzhou are not especially praiseworthy; it's because they're much too womanly. So Suzhou women are not bad after all . . . (Pause; he appears to be wrapped up in his past and is unwilling to pursue this line of conversation. He crosses behind CHEN and looks at

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8Xi Shi was a famous beauty who lived during the fifth century B.C. She was used by forces who opposed Prince Wu to debauch him so that his rule could be weakened and ultimately toppled.
his painting.)  Hmmm, not bad. I still see a place or two where you betray your insufficient love for nature.

CHEN

Sir, didn't you say that we should be masters of nature, that you don't want us to be slaves to it?

LIU

Yes, you must become masters of nature. But if you want to become its masters, you must know nature thoroughly, and to know nature thoroughly you must thoroughly love it. (While LIU has been earnestly reasoning things out with CHEN, ZHU, ZHAO, and ZHANG have long since slipped out one by one. MISS YANG gives in to them and turns her back on LIU SHU-KANG as she inches slowly out of the room. LIU does not sense that the students have all gone.) The love that a landscape artist feels for nature should be the same love that this farmer in the painting has for his fields; can you see how intimate his relationship is to those fields he hoes every day? They are just like his mother's milk, like smelling her fragrance, hearing her breath, feeling her pulse -- if the landscape painter does not achieve the same depth of feeling, his work has no meaning.

CHEN

(Sees that MISS YANG has also left; he has not been in the mood to paint for a long time, and he has no patience at all to hear his teacher's reasoning.)

Yes, yes.

LIU

(Warm and grateful.)

Bo-gao! 9 You must work hard so that you can learn to paint even better. I don't dream of the impossible. I just hope that among you there will be one true heir, one kindred spirit. Then I'll be fulfilled; then I won't feel so alone.

CHEN

(Turning to listen.)

Someone's knocking outside! (He hastily throws down his paintbrush and exits.)

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9Chen's first name.
LIU

(Seeing that all the students have gone.)

Every single one has gone. (From the neighboring banquet room comes the sound of girls singing, their voices clear and pleasant. LIU mocks himself.) Naturally the singing of Suzhou women is prettier to the ear than the chattering of an old painting teacher. (He sits down weakly on the sofa. MISS YANG slowly re-enters from outside. LIU sees her.) What's this, didn't you go out?

YANG

They wanted me to go out with them, but my feet hurt so I came back.

LIU

Your feet hurt? (Quickly stands up in order to let her sit down.) Come quickly and sit down.

YANG

(Sitting in her original place on the sofa.)

Thank you.

LIU

(Takes a quick look backward to see if all the students have left.)

Where does it hurt?

YANG

(Puts her right foot on her left knee and points to it.)

Here!

LIU

(Places his hand on it.)

Here?

YANG

(Pulling back with an exaggerated reaction.)

Ai-ye!

LIU

Ai-ya, who told you to wear these high heeled shoes to climb a mountain?
YANG
(Defending herself.)
I'm used to them.

LIU
(With deep emotion.)
An artist must experience immeasurable suffering in order to perfect his art. It's the same pain you women undergo in your love for being beautiful. (He paces back and forth in the room for a moment and suddenly bursts into hitherto constrained emotion.) Xiao-feng!

YANG
Ai! (Seeing the intensity of his feelings, she is greatly surprised.)

LIU
I have had few female students. But I -- I feel like you're all I have, Xiao-feng! You're all I have . . . (Very urgently.)

YANG
(Shrinking back in amazement.)
Me?

LIU
(Slowly, emphasizing each word.)
You have the most promise!

YANG
(Suddenly relieved.)
Oh!

LIU
Once a man has passed his prime, he needs to feel like a vital part of the mainstream of life -- far more than youths do. But as the days go by, life isolates him from other people. Throughout my life I have been a man adrift in the world, so I have been denied the joy that comes from having a family. I had the idea that only among my students could I seek for happiness, a ray of light, love. That's why I started this little school. But I am still so alone. And to learn that lesson, to arrive at that truth, I have suffered more than I can say. I was so excited about
bringing all of you to Suzhou. But even though everyone hears my lectures every day, they treat them like so much dirt. No one is really willing to take them in, to accept them. Xiao-feng, if it were not for you, I would surely lose whatever happiness, whatever light, whatever love, I have.

YANG

(After leaning forward to hear his urgent words, she suddenly rises and crosses to embrace warmly this desolate painter who is in the evening of his life.)

Teacher!

LIU
(On edge.)

What is it?

YANG

(Her head falls on his breast; one by one her words come out hesitantly.)

Although I am very young . . .

LIU
(Nervously.)

Mmmm . . .

YANG

It doesn't matter . . .

LIU

Mmmm . . .

YANG

But if you truly . . .

LIU
(Nervously.)

Truly what?

YANG

If you truly love me . . .
LIU
(Even more nervous.)

Oh, I do truly love you, so what is it?

YANG
(Holding him close.)

I -- I am willing to be your . . .

LIU
(Nervous to the utmost.)

Oh, you are willing to be my -- be my what? (YANG presses her head closer to him. LIU is so happy and surprised that he is beside himself.) Xiao-feng! You must say it. No matter what it is, you must let it out. Don't hide your words in your heart and let them hurt you. I may be much older than you, but my blood is still warm. Say it quickly, you are willing to be my what, Xiao-feng?

YANG
(Very warmly.)

I am willing to be your . . . (Suddenly buries her head in his breast once again.)

LIU
(Unable to contain his excitement; he looks up to heaven, caresses her head as though in thanks to God for bestowing this unexpected fortune upon him.)

Ah! (Suddenly embraces her like an animal, handling her roughly.) Be my what? Say it quickly!

YANG
(Caressing his face.)

To be your daughter.

LIU

Oh, (Relaxing after all the built-up tension.) . . . my daughter. (With great tenderness and without a show of force, he kisses her forehead.) Child, why haven't you said this sooner? (Wiping perspiration from his face.)

YANG

Didn't you know I was a poor, fatherless child?
LIU

Alright, now that you are willing, I will be your father. Sit down; don't stand here. You feel hurt, don't they? (He helps YANG to sit on the sofa and sits down next to her.)

YANG

Thank you.

LIU
(Sighs.)

So you say you once had a father but lost him. I am a father who once had a daughter but lost her.

YANG
(Happy.)

And where is Elder Sister now?

LIU
(Measuring YANG with his eye.)

If she was still here, I think she'd be a little taller than you. But she's younger than you are, so you'd have to call her "Little Sister." (Considers silently.) It all happened over ten years ago. She was maybe five, maybe six years old then, so she'd be almost eighteen now.

YANG

She's two years younger than me, then.

LIU

My daughter not only had a face as lovely as yours, but she also had a sharp mind. I remember when she was just a tiny thing, I taught her a Tang poem:

"Clear flow the waters of the Yang-zi. Far from home a man sees the water and thinks of his loved ones. Why must blossoms fall, Fall to the earth without hope?"

She only had to hear it once, and she knew it by heart. So often the song would be on her lips. But her love for those four lines foreshadowed the state I am in today. Ah, "Why must blossoms fall, fall to the earth without hope?"
YANG

Why do you say that Little Sister is gone?

LIU

Who can know where she is?

YANG

But how could you not know?

LIU

Xia-feng, I have been so afraid of touching my old wounds that I've never talked about my family with any of you . . . (Pause.) Long ago, I fell so in love with art -- I was like a man who so loves to drink, he uses the wine cask for a pillow. To me, nothing else could ever be as important as art. I even had a large collection of paintings that my father had left me. And so, after leaving school, I moved to the outskirts of Beijing where I built an exquisite art studio next to my home. I and my virtuous wife -- she was a native of Suzhou -- and my adorable daughter lived there, and I painted. After I studied the ancient painting "The Unending Yang-zi," I was so inspired I threw my energy into painting a large scroll entitled "The Unending Great Wall," symbolizing the extraordinary courage of our people. I even spent time collecting a number of legends about the Great Wall, like the one about Meng-jiang Nu! -- I thought I would paint her into the scroll. For five years I worked on it. And then that first detestable war started. Two warlords were struggling over Beijing, and the countryside surrounding the city became their battlefield. Needless to say, both my home and studio were targets for their artillery fire. I was, nevertheless, a stubborn man. I would not listen to my family's advice and, in the midst of the flying bullets, I continued to paint peacefully. But one black night I was suddenly awakened by soldiers who had come to loot and plunder my home. I panicked and instructed my wife to take our daughter and flee while I hurried to protect my studio . . . because painting was my life . . . but when the soldiers saw me bolting the studio door, they were convinced that I was concealing an emperor's tomb full

10Meng-jiang Nu is a heroine in Chinese folklore. Her husband was conscripted to build the Great Wall after their marriage. When he failed to return home, legend has it, she walked by herself to the Wall, where she discovered him to be dead. The sounds of her weeping were said to have caused part of the Wall to cave in.
of gold and silver and precious gems. With several blows of
their gun butts they broke down the studio doors. (Showing
his finger.) That was when this finger was broken.

YANG

(Opening her eyes wide with astonishment.)

And you were still alright? Ah-ya, but they didn't shoot
you, did they?

LIU

After they broke in, they saw that, except for the large
scroll, there was nothing else of value. As for the scroll,
they couldn't figure out whether it was really worth any
money. They became angry, and in a flash they pulled out
their bayonets and, piece by piece, they slashed the scroll
that I had spent five years of my heart's blood painting.
As I stood there watching, it was as though they were
slicing my own skin with knives. I knelt down on my knees
and begged them to leave just one piece of it; they -- ah,
those beasts -- they wouldn't listen. They took a flame and
my exquisite studio, ah -- my ivory palace -- they burned it
to the ground. I felt as though I were dreaming, and
suddenly I remembered my wife and daughter. Where were
they? -- I hurried to look in the fire the soldiers had
set, but I could find no trace of them. I looked up to
heaven, looked in the glow of the fire that had once been my
studio. What an idiot I was! Thunder pounded in my head, I
fainted . . .

YANG

And then what happened?

LIU

A month later I got out of the hospital -- when I fell to
the ground I had been saved by an acquaintance who had taken
me there -- I ran ads in newspapers, looking for my wife and
daughter. At the same time I changed my name, and threw
myself into the life of a student at a revolutionary
officers' school. I had come to understand that to
establish art, it isn't enough simply to pick up a
paintbrush. You must pick up a gun! Since that time I
fought in several detestable wars, and the revolution
succeeded. From that time on, we all embraced high hopes,
thinking that China had been saved with our blood. It was
only after the success of the revolution that I realized
that too much of our blood had been shed for nothing, so I
looked for a chance to go to Europe. At first I thought I
would study warfare again, but the grief from my
disillusionment and the intense loneliness of missing my family compelled me to cast my gun away and pick up my paintbrush once again. I thought that losing myself in my art would help me block out my past completely. But not only was I incapable of forgetting, but the longer the days went on, the more deeply I felt for my wife and daughter. My noble, beautiful wife, my adorable daughter -- where can they be now after all this time?

YANG

And you really cannot find them?

LIU

I have searched for their tracks everywhere, but only heaven and earth can tell where they have wandered to after all this time.

(The voice of the NEWSPAPER VENDOR is heard.)

VENDOR

Mister, you want to read this morning's Shanghai paper? Two coppers to read about the battle between General Zhang and General Li. What do you say?

LIU

(Irritated at him for interrupting the story.)

No, no.

VENDOR

(Sees that there is no hope of LIU's buying a paper and nonchalantly leaves, singing the same tune.)

This morning's Shanghai paper? Two coppers to read about the battle between General Zhang and General Li. (He exits, continuing to call out in the street.)

LIU

Ah, another battle, once more who knows how many wives and daughters will be scattered?

YANG

And who knows how many beautiful things will be destroyed.
LIU

The fate of beautiful objects is always to be destroyed. But man cannot cease creating them just because destruction may be their ultimate end. "Continuous destruction, continuous creation." — that must be our attitude. But when our people seem to be engulfed in a destruction frenzy, their creative energies are completely sapped. Now everything depends upon the strength of you, the young.

YANG

If Little Sister were still alive, she'd have to be a promising painter.

LIU
(Sighing.)

If the child is still alive, then I have not seen her on the roads I have traveled. She always so loved to sing, she ought to have been a promising music student by now.

FLOWER GIRL
(Offstage.)

Gardenias . . . white orchids . . . gardenias . . . white orchids . . .

YANG

It would have been so interesting to have had a little sister who studied music. I still love music best, even though I study art.

LIU

Someday I'll take you to Europe to study music. Ever since I lost my daughter I have often thought . . .

(The FLOWER GIRL enters. She crosses to the old painter and tries to peddle her flowers.)

FLOWER GIRL

Mister, would you care to buy a gardenia or a white orchid?

LIU
(Disregarding her request; he scolds her.)

No, no, get out of here!
FLOWER GIRL

Buy just one blossom, sir.

LIU

We don't want any. Now don't be making a nuisance of yourself.

FLOWER GIRL
(Turns to YANG.)

Miss, buy a blossom to put in your hair, they're fresh as can be.

YANG
(Quickly selecting several flowers.)

How much?

FLOWER GIRL

However much you want will be fine. (YANG gives her twenty cents.) Thank you, Miss. (Curious about the easels, she crosses behind one of them.)

YANG
(Takes blossoms to LIU; puts a blossom in his collar.)

You wear one, too.

LIU

I don't want to.

YANG

No. This is from me to my papa. (She takes a flower and hangs it on the collar of his robe.)

LIU

Ai, you young girls are as fond of flowers as we old people are of young girls.

YANG
(Notices that the FLOWER GIRL is correcting a painting.)

Ah-ya, she's fixing their paintings over there!
LIU
(Rises quickly.)
Ah-yuh! Put that down right now!

FLOWER GIRL
Who paints so well, Mister?

LIU
Look here, everyone painted such excellent paintings. You come in, and it didn't take a second for you to mess them up. How can you still stand there and ask who paints so well?

FLOWER GIRL
(In Shanghai dialect.)
I know painting. It's not such a great picture that I couldn't fix it.

LIU
There's nothing strange about that, but what do you understand about anything?

FLOWER GIRL
(Indignant, she switches to a Beijing dialect.)
How do you know I don't understand anything?

LIU
What a troublemaker this kid is. When she talks, one sentence comes out southern and the next, northern.

FLOWER GIRL
How could I get to be as old as I am without being able to talk?

LIU
Good, you can talk. (He takes back the paintbrush.) Hurry up and get out of here. You've dirtied up everyone's paintings. They'll be furious when they get back. Go, go.
FLOWER GIRL
(Resisting, as though she is used to being bullied.)

Alright, I'm going. (Takes her flower basket and begins to exit slowly. LIU takes the paintbrush and sits down. He is about to continue his story. The FLOWER GIRL begins to chant softly and slowly.)

"Clear flow the waters of the Yang-zi.
Far from home a man sees the water and thinks of his loved ones.
Why must blossoms fall,
Fall to the earth without hope?"

LIU

Hey! (Suddenly moved, he rises quickly and shouts.) Flower girl! Flower girl!

FLOWER GIRL
(Returning.)

What did you call me back for? Do you want to buy some flower?

LIU

No, I don't want flowers.

FLOWER GIRL

Then what?

LIU

Sit. Sit down for a moment. I have some questions to ask you.

FLOWER GIRL
(Forced to sit.)

Old sir, please talk quickly. I still have to finish selling all these flowers to support this small life of mine.

LIU

I ask you, do you sell flowers like this every day? How much can you earn in one day?
FLOWER GIRL

How much can I make selling flowers? Just a little, that's all.

LIU

Then how do you support yourself?

FLOWER GIRL

There is both good and bad in life, old Sir, but life must go on always! Suppose that I was the daughter of a rich family, well then, of course, things would be different. But with a life like mine, just a little bit of money is all I need to keep going.

LIU

(Mournfully.)

Ai, China, you have turned even a young girl like this into a fatalist! (He continues questioning her.) Have you studied? Have you gone to school?

FLOWER GIRL

I went to school here for several years. But then I didn't have a way to make a cent for food, so where would money for school come from? While I sold flowers, I would walk past the girls' school, and I would listen to the sounds of the piano coming from inside. When I would watch the girls playing tennis and see how full of life they were, how my heart ached because I could not turn into a bird and fly to join them. There were times when I listened and watched dumbly, not knowing how much time I lost procrastinating when I should have been selling flowers. Then the thought came clearly to me: "I am a flower seller! And a thick wall separates me from those lucky young ladies." After that I didn't pass by the school anymore.

LIU

Why didn't your father support you and give you money for school?

FLOWER GIRL

I don't have a father.

LIU

Ah, no father. Well, what about your mother?
FLOWER GIRL

(She pauses, stirred by feelings of sorrow and grieves for a moment. Then she gets control of herself and briefly looks the old painting teacher up and down.)

Sir, the first time I went out to sell flowers, my mother said to me, "Ming-er, I've told you to peddle flowers, not sorrow." So I often remember Mother's words and don't dare tell customers about my grief. But Sir, even when a tiny insect is pained, it, too, groans. I see that you are both kind people, and I don't want to interfere with your chat.

YANG

It seems to me you're not from around here, are you?

FLOWER GIRL

My mother came from Suzhou, but my father was from Beijing. I was born there. When I was very small, Beijing was involved in a war that I never really understood. Soldiers broke into our home one night, and the family was scattered. (LIU gasps.) Mama and I were forced to flee, along with most of our neighbors. After we got pretty far away, we turned to look back at our house. Sir, it was already so red that it lit up half the sky. There were still so many people running away, Mama and I were sure that Papa would be among them. It was hard, but we escaped to Tianjin.

YANG

Did you find your Papa when you got to Tianjin?

FLOWER GIRL

Mama searched among the refugees for a long time, but she could find no news of my Papa... then, after great difficulties, she ran across someone else who'd escaped from our village, a great-uncle. He said he'd heard that my Papa fought to the end and died defending our home. He wouldn't let the soldiers in, so in their anger they set the house on fire. And my father died in that fire... (Her voice is tearful.)

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This would not be quite the coincidence it seems; many Chinese villages were nothing more than enormous, extended families.
LIU
(Looks up to heaven.)

Ai, if your Papa really had died then, he would not have felt the grief that followed. (He rises, as though to embrace her.) Child, what is your surname?

FLOWER GIRL

Tang.

LIU
(Bluntly.)

Tang? Why is your surname Tang?

YANG
(Seeing that this exchange is confusing, she turns the conversation back.)

But then what happened?

FLOWER GIRL
(Continues speaking.)

Then my mother held me in her arms and cried for several days at the inn where we were staying. She thought of killing herself, but she couldn't bring herself to part from me. She wanted to run away with me somewhere, but we didn't have a bit of money.

YANG

Why didn't you look for relatives?

FLOWER GIRL

My father was always so wrapped up in his painting that we never made any contact with relatives, so we couldn't search for them. And at a time like that, who would come looking for us? So much suffering and misfortune, ai (Sighs.), and then we met a very kindly gentleman by the name of Tang. When he saw us weeping, he felt sorry for us. He told us that he was a businessman from Suzhou, and if and when we were willing to come to Suzhou with him, he would be willing to pay our boat fare. My mother was originally from the south, and she still had a younger sister here in Suzhou, so she thought this would be a good opportunity to come look for her. So we came to the south with him.
YANG

Did you find your aunt in Suzhou?

FLOWER GIRL

We looked for her, but we couldn't find her. As luck would have it, her family had been through some changes, and she had long since left Suzhou. So my mother and I had managed to get to Suzhou, but we couldn't live here, and we had no way of getting back to Beijing.

YANG

Well, what about Mr. Tang?

FLOWER GIRL

Oh yes, well, fortunately he told my mother, "Don't worry, since your relatives aren't here, it will be alright for you to stay at my house for six months or so." My mother wasn't willing to do that, but she did borrow a little money from him and rented a room instead. Every day she had to go out and sew just to support me.

LIU

Ah. (He bows his head.)

FLOWER GIRL

A year went by, and I turned eight. Mr. Tang told my mother personally, "Since your daughter is so worthy of your devotion, she might prove to be an asset to a man like me, without a son. She ought to get an education." Mother said she hadn't any money, so there was no way she could ever repay his kindness in bringing us to the south -- how could she take money from him again? And he said, "That's not important to me. If you would be willing to be my wife, I'd be willing to bring your daughter up and see that she graduates from a university."

LIU

(Troubled.)

Did she consent?

FLOWER GIRL
c

At first she wouldn't agree to it, but when she thought of my future she gave in. (Weeping.) My poor mother gave her self up for me.
LIU
(On edge.)

Oh! So that's why your surname is Tang. (He covers his face.)

YANG

And did he send you to school then?

FLOWER GIRL

That's how I got to go to primary school for three years. During the first few years my mother and Mr. Tang still had a good relationship, so I had an easy time of it. But after awhile, because Mother hadn't given Mr. Tang a son, he took another wife. From the time she came into the house, my mother and I did not pass a single day in peace. After two years, the new wife decided she didn't approve of me going to school, so I had to quit. Then she gave birth to a son, which was disaster for us. Mother and I simply had no say about anything in the house. And it wasn't just that I couldn't study anymore, I had to do chores so lowly that not even the maidservants would do them. As soon as I even picked up a book, they would beat me and curse me.

LIU
(Upset.)

Oh!

FLOWER GIRL

At night Mother would always hold me and weep. She would say that she failed not only Papa but me, too. Mother's health had always been frail, so how could she bear up under such bitterness? And so she fell ill. There was no room for Mother anymore in my stepfather's heart. He let her be sick and would not give her medicine. I have sold flowers ever since then, sir. With the money I made I bought medicine for her. But sir, could so little really have been of any help?

LIU
(The tears are already streaming down his old face.)

Oh, and then?

FLOWER GIRL

And then? Mother was sick all the time though she still clung to life. She said that all she had left to hope for
was that my life might get better gradually. But finally on a winter’s evening last year, she grasped my hand in hers and said, "Ming-er, I cannot bear it any longer. After I die I won't see you anymore, but I have already reckoned your eight characters. Although you will be greatly mistreated as you grow up, still it will be better than . . ." But she didn't finish. My poor mother had cast off life and left me. (She cries.) Ai . . .

LIU

(With a great sound of pain.)

She died!

FLOWER GIRL

She died, and they drove me out of the house.

YANG

And then how did you plan for your future?

FLOWER GIRL

What kind of future could a girl like me plan for! But if I don't starve to death first, I'll get revenge!

YANG

Revenge! For whom?

FLOWER GIRL

For my mother who was murdered!

YANG

Against your stepfather?

FLOWER GIRL

He died already, just this year.

YANG

Then who is your enemy?

FLOWER GIRL

My enemy? My enemy? One of my enemies is a war and the other is poverty. If there had been no war, would my family have been scattered? Would my father be dead? And if there
was no poverty, would my mother have re-married? Would she have died?

LIU
(He cannot bear anymore; his heart is breaking.)
Child, you have an enemy still, right here in this room.

FLOWER GIRL
(Dumbly.)
Sir, how could you be my enemy?

LIU
Because I valued art so much that I cast the both of you away!

FLOWER GIRL
How can you be my father? My father has already died.

LIU
Child, your father thought that you, too, had died.

FLOWER GIRL
(Carefully looking at him.)
Are you really my father?

LIU
Yes.

FLOWER GIRL
Is your surname Liu?

LIU
Yes! My surname is Liu!

FLOWER GIRL
And your first name?

LIU
Shu-kang!
FLOWER GIRL
Ah, Papa, you're still alive! Mother died calling out your name, saying she was unworthy of you.

LIU
Ah, child, I am the one who is unworthy of both of you.

FLOWER GIRL
Papa! (The two of them weep as they embrace each other.)

YANG
(Weeping with them.)

Is this Little Sister?
(LIU, with tears in his eyes, nods his head in assent.)

--CURTAIN--
CHAPTER SEVEN

Preface: "Tragedy on a Lake"

The first recorded reference to a performance of Tian's "lyric play,"\(^1\) "Tragedy on a Lake," comes from the daily records that were kept by Tian's colleague Chen Ming-zhong for the South China Academy of Literature and Art. According to Chen, the play was performed in Hangzhou on April 17, 1928, on the same bill with "Night Talk in Suzhou" that touched off a controversy among the leading educators of the city. Concerned with recording those events that led up to an eleventh hour rescue of the scheduled performance by a group of unnamed but "prominent" Hangzhou citizens, Chen unfortunately neglected to include any information about the performance itself. The concerned citizens did in fact override conservative educators' protests against the impropriety of Tian's company by appealing directly to the Bureau of Public Security, and the performance took place as originally scheduled.\(^2\)

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\(^1\)Tian Han, "Nan-guo-shi shi-lue" ("A Brief Chronicle of the South China Society") in Tian Han, et al., p. 131.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 129.
"Tragedy on a Lake" was next performed by the South China Society in Shanghai on December, 1928, where it played in repertory with "Echoes of an Ancient Pond," "Night Talk in Suzhou," "Shivers," and the full-length version of Death of a Famous Actor. The Society subsequently toured the same programme to Nanjing in January, 1929. Tang Shu-ming joined the tour, this time playing the part of Meng-mei's Little Brother, a role that she found difficult but in which she was successful. Zuo Ming, who had portrayed one of the art students in "Night Talk in Suzhou," played the Old Servant, and Wan Lei-tian, a prominent member of the South China Society who was also given leading roles in Death of a Famous Actor and "Echoes of an Ancient Pond," portrayed the consumptive poet Meng-mei. An actress named Wang Su took the role of Meng-mei's long-lost love, Ping Bai-wei.

The play, along with Death of a Famous Actor, was among Tian's most popular of the period, eliciting enthusiastic responses from youthful audiences throughout southern China. According to Tang Shu-ming, it was performed "countless times" in Shanghai and Hangzhou. Scholar and author Su Hsueh-lin writes that the play touched such nerves in its viewers that a wave of love suicides occurred in Guangdong

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3 Tang Shu-ming, "Hui-yi Nan-guo" ("Remembering the South China Society") in Tian Han, et al., p. 144.

4 Tian Han, "Nan-guo-shi-liue," p. 131.

Province after a number of unhappy lovers saw the play when it toured there. Among the most significant evidence of the popularity of "Tragedy on a Lake," however, is that it is the only one of Tian Han's early dramas of which there is a record of performances by a company other than Tian's own South China Society. Of additional historical interest is the identity of one of the young actresses in training who starred in the provincial company's production of Tian's play: a fifteen-year-old actress performing under the name Li Yun-ho, a name she would later change to Jiang Qing, was one of several girls who took the leading role of Bai-wei.

In 1929 Jiang was enrolled in the Shandong Provincial Experimental Art Theatre, a boarding school for budding performers in Jinan, Shandong Province. That year the school's acting company mounted what Jiang recalls as an "experimental" production of the "bourgeois drama, 'Tragedy on a Lake.'" Jiang was not among the highly favored students at the Experimental Art Theatre, and so she was permitted to take the role of Ping Bai-wei only on Mondays when the house was small, but her naturalistic approach to

her role was said to have provided exciting emotional experiences for the audiences who saw her. 7

Although Jiang Qing's later notoriety and her bitter hatred of Tian Han lends an air of irony to the fact that as a young unknown she took a leading role in one of his most popular dramas, it is of greater significance that an acting troupe as far north as Shandong Province would take note of Tian Han and include one of his works in its repertoire. The South China Society typically confined its performances and tours to Shanghai and the large urban centers to its south: Hangzhou, Suzhou, and Nanjing. Jinan in Shandong Province lies well to the north of Tian's base in Shanghai, and there is no record of the Society having traveled northward for a tour. Thus, Tian's influence and popularity seems to have spread well beyond the geographical sphere of his visible presence, no small feat for a budding playwright of limited financial resources.

Tian describes "Tragedy on a Lake" as "a play that depicts the complications of reality intruding upon romance, the vicissitudes encountered by a melancholy poet wrapped up in his painful memories, and the feudal oppression suffered

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7 Jiang does not explain her choice of the word "bourgeois" to describe Tian's play, but most probably she meant that the play revolves around personal concerns as opposed to greater socio-political issues. See Roxane Witke, Comrade Chiang Ch'ing (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1977), p. 54; also, Ross Terrill, The White Boned Demon: A Biography of Madame Mao Ze-dong (New York: Will Morrow and Company, 1984), p. 36.
by an intellectual woman."\(^8\) According to Constantine Tung, Tian, whose wistful memories of his wife, Yi Shu-yu, now five years dead, inspired him to write the play, drew upon Tang Xian-zu's (1550-1617) Ming Dynasty drama *The Peony Pavilion* (Mu-dan ting) as a source for "Tragedy on a Lake."\(^9\)

In Tang Xian-zu's version of the story a romantic young woman, after meeting her perfect lover, a young student, in a dream, dies of longing for him. Some time later, the student, who, like Tian Han's character is named Meng-mei, sees the girl's portrait and communicates with her spirit in a dream. A miracle occurs, and the girl returns from the dead to take her lover's hand. Although the girl's father, an important official in the capital city, initially refuses to believe Meng-mei's story, he is mollified in the end, and the two lovers are happily reunited.\(^10\)

Stylistically Tian Han's version of the story might be characterized as a transitional work, bridging the realism of his earlier plays with his later dramas of the decade, which are more romantic in spirit and in which he abandons social concerns, concentrating instead on the human psyche with its irrational and often inarticulated desires and

\(^8\)Tian Han, "Nan-guo-shi shi-lue," pp. 131-2.


motivations. His tale of frustrated young love has been criticized by Chinese and Western scholars alike for what they perceive as an overemphasis on self-indulgent, melancholy characters\(^{11}\) and a lack of stylistic unity in the dichotomy between an essentially realistic setting and the dreamy quality of the play's thought as expressed by Mengmei and Bai-wei.\(^{12}\) In fact, the play clearly demonstrates that Tian was indeed capable of effectively handling romanticism both dramatically and theatrically. In "Tragedy on a Lake" he carefully constructs a physical reality onstage that is peculiarly appropriate to the romantic sentiments expressed and actions taken by the protagonists. The romantic events that transpire are rendered believable by the otherworldly quality of the visual and aural universe in which they are made to occur.

The romantic qualities of the play are theatrically reflected in the manner in which Tian utilizes production elements. Before any actors appear onstage Tian establishes a ghostly atmosphere for the play, calling for the curtain


\(^{12}\)Constantine Tung, "Lonely Search Into the Unknown," p. 50.
to rise on a stage that is "cloaked in sorrowful darkness." The dark set is silent, devoid of actors, unlike any of Tian's previous works, all of which commence with characters engaged in activity. A moment or two into the play the Old Servant remarks that it has been raining for several days, thus, the gloomy atmosphere is internally logical to the action, not merely an arbitrary choice on the part of the playwright. The stage is still save for the gauze curtains that ripple softly in a gentle breeze. The only source of light comes from the reflection of moonbeams on the surface of West Lake, a lighting effect that further reinforces the ghostly atmosphere. There is no sound except for the patter of soft raindrops. Later in the play Meng-mei hears a faint sound of weeping which is carried to his ears by a "cool, refreshing breeze." Throughout the entire play the only source of illumination is a lighted candle which the Servant is carrying when he enters with Meng-mei and his Little Brother. The elusive nature of the characters and the action is thus skillfully reinforced both visually and aurally.

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13 Tian Han, "Hu-shang de bei-ju" ("Tragedy on a Lake"), in Tian Han du-mu xi-xuan (Selected Plays of Tian Han) (Hong Kong: Xiang-gang xi-yi-shé chu-ban, 1970), p. 2.

14 How Tian technically met the challenges posed by these requirements is a mystery as neither he nor his assistants were given to keeping detailed production notes.

15 Tian Han, "Hu-shang de bei-ju," p. 16.
The ethereal atmosphere is dramatically manifested throughout the play in several ways. In the Old Servant Tian introduces a character who, deeply superstitious, believes in the existence and power of the supernatural, infecting Meng-mei's Brother with his fears. The characters are often not what they seem to be, or they have both real and metaphorical identities. Bai-wei, for example, is known by more than one name. She is a real, flesh and blood woman, but Meng-mei's Brother mistakes her for a ghost, and yet, despite the warmth of her flesh, she is indeed a restless spirit returned from the grave.

Both Bai-wei and her lover Meng-mei behave emotionally rather than rationally, following the dictates of their hearts rather than realistically setting out on courses of logical action that will help them to achieve their desired goals. Whereas Lian-gu of "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" is prepared to defy her father's edict that she marry into the Chen family and has conceived a logical plan to escape with Huang Da-sha, thereby achieving her ends, Bai-wei, who cannot reconcile her desires with her father's demands, attempts suicide. Her life is saved by a sympathetic fisherman, but rather than traveling to Beijing to find Meng-mei, she returns to her father's home, concealing herself by day and weeping over Megg-mei's love letters by night.
Her lover is just as much of a dreamer. After receiving no response to his letters, Meng-mei rushes off to Europe to "advance his position," presumably in hopes of impressing Bai-wei's father. After he returns to China, penniless, he hears of Bai-wei's death and allows his parents to marry him off to a woman who can provide them with grandchildren. Meng-mei, however, continues to pine for Bai-wei, devoting all of his energies into writing his reminiscences of their love.

Tian has skillfully concealed the bare bones of the plot of "Tragedy on a Lake" in a manner he was not successfully able to do for either of his preceding plays, "View of a Riverside Village" and "Night Talk in Suzhou." The weak links that mar the play, notably the unexplained appearance of Bai-wei's gun in the rockery, the ambiguity with which Tian has arranged entrances and exits, and his perfunctory concession to politics in Bai-wei's speech in which she describes her three flirtations with death, are outweighed by a plot that is more carefully constructed and more finely tuned than any of Tian's previous efforts.

Tian's early one-act dramas typically depict the outcomes or results of events that transpired days, months, or even years prior to the onset of dramatic action. Narration, therefore, is an important element in any Tian Han play since the characters must inform each other and, by extension, the audience, about the past. In some plays
Tian's narrative technique takes the form of dull speechifying, as in "Night Talk in Suzhou"; in "Tragedy on a Lake," however, Tian cleverly incorporates the narration scenes into the movement of the plot so that they are at once logical and emotionally satisfying.

Rather than writing a single long monologue for the Servant in the first narration scene in which the old man explains the presence of the ghostly visitor, Tian constructs the scene so that there are logical interruptions from Meng-mei and his Brother; they carefully scrutinize the old fellow's story, asking him the very questions that the audience might be formulating. The servant spins his tale gradually rather than releasing information at a steady pace as did Liu and the Flower Seller in "Night Talk in Suzhou." The tale is full of ambiguities that reinforce the ghostly atmosphere and build suspense. Although the old man's story of the restless spirit's unhappy love affair is sufficiently similar to Meng-mei's experience to arouse his interest, Tian carefully sees to it that the Servant knew Bai-wei by a different name than did Meng-mei, thus postponing the inevitable moment when Meng-mei should realize her true identity. While Meng-mei, who has studied abroad and is scientifically "enlightened," is suspicious of the proof offered by the Servant of the ghost's existence, the Servant demonstrates that, with the lake on one side of the room and
a sealed door to the rockery on the other, no human woman
could possibly enter the room without being detected.

The second narration scene between the "dead" girl and
Meng-mei's Little Brother is also skillfully constructed.
The girl knows exactly who Meng-mei is, having read the
manuscript he has left opened on the table, but she has a
dramatic reason to conceal her identity from the boy,
unlike, for example, Liu Shu-kang in "Night Talk," who
inexplicably conceals his identity from his long-lost
daughter. By withholding her identity from him, Bai-wei can
trick the little boy into unwittingly relating crucial
information that Meng-mei's manuscript omitted.

If any fault is to be found with the narration scene
that follows between Meng-mei and his Brother, it is that
Tian allows the little boy to relate what transpired between
himself and the girl in the preceding scene in too much
detail. Nevertheless, in writing a long scene in which
Meng-mei carefully questions the boy, Tian is clearly
retarding the speed of the action as it moves toward its
climax, building suspense before allowing the audience to
discover what ultimately happens to Meng-mei and the girl.
Meng-mei, who has previously been established as mistrusting
what he perceives to be his brother's overactive
imagination, logically dismisses the boy's tale. By
delaying Meng-mei's moment of recognition until he discovers
the girl's handkerchief tucked in his manuscript, Tian
provides a particularly skillful theatrical effect: Meng-mei's shout of recognition is answered by the self-inflicted gunshot from offstage that kills Bai-wei.

In the final narration scene Meng-mei and Bai-wei are briefly reunited and explain how they initially lost touch with each other. Their narratives are dramatically motivated by the circumstances of the plot. They do not relate information that they should previously have known as, for example, Mama in "Before Lunch"; both the characters and the audience simultaneously hear the information for the first time.

Tian curiously chose to people his preceding play, "Night Talk in Suzhou," with artistically oriented intellectuals who would logically be given to expressing themselves in a heightened manner, but with a few exceptions the diction in that play did not flutter its poetic wings, instead taking the form of dry, straightforward reportage. In "Tragedy on a Lake" Tian avails himself of his choice of an intellectual woman and her poet lover who, not surprisingly, would speak in a heightened fashion. The images that the characters choose, particularly Bai-wei, who compares herself to "a wisp of gossamer that only fondly remembers the world of people,"\(^{16}\) and "a fish at the bottom of the sea [that gazes] at the shafts of light that pass

\(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 37.
through the water,"\textsuperscript{17} are appropriate for the dreamy, elusive pictures that they evoke in the romantic world of the play that Tian has created.

"Tragedy on a Lake," in spite of the flaws in its internal logic, succeeds as a serious drama of ideal love overcome by concerns for expedient marriage. The play's atmosphere is thoughtfully conceived, using all elements of production to create an appropriately ghostly atmosphere in which the action of the play can credibly take place. The play aroused heartfelt responses in Tian's youthful audiences who, like Bai-wei and Meng-mei, often found themselves caught between the demands of the old patriarchal Chinese family system and the new concepts of freedom in love and marriage. The theme was one to which later, more well known playwrights would return, as did Cao Yu in his famous 1934 tragedy \textit{Thunderstorm}, but Tian Han was the first Chinese playwright to put his finger on the pulse of his generation successfully in dramatic form.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 30.
"Tragedy on a Lake"

Cast of Characters

YANG MENG-MEI

PING BAI-WEI

MENG-MEI'S LITTLE BROTHER

BAI-WEI'S ELDERLY SERVANT

Time

The present

Place

A house on the shore of West Lake in the village of Wang Zhuang, Hangzhou Province. Painting and calligraphy are arranged neatly on the wall closest to the lake. At stage left is a path through a rock garden; at stage right is an entry hall into the room. A tray of food that has not been cleared sits on a table in the room. The curtain rises on a stage that is cloaked in sorrowful darkness. Everything is still except for the gauze curtains which billow gently in the soft wind. Tiny moonbeams can be seen on the lake. The only sound is the soft pattering of raindrops. Presently an
old SERVANT enters, carrying a candle in his right hand and holding up a tea tray in his left. He leads MENG-MEI and his LITTLE BROTHER onto the stage.

SERVANT

Careful, both of you, don't fall. This slate floor is very slippery.

MENG'S BROTHER

Ai-ya, I almost fell down just now. Hey, are there any snakes in this grass, it's awfully deep.

SERVANT

Snakes? No, no, no snakes, but just don't stamp your feet. It's been raining for a few days, and the water is pretty deep. . . . Alright, here's the room. Let me open the door. . . . You see, everything is all ready. You two can rest a bit and then get to sleep early.

MENG-MEI

Ah, sir, your room here is excellent. Why don't you rent it to us? It's hard to find a place so beautiful and peaceful. How about renting it to us for, say, six months?

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1The ambiguity with which Tian refers to entrances and exits (both in stage directions and dialogue) might lead to some confusion in staging. Here he indicates a stage right door leading to an "entry hall." The characters, however, mention walking through deep water and grass as they enter. They cannot make that entrance from stage left, though, because, as the Servant claims later in the play, the door to the rock garden "was sealed up a long, long time ago." Thus, the characters must enter from stage right via an "entry hall" that is likely to be some kind of outdoor covered walkway rather than an interior foyer. The stage left door to the rock garden will present problems of its own as the play progresses. Although Tian does not point out its existence in this set of stage directions, mentioning only a path that leads through the rock garden, nevertheless, the action of the play necessarily calls for a doorway to lead from the room to the rock garden (see 6n. for a brief discussion of the stage left entrance).
SERVANT

Oh no, if I did that and the old master found out, I would be sorely punished. And if my wife were to know of it, I'd be finished for sure.

MENG-MEI

But why? You didn't say anyone lived in this room, did you?

SERVANT

No, no one lives here, but I cannot rent the room to anyone. Last year at about this time, another person asked more than once about renting it. I was willing, but when I told my wife about it afterwards, she disagreed furiously and said she would tell the old master. Now today, first comes my neighbor, Mr. Shen, with the same request, and then you two come dragging in. And without even so much as bringing any bedding! Oh well, since it's so rainy I don't think that letting you two stay here and use the room overnight as a rest stop will be such a big deal. Alright, you two, hurry up and go to sleep. Tomorrow get up early, and don't let my wife find out you were here. She's off seeing relatives, but she'll return shortly. By tomorrow I'll have thought of something for you. Maybe I can rent the front room to you, that one's not so important.

MENG'S BROTHER

Elder Brother, I think this room is better.

MENG-MEI

You're right. Sir, I'd still like you to rent this room to us.

SERVANT

No, just let my wife find out about it tomorrow, and you can't begin to know what'll go on.

MENG'S BROTHER

Ha, ha, such an old man, and you're still scared of your wife?

SERVANT

I'm not scared of her, I just think she'll nag me. (Evasively.) Alright, you two get relaxed and then go to sleep. And don't forget to blow out the candle. (He starts
to leave but turns back again and eyes the two up and down.) You're two men, it's really nothing.

MENG-MEI

Two men, what?

SERVANT

Oh, it's nothing, nothing. . . . (He makes as though to leave again but turns around once more. In a low voice.) If you hear any sounds in the night, don't be frightened . . .

MENG-MEI

What, are you saying that thieves might break in?

SERVANT

No, no, no thieves . . .

MENG-MEI

Well then, could there be ghosts?

MENG'S BROTHER

My big brother has lived overseas; he's not scared of anything.

SERVANT

Ah, Mr. Yang has returned from abroad. I've heard that foreigners aren't afraid of ghosts. Well sir, surely you're not afraid of ghosts either, but what about the little gentleman, eh?

MENG'S BROTHER

Me? Uh, I've been to school, so I'm not afraid, either.

SERVANT

Well then, since nothing can scare you two, let me sit down for a second, and I'll tell you. Sir, I'll tell it to you straight: in this room there is . . . Ai-ya! Amidha Buddha!

\[2\] An expression akin to the Western, "Heaven protect us!"
MENG-MEI
There is what?

SERVANT
A ghost!

MENG'S BROTHER
(Drawing close to his elder brother.)
Is it a big-headed ghost? Or just a little-headed one?

MENG-MEI
(With a small smile, to cover up his brother's question.)
Is it male or female?

SERVANT
Female.

MENG-MEI
Is it old? Young?

SERVANT
It's young.

MENG-MEI
Well, did she die of an illness? How did she die?

SERVANT
She committed suicide.

MENG-MEI
Why?

SERVANT
Because of a marriage.

MENG-MEI
(With a curious, small smile.)
Oh, oh. (To himself.) A young girl killing herself because of marriage problems . . . perhaps this girl was beautiful, oh, oh, a beautiful girl perishes, and afterwards her soul
inhabits the shores of the lake in her village. I mustn't lose grip of that in the disintegrating mental stage I'm now in; it will make for a fascinating poem . . . (A bitter association of ideas causes him to cry out suddenly, and he seems utterly dejected.) Ah, Bai-wei!

SERVANT

No sir, her name wasn't Bai-wei. She was called Su-ping.

MENG-MEI

Oh, Su-ping. This is a fascinating affair, I'd really like to know more about it. Sir, you must give me all the details. . . . Uh-ya, did you prepare these dishes for us? Why is there only one pair of chopsticks?

SERVANT

(Confused, he doesn't know how to respond.)

Uh, haven't you eaten yet? When my wife comes home, I'll tell her to prepare something for you. This food was not prepared for the two of you.

MENG'S BROTHER

Who is it for?

SERVANT

Our young mistress.

MENG-MEI

But you just said no one lived in this room!

SERVANT

Our young mistress used to live here.

MENG-MEI AND MENG'S BROTHER

(Simultaneously.)

And now?

SERVANT

Now? Now she still lives in this room.

MENG-MEI

Well then, where will she go now?
SERVANT

Now? She is dead.

MENG-MEI

But that's not the young lady you were talking about just now, is it? The one you just said killed herself?

SERVANT

Sure it is!

MENG'S BROTHER
(To the OLD SERVANT).

Old sir, how did your young mistress kill herself?

SERVANT

I see that I should probably wait till tomorrow to talk more about it.

MENG-MEI
(Referring to his BROTHER.)

Oh, don't pay any attention to him, go ahead.

SERVANT

Well then, I'll tell you very simply. It all happened about three years ago. Our old master had no sons, only this one daughter. He loved that girl as much as a father can love, but our young mistress's temper was also as odd as a temper could be. At the time, she and the old gentleman had gone to live in Beijing together, where she was studying at the university. It was then that a certain young man (whose name I don't know) fell in love with her. He mentioned the possibility of a match between them to her father. Our master and the young man's father were good friends, and both men felt that a marriage uniting the households would be extremely beneficial. He wanted to betroth the young lady to the youth, but she was strangely unwilling.

MENG-MEI

Why?
SERVANT

That's just how it was. I heard he was an extremely fine young fellow, so I don't understand why the young lady was unwilling, either.

MENG-MEI

She probably had another lover.

SERVANT

That's what it was. I remember hearing my wife say that the young lady had long since found another lover while she was in school in Beijing.

MENG-MEI

How could your wife have known that?

SERVANT

She had always taken care of the young mistress.

MENG-MEI

Did she know what kind of man your young lady was in love with?

SERVANT

It was said that he was some kind of a "poet."

MENG-MEI

Was he rich?

SERVANT

An old man like me doesn't know anything about poets, but I've heard that poets are always poor ... their pockets are full of everything but money.

MENG-MEI

Then why did your young mistress want to love him?

SERVANT

It was this very matter in which our lady's temper was so very strange. No matter how her father objected, she persisted in loving this poet desperately. Her father
became furious and brought the young girl back here to the south -- back to this bedroom where he simply locked her up and left her as if in a prison for three months. This very room was our young mistress's prison.

MENG-MEI

Ah! This was your lady's prison cell! (To himself.) I have often seen such tall buildings on lake sides and thought that to live in such places would be like living in the palace of an immortal. And here it was his daughter's jail cell.

SERVANT

How couldn't it be? While our mistress lived in this pretty prison my wife brought her food and tea every day, but she always refused to eat or drink and just watched as my wife cried. A few days before the old man had planned to marry her off, when my wife came again ... Sir, our young mistress was suddenly nowhere to be seen!

MENG'S BROTHER

Where did she go, then?

SERVANT

Listen to what I say -- after the young lady disappeared, we found a letter on the table.

MENG-MEI

What did it say?

SERVANT

She said her father loved her so much ... .

MENG-MEI

But how, considering what you just said, could your master still think he loved his daughter?

SERVANT

He loved her very much. I've never seen another father who so loved his daughter. Why, when our young mistress was seventeen or eighteen, the master still treated her as though she was seven or eight. Every night before he retired, he would tuck her into bed and straighten the bed curtains. Just because her father doted on her so, she
would continually contradict him, and so finally the old man just became too angry. The young lady's letter said she was grateful that her father loved her so much and besides, that she greatly loved him in return, but she also loved her own freedom. There was no way she could obey her father, and so it would be better for her if she killed herself.

MENG'S BROTHER

And then what happened?

SERVANT

Didn't I say that our master loved his daughter passionately? As soon as he read the letter he was seized with grief and remorse, and immediately he sent messengers everywhere to try and find out where his daughter had gone. Then finally, on the banks of the Qian-tang River, they found the young lady's fan, on which were written several lines of poetry. When our master received this fan he wept for days; he took her favorite clothing and jewelry and built her tomb at the foot of Gu Mountain and commanded us to preserve all of the things in this room. He even told my wife to sweep the room every day for the young lady, to make her bed, to bring food and tea, all just as though she was still alive. Every spring he used to come and stay in this room for a month or two, but ever since the young lady died, even the sight of a flower blossom or a small pebble causes tears to well up in his eyes. So for the past three years, ever since the first anniversary of the young lady's death, he hasn't come again. But still he constantly orders someone to come, or else we get letters that direct us to wait on the young lady.

MENG-MEI

Now that you've told me all this -- so your master still remembers your young lady and commands you to bring food to her as usual -- what could be frightening about that?

SERVANT

Ai-ya, sir, what could be frightening is that the food we bring -- well, sometimes the young lady eats it!

MENG-MEI

How can you be so sure?

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3 A river in Zhejiang Province.
SERVANT

How could it be anyone else? Bamboo shoots were her favorite dish. One day I forgot to make them for her. When I returned to get the dishes, she had slammed the plate down and smashed it into bits. That night my wife dreamt that our young lady was angry at her. And so we don't dare to come in here often. One morning when I had plucked up my courage to come in here and tidy up, I felt the covers on the bed, and they were still warm, as though someone had slept there!

MENG-MEI

Weren't you concerned that someone else might have been sleeping there?

SERVANT

Someone else? That would be something! See, there's a lake on one side of this room, and the other side juts up against a rock garden -- and the door to the rock garden was sealed up a long, long time ago.

MENG-MEI

Why was it sealed up?

SERVANT

I'll tell you, sir. One day my wife told me not to go into the rock garden anymore. She said that when she was in there, she saw the young lady from behind.

MENG-MEI

Perhaps your wife's eyesight isn't so good.

SERVANT

That's what I said, too, but not long after that, when the sun was setting behind Gu Mountain, and the evening wind was whispering through that willow tree outside the window, our neighbor, Lao Wang, said that he could just barely make out the young lady passing through the rock garden. After that, who would dare to go in there? We usually lock up the door to this place.

MENG'S BROTHER

 Couldn't it have been a cat?
SERVANT

A cat? There's not even a mouse hole, how could a cat get in there?

MENG'S BROTHER

Ai-ya, this is horrible, there's a ghost in this room, Elder Brother! Let's go and stay at an inn.

MENG-MEI

I hate staying at inns, they're too noisy and besides, it costs too much. I would much rather stay here instead.

SERVANT

Sir, if you like it here so much, then tomorrow night stay in the side room instead. If you remained in this room and something happened, I wouldn't be able to stand it.

MENG-MEI

But I love this room, and I'd really like to rent it for two or three months and write something here.

SERVANT

Did you write this? 4

MENG'S BROTHER

My Elder Brother wrote it.

SERVANT

My, it's so thick. You wrote all of this, sir?

MENG-MEI

Well, it's a novel, and there's some poetry in it, too.

SERVANT

Well sir, are you a poet, too? . . . That's excellent, our young lady likes poets best. I'm sure she couldn't harm you, sir. Well, that's just fine. I'll see you first thing tomorrow. You get to sleep early. (He goes to light the

4 The Servant is referring to Meng-mei's manuscript, which Tian has not mentioned up to this point.
candles, stops, and looks at MENG'S BROTHER.) Little Sir, I'm telling you, when you hear any sounds in the night, the best thing for you to do is take the blankets and cover your head. Don't lift up the covers even to peek, for just one look will frighten you.

MENG-MEI

Enough, enough, you go on to sleep.

SERVANT

Alright, I'll see you early tomorrow. You two be careful. If you hear anything moving around, you'd better call me.

MENG'S BROTHER

See you in the morning. (The OLD SERVANT exits.)

MENG-MEI

Yes, we'll see you in the morning. Ha, ha, this old man sees ghosts and spirits.

MENG'S BROTHER

Ah! (He seems to be weary and longing for sleep.)

MENG-MEI

Little Brother, you get to sleep right away now.

MENG'S BROTHER

I'm afraid of ghosts, you come and sleep with me.

MENG-MEI

Don't talk nonsense, get to sleep.

MENG'S BROTHER

And you, Elder Brother?

MENG-MEI

Me -- I'd like to work on an essay for awhile.
MENG'S BROTHER

You want to work on an essay! Every day I watch you write, and you never finish anything. Come to sleep now. . . . 
Ai-ye, I sleep better at Mama's house.

MENG-MEI

(Returns to sit; he sighs as a command to his brother to sleep as he sits down at the table and takes out a Western-style pen. He avails himself of the candlelight to continue writing his rough draft. Suddenly he thinks of what the OLD SERVANT has just said, and he sighs impulsively.)

A young girl, for the sake of a poet who has nothing -- this Su-ping's circumstances are so similar to Bai-wei's. If this wasn't Wang Zhuang Village, I would surely suspect her of being Bai-wei. (He continues writing but stops again.) Ai, a ghost? Modern science has shot down that sort of thing, but wouldn't it be wonderful if it could still be true -- even sometimes? This Su-ping is a restless ghost, but why can't Bai-wei be restless enough just to enter my dreams? (He writes.) Ah, Bai-wei! If I could see you again, even if I could only see your spirit again . . . (Again he writes.) But if there are truly ghosts in this world, if there are really spirits, would I be able to face her? Would I have the courage to see Bai-wei, who took life so seriously? Ah! I would be too frightened. (He covers his face and weeps with shame.)

MENG'S BROTHER

Elder Brother, are you crying again? Come to sleep, I'm afraid.

MENG-MEI

You sleep, I'll be there in a second. Don't be afraid of anything.

MENG'S BROTHER

Aren't you afraid?

MENG-MEI

I'm not afraid of anything!

MENG'S BROTHER

Then why did you say you'd be too frightened?
MENG-MEI

Don't talk, just go to sleep. . . . Ah, horrible, you may think that being young determines what you do, but the impact of what you do is not diminished just because of your youth. Everyone says that reproach from a dear, true friend is much more frightening than seeing a ghost.

MENG’S BROTHER
(Crying out in his sleep.)

Ai-ya, ghosts!

MENG-MEI

Sleep well, Little Brother, don't be afraid. (His BROTHER, asleep, does not answer him.) This child is fast asleep. How lucky he is to have only ghosts to fear. . . . It's stopped raining now, and the moonlight is shining. The lake must be beautiful right now. (He quotes.)

"Year after year in the bright moon-lit nights,
Two oars row through the soft waves together."

Ah! Bai-wei! Wasn't this the poem I gave to you when we visited Bei-hai Gardens together? Now I am at West Lake meeting the night once more, and in what world are you? (There is a sudden cool, refreshing breeze that brings with it the muffled sound of weeping.) Ai-ya, is there someone weeping at the lakeside at this hour? (Cocks his head.) It certainly sounds like someone crying. What a strange sound . . . (He exits in search of the sound.)

(A cool breeze blows the window curtains, and the cloth moves ever so slightly. The scene is melancholy and eerie. A pretty girl slowly enters from behind the screen at stage left. She notices the candle burning on the table; it startles her. She tiptoes softly to the side of the bed and calls out in a low voice.)

THE GIRL

Mama Wang?

(She does not seem to be very surprised when she does not receive an answer. She rises and is about to leave when she sees the manuscript on the table. Full of curiosity, she begins to turn the pages. When she sees that the manuscript is about her, her curiosity turns into happy surprise. As she reads, all kinds of memories are evoked. From time to time a small smile passes over her face, or she dances for joy, frowns sadly, or weeps. When she comes across
something that pleases her, she underlines it; if she finds
something with which she disagrees, she adds her own
comments in writing. She reads carefully until her sorrow
is fully aroused, and she can no longer control her bitter
grief. Sounds of crying escape from her.)

MENG'S BROTHER
(Waking up.)

Elder Brother, sleep. Why are you crying again? (When he
realizes that he is not getting an answer, he pulls aside
the bed curtains to see why and is shocked by what he sees.)
Ai-ya, who are you? You . . . (THE GIRL moves closer to him
without a word. Astonished, he gets off the bed and moves
around it to get away from her.) Who are you?

THE GIRL
(Moving around the bed after him.)

Don't be afraid! . . . Who are you?

MENG'S BROTHER

My surname is Yang, but who are you? Are you a ghost or a
person?

THE GIRL

Don't be frightened.

MENG'S BROTHER

Where did you come from?

THE GIRL

I came from this room.

MENG'S BROTHER

Is this room yours?

THE GIRL

It's the room where I live.

MENG'S BROTHER

Well then, are you the young girl the old servant told us
about, the one who killed herself?
THE GIRL
(With a small smile.)

Yes.

MENG'S BROTHER

Ai-ya, you're a ghost! Don't hurt me, I'm still so young.

THE GIRL

No, don't be afraid. I was joking; I'm the old man's relative.

MENG'S BROTHER

Are you really a person or are you a ghost? (He is hesitating.)

THE GIRL

Look, a ghost doesn't have a shadow. But I have a shadow, don't I? Grab my hand. Ghosts aren't supposed to be warm, but I'm warm, aren't I?

MENG'S BROTHER

Yes.

THE GIRL

Well then, you can believe that I am a person.

MENG'S BROTHER

But just having a shadow and being warm does not make you a person. (He considers this carefully.)

THE GIRL

Why don't you just have a look at me and don't think about whether I'm a person or a ghost. Just say if you like me.

MENG'S BROTHER

Yes, I like you.

THE GIRL

Well then, that's all that matters. Tell me, who did you come here with?
MENG'S BROTHER

My Elder Brother.

THE GIRL

So your Elder Brother brought you here. Did he just bring you here for fun?

MENG'S BROTHER

Yes, Elder Brother's heart was breaking, so Mama wanted me to come with him here to relax. He still thought it would be a good idea to come and work on some essays.

THE GIRL
(Pointing to the manuscript on the table.)

Did your Elder Brother write this?

MENG'S BROTHER

Yes.

THE GIRL

When did he begin writing it? Why hasn't he finished it yet?

MENG'S BROTHER

He's been working on it for three years, ever since his beloved girlfriend died.

THE GIRL

He's written that whole time?

MENG'S BROTHER

No, it's been three years since he began, but he's had to find money to support his family, so he can't spend the whole time writing. But when he writes, well, I don't know what he can be thinking of, because he's constantly crying.

THE GIRL

Oh. (Expressing sadness and satisfaction at the same time.) So the hardships and the dismal days of the past three years have all been worth it. How is his health now?
MENG'S BROTHER

Not too good. How can someone be healthy if he's crying all the time?

THE GIRL

So who takes care of him?

MENG'S BROTHER

My sister-in-law.

THE GIRL

How many elder brothers do you have?

MENG'S BROTHER

How many elder brothers do I have? Only one.

THE GIRL

So your Elder Brother is married?

MENG'S BROTHER

Yes.

THE GIRL

Gotten married! ... When did he get married?

MENG'S BROTHER

Not quite six months after his girlfriend died.

THE GIRL

Not quite six months? Why didn't he write that he was already married in this love story?

MENG'S BROTHER

I'm afraid it's because he's always remembering that girlfriend of his.

THE GIRL

If he remembered her, why was he so quick to get married?
MENG'S BROTHER

Probably because Papa and Mama were so anxious to have a
grandchild to hold in their arms. They badgered Elder
Brother about it every day until he finally got married.

THE GIRL

Does he have a child now?

MENG'S BROTHER

Oh yes, the most adorable, chubby, fair child.

THE GIRL

Ah, a chubby, fair child.

MENG'S BROTHER

Oh yes.

THE GIRL

What is your sister-in-law like?

MENG'S BROTHER

Sister-in-law is a really nice lady. She buys candy for me
a lot. But she and Elder Brother don't get along too well.

THE GIRL

Why?

MENG'S BROTHER

Because he's always thinking of that girl he loved so much,
and my Sister-in-law doesn't want him to. She says that
since he married her, he should love only her, and otherwise
he should go dig that dead girl up out of the ground and
marry her!

THE GIRL

Yes, she's right to complain.

MENG'S BROTHER

So the two of them argue a lot. Sometimes Elder Brother
worries so much he gets sick.
THE GIRL

Oh, his tuberculosis, is it any better?

MENG'S BROTHER

It's a little better than it was before. But that's strange, how could you know he has tuberculosis?

THE GIRL

Of course I know about it. Your brother and I used to be the best of friends.

MENG'S BROTHER

So then, you've come to find Elder Brother. That's wonderful! He was just here in this room working on an essay, but I think he's gone outside to gaze at the moonlight now. He loves to walk all by himself in the moonlight better than anything. He'll be back in a moment or two. You wait awhile. Just now that old servant was saying there was a ghost in this room, and I was so scared. But now that you're here, it's really alright. Stay here with me. My Elder Brother will be back soon.

THE GIRL

Alright, I'll stay with you. Your Elder Brother and I have been apart for several years, and I would like very much to see him again.

MENG'S BROTHER

Oh, that will be nice. Listen, he's coming back.

THE GIRL

How do you know?

MENG'S BROTHER

I hear his footsteps.

THE GIRL

Little Brother, you close the door quickly and let me fix my hair. Do you think he'll still recognize me?

MENG'S BROTHER

How could he not recognize such a good friend?
THE GIRL

No, the closer friends are, the easier it is not to recognize them. (She faces the mirror and fixes her hair; as if discovering and becoming conscious of something for the first time.) Have I become so thin and drawn? How is it I haven't felt it during these past three years?

MENG'S BROTHER

My brother has come back; I'm opening the door now.

THE GIRL

Wait, let me think for a moment ... Little Brother, I'd better not see him just yet. My shadow and warmth have just now vanished ... when he returns don't tell him I've come.

MENG'S BROTHER

(Tugging at her.)

No, aren't you his good friend? Why don't you want to see him?

THE GIRL

I've decided not to, don't pull on me.

(The sound of footsteps comes closer.)

MENG'S BROTHER

My brother has come back. Since you're so close to him, see him and tell him not to be so mournful.

THE GIRL

But I ... I ... don't want to see him. Don't hang on to me, good Little Brother.

MENG'S BROTHER

No, I won't let go, no matter what.

THE GIRL

You really won't let go?

MENG'S BROTHER

No.
THE GIRL

Do you know who I am?

MENG'S BROTHER

Who are you? You're related to that old servant who looks after the house, aren't you?

THE GIRL

No, I'll tell you the truth. I am the ghost of the girl who killed herself in this very room.

MENG'S BROTHER

Ai-ya, you're a ghost!

(He withdraws his hand nervously. THE GIRL blows out the candle, pulls her hand away, and escapes. MENG-MEI bursts through the doorway, embraces his BROTHER, relights the candle, and shakes his LITTLE BROTHER'S head.)

MENG-MEI

Little Brother, wake up now. What evil dream have you had?

MENG'S BROTHER

Elder Brother, Elder Brother.

MENG-MEI

Little Brother, I'm here now, what kind of dream was it?

MENG'S BROTHER

(Panting as he speaks.)

It wasn't a dream. I've just met a ghost, honestly!

MENG-MEI

Ha, ha, you've met a ghost? Did it have a big head? Or did it have a small head?

MENG'S BROTHER

Don't you laugh! Why didn't you tell me when you went out? I'm not going anywhere with you anymore.
MENG-MEI

What are you saying? Come on, what happened?

MENG'S BROTHER

After you left, I don't know how long it was, but I could hear someone crying as I slept.

MENG-MEI

Just now I heard someone crying, too, far, far away, so I ran to see who it was. I searched for a long time, but I couldn't even find a shadow.

MENG'S BROTHER

But as soon as I woke up, I saw someone sitting at the table. At first I thought it was you, but when I looked carefully I saw that it was a girl.

MENG-MEI

Did you ask her who she was?

MENG'S BROTHER

Yes, and she said she was the one from this room. Surely she must be that Su-ping who killed herself. I was scared to death. Then she said, "Don't be afraid, don't be afraid. I'm just joking with you." And then she said she was related to the old servant who looks after the house, but I didn't believe her. So she told me to look at her shadow, and she said ghosts don't have shadows. And she told me to feel her hands, a pair of warm hands. She said that if they were the hands of ghost, they would surely be cold. I saw that she did have a shadow and that her hands were warm. So I said that I wasn't afraid anymore, and I sat down and spoke with her. She asked me who I came here with. I said I came with my Elder Brother. And then she asked me, "Did your Elder Brother just bring you here for a vacation?" I said that you have been so depressed ever since your dearest love died and have cried so much and written so many novels and poetry. When she heard that, she seemed to be very sympathetic and asked me how your health was. I said, "How can someone who cries so often be in good health?" And she asked, "But who takes care of him?" and I said, "My sister-in-law." And then she asked me the most curious question.

MENG-MEI

What was that?
MENG'S BROTHER

She asked me how many elder brothers I had, if I had only one.

MENG-MEI

Yes?

MENG'S BROTHER

And then I told her I only had one. She asked me, very anxiously, "Well, has your brother gotten married?" I said you were. She said, "Ah . . . already married," and then asked me, "Why doesn't he mention his marriage in that novel over there?" Elder Brother, how come you don't mention being married in the novel?

MENG-MEI

And then what?

MENG'S BROTHER

Then I told her it was because my brother is always thinking of his girlfriend. Isn't that right?

MENG-MEI

Oh, and what did she say?

MENG'S BROTHER

She said if he was always thinking of her, why did he marry someone else so quickly?

MENG-MEI

Mmmmmm . . .

MENG'S BROTHER

I said that Papa and Mama were anxious for a grandson, so Elder Brother went along with their wishes.

MENG-MEI

. . . Ahhh . . .
MENG'S BROTHER

And then she asked me another question: "Do they have a grandson then?" I said, "I have a small, chubby, fair nephew." She listened and said, "Ah... he has had a son." And finally she asked if you still had tuberculosis or not. I said, "This is strange indeed, how do you know he has tuberculosis?" She said she was a good friend of yours. I said, "That's wonderful; my Elder Brother has probably gone to take a stroll in the moonlight, but he'll be back in just a moment." When she heard that, she seemed to be very happy. She said you and she hadn't seen each other for many years and that she would very much like to see you again. She asked me to close the door for a moment so she could fix her hair. When I heard you coming and went to open the door, she suddenly stopped me and told me not to, and she said, "A shadow always disappears. It's best if I don't see him." When I grabbed her hand to keep her from leaving she became hostile all of a sudden and said, "Do you know who I really am after all?" I asked her who she was, and she told me she was the ghost who had committed suicide in this room. When I heard that, I let go of her hand right away. She quickly blew out the candle and in a flash of light she was gone. And then you came in.

MENG-MEI

What are you saying? When did you make this up? Are you dreaming? (Shakes him.) Wake up! Wake up!

MENG'S BROTHER

I'm not dreaming. Can't you see my eyes are open?

MENG-MEI

If you're not sleeping, then go to sleep now.

MENG'S BROTHER

I'm not going to go to sleep. That ghost will be back to look for me in a moment.

MENG-MEI

(Urging his BROTHER to bed.)

Don't let your imagination run away with you; there are no such things as ghosts. (He sits down.)
MENG'S BROTHER
(In his sleep.)

My name is Yang. Who are you?

MENG-MEI

Sleep well now. Don't dream anymore.

MENG'S BROTHER

Ai-ya, she's coming!

MENG-MEI

Don't be afraid, my child. (He rises and crosses to his brother to comfort him.)

MENG'S BROTHER

Elder Brother, why aren't you asleep yet? Come to sleep right away. I'll tell Ma, I'll say you brought me here and didn't look after me.

MENG-MEI

Sleep well. I'll come right away. Just now, when I was walking in the moonlight, so many thoughts and feelings welled up in me. I can't sleep just yet because I must write them down first.

MENG'S BROTHER

Alright, but then you come to sleep right away.

MENG-MEI

It is now as sadly still as a graveyard -- even the sound of one's own breathing is frightening. (He sits at the table to work, turning to the front of the manuscript. He sees the marks written there.) Little Brother, I have told you not to dirty my manuscript. Why have you made these marks for me, why, you know nothing about my work! (His BROTHER continues to sleep soundly.) On the contrary, these markings make a lot of sense. Ai-ya! And here's some criticism! (He turns to the back of the manuscript where he discovers a handkerchief which he hastily examines. He gasps in surprise and runs to his LITTLE BROTHER's bed.) Little Brother, whose handkerchief is this? Little Brother!
MENG'S BROTHER
(He is sleeping heavily and murmurs indistinctly.)

My name is Yang, my name is Yang . . .

MENG-MEI

Hey, whose handkerchief is this?

MENG'S BROTHER
(Waking up.)

Handkerchief? I don't know. Probably Miss Su-ping's. When I woke up I saw her crying over your manuscript.

MENG-MEI

Where did she go?

MENG'S BROTHER

She pushed my hand away, blew out the light, and then I didn't see her anymore.

MENG-MEI

Ah! Bai-wei! (He runs wildly about the room. Suddenly the sound of a rifle shot is heard.)

MENG'S BROTHER

Where did that gunshot come from?

MENG-MEI

(He crosses quickly in the direction of the sound; from within the rock garden.)

Little Brother! Bring the light over here.

MENG'S BROTHER

What is it now?

(MENG'S BROTHER, holding the candle in both hands, advances, trembling. Then, with his LITTLE BROTHER holding the candle and leading the way, MENG-MEI appears, carrying BAI-WEI in his arms. MENG'S BROTHER pushes MENG to the sofa and assists him in laying the girl down.)

MENG-MEI

Bai-wei, Bai-wei.
BAI-WEI
(Moaning and raising up her eyes to look at him.)
Ah, Meng-mei, I -- I have finally come to see you.

MENG-MEI
Bai-wei, I have wept for you for three years.

BAI-WEI
And I, too, have waited for you for three years, like a fish
at the bottom of the sea, looking at the shafts of light
that pass through the water.

MENG-MEI
As I listened to the guardian of Wang Zhuang telling about
Miss Su-ping who lived in this room, I suspected it might be
you, but I only knew you to be called Bai-wei. Did they use
to call you "Su-ping?"

BAI-WEI
Ai, Su-ping -- Bai-wei, what does it matter? Either way,
they are both unlucky names.

(The OLD SERVANT hears the sounds of the voices and bustles
into the room, carrying a candle.)

SERVANT
What was that gunshot in the dead of night? Ai-ya, is this
the young mistress? Mistress, I've taken care of you for
three years! Do you still live? Thank Heaven and Earth!

BAI-WEI
Old Wang, there's no use in taking care of me anymore. Go
quickly and call your wife here.

MENG-MEI
Hurry and get a doctor!

BAI-WEI
It's useless to get a doctor. Call your wife; I have
something to tell her.
SERVANT

Where are those words coming from? I thought you'd killed yourself, and now I see you're still living. Since you are alive now, why do you want to do away with yourself once more?

MENG-MEI

You don't understand -- go quickly and bring a doctor.

SERVANT

Mr. Yang, do you know our young mistress?

MENG-MEI

Don't ask me that. Go, go quickly. (The OLD SERVANT begins to exit.)

SERVANT

I really don't understand. (Exits.)

BAI-WEI

I wrote you a long letter in this room. Did you receive it?

MENG-MEI

I received it . . .

BAI-WEI

Then why didn't you write back to me?

MENG-MEI

How could I not have written back to you? I immediately spent an entire night writing you a very long letter, telling you that no matter how much unjust treatment you had to suffer, you must wait for me . . . and I was suspicious as to why you hadn't written back . . .

BAI-WEI

Yes . . . naturally Papa received that letter . . . but then I wrote you so many letters. Why didn't you answer any?
MENG-MEI

Because I started thinking about advancing my position, so I went to Paris. I didn't have the money for my boarding house rent in Beijing, so when I left I couldn't give the landlord there my forwarding address. How could they have forwarded your letters to Paris?

BAI-WEI

How long were you in Paris?

MENG-MEI

Not quite a year.

BAI-WEI

Why did you return before a year was up?

MENG-MEI

Because I had no money. I relied on foreign work, and there was no work to be had. And so I had to depend upon sending poetry and manuscripts back here for the publishing house to sell. But no one wanted to buy anything, so it was best for me to return. As soon as I came back I heard you had died.

BAI-WEI

For the past three years everyone except Mama Wang thought I was dead. Actually, I had died twice previously. The first
time was in front of the President's office. Do you still remember what happened as a result of us presenting our demands? How many of our comrades at school were sacrificed? Me and Su Yun and Jiang Wei-xia stood side by side, and both of them died under the warlord's bullets. Wasn't I the only one still alive and only by chance? The second time was three years ago: I couldn't bear Papa's oppression anymore and besides that, I hadn't received any news of you. I was furious, so I ran out of the house as far as the Qian-tang River and jumped in. Unluckily I was saved by a fisherman. While I was staying at the fisherman's house I heard that Papa was searching for me and had found my lost fan, that he left this room in my memory, and that he'd had a grave built for me on the shore of the lake. I decided to conceal my identity and came by myself, for the first time since I'd left, to Gu Mountain where I watched the sun as it set over the lake. As I sat and meditated upon my own grave, it seemed to me that I could see the shadow of our neighbor, Feng Xiao-qing. When evening fell, Mama Wang prepared a new and different way for

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5 A description of a student demonstration would have been familiar to Chinese audiences in the wake of the May Fourth Movement of 1919, in which students and workers demonstrated against the Beijing government's economic and territorial concessions to Japan at the Paris Conference, and the May Thirtieth Incident of 1925, which resulted in massive student and worker uprisings as the result of a Japanese foreman's fatal shooting of a Shanghaiese cotton mill worker. See Chan and Etzhold, China in the 1920's (New York and London: New Viewpoints, 1976), pp. 101-4, for a discussion of the impact of those two events on student radicalism. C. T. Hsia devotes considerable space to the response of the Chinese literary world to both the May Fourth Movement and the May Thirtieth Incident in A History of Modern Chinese Fiction (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), as well as identifying other writers of the period who drew upon those occurrences as material for their work (see especially, pp. 64-5, pp. 142-3, pp. 148-53, p. 166, and p. 244).
me to return to my room. \(^6\) I waited until after everyone had
gone to bed to go in. I read a book I'd loved as a child
for a little while, rouged and powdered my face with some
makeup I'd often worn, and then briefly looked through the
letters you sent me -- ai -- Meng-mei, I am so tired of this
life. I have waited so long to die, why should I pass yet
another three years as a wandering soul? Even though I
never received your letters, I never stopped thinking about
when I might see your face again. I always looked for your
name in the newspapers, why is it I couldn't find it?

MENG-MEI

Why would you find the name of a destitute poet in the
newspapers? Only if he'd committed a crime.

BAI-WEI

I always lived with the hope of finding you, so I was always
able to bear the pain, and still I was unwilling to leave
this world.

MENG-MEI

Bai-wei! When I heard that you'd died I also became a
living corpse. Even though it wasn't very long since I'd
known about your death, I got married and had a child, but
it didn't seem at all that it was me doing those things
... in these three years I have dreamed of seeing you
every minute. Just before, when that old servant said there
was a ghost living in this room, I thought that if there
were such a thing as ghosts, I at least might see your
spirit ... now we have, just by chance, gotten an
opportunity to actually live out all we'd hoped for for the
past three years, and why do you want to die again? Bai-
wei, have you lost hope in me?

\(^6\) Some of the inconsistencies in the play's logic should
be apparent at this point. The servants evidently use the
stage right door for daily comings and goings because the
old man believes the door to the rock garden at stage left
to be sealed. Both Meng-mei and Bai-wei, however, appear to
have easy access to and from the stage left area. Because
Tian neglected to address the questions raised by his lapses
his logic, modern attempts to answer them (e.g., Did Mama
Wang secretly provide Bai-wei with a key to open the
supposedly sealed door at stage left?) can only be
speculative and must be left to the discretion of the
director and actors of a contemporary production of the
play.
BAI-WEI

No, no, I haven't lost hope in you; I am still very fulfilled. Did you write that novel for me?

MENG-MEI

Bai-wei, those are the tears I have cried for you.

BAI-WEI

It is a most precious diary of your feelings. A girl gives her loved one deep inspiration and helps him to contribute to the world of literature. And so the girl has not wasted her life. And for a girl, in the same lifetime, to see her loved one express such true love even after her supposed death -- is is more than enough fulfillment.

MENG-MEI

Then why do you want to hurt the one who loves you so by reopening his wounds afresh?

BAI-WEI

Meng-mei, this -- this is what I mean: "A dead person cannot be resurrected." If you discover your loved one who is three years dead and, just by chance, you have the opportunity to reestablish a life together, surely the vain tears you have spilt for three years are laughable. If that is so, how can your precious diary have the right ending?

MENG-MEI

Bai-wei . . . If you sacrificed your life only for my art, then I want to negate my art completely! Then I have written for three years, and still haven't finished this novel of mine, and I want to tear it to shreds before your eyes.

BAI-WEI

(Quickly stops him.)

No, no, Meng-mei, you cannot tear it up. If there was ever a time when you truly loved me, you must protect it. Our love has been so very bitter, Meng-mei -- this is the memorial to that love. Life is short, but art is forever. If, by turning your tears into weapons, you want to defeat the deep sorrow of our separation in life and parting in death, complete this solemn memorial. And though I die, I love forever with you. How can I hear Little Brother there speak of your virtuous wife and your darling child just
moments ago? And I like a wisp of gossamer that only fondly
remembers the world of people. Must I return there to
destroy a family who has such good fortune? and so I . . .
(In agony, she becomes feeble.) Ah, Meng-mei, I cannot bear
it, I must leave you forever. (She loses consciousness.)

MENG-MEI

Bai-wei, Bai-wei, you are wrong. This sacrifice is wrong,
completely wrong! You think that this is loving me? I know
that I've made mistakes, too. I thought no harm could come
of my heart belonging to one world and my body belonging to
another. But my body and my heart made excuses to each
other, deceived each other. I thought I could make peace
with myself this way, but how was I to know that this
deception would result in my being a person who was neither
alive nor dead. But I understand now. We must be brave and
unite our lives into one and go on living together. You
cannot die. -- Ah, a doctor! A doctor!

SERVANT

(Hastily enters.)

The doctor will be right here.

MENG-MEI

Bai-wei? Bai-wei?

SERVANT

Ai-ya, young mistress, young mistress!

BAI-WEI

(As though awakening from a dream.)

Ah, Old Wang, Mama Wang?

SERVANT

Mistress, my wife has gone out and hasn't returned yet.

BAI-WEI

Ah, my adopted mother, once more I cannot see you. (Looking
at the SERVANT.) Thank your wife for the years she looked
after me. I have no way to repay her. Ask her not to tell
the master that I've killed myself for a second time. Just
tell her to say that her adopted daughter has died.
SERVANT

Ah, young mistress, how can you say this? Please don't die. We are willing to take care of you your whole life.

BAI-WEI

(Holding the brothers' hands.)

Meng-mei... help your clever little brother... love your wife and child... finish your novel...

MENG'S BROTHER

Elder Brother, her hand is already cold.

MENG-MEI

What? (Grasps BAI-WEI's hand.) Bai-wei... no matter whether the place to which you are going is heaven or hell... or an absolutely lonely place... even nothingness... please wait for me there... my tuberculosis will soon kill me. When I have spit up all of my blood, I will come.

SERVANT

Young mistress... young mistress... sir, come quickly... what can we do?

MENG-MEI

(Standing close to his brother.)

Little Brother, shake me, am I dreaming? Quickly, shake me!

SERVANT

Ah, young mistress.

MENG'S BROTHER

Elder Brother... Elder Brother... (Holds his brother up.) Elder Brother...

MENG-MEI

Shake me... Little Brother... ah, Bai-wei, Bai-wei, Bai-wei! (Trembling, he crosses to BAI-WEI, who is already dead, and he lies down next to her.)
MENG'S BROTHER

Ah, Elder Brother, Elder Brother!

--CURTAIN--
CHAPTER EIGHT

Preface: "Echoes of an Ancient Pond"

"Echoes of an Ancient Pond," which Tian Han called a "lyric one-act drama,"\(^1\) was first performed by the South China Society in December of 1928 in Shanghai and again in January of 1929 in Nanjing. The production starred the actor Wan Lei-tian, who had previously portrayed Meng-mei in "Tragedy on a Lake," in the role of the Poet. Tian seems to have originally conceived the play entirely as a monologue for one actor; he does not mention the character of the Mother in his synopsis of the plot nor does he record the name of an actress who might have taken that role.\(^2\)

The play was the only one of those included on the Society's first programme to be remounted for the Society's second season, which ran from July 7 through 12, 1929, in Nanjing and continued in Shanghai from July 29 through August 5. Tian apparently revised the play for this run, adding music, which was contributed by a composer named Wu Bai-chao, and the role of the Mother, which was taken by

\(^1\)Tian Han, "Nan-guo-shi-shi-lue," in Tian Han, et al., p. 130.

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 130-1.
Kang Bai-shan. The actor Chen Ning-qiu replaced Wan Lei-tian in the role of the Poet. Although Tian offers no explanation for the change in casting, the cast lists for the other plays included in the 1929 repertoire reveal that Wan Lei-tian had been cast in leading roles in *Dancing Flames*, a three-act socialist drama by Tian, and in Tian's translation of Oscar Wilde's *Salome*. Wan's roles in those full-length dramas conceivably demanded more of him than a role in a one-act play, and thus the role of the Poet in "Echoes" was probably recast in order to allow him the freedom to concentrate on his new roles.

Tang Shu-ming was apparently never cast in a production of "Echoes of an Ancient Pond," but in her records of the South China Society she recalls that the play was performed by the Society more than once in Shanghai at the Jin-mo Theatre Association. According to Tang, the performances at the Association were attended by audiences comprised primarily of university students who were devoted supporters of Tian Han and the South China Society. The only other record of a performance of "Echoes" comes from a two-day tour that the Society made to Wu-xi, a county in Jiangsu Province in the vicinity of the city of Suzhou. On that jaunt, which presumably took place after the second Shanghai run closed in August of 1929, the play was performed on a

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programme that included "Return South" and "Shivers."
According to Tian, the audiences responded enthusiastically to the performances.  

"Echoes of an Ancient Pond" is the most uncharacteristically structured of Tian Han's early dramas. Tian typically establishes exposition by means of a question and answer narrative scene, as, for example, in "A Night in a Cafe," in which Bai and Feng relay the necessary information to the audience, or in "Tragedy on a Lake," in which the initial scene between the Old Servant, Meng-mei, and his Brother fulfills a similar function. During the course of the first scene the conflict which, involves a character who is absent, is introduced. The exposition scene is then followed by the appearance of the absent character who provides, often by means of narration, the resolution to the conflict that was previously established during the exposition. Finally, the protagonists enact their responses to that resolution, usually in the form of a brief denouement, as in the beating scene in "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," or Elder Sister's transformation scene in "Before Lunch."

In "Echoes of an Ancient Pond" Tian opts for a somewhat different structural configuration, departing from his habitual attempts to construct well made melodramas.

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4 Tian Han, "Nan-guo-shi shi-lue," in Tian Han, et al., p. 137.
Instead of a series of dialogue scenes, "Echoes" consists of a lengthy monologue delivered by the Poet to Mei-ying that comprises virtually half of the play. Throughout his speech the Poet assumes that his lover is lying in her bed and listening to his confessions, but she has actually committed suicide by drowning ten days previous to his return from a journey to the south of China. The brief scene between the Poet and his Mother that follows resembles a typical Tian Han play in attenuated form: the Mother explains, by means of a narrative question and answer scene, what has transpired in the Poet's absence, and the Poet, driven to a frenzy by the news of Mei-ying's death, takes his own life in exactly the same manner in which Mei-ying took hers.

Unlike Tian's previous plays, "Echoes" has no clearly identifiable villain, either in the form of human characters, such as Li Gan-qing in "Cafe" or Wei Fu-sheng in "Tiger," or socio-political injustices, as in "Before Lunch" or "Riverside Village." The heroes and heroines who are destroyed in their attempts to challenge the patriarchal Chinese family system are absent from this play. Instead Tian objectively depicts an emotionally explosive situation and remains distant from it, rather than passing judgment on the characters and the action and thereby manipulating the audience's emotions. Thus, "Echoes of an Ancient Pond," although as brief in length as "View of a Riverside Village," which was actually a mere plot outline, is
significant, for it represents a conscious attempt on the part of the playwright to experiment with the limitations of dramatic form.

In "Echoes," Tian opts to use narrative technique almost completely to the exclusion of enactment, even more so than he does in previous or subsequent works. Until the Poet, maddened by thoughts of his failure to keep Mei-ying safely quarantined in the "ivory tower"\(^5\) he created for her, reads her final words, the play is entirely comprised of narration; the Poet narrates the stories of his travels to Mei-ying, and his Mother narrates that which transpired in the mansion in the Poet's absence. The resultant effect is that the audience must experience the play second-hand, in the past tense. Although Tian might have opted to dramatize the Poet's and Mei-ying's relationship in the process of its disintegration rather than demonstrating its ultimate outcome, in order to accomplish that he would have been forced to rearrange completely the materials of his play. In all likelihood his one-act play structure would had to have been abandoned in favor of a longer dramatic form wherein an earlier point of attack would have permitted the inclusion of more incidents.

Thus Tian, whose full-length plays Death of a Famous Actor (1928) and Dancing Flames (1929) indicate that he was...

\(^5\) Tian Han, "Gu-dan de sheng-yin" ("Echoes of an Ancient Pond"), in Tian Han chuang-zuo xuan (Selected Plays of Tian Han) (Shanghai: Fang-gu shu-dian, 1936), p. 74.
at least interested in utilizing the full-length dramatic form to structure materials of greater length and magnitude even at this early point in his career, must have deliberately chosen the attenuated form of the one-act play for "Echoes," as well as the extensive use of narration, rather than as a result of dramatic incompetence or an inability to utilize enactment effectively. If the play is interpreted as depicting the outcome of a symbolic battle of wills between the two protagonists, albeit one of whom is entirely absent throughout the play, rather than criticized as a failed example of Tian's adaptation of Western-style melodramatic structure, an interesting configuration emerges. It seems that Tian may have self-consciously chosen narration as a means of focusing the audience's concentration on the dichotomy between the Poet's and Mei-ying's experiences of life. "Echoes of an Ancient Pond" additionally demonstrates Tian's interest, if not his skill, in moving away from the straightforward realism and semi-political concerns of his earlier dramas and in experimenting with symbolism and poetry to make a dramatic statement.

The action of the play depicts the outcome of a psycho-sexual contest between the Poet and Mei-ying which Tian effectively reinforces visually. When the curtain rises the tension in their relationship is made immediately apparent by the queer mixture of Chinese furniture pieces with a
Western piano and the state of disarray in which the bedroom has been left. At upstage center, one of the strongest focal points on the stage, a balcony leads to a vista with "trees that are so thick and lush that they obscure the sky and sun."\(^6\) It is toward that beckoning tangle of luxuriant growth that Mei-ying has been lured in her lover's absence.

The Poet represents a masculine attempt to force nature to bend to his will. As a means of taming what he perceives to be Mei-ying's wild nature, he schemes to protect her from the temptations of the material world by sequestering the girl, a former actress whom he deeply loves, in his mansion high in the mountains. By holding her prisoner in a sterile environment free of the contaminations threatened by the physical world, he foolishly believes he can control her desires and longings, transforming her into a woman scholar of pure conscience whose eyes are blind to other men. His choice of gifts for Mei-ying, collected during his sojourn to the South, reveal his limited understanding and lack of real control, however, for he has brought the girl material gifts, symbols of the very world he wants her to eschew: a simple offering, a scarf, rapidly progresses to silk slippers, a hat, silk stockings, and face cream, all symbols of vanity. The Poet yearns for Mei-ying to refrain from wearing the Western high-heeled shoes that she prefers, even in imprisonment, yet he repeatedly urges her rise from her

\(^6\)Ibid., p. 59.
bed and adorn herself as he would have her do. He continues to unpack, telling the tales that accompany each of his gifts which become more and more fantastic as he presents a rare perfume, lichee fruits, and finally, the pearls that supposedly came from the tears of a female shark, weeping over the loss of her mate. The Poet may be telling the truth about his acquisitions; it is just as likely, however, that he is fabricating, embellishing reality with artificial constructs of his own choosing so as to impress Mei-ying and charm her into doing his will.

But the Poet ultimately fails, as he must, for he is not the "master" he supposes himself to be, and he cannot force Mei-ying, who represents the feminine approach to nature, to be his "slave," as he wishes. Neither Mei-ying nor Nature can be controlled or manipulated, nor can either be bought with fantasies. Locked in her chamber and denied the freedom to pursue the desires that are natural to her, Mei-ying begins to wither and suffocate. Her only salvation is Nature, with which she feels a deep affinity, and which she characterizes as being female like herself, reaching out "her great arms" to welcome her into the night. Over and over she is inexplicably drawn to her balcony where she hears voices calling her, urging her to escape her fetters by becoming one with the pond. Her final words, an ode

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7 Ibid., p. 61.
8 Ibid., p. 71.
written to the pond, are distinctly sexual in their imagery, calling up images of the pond as a great womb which gives rise to all fears and all desires. Mei-ying wonders what kind of sound the pond will emit when she "kisses" it as she enters. 9

The Poet's response to the triumph of Nature over his will is to "smash" the pond, 10 to destroy that which he cannot control. Although he is no match for its power, he uses violence as a means of attempting to bend it to his will. To him, the pond is not a mother-image, a symbol of the natural ebb and flow of life, but a competitive male who has wrongfully stolen his Mei-ying: "Ancient Pond, my enemy, have I seized her from the hands of so many men only to have you seize her from me?" 11 The Poet attempts to overpower the pond by attempting to break it, and in so doing, he loses himself, succumbing to the power of Nature.

In "Echoes of an Ancient Pond" Tian turns away from the realism of such earlier works as "A Night in a Cafe," "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," "Before Lunch," and "View of a Riverside Village," to further examine the nebulous world of unarticulated desires and motivations that he initially portrayed in "Tragedy on a Lake," and continued to explore in his next play, "Return South." The setting for the play

9Ibid., p. 73.
10Ibid., p. 74.
11Ibid.
is not a readily identifiable locale but a nameless mansion in a nameless chain of mountains. Rather than presenting the lamentable outcome of an easily discernible social problem such as class differences in marriage, a former favorite theme, Tian attempts to dramatize the result of a less clearly defined clash of wills, using it as a metaphor for a larger, more universal conflict. The potential success of the play, however, is diminished by those instances in which Tian reverts to old habits, including extraneous realistic details that are stylistically out of place in this otherwise romantic and impressionistic drama. The arbitrary insertion of realistic detail has an obtrusive rather than complementary effect because it introduces concerns that are never properly developed and most probably would be distracting had they been.

Such realistic inclusions of superfluous details are most readily apparent in the scene between the Poet and his Mother. Mother claims, for example, that the Poet's failure to send her money while he was away forced her to seek financial relief from her neighbors, the Changs, in order to arrange a proper burial for Mei-ying. When she enters she makes a point of explaining that she has just returned from visiting the Changs, whom she went to thank for helping her in her time of need. Although Tian is clearly attempting to justify her absence while the Poet gives his monologue, her explanation rings false; it has the sound of self-conscious
exposition. Mother also mentions that when the Poet first left on his journey he was accompanied by a friend, a person to whom the Poet himself never refers.

In other instances, Tian generalizes where he ought to be specific. When the Poet first enters he expresses pleasure over the type of book that Mei-ying appears to have been reading in his absence; he does not, however, comment on the exact nature of the book. Because the Poet confined Mei-ying in his tower for the express purpose of purifying herself by studying certain materials and because her book is the first thing he mentions before the audience hears any further information, the book's importance is not merely tangential to the action of the play and therefore requires explanation.

Subjecting the play to overly meticulous criticism, however, can result in overlooking its inherent dramatic and theatrical value. Although "Echoes of an Ancient Pond" clearly would have benefited from serious attempts at revision, it nevertheless is a landmark work. Viewed against Tian's career as a young playwright and the history of modern Chinese dramatic literature in general, his attempt to use characters and action such that they simultaneously have both literal and metaphorical meanings is unique. It is a technique that Tian attempted only once more, in his next play "Return South," before returning to the more immediate social concerns of Chinese family life in
"Shivers" and later to political issues during the nineteen-thirties. Because Chinese playwrights were to embrace romanticized socialist realism as their dominant, and ultimately official, style, "Echoes of an Ancient Pond" stands out as a curious aberration from the norm, as a fascinating and self-conscious experimentation with dramatic form, one which, sadly both for Tian Han and the course of modern Chinese dramatic literature, he abandoned too soon and too easily.
"Echoes of an Ancient Pond"

Cast of Characters

POET

HIS OLD MOTHER

Setting

A quiet, unadorned bedroom. The curtains around the bed are slightly parted, revealing an embroidered blanket and disordered bedclothes within. A pair of high-heeled shoes lies under the bed. The set should give the appearance of being the bedroom of a lovely girl who has not yet risen from her slumber. At the head of the bed is a small end table on which is a red lamp that is still burning and an opened Western-style book. At stage left is a glass-front bookcase and a piano. A messy heap of music scores lies on the piano. Offstage right leads to a staircase. Outside the up center window is a balcony which is, at the moment, hidden from view by a flowered curtain. The trees beyond are so thick and lush that they obscure the sky and the sun. Below the balcony is the ancient pond, the depth of which cannot be measured. The POET enters, carrying a walking stick and a leather trunk. As soon as he comes through the door, he calls out softly in a low voice, "Mei-ying! Mei-ying!" He continues looking at the lovely room. Quietly, as though not wanting to disturb or alarm someone, he puts his walking stick aside and sits on the small sofa. He looks all around the room and smiles, a small, satisfied smile.

POET

Only two months since I left, and she's already arranged this room so beautifully. (He sits down and notices the book lying open on the table.) I don't believe it -- she's finally begun reading, this child, and just look what kind of book she's begun to read. And to think I once believed that such a clever girl had no use for reading . . . This really makes me happy. (Looks at the bed.) Still not up at
this hour. No doubt she stayed up too late reading instead of getting to sleep. (Pleased with himself.) Ah-ha! I am triumphant! I have succeeded! I have saved her at last from the seductions of the physical world; I have taken a person who was wandering in a stupor and given her an awakened soul . . . (Pauses.) But I mustn't let her study too diligently. If she works too hard she'll fall ill. (Looks at the bed and calls softly.) Mei-ying! Mei-ying! Look how sweetly this child sleeps in a mansion like this -- so solitary, it's frightening. But she sleeps too peacefully to even have a bad dream. Mother's letter said she hadn't even come downstairs for two months. She really is a brave child after all, to mend her ways like that . . . (Pause. Notices the high-heeled silk shoes under bed, picks one up, and toys with it.) Look at this, she's still wearing these shoes! Ah, they're just tokens of the carefree life she no longer lives. (Holds the silk shoes high and allows his imagination to run wild.) Ah, shoes, what sinful blossoms are the legs and feet that walk in you! What a beautiful hell you can lure men into! I remember when I bought these shoes for her -- it was a winter evening. She stretched out her leg, barely covered with a black silk stocking, and she allowed me to slip the shoes on. As I slipped them on her feet, I felt something so strange in my heart. Why should a little pair of man-made, high-heeled shoes, from the moment she had them on her feet, transform themselves into demons that tempt men to enter such a magnificent hell? Ah, if I wasn't already the master of this house, I would have been your slave long ago, but now . . . (Pause.) you are my slave instead! (As he says this, he throws the shoes down onto the carpet; then, afraid of awakening the sleeper, he quickly picks them up and puts them back in their original place. The bed curtains remain as still as before.) Mei-ying! Mei-ying! Hmph, don't be such a mischief-maker, child. Who wouldn't know that this is just one of your old tricks, pretending to be deaf and dumb, pretending to be asleep when you're really awake? Remember last year when I brought all of us on that trip to the Yang-zi River country? We stayed at an inn on a mountain. The first night our performance exhausted us. Everyone slept till nine o'clock the next morning, but you still couldn't get up. But if we had gotten up one hour later, we would have missed our boat. When I tried to wake you, you seemed to be sleeping, but it turned out that you were just pretending, right? You waited until I was so worried that it was pitiful, and then finally you gave me a smack and jumped up, saying, "Let's go! We said we were getting up, so get up!" You really are such an adorable little idiot! Get up quickly now, look, the sun is about to sink behind the foot of the mountain. It's about to scorch the solitary pagoda on that mountain there. I instructed you to come here so you could study in peace; who told you
to come and sleep all the time? Get up, get up! See? I've returned after traveling so far away. I'm starving, my feet ache. Mother isn't home, and you won't get up. Who will look after me? Up, up! Otherwise I'll pull off the quilt. . . (The girl does not answer; the POET opens his leather trunk.) Get up quickly and look here: I bought lots of your favorite things. (He shows them, one by one.) This scarf is the latest style. You know the scarf that fool bought you when we were traveling in the Yang-zi region last year? Well, it's a very nice scarf, but nevertheless, it is wool, and since the weather's warmed up you'd better not wear it. And look, look at this black silk from India! I bought it for you to sew something to wear. Didn't you say you were wearing black and white clothes? So this'll be just right, won't it? And look what else: the most fashionable silk slippers, much better than the ones you were wearing before. And look at this hat, and silk stockings, and face cream, I ai-ya! And see? Newly published music scores! The songs in them have just been written by the most brilliant writers -- just during the past couple of months. Get up quickly now and play them. And here's some perfume. A new friend gave it to me, and you can only get it in southern China. He's a chemistry professor who researches perfumes. Why, his nose can distinguish among fifty or sixty different scents! He's even made countless dangerous trips by himself to the mountains in Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces to gather lots of the most bizarre flowers and grasses. He spent many years working on this perfume before he finally finished making it. According to him, this perfume can make men experience a kind of sacred intoxication. And if that isn't enough, as soon as a wanderer far from his home smells this aroma, it makes him think of his native countryside, so my friend calls it, "Remembrance of Home." Ah, Mei-ying, you must know, though, that I really do consider your spiritual life, too. Even though material happiness can't save you, still, I never meant to make my yellow nightingale so depressed that she wouldn't sing or cause my orchid to wither away and lose her fragrance. Hurry, get up and smell this perfume. Just don't start thinking of home or shouting about how homesick it makes you. But how is it you are a Northerner, after all? You have some characteristics that are distinctly Southern. Can you guess what they are? (The girl does not answer him) You can't guess? Silly child, in the letter you wrote me you pretended to be such a clever little wretch! I'm always telling you what it is: women, great scoundrels that you are, adore eating delicacies. Countless men have already searched for those dainties that you so love to eat until they dropped from fatigue. And

1 In English in the original text.
just to get those treats that a little wretch like you loves
I, too, have traveled far and wide, exhausting myself,
facing all kinds of obstacles until I finally arrived in
Lizhiwan to pluck some lichees for you with my own hands.
The scenery there is beautiful, and the lichees are
especially fine. Everyone can eat as many as they want --
for free! But you can't take any away with you or else you
must pay for them. I got special permission to bring these
back. Come quickly and taste some. (Fills a dish.) And
there's also something precious; when you see it you'll die
from happiness. See, it's in this box. Can you guess what
it is? (The girl does not answer.) Never mind, you needn't
guess. They're droplets of perfectly round, delicate,
shining pearls. Southerners love pearls best. When someone
gives birth to a body, they call him "Pearl Boy," and if
they have a girl, they call her "Pearl Maid." A man could
be tempted to ruin a country or even throw himself off a
building for one of those Southern beauties. See, they even
use "Pearl" in their names, so you know how precious pearls
are to them. But a clever one like you, no doubt you
suppose that these pearls are all fake. If they were real,
where would a poor poet like me get the money to buy them?
You don't know how wrong you are. You must realize that you
don't always need money to get valuable things in this
world. It is said that lots of glowing pearls used to come
from the South: black dragons held pearls in their teeth,
and ancient oysters gave birth to pearls that shone bright
like the moon, and there were countless strange pearls of
every kind and color. But the women so covered themselves
in the lustrous pearls that they provoked the anger of those
demons that especially loved to eat pearls. So year by year
the demons kept eating those Southern jewels until they were
all gone. Except for one solitary pearl, which was owned by
a merchant who guarded it as though it were his own life!
But who could know that a demon would sneak up behind him
and try to snatch his pearl away? But he wasn't willing to
let the demon seize it, so he quickly hurled this enormous
stone into the ocean, and there it turned into the ocean
pearls of today! The pearls I brought you weren't spit
forth by a black dragon nor were they born of an oyster. I
got them on a trip I took this time to an island in the
South Sea. There, just when I was leaving, I happened upon
some fishermen who had caught two sharks: a male and a
female. They had already killed the male, but I saved the
female. These pearls are the tears wept by that poor female
shark. Do you think money could buy them? You know, Mei-
ying, I really can't count this trip to the South Sea a

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2 In Guangdong Province in southeast China.

3 A small, sweet Chinese fruit.
happy one. The whole time I was feeling anxiety, anger, despair -- despair in women, despair in friendship -- even despair in humanity! And then I just couldn't forget my old mother's kindness. I couldn't forget your tiny, mysterious smile, or your voice, so like the tinkling of silver bells. I've thought so much about you in the past few months! I was afraid that while I was living so far away in such strange lands I would lose you and Mother in such a vast mansion so deep in the mountains. Someone like you, who could only remember past happiness, would feel so lonely here, and I hated not being able to return instantly so that I could comfort you. And at the same time I remembered what a clever little one you are, how well you understand that life is transient and art endures forever. There is no doubt that you took my words about serious study to heart. You are definitely striving for a more spiritual life, day by day. As soon as I remembered this place, my mind came to rest once more. I've waited for the time when I could return home to see my new Mei-yung living her new life! For the past few months my insides were tied in knots, but now everything will be resolved once and for all. Now I can see my Mei-yung. But Mei-yung, quickly now, set this weary traveler free with your mysterious smile and your silver-bell voice! (The girl still does not answer.) How can you be so hard-hearted? You little wretch, shall I really pull off your blankets? (With all his strength he pulls off the coverlet, only to find no one there.) Ai-ya! Mei-yung! Mei-yung! She's not downstairs, not in bed, not on the balcony . . . can it be that my Mei-yung has gone to Heaven?

MOTHER
(Entering.)

Ah, child, you have returned.

POET
(Rushes to her and embraces her.)

Ah, Mother.

MOTHER

How can you have been gone so long and only just now come home? It's been hard on me, worrying about you so.

POET

I could talk for a long time about-it, Mother, but tell me, where has Mei-yung gone?
MOTHER

Mei-ying?

POET

Yes . . . ?? (Pause.)

MOTHER

Ah, child, don't ask about her. You are your mother's child.

POET

Mother, how can you tell me not to ask about her? You gave me my life, Mother, but I have given that life to her.

MOTHER

Oh, child, she's not worthy of such a gift. The precious gift that you so lightly gave to her -- give it to your mother instead. Your life is too valuable for Mei-ying.

POET

Ah, she -- she's gone?

MOTHER

(After a pause.)

... mm ... she's gone.

POET

Gone???! (The old woman does not say anything.) Then why are her shoes still sitting in front of her bed, and why are her clothes still piled on top of the bed? Why is the lamp still burning there at the head of the bed? Why has a book been left sitting opened beneath the lamp?

MOTHER

When she left, this is just how she left everything. She was afraid that when you came back you would ask questions, so she didn't move anything.

POET

Ah! . . . Mother! When did she leave?
MOTHER
Almost ten days ago . . . child.

POET
Ten days? . . . (Pause.) How did she go? With someone or alone?

MOTHER
Alone.

POET
Did she say anything to you when she left?

MOTHER
Nothing. I didn't even know when she left; I was sleeping.

POET
So she left at night. Did she take anything with her?

MOTHER
Not a thing. She even left her shoes behind.

POET
Ah, Mei-ying! Have you gone after all? I've known all along that you would leave. But if you wanted to go, why did you come here and stay with me at all? Ah, I don't know what to think. I hate it that you left! Why didn't you leave completely? Why did you leave behind these red garments that lie here like poisonous blossoms? Why did you leave these black demons? And those books you hated reading -- and the rouge and powder you loved to wear! You know how they all burn my eyes, how they pierce my heart and soul. You evil thing, how you love to toy with me -- even though you are gone, you have no mercy for me, do you? Ah, what have I done for the past two months? I worked so hard to get all these things, and for whom? An Egyptian-style scarf, black silk from India, silk shoes from the South Sea, a red hat, silk stockings, face cream, extraordinary music scores, exotic Southern perfume, the same lichees that Yang
Yu-huan so loved to eat, pearls that came from a shark's tears... I labored to bring all of you here. But now she's gone, and you are lifeless. Mother, where do you think she's gone?

MOTHER  
(After a pause.)

Child, she's gone into the ancient pond.

POET

Into the ancient pond?

MOTHER

Yes. She threw herself off the balcony into the pond, and there she drowned!

POET

Is that true?

MOTHER

How could your mother deceive you? I've been miserable over it for days. I hadn't even received any money from you, so I was forced to ask friends to help out so I could bury her. In fact, I just returned from the Chang's; I went over there to thank them.

POET  
(Runs to the balcony and gazes out for a moment.)

Ah, Mei-ying!

MOTHER  
(Very quietly.)

Ever since you and your friend left, the house has been as quiet as a temple. Mei-ying really believed what you said about reading peacefully every day, but sometimes she would

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4 Chinese audiences would also know Yang Yu-huan (719-56 A.D.) as Yang Gui-fei, the favorite concubine of the Tang Dynasty Emperor Ming-huang (r. 712-56 A.D.), who was himself the founder of the first formal Chinese academy of music and dance. Their intense love affair inspired numerous writers, among them the Qing Dynasty dramatist Hong Shen, whose epic drama Palace of Eternal Life (ca. 1687) depicts their relationship on earth and in the hereafter.
get so depressed. And then I would hear her playing her piano. As soon as I heard those lonely sounds, I'd worry that she was making it worse for herself, and I would tell her to go out, enjoy life. She was never willing to -- she'd go back to reading her books instead. It seemed to me that the child had become too good. In such peace and quiet, I thought, she was turning into a very promising lady artist indeed. I was happy, not just for her, but for everybody. But child, you must know that girls are just girls, after all. It is a bad omen if they are too good. Secretly I worried that she couldn't bear it much longer. Sure enough, she waited a month for you, and when you still didn't come home, she began to read less often and spend more time playing the piano. Then even the sounds of the piano became softer and soon I could only hear her, sitting all alone on the balcony, singing.

POET

... oh ... ?

MOTHER

One night she was sitting up very late on the balcony, not sleeping, so I came upstairs to tell her to come inside and go to sleep. I was worried she might catch a chill and get sick. She said, "It's not important, Old One. If my health is all I have, then I have nothing." I said, "Child you should know that good health is something to be treasured." "What good is that?" she asked. I said, "Child, you study so hard, how can you say such things? You haven't gone over to my son's way of thinking that life is transient and only art does not decay, have you? If you don't cherish your health, how will you ever be able to use your brief life to complete art that won't decay?" She seemed distressed, and then she said, "Ah, Old One, you know that I am a girl who is used to drifting about: North, South, to the Yellow River, to the Yang-zi. Of course, I have left my mark on all those places, but I have not left my soul there. It's as if my soul is always looking toward a mountain beyond the mountain, water beyond the water, a world beyond the world. I haven't been in this world for very long, but my heart had prepared me long ago to go to another world. At first I wanted to believe his words and commit art to a place in my soul, but my soul told me that she could never get used to being confined, even in a palace of art. She never felt a moment's peace, she wanted to fly ..."

POET

Oh. Did she ever say where she wanted to fly to?
MOTHER

She never said. When she began to talk like this, I thought that surely this child, who had never so much as gone downstairs, had gotten so depressed that she was falling ill. When someone who is used to moving about like that is suddenly still, how could they not get sick? I said, "Then tomorrow I will go with you to town like we used to do and get away from whatever it is that's making you unhappy here." She said, "I'm not a little girl anymore, Old One. Don't worry yourself so. I'm not the least bit depressed here." I said, "The night is deep. You'd better come in and go to bed." She said, "No, just because I want to sit out here on the balcony doesn't mean I'm unhappy. Can't you see that Old One? Someone out there is reaching out her great arms toward me to grasp me. They are singing out there to welcome me!"

POET

Did you see "them" at that time yourself? Or hear "them?"

MOTHER

I couldn't see a thing, just the black shadows of those tree trunks by the pond. And I didn't hear any singing; it must have been the night breeze sifting through the leaves or the sound of the leaves as they floated to the pond.

POET

Ah, she was ill!

MOTHER

Yes, I thought so, too, right away. I touched her head, and sure enough, she had a fever. I dragged her inside quickly and helped her to bed so she could get some sleep. I tucked her in snugly, closed the bed curtains, and locked the window for her. Then I went back downstairs to go to sleep myself. The next day I asked a doctor to come have a look at her, and all he said was, "It's nothing. Just give her some ginger soup to help her sweat out her cold, and that should do just fine." But even after I had done that for three nights she was still out on the balcony, singing to herself as before. She'd sing for a moment and then stop for a moment. It was as if she were singing to a person. By the third night I couldn't bear it anymore, and I told her to come inside and sleep. She followed me inside obediently and locked the window herself. She turned on the lamp, opened her favorite book, wrote a little, and chit-chatted with me for awhile about this and that. Then she
undressed herself and climbed under her blankets while I arranged the bed curtains for her. Only then was I able to go downstairs with my heart resting easy. I had just closed my eyes for a second when I heard the sound of a splash in the pond. My heart pounded, and I raced upstairs to see what happened, child! Everything looked just as it does now, except the door was open, and Mei-ying was nowhere to be seen.

POET

(Grief-stricken and weeping.)

Mother, can it be that when Mei-ying died, she didn't leave a single word for me?

MOTHER

She didn't. (Suddenly remembers.) But here are the last words she wrote before she died. She wrote them before she went to sleep that night.

POET

(Snatches the pages from her and, after getting control of himself, reads aloud in a clear voice.)

Ancient pond,
An ancient pond, lying beneath my balcony!
An ancient pond, so deep, beyond measuring!
An ancient pond, that catches the shadows of the trees as they fall!
An ancient pond, reflecting the moonbeams so tranquilly!
An ancient pond, into which the leaves flutter!
An ancient pond, over which strange flowers dance!
Ancient Pond, you are concealing all my fears,
Ancient Pond, you are concealing all my desires,
Ancient Pond, you are a womb for a wanderer,
Ancient Pond, you are a wanderer's grave,
Ancient Pond, I want to hear what kind of sound you will make,
When I am kissing you.

Ah, now I know. (He walks out to the balcony.) Mei-ying, Mei-ying, I saved you from the temptations of the mortal world only for you to be tempted instead by an ancient pond. Women, are your lives but paths from one seduction to the next? Ancient pond, my enemy, have I seized her from the hands of so many men only to have you seize her from me? Can the crystal palace she saw in your depths be so much more meaningful than the ivory palace I created for her here? Most vicious ancient pond, I will revenge myself on you! I wonder what kind of sound you will make when I smash
you to bits? (As he speaks, he rises and runs toward the balcony. His OLD MOTHER flies after him and hangs on to her son who is about to fall off the balcony.)

MOTHER

Child! Child! Have you lost your mind? Are you mad? Hurry, hang on to the railing! Child, you must hold on! Can you forget your mother for Mei-ying?

POET

Ancient pond, vicious ancient pond!

MOTHER

Child, hang on to the railing! I don't have the strength! I only have you, my child! -- You are my life's blood -- if you die, I cannot live. You must grab on to the railing quickly now. Child -- have pity on me.

POET

(Continues to clench his fists and call out miserably.)

Ancient pond! Vicious ancient pond!

MOTHER

Child, can you really be this cruel? I -- I -- I cannot bear it another second. I spent my life's strength caring for you. How can you cast me off like this?

POET

Vicious pond, I will smash you to bits! (He jumps and the old woman, who can bear it no longer, releases him; he falls.)

MOTHER

(With a maddened cry.)

Oh! (After a moment we can only hear the splash, the sound of the POET as he "smashes the pond to bits." As the MOTHER hears the sound, she seems to arrive at an understanding. She spits forth a sound.) So. (She sits on the balcony, motionless. From within the pond there are no more sounds.)

--CURTAIN--
CHAPTER NINE

Preface: "Shivers"

The first season of the South China Society opened in Shanghai in December of 1928 with a repertoire that included "Echoes of an Ancient Pond," "Night Talk in Suzhou," "Tragedy on a Lake," and the full-length production of Death of a Famous Actor. When the company debuted in Nanjing in January of 1929 Tian added a new one-act play, "Shivers," to the programme. Tian is ambiguous in regard to his reasons for including the new drama only in the second round of performances in Nanjing; he makes no references to being unable to meet his production deadline in Shanghai, implying instead that it was only when the company arrived in Nanjing that he realized he could comfortably cast "Shivers" without overtaxing the actors who had been cast in those plays previously scheduled for production.¹

The cast for the original production of "Shivers" united two Society favorites. Tang Shu-ming, who had begun her training under Tian Han's tutelage at the South China Academy of Literature and Art, added the role of the Mother

¹Tian Han, "Nan-guo-shi-shi-lue," in Tian Han, et al., p. 132.
to her list of important credits in Society productions, including the Flower Seller in "Night Talk in Suzhou" and Meng-mei's Little Brother in "Tragedy on a Lake." The role of Elder Son was given to Zuo Ming, who was also cast as Bai-wei's Old Servant in "Tragedy on a Lake," and one of the art students in "Night Talk in Suzhou."

Chen Ning-giu, a Tian devotee since the days of the South China Academy, was cast in the small role of the Police Chief, his only role during the Society's first season; in July of 1929 when the Society opened its second season in Nanjing, Chen would be given larger roles, including the Poet in "Echoes of an Ancient Pond" and the Wanderer in "Return South." The plum role of Younger Son went to Zhang Hui-ling, an actor whose only other experience in Society productions was to be playing one of the art students in "Night Talk in Suzhou." During the Society's second season Zhang was featured as the Young Master in the full-length socialist drama Dancing Flames.

When the South China Society opened its second season in Nanjing six months later, "Shivers" was dropped from the company's repertoire. Tian unfortunately neglected to record the reasons behind his decisions regarding the composition of each of the Society's programmes.

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2 Tang Shu-ming, "Hui-yi Nan-guo," in Tian Han, et al., p. 139-40.

3 Tian did not record the names of the two actors who were given the silent roles of the policemen.
Apparently, however, Tian intended to present a more ambitious season as far as mounting full-length productions; "Echoes of an Ancient Pond" and "Return South" comprised the programme's only one-act offerings, along with two new full-length dramas: Dancing Flames and Tian's translation of Salome. Tian may have wanted to dazzle his audiences with his new full-length plays and felt that the limited size of his company necessitated something being struck from the programme. "Shivers," the shortest play in the company's repertoire, would have provided a likely candidate for elimination from the repertoire.

A production of "Shivers" was included on the programme, along with "Echoes of an Ancient Pond" and "Return South," when the South China Society made its brief tour to Wu-xi in Jiangnan Province in 1929. Although Tian was careful to note the warm responses of the audiences who saw his plays in Wu-xi, he regretfully did not record the names of any of the company members who went on that tour.

Of "Shivers" Tian Han simply wrote, "It is a play about the chilling reasons that drive a mentally disturbed young man to attempt to murder his mother and his ultimate transformation as he embarks on the road to a new life." The play is an indictment of the traditional Chinese family system, which was a recurring motive in Tian's dramas, one

4 Tian Han, "Nan-guo-shi-ling," p. 137.

5 Ibid., p. 132.
that he explored previously in "A Night in a Cafe," "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," and "Tragedy on a Lake." In "Shivers," however, Tian departs from his usual theme of the ill effects of the Chinese patriarchy upon romantic love for a new concern: the undeserved humiliation suffered by illegitimate offspring for whom the traditional family structure provides no rightful place. The Mother in "Shivers," tormented by her husband and her own guilty conscience, has recoiled from her youngest son and harbored the secret of his illegitimate birth, which has poisoned the entire family and driven the young man to the brink of madness. Younger Son, an emotional prisoner of the rigid familial system that peremptorily rejects him, lashes out by making an attempt on his Mother's life. He fails to kill her, but his desperate action causes her to understand the extent to which she has been responsible for crippling him. As a result of her realization, she reveals the secret to Younger Son and offers to die as atonement for her sins. Only when Younger Son absolves his Mother of guilt is he finally able to individuate and leave his decadent family as a psychologically whole person.

Although the materials upon which the action of "Shivers" is based have the potential to be shaped into a gripping account of familial guilt and responsibility, Tian diminishes the impact of those materials by creating causal relationships between actions and their outcomes in which
the magnitude of the consequences are disproportionately insufficient in relationship to their antecedents. The incident that establishes the foundation for subsequent action, Younger Son's act of matricide, is horrifying indeed. When it becomes apparent, however, that the outcome of the mad young man's attempt is to have accidentally stabbed the pet dog that was coincidentally sleeping with his Mother, the effect is risible rather than awe-inspiring.

Younger Son must commit an act of extreme violence in order to demonstrate the extent of his desperation. Ultimately, however, he awakens to the superficiality of his stepfather's and elder brothers' attitudes and acknowledges his Mother's courage in creating a child out of love rather than obligation. Thus, he realizes that the system of values against which he has rebelled is a false and inherently evil system. Tian therefore needed to keep the character of the Mother alive in order to arouse pathos rather than revulsion for Younger Son and to establish both Younger Son and Mother as victims of the same intolerant attitudes to human relationships. Practically speaking, the Mother's presence is also necessary so as to heal Younger Son by revealing the secret of his birth to him. Her revelation, in turn, effects Younger Son's absolution of her guilt. Nevertheless, by using the Mother's dog as a means of preventing Young Son from committing a heinous crime,
Tian neither solves the problem posed by his materials nor does he accomplish his dramatic purpose.

The problems created by the inappropriate relationships between antecedent and consequential action are further compounded by other structural flaws. As early as 1921 when he wrote "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," Tian began to demonstrate that he was capable of successfully integrating expository narration into dramatic action so that it assumed a semblance of real conversation rather than calling attention to itself as dramatic technique. He continued to develop that facet of his writing more recently in "Tragedy on a Lake" and "Echoes of an Ancient Pond." With its lengthy narrative sections that are arbitrarily pasted onto the action rather than growing naturally out of the plot, "Shivers" bears a greater structural resemblance to "Before Lunch" and "Night Talk in Suzhou" than to those works that immediately preceded it.

In "Shivers" Tian reverts to using narration instead of enactment whereby characters inform each other of events of which they ought logically to be previously cognizant, a characteristic the play shares with "Before Lunch." When the play begins the only information the audience is given is that Younger Son stabs an unidentified person who is concealed by the bed curtains; his motivations for committing the murder are not revealed until his elder brother ascertains the corpse's identity. At that juncture
in the action Elder Son gives his younger brother a convenient cue so that Younger Son has an opportunity to recite the long chain of incidents that impelled him to take his shocking action: "Who told you to be so discontent with your lot in life?" Younger Son explains his reasons for leaving school, discusses his realization that he would never receive inheritance money, and decries his Mother's deception of him. He goes on to describe his failed attempt to purchase books by stealing and pawning a pair of candlesticks and his Mother's subsequent interrogation that resulted in his hospitalization. Elder Son and Younger Son have, however, always lived in the same house. Although Younger Son's narrative is delivered under the guise of being recited in response to his brother's question, the older man would logically have already heard Younger Son's story; thus the speech is recited purely for the audience's benefit.

The play is also plagued by poor or complete lack of motivations, which renders much of the action self-conscious and contrived. Younger Son's transition from self-pitying neurotic to healthy, self-sufficient individual is too abrupt to be realistic, recalling Elder Sister's transformation in "Before Lunch," a character reversal which is similarly arbitrary. His Mother's transformation from

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repulsion to loving concern for her illegitimate son appears to be just as arbitrary. Tian has already established that the woman spent a lifetime rejecting Younger Son; the mere sight of a dead dog is hardly sufficient cause for her to soften her heart toward the boy.

Falling as it does between "Echoes of an Ancient Pond" and "Return South," "Shivers" represents a step backward in Tian's methodology. It is preceded by a play in which Tian tentatively experiments with traditional dramatic structure and symbolic action, and succeeded by a drama in which he began to pay careful attention to the dramatic values of poetic language. Though "Shivers" cannot be discounted for failing to break new dramatic ground, it nevertheless exhibits serious structural flaws that render it nearly ineffective as a work of drama.

It is easy to judge "Shivers" from a contemporary Western vantage point and wonder how an experienced man of the theatre like Tian Han could have mounted such a simplistic drama. In assessing the effectiveness of the play, however, the novelty of spoken drama to Chinese audiences in the nineteen-twenties must also be taken into account. The fact that the play was added almost as an afterthought to the Society's second season suggests that Tian may have been anxious to test his new drama on an audience. If his recollections are indeed to be trusted, the audience's warm response, even to a play as fragmentary
as "Shivers," should come as no surprise; Tian's following, already firmly established, was fiercely loyal. Having received the desired response to his play, Tian most likely became involved in other projects, particularly his later commitment to leftist drama, and simply neglected to revise "Shivers." While the play is structurally flawed, its subject matter is significant for it demonstrates Tian's continued interest in and sensitivity toward the plight of the young Chinese intellectual at the crossroads of the 'twenties, entangled in a web of conflicting values.
"Shivers"

Cast of Characters

MOTHER

YOUNGER SON

ELDER SON

POLICE CHIEF

TWO POLICEMEN

Time

The present

Place

Shanghai

Setting

A bedroom. MOTHER is lying on the bed. Her YOUNGER SON enters in a state of great excitement and locks the door behind him. He coughs a few times and, seeing no movement from the bed, is reassured that his MOTHER is fast asleep. Suddenly, without warning, he draws out a knife, runs to the bed, pulls the bed curtain aside, and thrusts in the knife. When he draws the knife out again, both it and his hand are covered with blood. He stares at his hand for a moment and then emits a miserable moan as he lets the bloody knife fall to the floor. He covers his face with his hands as sinks to the floor. Then a scheme to escape with some of the valuables in the room flashes through his mind. As he is about to make off with them, there is a sound of knocking on the door. In a panic and trembling, he throws the valuables
aside and is about to move the corpse but realizes that it is too late. He hastily straightens the bed curtains and places a pair of shoes in front of the bed. Then he plucks up his courage and opens the door. His ELDER BROTHER enters and notices that something about the bed looks different.

ELDER BROTHER

How come you had the door locked? You nervous or something?

YOUNGER BROTHER
(Stammering in spite of himself.)

It's -- it's nothing. Mama's been fast asleep.

ELDER
(Lowers his voice.)

What about my wife? Did she go to sleep?

YOUNGER
(Carelessly.)

Long ago.

ELDER
(With a smug laugh.)

Well, it won't be long before you have another sister-in-law.

YOUNGER

Who?

ELDER
(Sitting down and taking out a cigarette.)

Guess.

YOUNGER
(Nervously.)

I can't.
ELDER

You idiot, how could you not be able to guess? It's the girl who sings the ging-yi\footnote{The ging-yi roles in Beijing opera are the romantic female leading roles.} roles at the Tian-li Theatre, who else?

YOUNGER
(Carelessly.)

Oh.

ELDER

What do you mean, "Oh?"

YOUNGER

Oh, that's nice.

ELDER

Well, what do you think of her?

YOUNGER

She sings well.

ELDER

Who cares if she sings well! She's good looking, and I intend to take her for a second wife!

YOUNGER
(Nervous, but still attempting to sound casual.)

I'll bet that's going to be tough.

ELDER

Tough! Your big brother doesn't know the meaning of the word. "Tough" is not having any money. You get money, and "tough" disappears. Tonight I'm going to discuss money with her mother. I'm only willing to fork out twenty thousand but damn! She wants another five thousand!

YOUNGER

No, really?
ELDER

But what the hell? If the girl will marry me, I'll get thirty-five thousand. (Suddenly notices the mess on the table.) What's this? What were you doing with this stuff just now? Stealing it? What a clever thief you are!

YOUNGER

What are you talking about?

ELDER

What do you mean? Still trying to outsmart me, aren't you? I've been right about you all along!

YOUNGER

Ha! What would I ever want to steal from you? Those are all Father's things!

ELDER

Father's things! (Laughs.) That's right, they're Father's alright, but you get nothing. You know damned well your name isn't in his will.

(YOUNGER SON suddenly remembers the blood on his hand and quickly conceals his hand behind his back.)

ELDER

What else have you stolen?

YOUNGER

(Continuing to conceal his hand.)

Nothing.

ELDER

(Violently.)

You think you can fool me? (Trembling, YOUNGER SON stretches forth his hand. ELDER SON is startled.) Blood! (His brother does not reply.) How did you get blood on your hand?

YOUNGER

I hurt it.
ELDER
(Examining the hand.)

Where? (He suddenly steps on the bloody knife and bends down quickly to pick it up. YOUNGER SON turns as though to run, but ELDER SON grabs him with his free hand.) A knife, ai-ya, a bloody knife! Who have you murdered, you lunatic? Just let me tell Mother . . . Mother! (He crosses to the bed and pulls the bed curtain aside. His YOUNGER BROTHER follows him quickly and pulls the curtain shut.)

YOUNGER

Lower your voice. She's sleeping. Don't wake her up!

ELDER

Hmph! You madman, you really know how to treat your old mother, don't you? I don't have any choice but to tell her.

YOUNGER

You can't!

ELDER
(Pushes him away.)

I've got to.

YOUNGER

No, it's too late to tell her.

ELDER

Why?

YOUNGER
(Determined to see it through, but sadly.)

I've already killed her.

ELDER
(Pause.)

... What? Is that true?

YOUNGER =
(Pause.)

... It is.
ELDER

Why have you murdered her?

YOUNGER
(Pause.)

... Because she murdered me.

ELDER
(Pause.)

... Murdered you! And when did she murder you? You lunatic!

YOUNGER

The day she gave birth to me, she murdered me.

ELDER

This is the talk of a madman!

YOUNGER

Ah, if she'd only aborted me before I was born, how grateful I'd have been to her! (Pause.) ... Think about it: a person comes into this world only to be humiliated, to be ridiculed. He cannot get what is rightfully his, he cannot get the education he wants so desperately. He has no one under the sun with whom he can walk proudly and smile. He is just like a weed growing by the foot of a wall, twisted and withered. Ah! Is such a life not more bitter than death?

ELDER

Who told you to be so discontented with your lot in life?

YOUNGER

Long ago when I was in school, I was by no means stupid. The teacher wanted me to go on and get a higher education. It was during my second year and I wasn't many days away from graduating when Mother came to school and forced me to come home, saying we didn't have the money to pay for tuition. The teacher said that everyone knew how well off my family was, so how could she not afford to pay? Everyone laughed at Mother's stupidity and stinginess. So I returned home -- to get my share of the goods, right? But after that I not only didn't have a cent to call my own, I had to face up to the bitter facts: Mother had tricked me by saying
that I would get my share of the estate when I turned twenty-five. But I waited until I was fully twenty-five years old. And on that day I finally realized that I could turn thirty-five, forty-five -- it didn't matter! I still would never get my share. All I would get would be humiliation, ridicule -- ridicule at home, ridicule at school, ridicule from society, and even ridicule from your own wife! Ah, from that day on I have hated my own wife completely -- I even hate being alive! One time I wanted to buy a book, but I had no money. I came home and asked Mother for the money, but she wouldn't give it to me. Instead she cursed me: "You dead-end good-for-nothing! What do you need to read for?" But there was nothing wrong with me -- why shouldn't I want to keep studying? And I'm so stupid: I took candlesticks from the house and pawned them for three dollars so I could finally buy that book, but your wife saw and told Mother. And Mother locked me in a room where she tortured me with questions night and day until finally I told the truth. From that day on I wasn't even fit to be a human being. A person who wasn't good enough to receive his inheritance, whose reputation had sunk so low he would resort to thievery. No one would see me anymore. I thought, how could I dare go on living? I wrote for three nights running, but I was so confused I didn't even know what I was writing. When I lost consciousness Mother sent me to a hospital, and the doctor said I had lost my mind completely, didn't he? (Pause.) . . . Ai! Wouldn't it have been better if I had died of insanity then? But instead the doctor had to try to cure me. From then on, except for "thief," what other name could there be for me? Ah! I am sick! For a son to be driven to such a sick frame of mind and to keep on living, is it not a thousand times worse than killing him?

ELDER

You hateful thing, how could you be so deranged that you would kill your own mother?

YOUNGER

Many under heaven kill their mothers. The clever ones do it by speaking sweetly. The stupid ones do it by acting viciously. The failures leave home, never to return, hoping to break their mothers' hearts -- until their mothers have worn their eyes away, looking for them. The successful ones worry their mothers until, hair by hair, she has gone all white, and drop by drop, she has wept herself dry -- and this they do for a lover or just out for love for other people. (Pause.) . . . And we crazy ones? We crazy ones, we simply use a knife!
ELDER

Alright! You're not even a human being to have committed such an unnatural sin! It's terrible! You stay here. I'll be back in a second with the police. (He puts the knife down on the table, crosses to the door, and exits, locking it as he goes.)

YOUNGER

(Left alone with nothing but the heartbreaking scene of his crime, he is forced to confront his guilty conscience.)

Oh! Truly, how could I have done such a thing, to have committed such a great sin . . . (Pause.) Oh Mother . . . (Pause.) you are not to blame. I've heard everyone say that when Father was on his deathbed he wanted to kill me, but it was you who begged him to give me my life in the end . . . (Pause.) It would have been better if you'd let him kill me. I wouldn't have murdered you tonight! (Pause. He moans. A cold breeze suddenly rustles the bed curtains. From the bed comes a sound as though someone is being tormented by a nightmare.) Oh! (He trembles. Another moan comes from the bed.) Oh Mother . . . (Pause.) Do you -- do you hate me? (He shudders again; the moaning from the bed continues. He cries out.) Oh! (He is shaking so hard now that he cannot stand up and run. With a guttural sound his MOTHER suddenly sits up and pulls the bed curtains aside. He continues to shake and goes pale. MOTHER, a woman of forty-five or forty-six years, has streaks of blood on her face. She groans hoarsely. Her son trembles as he speaks.) Don't hate me, Mother, let me be my own executioner.

MOTHER

(Sees the knife on the table.)

Oh, this is the knife, oh! I was so frightened! (She strokes her neck and sees that her hand is stained with blood.) Am I really dead? (Her SON trembles. She crosses to him.) Why are you sitting in here like that?

YOUNGER

(Trembling.)

Mother! Quickly! Take the knife and kill me now!

MOTHER

Why?

YOUNGER

Because I have just murdered you.
MOTHER

You? No, it cannot be so. I just dreamt that your father was going to kill me. Oh! Those frightening eyes of his, his deep and never-ending hatred of me -- I can never forget. He picked up a knife, wanting to slit my throat! (She strokes her neck.) Have I died after all? Or do I still live?

YOUNGER

Mother, you are already dead. In my madness I murdered my own mother! (With a tiny moan his MOTHER crosses back to her bed and feels under her pillow. She pulls something out.) Oh, the dog! Have I only killed a dog?

MOTHER

Yes, you have killed my beloved dog. And no, child, you didn't kill me -- you killed the beast in my soul. It was because of that animal in my soul that I couldn't make peace with your father -- and it ruined your life. So much shame, so much ridicule, all heaped on you from the moment you were born. When your Father learned the secret of your birth, he wanted to kill us both so many times! When he lay dying you had just turned four years old. Did you not stand alongside your elder brothers before his bed? When he lost consciousness did you not wail and weep with them? And when your Father regained consciousness and heard the sounds of your sobs, his old anger was aroused again. He turned his glowering eyes on you as he drew a knife out from beneath his pillow. He was going to kill you. And I said, "No matter what sin created this child, what does he know? If you want to kill someone, kill me!" I wept and pleaded until he finally relented. But as he was about to die, ah, those eyes! (She covers her face.) Just now I could see him again, glaring at me with those eyes . . . (Pause.) You know, the truth is that you were the one I loved most of all my children. And you were my brightest child, besides. How didn't that result in a desire on my part for you to study, to rise about your circumstances? But from the time I knew I had started to hate myself, I even began to hate you. Because when I looked at you I saw my sinful past. You -- you were the proof of my sinful past! Although you are not your father's son, your deep remembrance of your dead father's spirit is like a voice from my conscience, blaming me always. (Shivers. Pauses, then:) . . . Ah, the day you made all that fuss about dividing the family's property. The disappointment you felt, the shame, the suspicion, when you realized your name wasn't in the will. How you pressed me to tell you why, but how could I? So I said that when you turned twenty-five, then you could have your share of
the property. Then when you advanced in school, I told the teacher that you had nothing. Of course you didn't trust me. When I only gave you five dollars to spend each month, you said I was so stingy, but how could you know how hard it was to pry even those five dollars from your sister-in-law's hand? Oh child! In the whole world is there not a mother who doesn't burn with love for her sons? But from the moment of your birth I scorned you and beat you. When you were four years old I begged your father to lay his knife aside, but as you grew up, I didn't just refuse my clever child an education so that his talents could blossom. No, on the contrary, I turned him into the object of everyone's humiliation and ridicule, so that day by day he grew thinner and paler, day by day sinking lower and lower. Because of me, no one could call my child by his name, they could only call him insane. Did Mother not kill you while she lived? And after being attacked by such a person, would it not be natural and proper for my punishment to come from the victim's own hands? Didn't you just say that you were going to kill me? Such a punishment can never be escaped; by day, by night, my conscience has haunted me. It would have been so much better if I had been punished long, long ago. Child! I dreamt just now that your father killed me with that knife, so kill me now. Child! I beg you! Our lives are cursed! But we have the power to end such cursed lives! Take up the knife and kill me. Women are weak at heart, and your mother is the weakest of the weak, otherwise she'd have taken her own life long ago. Now let her die at the hands of her own sin!

YOUNGER
(Embraces his MOTHER as a flood of tears escapes him; cries out miserably.)

Oh Mother! (His MOTHER also beings to weep as her YOUNGER SON cries out, slowly and pitifully.) I do not dare blame my mother anymore, and Mother, you must not blame yourself. I've heard people say how all his life Father used his power and property to ensnare mistresses, and that although you were one among his many wives, he did not love you. He hated you, Mother, because you violated his ownership of you, throwing his bloodline into disorder. And here your son turns around and tries every way he can think of to get at Father's property. How could he have included me in his will? When I first saw my name missing, I felt such disappointment, such anger, but now I feel grateful, grateful that I am not eligible to receive his legacy. I am nothing like my elder brothers, who think of life as so easy, love as so cheap, art as trifling and unimportant. Property is a sinful thing; it makes people do evil things. I had three brothers who were entitled to inherit the property, didn't I? And now only one, Second Brother,
remains, isn't that so? Eldest Brother is dead, and Third Brother is in prison. And I am crazy -- but I understand the most clearly of all. I am grateful that I haven't the right to receive a share of Father's great estate, grateful to be crazy, otherwise I believe I'd have lost my life long ago. Oh Life, Life! A life can be totally destroyed! Or it can be completely built up! Oh Mother! No matter where a life has come from, no matter whether it bears virtuous fruits or evil deeds, life is itself always something to be glorified, to be cherished! Because it is full of vitality, forever changing, moving onward and upward! It doesn't matter who Mother created me with, I will always be thankful that she gave me life! And what's more, I know I am not an aristocrat, I am not the son of a lecherous father. I am so honored! Under that tyranny, that obscene power, my Mother, so brave, so independent, so daring -- joined with another life. Mother, how noble you are! I have just worked this all out carefully, and I don't blame you at all! Even though I haven't gotten enough education, if education is something that teaches people to know what life is and how to live it, then the past ten years have given me education enough. All the thinking I'd been doing over the past few days about my painful past and my uncertain fate -- I couldn't help myself, Mother, but it made me hate you, and for a moment my spirit was so confused. Oh Mother! I came so close to murdering you, but by killing the dog instead I was saved from committing such a great sin. And at the same time, my sickness has been frightened out of me. For the past few years I've been trapped, clawing at and striking out against my soul, but now it's as though I've been liberated, as though my brain has awakened. Dearest Mother, I'm going to leave you, to leave Elder Brother and Sister-in-law. I'm going to leave this house of sin and go out on my own and build a life for myself. I'm going to forget my past, all of it, for now I have a great future, a glorious future, a joyful future. Oh Mother, you'll see!

MOTHER

Alright, child, go, go out into the world and build your own life. Your mother can only give you life. To take that life and use it for good, to make your future great and glorious and joyful, all of that will have to come from you!

(From outside comes the sounds of footsteps and someone turning the lock. ELDER BROTHER's voice can be heard: "The criminal is in here, and Mother lies murdered on the bed." The door opens and ELDER BROTHER brings the POLICE CHIEF and TWO POLICEMEN into the room.)
ELDER
(Amazed.)

Ah!

POLICE CHIEF
(Inquires in a surprised tone.)

What's going on here?

ELDER

You're not dead?

MOTHER

Why have you brought policemen here? How could you think he really murdered me?

ELDER

Where did this blood come from?

MOTHER

He was caught up in his evil feelings, so the child killed the dog and smeared the blood on my face so it would just look as though he'd killed me.

POLICE CHIEF

Killing his mother as a joke?!

MOTHER

Sir, you couldn't be expected to know it, but it's well known that this child of mine has been suffering from mental illness.

POLICE CHIEF

(Feeling foolish.)

Ha! It's not common to come across a criminal who'd kill his own mother. . . . (Pause. To ELDER SON.) Well! You've dragged us out all this way for nothing.

MOTHER

Please excuse us.
POLICE CHIEF
(To ELDER SON.)

Next time you want to make a report, do a little bit of investigating first!

ELDER

Yes, sir.

POLICE CHIEF
(To the TWO POLICEMEN.)

Let's go. (They all turn and exit together.)

ELDER
(His disappointment turning to anger.)

What kind of idiot are you to play such a joke? I can't bear having such a sick person in my home! You are no longer of the Li family. People may always call you my brother, but you're no brother of mine!

YOUNGER

Yes, I no longer belong to the Li family, I no longer have an elder brother. But I don't even want to be your brother. I don't want to be a Li ever again. I have never wanted to. From this day on, I am a man without a home. I am an independent man, a son of nature, I belong to the glorious people of the future! My road is so long! My world is so large!

ELDER

Good, if you don't want to be in our family, then get the hell out!

YOUNGER

I wanted to get out long ago. (To his MOTHER.) Mother, don't blame yourself anymore. When the time comes, my dead father -- my father, the only man who truly loved you -- he will come for you. Dearest Mother, take care of yourself. Even though I will forget my past, I can never, ever forget you, Mother!

MOTHER

Are you really leaving? If you must leave, wait till tomorrow.
YOUNGER

No, I must go now.

MOTHER

(Looking out the window.)

It's so dark outside. How can you leave now?

YOUNGER

No, Mother! It may be dark outside but compared to this house, it is far, far brighter. (Kisses his MOTHER and then turns to face his ELDER BROTHER.) Good-bye. (His BROTHER stands there dumbly.)

MOTHER

(Weeping.)

Child.

--CURtain--
CHAPTER TEN

Preface: "Return South"

Tian Han premiered "Return South," "a lyric one-act drama,"¹ during the South China Society's second season which commenced in Nanjing in July, 1929, and concluded in Shanghai the following month. The play, Tian's only new one-act offering for the season, played on a programme that included a revival of "Echoes of an Ancient Pond," a full-length socialist drama by Tian entitled Dancing Flames, "The Death of Dr. Sun Yat-sen," which was final act of Tian's biographical seven-act play about the father of China's democratic revolution, and Tian's translation of Oscar Wilde's Salome. A revival of "Tragedy on a Lake," was also added to the programme, and was scheduled to run for three performances.²

For the 1929 premiere of "Return South," Tian used a musical score that was created by a composer named Zhang En-

¹Tian Han, "Nan-guo-shi-shi-lue," in Tian Han, et al., p. 134.

²Ibid., p. 136.
xi, who had occasionally acted in Society productions, taking a small role in the production of *Death of a Famous Actor* earlier in the year. The first cast for "Return South" included two newcomers, Wu Cong as the Farmer and Wu Si-hong as Chun. The actor Zuo Ming, a veteran of Tian Han's company since Shanghai College days, added the role of Qun's Mother to a variety of roles that included the Old Servant in "Tragedy on a Lake," one of the art students in "Night Talk in Suzhou," and small roles in *Death of a Famous Actor* and *Salome.* The role of the Wanderer was created by Chen Ning-qiu, who had first studied under Tian Han at the South China Academy of Literature and Art; during the

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3"Echoes of an Ancient Pond" and "Return South" are the only two of Tian's plays written during the nineteen-twenties that call for musical scores; he seems to have employed the services of a composer only for those dramas that he considered to be "lyric" in nature.

4Wu Cong and Wu Si-hong were not related to each other.

5Tian's decision to cast a man in a female role, given his theatrical commitment to realism, is puzzling indeed, however, since Tian himself typically offers no explanation for his casting choice, his reasons can only be assumed. One possible explanation is that Tian was actually experimenting with verisimilitude in casting by capitalizing on those qualities that might make a male an appropriate choice for the role of an elderly woman; Tian had previously made a similar, and, by all accounts, successful, experiment in reverse by casting Tang Shu-ming as Meng-mei's Little Brother in "Tragedy on a Lake." Another explanation is purely practical: Tian may have written one more female role than he could comfortably cast for the South China Society's second season and turned to one of his more experienced actors as a means of solving his casting problem.
Society's second season Chen also took over the role of the Poet in "Echoes of an Ancient Pond" from Wan Lei-tian. "Return South" was subsequently included on a programme that the South China Society toured to Wu-xi in Jiangsu Province, along with "Echoes of an Ancient Pond" and "Shivers." According to Tian, all three plays were warmly received by the provincial audiences who saw them, thus demonstrating that his work could be as much appreciated in the countryside as it was in urban areas.6

Although Tang Shu-ming mentions several of Tian's dramas that were written around the same time as "Return South," such as "Echoes of an Ancient Pond" and "Tragedy on a Lake," she neglects to include a discussion of "Return South" in her memoirs. Quite possibly, however, the omission of the play from Tang's writings simply resulted from her never having been cast in a production of the play.

Unlike "Echoes of an Ancient Pond," an earlier work which was significant for its experimentation with established approaches to dramatic structure, "Return South" breaks no new structural ground, returning instead to the more traditional arrangement of dramatic incidents that Tian had previously utilized in his writing from "A Night in a Cafe" to "Tragedy on a Lake." The action of "Return South" commences with an expository scene between Farmer Li and

6Tian Han, "Nan-guo-shi shi-lue," p. 137.
Chun's Mother in which Li convinces the old woman to give him Chun's hand in marriage. Tian recaptures the skill for constructing expository dialogue that he seemed to have lost after "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," by cleverly disguising the exposition so that it assumes a semblance of real conversation, rather than calling attention to itself as the foundation for subsequent dramatic action. The story of the Wanderer's previous sojourn with Chun and her Mother is deftly woven, first into the scene in which Chun's mother consents to make a match for Chun, and then into the exchange between Farmer Li in which the young woman ultimately rejects him, rather than being recited all at once by a single character as it was, for example, by Mama and Elder Sister in "Before Lunch" and Liu Shu-kang in "Night Talk in Suzhou."

Throughout the exposition and subsequent rising action Tian effectively utilizes false discoveries in order to construct plot complications that are evocative of suspense, always allowing the audience to know more than the characters onstage. Because the characters in "Return South" are given either conflicting reports or incorrect information, surprises and reversals are made to occur logically. Having promised her daughter to Farmer Li, Chun's Mother allows him to propose to the young woman himself. Intent upon waiting for the Wanderer, with whom she is truly in love, Chun refuses the lad, and Li, bitterly
sad, takes his leave of Chun without informing her Mother of the change of events. Chun's mother, in turn, mistakenly leads the Wanderer to believe that an alliance with Chun is impossible, which effects the crisis in the dramatic action: broken-hearted, the Wanderer trudges off, leaving Chun to what he assumes will be marriage to the lad next door. No sooner does the Wanderer bid his final farewell to her Mother than Chun appears, and, quickly ascertaining that he is gone indeed, abandons her Mother to accompany the Wanderer on his travels.

The play is structurally flawed by its denouement, which is so abrupt as to give the impression that Tian either ran out of creative steam suddenly or was attempting to complete the play against a performance deadline that forced him to finish the play hastily rather than effectively. As a result of the attenuated denouement, neither the characters nor the audience have sufficient time to respond emotionally to the implications of the dramatic action and the potential significance of the play is diminished. Chun responds with lightning speed to the realization that she has been deserted once more and

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7If a revised version of "Return South" exists, Tian neither published the manuscript nor did he refer to it in his writings. Although he was not above acknowledging that several of his scripts would benefit from rewriting, such as "The Night a Tiger Was Captured" and "Before Lunch," the only early script for which he published a revised version was "A Night in a Cafe" in 1932.
vanishes only moments after the Wanderer's exit and before the final curtain falls, yet Tian has previously established a scheme of probability in which Chun verbalizes her motives, attempting to comprehend her experiences fully.

"Return South" thus affords few surprises in the manner of its construction, adhering to standard methods of organizing dramatic action. Tian supplies background information, introduces a potential conflict, and resolves it through a series of complications leading to a major turning point and resultant falling action. Although the play is not as unusual in its arrangement of incidents as "Echoes of an Ancient Pond," it is significant for the manner in which it demonstrates Tian's continued interest in moving away from the fundamental realism that initially sparked his interest in drama earlier during the nineteen-twenties. In "Return South" Tian experiments successfully with the incorporation of both poetic diction and formal poetry into dramatic action that is simultaneously literal and metaphoric.

Because of Tian's interest in creating a modern realistic Chinese theatre and body of dramatic literature, he confined himself in his previous plays to prosaic diction, keeping heightened language and poetic structures to a minimum. When he used poetic language he did so sparingly, as a means of reinforcing the unique qualities of a character that set him or her apart from others and
commenting on that character's sensitivity. Lin Zi-qi, the melancholy student of "A Night in a Cafe," and Huang Da-sha, the village fool of "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," for example, are two characters who express themselves by using poetic language. Both young men represent deviations from societal norms, Lin, in his inability to conform to his father's demands, and Huang, in his insistence upon living a vagrant's life in order to remain close to a woman he can never marry. Their ability to use heightened language as a means of self-expression accentuates their emotional awareness, a characteristic they do not share with the characters by whom they are surrounded, who speak prosaically and are representative of traditionally acceptable social behavior.

In "Return South" Tian continues to use diction as a means of differentiating characters, but he relies upon poetic language more extensively than in his previous dramas, using it throughout the play rather than sprinkling it randomly throughout the dialogue. He chooses especially appropriate diction for the characters in "Return South," a technique that recalls a deftness with language not seen in Tian's work since "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," in which he used images of light and fire for Huang Da-sha. The poetic diction in "Return South" is clearly associated with the Wanderer, an outsider in the social system depicted in
the play, and with Chun, whose emotional consciousness has blossomed under his tutelage.

Until Chun begins speaking about the Wanderer to Farmer Li, the diction in "Return South" is distinctly prosaic. Farmer Li and Chun's Mother converse in language that is unaffected and forceful, using simple sentences composed of straightforward, colloquial expressions. Their conversation revolves around the practical concerns and activities of daily life: the preparation of food for dinner, the importance of having a man in the house, and the value of arranging sensible, rather than romantic, marriages. However, when Chun tells the farm boy that she will never become his wife, her diction becomes distinctly different. Although Chun continues speaking in prose, her speech becomes more poetic, her sentences becoming longer and more complex than Li's; when she speaks of the Wanderer she uses parallel structures, similes, and metaphors to compare him to a divine being, omniscient and omnipresent. After her Mother bustles in, anxious to determine if Farmer Li has been successful in wooing her daughter, the diction reverts to realistic prose, and the homely activities of everyday life, arranging marriage horoscopes, cooking dinner, and feeding the chickens, eclipse the romantic notions that Chun expressed previously.

The diction changes noticeably once again after Chun discovers the Wanderer's worn traveling shoes that her
Mother has tossed away. Chun personifies the forgotten shoes, which, along with the poem carved into the peach tree, are her only tangible connections to the Wanderer, as sharing her fate. When she describes the north country to which the Wanderer has travelled, she uses words and images that the Wanderer taught her to paint a vivid portrait of its intense colors and magnificent natural vistas; the Wanderer is thus associated with a sensitivity to the beauty of nature that is devoid from Farmer Li's speech, even though the farmer owns his land and interacts with the earth daily.

Her Mother's response to Chun's description, although written as prose, is poetic in its construction, using a refrain in which she questions the accuracy of her daughter's memory, which is separated by variations on contiguity. Each of Mother's sentences opens with the phrase, "Have you forgotten . . . ", after which she goes on to use the final image of her preceding sentence as a means of introducing a new image. It is significant that this speech is the only instance in which Chun's Mother uses poetic diction. The words that she chooses are clearly not her own; either she has overheard the Wanderer use such language or the Wanderer has taught her the words himself.

When Chun and the Wanderer finally meet, they reiterate each of the images of the north country that Chun's Mother has previously mentioned. The Wanderer gives an even richer
description of each image by using metaphorical language, comparing a lake at the foot of a mountain to green jade and a field on a river bank to soft velvet. Poetic diction in the play is thus directly associated with the character who stands beyond the limitations of social behavior that is considered acceptable in Chun's little village. As Chun states early in the play, the Wanderer, by virtue of his rootlessness, is a man whose vision extends far beyond that of an ordinary man. The heightened manner in which he is capable of expressing himself is further indication of his unique sensitivity and creative abilities.

Another distinguishing feature of "Return South" is its use of formal poetry as an integral part of the plot, a technique that Tian first attempted to use in his previous play, "Echoes of an Ancient Pond." The poem that the Poet in "Echoes" reads aloud is not his own but Mei-ying's, a character who is deceased before the dramatic action begins. The poem serves as the dead girl's voice; it is the only time her own words are spoken onstage. The first formal poem in "Return South" functions in similar fashion, providing a voice for the Wanderer who does not appear onstage until much later; it also demonstrates Tian's ability to use poetry rather than prosaic narration as an effective means of establishing exposition. Until Chun reads aloud the poem that the Wanderer carved into her peach tree, the nature of their previous involvement is ambiguous.
The Wanderer's poem efficiently clarifies that relationship while simultaneously revealing significant aspects of the Wanderer's persona; he confesses to being "a man who does not know how to love," but promises that his heart will belong to Chun always. The prosaic, earth bound topics around which Farmer Li's dialogue previously revolved contrast sharply with the Wanderer's use of images of light, airborne objects: he compares his voice to the sound of the evening breeze rustling through the tiny leaves of the peach tree and Chun's abundant tears to peach blossoms drifting in that breeze. As Chun finishes reading the poem, the Wanderer's shadow draws slowly near, almost as if the girl had summoned him by her reading, thus demonstrating Tian's ability to integrate the poem into the dramatic action so that its recitation had visual as well as emotional consequences.

Tian uses the second poem in "Return South" as a means of introducing background material in a more sophisticated manner of narrating offstage action than the dry reportage of some of his previous plays, such as "Before Lunch" and "Night Talk in Suzhou." While reciting to Chun and her Mother a poem that he set to music, the Wanderer reveals the misfortunes that befell his beloved shepherdess and family.

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8 Tian Han, "Nan gui" ("Return South"), in Tian Han ju-zuo xuan (Selected Dramas of Tian Han) (Beijing: Ren-min wen-xue chu-ban-she, 1955), p. 143.
in the north country. The poem additionally serves as a means of moving the plot forward; upon hearing that the Wanderer is alone in the world, Chun extracts a promise from him never to leave her again, which ultimately places both the Wanderer and Chun's Mother in the quandary that brings about the play's crisis and climax. It is significant that Chun's Mother is incapable of fully comprehending the implications of the poem until Chun, the only character who feels an affinity for the Wanderer, paraphrases it in the form of prosaic sentences that her Mother can understand; Chun's alignment with the Wanderer and delineation from her Mother and the farmer are thus further underscored.

The Wanderer improvises the final poem of the play as he gouges his "living" poem out of the bark of the peach tree, thereby visually reinforcing the end of his relationship with Chun, recalling Chun's words to Farmer Li that only when the tree no longer bears the Wanderer's words will she be able to forget him. The Wanderer's farewell to Chun commences with a line that echoes her previous address to his shoes, "Oh, shoes, you are worn, you are so worn," a line which further accentuates his emotional and spiritual connection to Chun, whose relationship to the shoes is not unlike the Wanderer's own: both characters see themselves like the shoes, as having been cast away, and each treats

\[\text{\textsuperscript{9}}\text{\textsuperscript{ibid}, p. 152.}\]
the shoes as precious mementoes of a forgotten love. In this instance Tian uses the formal poetry in place of a soliloquy; as the Wanderer speaks his thoughts out loud he becomes aware of the irony of his decision to return from the north only to be sent roaming once more. No longer are his images light and airborne; now they are heavy and earth bound, reinforcing the reversal in his relationship to Chun and his attitude to wandering as a free agent. Instead of blossoms floating weightlessly in the breeze he compares himself to a lonely bird, warily flapping its wings and seeking a place to rest its head. He realizes that the price he must pay for his freedom is a lonely future so uncertain that he knows not who will bury him "so deep in the earth."¹⁰ Accompanied by the shoes, his walking stick, and knapsack, all symbols of the rootless life he leads, he prepares to begin wandering again, wandering which he now characterizes as "desolate."¹¹

The emphasis upon poetry in "Return South" indicates that the play operates on a symbolic level beyond the superficial depiction of an unhappy love affair. It is not merely the story of an impetuous, headstrong girl who impulsively decides to accompany a stranger on his travels far beyond her native village but a metaphor for stability

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 153.

¹¹ Ibid.
versus the unknown. The action takes place in the spring, a
time of change, growth, and uncertainty, a time when all
things are ripe with the promise of fulfillment; Chun's very
name means "springtime." The girl's possible choices are
represented by the two male characters who stand at opposite
ends of the spectrum. Farmer Li is a symbol of stability;
he owns good, arable land on a hillside, land to which he is
forever bound. Practical and down to earth, his ability to
fish and farm demonstrates his visible means of self
support. As Chun points out, however, he is entirely
predictable, an open book that she has repeatedly read and
grown increasingly tired of since childhood. The Wanderer,
on the other hand, is, to Chun, mysteriously alluring in his
rootlessness. He does nothing practical to support himself,
passing his time instead sitting under the peach tree and
composing poetry in which he regales Chun with tales of his
wanderings in distant lands. In Chun's eyes the Wanderer is
a god, superhuman in his ability to see beyond the horizon
to which Farmer Li is so pitifully bound. Chun cannot be
what the farmer wants, a dull and commonplace peasant woman
tied to the land.

The conclusion of "Return South," with its the union of
two characters who are clearly meant to be kindred spirits
is outwardly uplifting, but the story also has an
interesting twist. While Chun dreams of uprooting herself to
follow the Wanderer on his travels, what the Wanderer most
desires is finding a permanent pillow upon which to rest his weary head. At first Tian seems to suggest that freedom without responsibility is far preferable to the dull, predictable world that Chun inhabits. Ironically, however, when the Poet returns at last, he returns to tell a tale of utter misfortune. He longs to give up wandering and settle in a place where he can feel nourished. When he realizes that he has arrived too late to marry Chun, he takes up his walking stick and his worn shoes once again and wanders off on a journey far away to nowhere.  

Thus, Tian may also be implying that the Wanderer is searching for answers that cannot be found and that the exhilarating freedom that Chun believes will result from exploring the unknown is a naive illusion.

The play raises interesting questions about the value of stability as opposed to the desirability of freedom. Although Chen Shou-zhu has criticized the play for failing to provide concrete answers to those questions,  

part of the play's strength lies in its utter ambiguity. Though Tian might have written a more poignant ending if Chun were to have married the dull farmer, never realizing her Mother had deceived her, Tian's objective attitude toward the

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12 Ibid.

action and his characters provides a modern, sophisticated approach to drama, instead of the pat reinforcement of conventional, in this case, leftist, morality that Chen would prefer.

In "Return South" Tian continues to work toward the successful adaptation of traditional dramatic realism to the Chinese stage, but at the same time the play demonstrates his ability to see beyond the realistic potentials of drama. Most significantly, Tian successfully experiments with poetic diction both as a means of differentiating characters and of creating metaphoric action while demonstrating himself to be capable of refraining from passing judgment on the action and the characters, and thus avoiding the creation of yet another morality play in the pattern of "Before Lunch," "View of a Riverside Village, and "Night Talk in Suzhou." "Return South," along with "Echoes of An Ancient Pond," therefore represents a fascinating departure from Tian's established dramatic practices. The success of "Return South" is further proof that as a young man Tian Han had the potential to become one of the most influential of twentieth century Chinese playwrights, making his capitulation to leftist literary policy that much more poignant.
"Return South"

Cast of Characters

MOTHER

DAUGHTER

A YOUNG FARMER

A WANDERER

Time

The present

Place

In front of a farm house door; there is a well and a peach tree.

Setting

The old MOTHER sits on the railing surrounding the well, sewing clothing. At stage right the YOUNG FARMER, who is holding a fishing rod, strings fish together.

FARMER

Auntie!

MOTHER

Ah, Brother Li, are you back from fishing? (She puts her sewing down.)
FARMER

Look, Auntie, I had some pretty good luck today.

MOTHER

Ai-ya, it's true, you've gotten yourself a feast for supper. 

FARMER

No, I've brought it as a gift for you. Hurry and get yourself a bowl.

MOTHER

Well, thank you, thank you. (She exits to get a bowl for the fish and re-enters.) What a lovable child you are, and so able and hard-working, too.

FARMER

You praise me too much, dearest Auntie.

MOTHER

It's true, I wish I had a child as good as you.

FARMER

You've got a good daughter, isn't that the same?

MOTHER

Well, after all, a daughter is a daughter. She can't do the things a boy can do. I've said it before, and I'll say it again: a daughter always marries into another household. You can't keep a daughter for a whole lifetime, isn't that so?

FARMER

(Pauses, then:)

What if a daughter could marry and still stay with her mother? Wouldn't that be even better?

MOTHER

Well, that would be fine, but how could it happen?
FARMER

How could it not happen? (The old woman doesn't answer him. He goes on, simply and bashfully.) Auntie, have you done what I asked you to do?

MOTHER

I've asked, child. But she is still thinking of that man.

FARMER

(Grumbling.)

But how can you go on humoring her and letting her have her way like this?

MOTHER

(Sighing.)

Ai, this daughter of mine is all I have. Instead of humoring her, would it be better to curse her and beat her every day?

FARMER

But that's no way, either, Auntie. Look, it isn't just that he left over a year ago and that he probably won't return. Even if you could make him come back, he wouldn't be able to support you for your whole life, dearest Mother. He is a man who is used to wandering, and he doesn't know or even want to know where he's wandering to. Last year when he wanted to leave, you had to let him go. You couldn't keep him here. Suppose he wanted to go wander off again, and Sister Chun went with him? How on earth could you possibly follow them?

MOTHER

Yes, I've thought the same things. I didn't think them when my husband was alive, but ever since he died last year my daughter is all I have left in the world to depend on. How could I not think about marrying her off to the perfect man?

FARMER

Well then, see here, Auntie. Give Sister Chun to me. Wouldn't that be alright? My family has several acres of land and a few fields on the hillside, besides. I'm a hard worker; I've never been idle. And my house is so close by -- see? What could be better?
MOTHER

(Thinking it over.)

Nothing could be better -- naturally. But my daughter isn't easy to handle.

FARMER

But even if Sister Chun still thinks about that man, she'll forget him as the days go by. We've grown up together since we were just children. She can't dislike me too much.

MOTHER

Yes, I think so, too. If the question was settled once and for all, she'd have to listen to what I say, wouldn't she?

FARMER

(Happy.)

Dearest Auntie, why didn't you settle it once and for all a long time ago?

MOTHER

Well, as long as you're going to be engaged you might as well be engaged to her.

FARMER

(So happy he grabs her.)

Then you will be my mother! Sister Chun doesn't have a father, and I don't have a mother, but after we get married we'll have both father and mother.

MOTHER

Didn't I just say so, child? I'm willing to have you for my son.

FARMER

Ai-ya, I'm so happy, I'm so happy I could cry.

DAUGHTER

(Calling out from inside.)

Mama! It's time to cook supper.
MOTHER

Oh, I'm coming. (To the FARMER.) I'm going to cook some dinner. You sit here for a second, and I'll tell Chun-er to come out here. (She exits, taking with her the bowl of fish and the mending she just finished.)

FARMER

My heart can rest easy now. But . . .

MOTHER

(Offstage.)

Chun-er, go draw a bucket of water. There's no more in the jar.

(DAUGHTER enters, carrying a bucket to which a thick rope is tied.)

FARMER

Ah, Sister Chun.

DAUGHTER

(Silently lowers her head.)

Brother Zheng-ming, when did you get here?

FARMER

Oh, I've been here for a little while.

(The girl does not answer him. She silently carries the bucket to the well to draw water.)

FARMER

(Plucking up his courage.)

Are you drawing water? Here, let me help you.

DAUGHTER

No, thanks. (She draws the water herself.)

FARMER

(Continuing.)

Sister Chun . . . (She does not answer. The FARMER begins to lose hope. He wants to weep but manages to stammer on.) Sister Chun, for the past several years I have thought of you every day. I have begged you. How can it be that you
don't even feel a little for me? (She does not answer.) Uncle is dead now, and only you and Auntie remain in the house without a single man to look after you. How can you go on like that?

DAUGHTER

Brother Zheng-ming, I am waiting for a man.

FARMER

I know. But will that man really return?

DAUGHTER

He'll return.

FARMER

How can you be so sure?

DAUGHTER

That's what I think.

FARMER

Have you gotten a letter from him?

DAUGHTER

No, he hasn't sent me even half a word since he left. Every day the postman, wearing his green uniform, walks past our door, but he never stops to leave anything here.

FARMER

Really? If someone forgets you, how can you go on thinking of him?

DAUGHTER

How do you know he's forgotten me?

FARMER

He hasn't written you a single word. How could he not have forgotten you?
DAUGHTER

Just because he hasn't written, does that mean he's forgotten me? No, every night he comes searching for me in my dreams.

FARMER

So, you cannot forget him.

DAUGHTER

You are right, Brother Zheng-ming! At the very least I cannot forget him. He so loved to sit under the peach tree by the well and write his poetry . . . and he would love to take me by the hand and lead me to sit under this tree with him and tell me tales of his wanderings in far away places. See, isn't the poem he wrote for me still carved into the bark of this tree? This tree still lives, still blooms, and the words carved upon it are still as fresh as the day he first carved them; how can I forget him?

FARMER

But Sister Chun . . . (She does not speak.) Will you ever be able to forget him?

DAUGHTER

Brother Zheng-ming, you must wait till this tree has died, when its leaves have fallen, when it no longer blossoms and its bark no longer bears his words . . .

FARMER

That will take a lifetime . . .

DAUGHTER

Yes, even in a lifetime I could not forget him, Brother Zheng-ming.

FARMER

(Kneeling down, he puts his arms around her knees.)

Sister Chun, you can't forget him, but you can forget all about me? Didn't we grow up together? I have never left you, have I? Haven't I always wanted to marry you?
DAUGHTER

Brother Zheng-ming! Since childhood I have always hated it that we grew up together. I hated it that you would never leave me, that you always wanted to marry me. Look at him; he is nothing like you. He came, and I didn't know where he was from; he left, and I didn't know where he was going. He is a god to me. It didn't matter if he was sitting or standing; his eyes always looked toward some place far, far away. Even though I couldn't understand at all, deep in my heart I felt that such a place so far away must be so interesting, so full of beautiful things. And I know he is a divine being because even though he and I are apart, I always feel like he is standing by my side, always whispering into my ears. I know that a day will come when he will suddenly return and take me away and bring me to that far, far away place that he always sees...

FARMER

Ah, Sister Chun, he must be a demon. You have come under an evil spell of his for sure.

DAUGHTER

Perhaps, but it's what I want.

FARMER

But how can you not want me?

DAUGHTER

(Pauses.)

... Brother Zheng-ming, I cannot be what you want.

FARMER

Ah, Sister Chun...

MOTHER

(Entering.)

Good, good, if you two are talking this nicely together, Mama will have something to depend on for sure. (DAUGHTER rises quickly and, taking the water, hurries into the kitchen. MOTHER speaks in a low voice to the youth.) Child is she willing?
FARMER
(Smiling bitterly.)
Mmmmmmm . . .

MOTHER
Well, that's just fine. You go tomorrow and invite Mr. He over, and I'll give him her eight characters.

FARMER
(Vaguely.)
Mmmmmmm . . .

MOTHER
Why are you turning around and getting all bashful? Come on in; we'll all set the table and eat supper.

FARMER
No, Auntie, I've got to go.

MOTHER
And getting polite to boot? Come on in.

FARMER
No, I'm going, Auntie.

MOTHER
Do you have to? Then you be here first thing tomorrow with Mr. He. I'll be waiting for you two. (The youth silently takes the fishing rod and exits stage right.) Oh well, youngsters do get a little bashful, after all. (About to exit.) Ai-ya, the chickens still aren't locked up. Chun-er, you better go feed the chickens, and be sure to close the door after them. Don't let the wild dogs get to them, or they'll drag them off.

DAUGHTER
Alright. (MOTHER goes inside and lights a lamp. DAUGHTER takes rice to feed the chickens. As she tosses the rice she makes clucking sounds. She follows the chickens as they peck at the rice and then grabs them one by one and puts them into a wire chicken coop. After she shuts them all in she suddenly trips outside the door and discovers an old, worn out shoe.) Mama! Who dragged this shoe out here?
MOTHER
(Offstage.)

What shoe?

DAUGHTER
(Holding up the shoes.)

These shoes!

MOTHER
(Appears in the doorway.)

Uh . . . those . . . aren't these the shoes that man left behind? You know what, those are Fu-gan's shoes, that useless dog! Yesterday I tossed out the rain shoes I'd left under the bed, too.

DAUGHTER
(Silently turns the shoes over and over in her hands, examining them; a sigh of grief escapes from her.)

Oh, shoes, how worn you are, how worn!

MOTHER
(Moving to the doorway.)

Child, come inside and cry, "Worn! Worn!" in here. You won't even throw away his tattered old shoes, and he doesn't even remember your name.

DAUGHTER

I can't, Mama.

MOTHER

Can't! Ha! Your mother always used to think that there were so many things in the world that couldn't be. But as my life went on, one by one, the things I thought I couldn't bear rudely shoved their way into my life. Like when your father became so terribly ill: he would clutch my hand and say that he was afraid of death. And I would say, "That can't be -- if you die and leave us, how will we manage?" But still he died. Then that Mr. Xin of yours lived in our house with us over a year. And we were good to him; we treated him like one of the family, and we thought he could never leave. But still he left.  

---

1 The Wanderer's first name.
DAUGHTER

He started thinking of his home, so he wanted to go. Who can cast off their birthplace? If I wandered off to far, far away places, as the days went by I would start wanting to come home.

MOTHER

Silly child, do you really believe he was thinking of home?

DAUGHTER

How couldn't he be? When he left he told me that when he saw the peach blossoms of Jiangnan, they reminded him of the northern snow. There are those deep grey skies there and black forests and snow-capped mountains. It was almost three years since he had seen those snow-capped mountains. If I were to leave my home I couldn't help but think the same way about our Peach Tree Village. How could he have spoken of his old father and his adorable little sister, who were still living there at the foot of that snow-covered mountain, without thinking of returning home?

MOTHER

Ah, child, don't fool yourself. Have you forgotten what else he said: that at the foot of that snowy mountain there was an emerald green river, and on the river bank was a green, grassy field, and on the grassy field grazed a large flock of lambs, and under a willow tree sat a young girl who tended the lambs? (The girl does not answer.) Have you forgotten he told you how every day that young girl drove the lambs to the grassy field on the river bank, and how she looked toward the sun as it was about to set behind the mountain, and sang in her low voice? (The girl does not answer.) Have you forgotten him saying that even though he had wandered far, far away to the South, he still could not forget that girl, that the sound of her song remained in his ears? (The girl still does not answer.) Have you forgotten that he said he could not forget that girl -- her arched eyebrows and big black eyes and the rich black hair that flowed like water down her back? (The girl still does not answer.) Did you forget what he said, that that was why he left the South: so he could return to his village at the foot of the snow-covered mountain and visit his father and his little sister and that young girl who tends the lambs. By now he's surely married that girl, and they sing as they

\(^2\)A name for southern Jiangsu Province, south of the Yangzi River.
tend the sheep together on the mountain and on the river bank. And in the evening they talk and laugh in their warm, cozy room. And who still remembers that in the South, in Peach Tree Village, there is a foolish girl who still embraces the worn out shoes he left behind, who thinks that he still thinks about her? (DAUGHTER, with her arms around the shoes, wobbles and seems about to collapse.) Ai-ya, child, I was wrong, I made it up. How can you take me seriously? Chun-er! Chun-er!

DAUGHTER

(Holding the shoes.)

Oh shoes, oh, our lives are just the same!

MOTHER

Ah, thank heaven and earth. Child, I've often told you not to be so foolish. You can't pass your days pining away for someone like that. Get a hold of yourself. Hurry up and throw those shoes away. If you keep hugging them like that, you'll get your clothes dirty, and I'll have to wash them.

DAUGHTER

No . . .

MOTHER

Child, get up, listen to me.

DAUGHTER

No, I don't want to get up.

MOTHER

Don't upset your mother. Who else do we have now in this world but each other? Without you, who would look after me? Without me, who would look after you?

DAUGHTER

(Moved, she grabs onto her MOTHER.)

Mother . . .

MOTHER

Child . . . (Smells food in the kitchen.) Ah-ya, the food is burning. Child, listen, get up now. I'll go and check on supper. (She exits quickly.)
DAUGHTER
(Slowly rises and crosses to sit by the well under the tree; sorrowfully reads aloud the poem that has been carved into the tree's bark.)

"It was here that I leaned upon my walking stick. It was here that I laid down my knapsack. In the midst of a lonely journey I met a most lovable girl.

We sat together under the tree And I spoke to her of my wandering. And she opened her large black eyes, And hung upon my words.

Young girl, I am a man who does not know how to love. But you, you truly give too much love to me. Even were I to wander so very far away My heart would remain forever by your side.

Listen to the sound of the evening breeze rustling through the tiny leaves. That is the sound of my voice calling to you. See the blossoms drifting in the evening breeze. That is my remembrance of your overflowing tears."

(Suddenly the shadow of a person becomes visible; it moves closer gradually. DAUGHTER slowly turns her head toward it.)

MAN

Is this Miss Chun's house?

DAUGHTER

Yes, and you... (She slowly moves close to him; amazed.) Oh! Mr. Xin! Is it you?

MAN

Ah, Miss Chun, I've come to find you.

DAUGHTER

Is it really you? I'm not dreaming? (Gazing at him.) Oh, Mr. Xin, I have waited for you for so long. (She embraces him, crying. The shadow is, in fact, the WANDERER, and he returns her embrace.)
MOTHER
(Offstage.)

Child, why don't you come inside and eat? Who's here? Who?
(Entering slowly; she is surprised to see the WANDERER.)
Oh, it's you! (The WANDERER does not answer her.)

DAUGHTER

Yes, he's come! He's really come back. But it's as if I'm
dreaming. Mother, what is it? You're staring at me.

MOTHER

Well, what a lucky coincidence for you to show up, just when
Chun-er was talking about you. Come over here and sit down.

DAUGHTER

Yes, come quickly. Sit here and put your things down. (She
helps him put down his knapsack and takes off his cap.)

WANDERER
(Crossing to the side of the well.)

The tree has grown so tall.

DAUGHTER

You should see how big our Lai-fu3 has grown! Lai-fu! Lai-
fu! Where did he go?

MOTHER

He left with Brother Li. He likes to go visiting folks.

WANDERER
(Crossing to the tree.)

And to stand beneath this tree once more. (DAUGHTER grabs
his walking stick out of his hand and flees inside to hide
it.) Miss Chun has really grown a lot in the year since
I've seen her.

MOTHER

Yes, she ought to have: she turned eighteen this year.
She's a very foolish child; you see that, don't you?

3Chun's dog, heretofore not mentioned.
WANDERER

Whose shoes are these?

MOTHER

Yes, I knew you'd forgotten them. They're the worn out old shoes you left behind. She treats them as though they are precious jewels. Until today she'd hidden them away somewhere. (The WANDERER does not answer. DAUGHTER brings some water out and gives it to the WANDERER so that he can wash his face.) That's right, Mr. Xin, go ahead and wash your face. Later on you can take a bath and get a little more comfortable.

WANDERER

Thank you. (He washes his face.)

MOTHER

Where did you come from this time?

WANDERER

Up North.

DAUGHTER

Then you must have seen those deep grey skies and the black forests and the mountains covered with snow.

WANDERER

Naturally I saw all of that and because I'd seen my fill I started thinking about coming south again.

DAUGHTER

But still, is the lake at the foot of that snow-covered mountain as green as ever?

WANDERER

As green as jade.

DAUGHTER

And is the field on the river bank as green as it was, too?
WANDERER
As soft and green as green velvet.

DAUGHTER
And do folks still tend their lambs on that field?

WANDERER
Mmm-hmmm, there is often a flock of lambs grazing on the velvety grass.

DAUGHTER
And by the flock of sheep, beneath the willow tree . . .

MOTHER
By the flock of sheep, beneath the willow tree, the maid who tends the sheep? (The WANDERER does not answer.) You have already married her? (He still does not answer.) Why didn't you let her come with you to the South?

DAUGHTER
Yes, why didn't you bring her along? I'm sure she's an adorable girl!

WANDERER
(Pauses; then:)

. . . Miss Chun, don't mention her. I have written this poem: (He holds his guitar and sings while he plays.)

"The village, wrapped in mist, receives me at its gate. The tip of the church steeple points proudly upward. Dimly I can still make out the same garden willows of five years ago. Chimney smoke curls upward forlornly from the roof tops.

The farmers tramp through the dusk, returning home. I stand, unmoving, before her door. The moon has sunk behind the western gate. And dawn breaks, white as the white of an egg.

I have no thoughts, My exhaustion is forgotten. I am only standing still and foolishly, Standing in front of her door."
I am so silent!
Silent, without a word,
As I wait for the dawn to enter my breast
I stand silent and still before her door.

Gradually I hear the rumors fly:
In the first year after you'd left your home
She had already married another man.
In the third year after you'd left your home
She finally perished of grief."

MOTHER

What? What kind of sadness is this? Then you two weren't married after all?

DAUGHTER
(Making it clear for him to her MOTHER.)

He returned home to look for her, and it was only then that he learned she'd married another man a year after he'd left. But she was unhappy in her marriage, and after three years she fell ill and died . . .

MOTHER

Oh, that girl is dead? This is really . . . well, what about your father who was living at the foot of that snow-capped mountain?

DAUGHTER

And your little sister? Are they both well?

WANDERER

Little Sister Chun (There are tears in his eyes as he sings.),

"Gradually I can hear the rumors fly
About an evil war of four years' past.
My home so burned that not a single tile remained.
Father died long, long ago
And Little Sister wandered, lost and penniless, to the ends of the earth.
That is not the courtyard of your home from olden days.
To where does the smoke float as it coils through the ruins of the desolate remains?"
DAUGHTER

Ai-ya, his papa died, and no one knows where his sister wandered to.

MOTHER
(Sighing.)

Ah, pitiful, how bitter our lives are.

WANDERER

Ah, Miss Chun, what about your father? He's not back yet?

DAUGHTER

Mr. Xin, my Papa cannot come back anymore. I am like you -- fatherless. (She weeps.)

WANDERER
(Shocked and mournful.)

When did Uncle pass away?

MOTHER

Almost six months ago.

WANDERER

Ah, how can life change so much? Human beings come so quickly into this world, and they leave it just as quickly, isn't that so?

DAUGHTER

Mr. Xin, this time you cannot leave again so quickly. You are the only one remaining from your family; Mother and I are the only ones remaining from ours. We need a man -- we need someone who can help us. You cannot leave me again. Mother will not let you go. Mama, isn't that right?

MOTHER
(Caught in a dilemma, she does not know what to say.)

Mmmm-hmmm. That's right, yes.

DAUGHTER

You cannot, cannot go. I have thought of you and hoped for you with such sadness in my heart. The shoes you left behind were the pillows where I rested my head every night.
And the poem you carved in the tree bark -- it became the
lesson I studied every day. As I grew taller day by day --
just like our tree -- I missed your heart so! If you hadn't
come back, I would have been as forgotten by you as those
shoes you left behind. But you have come back, just like I
knew you would! I will never be able to leave you, Mr. Xin.
Can you tell me that you won't leave me?

WANDERER

Miss Chun, you know that I am one who wanders to places far,
far away. How can I say anything with certainty? But I am
really so very weary. Because all I wanted was to rest
peacefully I returned at last to my native village. I
believed that those deep grey skies and black forests, and
the white, snow-covered mountain and the green lake would
comfort me as a tender mother comforts her son. But once I
knew that she had married another man and died, and that my
father, too, was no more, and that my sister had disappeared
-- then the skies, the forests, the snow-capped mountain,
and the river, seemed to weigh me down with grief. Friends
gave me work in the village, and I had plenty of money, so I
managed to get by for a couple of months. But the longer I
stayed, the more pain I felt. In the midst of my bitterness
I remembered the comfort you had given me. And so I took up
my knapsack and put my guitar on my back without even
realizing that I was once again wandering southward. I
never expected you to be so concerned for a wanderer like
me, without a home in all the four corners of the earth.
Miss Chun! You say you don't want to leave me. You ask me
how I could leave you. But even if I were to promise not to
leave you, who can guarantee with certainty that the day
won't come when I must?

DAUGHTER

No, Mr. Xin, believe me, there is no one who can separate
us.

WANDERER

Alright, then I will never leave you. (He embraces her.)

DAUGHTER

Oh, I'm so very happy. Mother, you be happy for me, too.
He says he won't leave me.

MOTHER

Child, look at you hanging on to Mr. Xin like that and
chattering away! He's come such a long way; he must be
hungry. Hurry up and make a little something for him to eat!

DAUGHTER

Yes, yes, I'll go right now and make something. Mother, is it too late to go and buy something special?

MOTHER

Tonight we'll eat light, and then tomorrow I'll go back and get something special.

DAUGHTER

Oh, alright. I'll steam the fish Brother Zheng-ming gave us. How would that be?

MOTHER

Alright.

DAUGHTER

Mr. Xin, sit here for awhile. I'll go make supper. (She exits into the kitchen.)

WANDERER

A year has passed quickly since I left, old Aunt.

MOTHER

It's been over a year, a year without end. When you left last year, the peach blossoms still had not opened. Now you're here, but the blossoms all fell to the ground long ago.

WANDERER

The days have flown by.

MOTHER

Yes, we planted several new trees out back this year, and they bloomed beautifully. If you'd come back a little sooner, you could have seen them. You've come too late; it's really too bad.
WANDERER

I'll have lots of time to see them. Since I won't be leaving I can plant lots more peach trees on the mountainside and turn this village into the capital of peach blossoms.

MOTHER

Mmm-hmm, that's right. (With another meaning.) But Mr. Xin, you have come too late, after all. You needn't think about having come a couple of months earlier or even a couple of weeks earlier. Just one day earlier, and everything would have been different.

WANDERER

What, could all the peach blossoms have fallen that quickly?

MOTHER

(Clears her throat before speaking.)

It's not that the peach blossoms have fallen quickly, it's that things have changed so quickly, Mr. Xin . . .

WANDERER

What is it, then?

MOTHER

Just before you arrived, just a moment ago, I promised Chun-er to a fellow named Li.

WANDERER

(Turning on her suddenly.)

What?

MOTHER

Don't be so upset. You can still live in my house, and I'll still look after you. But I must tell you this: Chun-er felt very strongly for you. Like a fool, she thought of you and waited for you constantly. Over a year passed, and you didn't come -- you didn't even write her a letter. I thought you had already married that young shepherd girl. And so I encouraged Chun-er to marry Li. You know, Chun-er is eighteen years old, and it's high time that she were married. (Pause.) Li is a good man, honest and a hard worker, and his family owns several acres of land and some hillside fields, too. Besides, he and Chun-er grew up
together, and she doesn't dislike him. I wanted to marry her off to him so I could have something to depend on. I told him just now to go ask Chun-er himself.

WANDERER

And what did Miss Chun say?

MOTHER

Chun-er? She has agreed . . . (Pause.)

WANDERER

Oh . . .

MOTHER

I want to choose a good day next month for Chun-er to be wed. What do you think?

WANDERER

(With a bitter smile.)

Fine.

Daugther

(Calling out as she enters from the kitchen.)

Mama, should we still plan on eating inside or should we eat outside?

MOTHER

It's too cold to eat here. We'll eat indoors.

DAUGHTER

Then I'll set the table in there. But just wait a minute while I go out to the garden and pick some vegetables.

MOTHER

Mr. Xin, we'll go on in. It's too warm inside during the day, but when evening comes it cools down some. Oh well, it is springtime, after all.

WANDERER:

Alright. But Auntie, there's something I want to ask you.
MOTHER
(Very anxiously.)

What is it? Ai, if you'd just have arrived a little sooner. Then everything would have been alright.

WANDERER

No. Please, dear Auntie, would you go inside and fetch my hat and walking stick for me?

MOTHER

Why?

WANDERER

No reason.

MOTHER

Mr. Xin, do you want to go? If you leave, Chun-er will be so sad. You can't leave today.

WANDERER

But I don't want to make Miss Chun unhappy, and so I must.

MOTHER

Then go. But wait until you've eaten, then go.

WANDERER

I can't; if I wait any longer to leave, it'll be too late to find an inn.

MOTHER

No, don't say anything about leaving tonight, Mr. Xin.

WANDERER

I must go. You know how I am. Take advantage of Miss Chun not knowing and hurry -- bring me my hat and walking stick.

MOTHER

There really is no other way. (She exits.)
WANDERER
(First takes out a small knife and crosses to scrape the poem off the tree; then turns to pick up his worn out shoes.)

"Oh, shoes, you are worn, you are so worn.
I left you behind in the South.
Once more I have staggered back.
You have served as a young maiden's pillow.
Seeing you stirs up memories of the days when once I roamed,
Seeing you, a wound in my heart is touched and opened.
I am like a lonely bird, wearily flapping his wings.
I am searching for a place that will nourish my scars.
But where is such a place in the world, where is such a place?
Again I am about to wander on a journey far away to nowhere.
Tired old shoes, I have left you behind, but I take you up again.
You are like precious gems that I will treasure and cherish;
You, with my walking stick and knapsack,
Will console me in my desolate wanderings.
Worn out shoes, when will we turn towards the road,
By whom will we be buried so deep in the earth?
Oh, shoes, I am lonely, and my heart is broken."

MOTHER
(Entering.)

Here's your hat and walking stick and knapsack. I had a hard time finding them: Chun-er had hidden them away, that foolish child. But please, Mr. Xin, won't you at least eat first before you go?

WANDERER

I can't wait, Auntie. (Puts on his cap, puts his knapsack on his back as before, puts his guitar over his shoulder, and takes up his walking stick.) Old Auntie, you take good care of yourself.

MOTHER

Really . . . you're leaving like this -- it makes me so very sad. Sometime, when you pass this way again, come and stay?

WANDERER

Alright. But things will never be the same again.
MOTHER

Have you anything for me to tell Chun-er?

WANDERER

What words could I have? . . . (Pause.) I came to the South to see the blossoms, but I arrived too late. What else is there to say? (Pause.) . . . Please tell Miss Chun not to think of me anymore. Life is a long journey: east or west, she must travel on her own road. I am an unfortunate man, and I am not willing for her to share my sorrow. Besides, sorrow is not something one shares with others. I'll take the shoes with me. I've scraped the words off the tree -- I do not wish to leave traces of sorrow behind for fortunate people. Naturally life is not merely a matter of luck. Whenever she is sad, tell her to know that in this world, in a far, far away corner of this world, there is a wanderer who secretly prays for her, for blessings on her . . . Good-bye. (Exits.)

MOTHER

(Calling after his shadow.)

Good-bye. Take good care of yourself.

DAUGHTER

(Offstage.)

Mother, supper is ready, and the table is set. Ask Mr. Xin to come in and eat.

MOTHER

Mmmmm. . .

DAUGHTER

(Offstage.)

Uh-ya, Mama, where is Mr. Xin's hat?

MOTHER

He's wearing it.

DAUGHTER

(Offstage.)

His walking stick?
MOTHER

He's holding it.

DAUGHTER
(Offstage.)

And his back pack?

MOTHER

It's on his back.

DAUGHTER
(Coming into the doorway.)

Mr. Xin?

MOTHER

He's gone.

DAUGHTER

He said he wouldn't leave! (Pause.) How can he have left? Mother, did you make him angry?

MOTHER
(Ashamed.)

No, no.

DAUGHTER

Did he say anything?

MOTHER
(Pauses, then:)

... No, he didn't say anything. Just that you should listen to what your mother says.

DAUGHTER

I don't believe it! (She begins throwing on clothes as though preparing to run away.)

MOTHER «

Where are you going? Child!
DAUGHTER

With him: to a far, far away place! (Running off.) Mr. Xin! Mr. Xin!

MOTHER

(Trying to stop her.)

Child! Child!

--CURTAIN--
AFTERWORD

Tian Han almost singlehandedly revolutionized Chinese theatrical practice with his early one-act plays. The structural shortcomings that characterize his initial forays into the field of dramatic writing, which are attributable to his inexperience and relatively limited exposure to the Western dramatic tradition, are outweighed by the historical implications of Tian Han's accomplishments. The plays represent the earliest attempts by a modern Chinese playwright to utilize a foreign form, spoken drama, and a foreign style, realism, to create dramas that were uniquely Chinese in theme and subject matter and present them to audiences who for centuries had relied upon highly presentational operatic melodrama as their only theatrical staple. Tian's early experiments with realism also served as examples for those Chinese playwrights who succeeded him, particularly Cao Yu and Lao She. The pre-leftist one-act plays of Tian Han, though seemingly simple and sometimes fragmentary, thus constitute a significant body of dramatic work.
Tian's interest in and commitment to realism in the theatre had important ramifications both in his producing and in his approach to dramatic writing. The notion that playwrights ought to strive to present objective representations of material reality based on their direct observations of contemporary life and manners had long been accepted in the West as established dramatic practice; it was, however, a concept that was unheard of in the Chinese theatre. Tian was instrumental in introducing and popularizing the fundamental tenets of dramatic realism to audiences who had little or no experience with a theatre that reflected the activities and occurrences of daily life and, in so doing, deliberately strove to conceal its artifice.

After over a century, the recreation of physical reality on the Western stage is taken for granted, but to Chinese audiences in the nineteen-twenties, heretofore accustomed to seeing bare stages upon which elaborate and symbolic choreography was utilized to suggest realistic scenic effects, Tian's use of scenic realism must have been stunning. Tian intended each of his early works to be performed in a completely new and realistic setting designed especially for that play and used for no other, a practice never before seen in Chinese staging. The concept of set design was essentially non-existent in the Beijing opera, which traditionally was performed on a bare stage before an
ornately decorated backdrop which could be used for any number of plays. The presence of set properties were either mimed by the actors or indicated by the symbolic use of stock set pieces: a simple table indicated a bed and a chair turned on its side represented a mountain.

Tian Han transformed the Chinese theatre scene by calling for thoroughly furnished interiors and exteriors which visually reproduced the physical trappings of daily Chinese life. To achieve that end he introduced the use of free standing three-dimensional set pieces and properties, including box sets and practical doors and windows, none of which had been seen onstage previously. Rather than using mime and dance as means of performing stage business, Tian's plays require the actors to handle properties realistically; in his plays characters cook and serve real food and drink, smoke, sew, paint, and write. In "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," "View of a Riverside Village," "Tragedy on a Lake," and "Shivers," characters use stage equivalents of various kinds of weapons to commit ostensibly graphic acts of violence, a practice that would have been shocking to audiences accustomed to seeing bloodless battles played out through the elaborate dancing and acrobatics of Beijing opera.

In order to place dramatic action in a larger context, Tian also attempted to use offstage space and sound effects as means of logically extending the stage beyond an area
that was immediately visible to the audience. Though his attempts to use offstage space effectively occasionally failed, as in "Before Lunch," he generally proved himself to be capable of creating believable offstage environments for his plays. The setting for "A Night in a Cafe," for example, does not stop at the cafe door; Tian combines offstage action with sound effects such as Kerensky's guitar to indicate a world that extends beyond the boundaries of the set walls. Thus, Tian attempted to conceal the identity of the stage as an artificial construct, creating instead a realistic impression of a world that exists beyond the immediate scope of the audience, who is witnessing only part of a larger, unseen whole.

Tian's settings for each play were not merely used as ornamentation for their own sakes or as backgrounds for action that unfolded in front of them. He paid close attention to the potential emotional qualities of scenic elements, creating dramatic relationships between his settings and the actions that transpired in them. He thus became the first Chinese playwright to dramatize the concept of the causal relationship between environment and behavior, a notion that was central to Western dramatic realism. The seediness of the set in "A Night in a Cafe," for example, is instrumental in effecting the attitudes and behavior of the characters. The poverty that drives the protagonists in "Before Lunch" to undertake their desperate measures must be
evident in the design of the set. In "Echoes of an Ancient Pond" settings function as visual manifestations of the physical or emotional states of the characters. Although Tian effectively made extensive use of furniture and hand properties for the purpose of realistic set decoration, such as the painting paraphernalia in "Night Talk in Suzhou" and kitchen utensils in "Before Lunch," his ability to take scenic elements a step beyond mere ornamentation by incorporating them as essential elements of dramatic action is indicative of his sensitivity to and ability to exploit fully the tenets of stage realism.

Tian's advances in the area of stage lighting were also remarkable, especially considering the technological state of the art in nineteen-twenties China and the standard approach to theatrical lighting for Beijing opera. Instead of using general illumination to light his plays, Tian made the realistic sources of his lighting effects visible, using both artificial and natural effects that ranged from gas lamps, fire, and candlelight to sunshine and moonlight. He was also painstakingly attentive to the effect his choice of light would bring to bear on each of his plays as a whole. The ethereal qualities of the candlelight and moonlight in "Tragedy on a Lake," for example, function as essential elements of Tian's scheme of probability for the play. Tian thus reveals at least a theoretical understanding of the importance of the quality of light as an integral element in
the creation of an environment and atmosphere that is peculiarly appropriate to the play for which it is required. Tian's concern with recreating physical reality onstage led him to strive to conceal the artificiality that is part and parcel of dramatic writing rather than capitalize upon it. Tian replaced the deliberate theatricality of Beijing opera with facsimiles of real life in order to give his audiences the impression that what they were witnessing was reality rather than theatre. He therefore wrote dialogue that he intended to be spoken in natural, conversational tones of vernacular Chinese rather than sung. The characters in Tian's plays address each other rather than the audience so that the spectators are placed in the position of "spying" on the drama through an invisible "fourth wall," a concept that was completely foreign to the Beijing opera, in which characters regularly acknowledge audience members by addressing them through the use of direct monologues and asides.

In choosing to write dramas in a realistic vein, Tian was challenged by the requirement of the style that the dramatist conceal rather than call attention to the process of selection that is essential to the shaping of a drama. Although he was not consistently successful in disguising the artificiality of his plots, as the clumsiness of structure in "Before Lunch" and "Shivers" demonstrates, he made significant strides in presenting action in such a way
that the action appeared to be transplanted to the stage in untampered form from daily life. In "A Night in a Cafe," "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," "Tragedy on a Lake," "Return South," and the first half of "Night Talk in Suzhou," Tian proved himself to be capable of hiding exposition in the flow of dialogue so that it seemed to be a natural part of the characters' conversations while simultaneously relaying needed information to the audience. He was able to disguise coincidental occurrences by carefully constructing logical schemes of probability and credible, causal relationships between antecedent and consequential action in "Tiger," "Tragedy," "Return South," and "Echoes of an Ancient Pond." In "View of a Riverside Village," he skillfully used false discoveries in conjunction with a calculated sequence of entrances and exits in order to create the illusion that action was moving toward a necessary, not merely probable, outcome. Tian thus experimented with a variety of structural techniques as means of constructing dramas that posed as equivalents of material reality.

To further achieve his goals, Tian based his dramas on daily problems as experienced by ordinary Chinese people, whom Tian portrayed as products of their environment, as in "Before Lunch and "View of a Riverside Village," psychology, as in "A Night in a Cafe" and "Echoes of an Ancient Pond," or heredity, as in "Shivers," all three of which were novel
ideas for Chinese audiences. Instead of recycling the stock types of Beijing opera, he drew upon contemporary, readily recognizable individuals of early twentieth century Chinese society to create new characters for the Chinese stage. The self-consciously nonconformist, often Westernized, young men and women who people Tian's plays are caught in the same dilemma that faced their counterparts in the audience: an overriding urge to explore and satisfy personal drives and desires brings them into direct conflict with the rigid, Confucian controls that traditionally governed acceptable modes of Chinese social behavior.

The collision between traditional and modern values results in the literal or figurative destruction of the young challengers to the old order. In "A Night in a Cafe," "The Night a Tiger Was Captured," and "Tragedy on a Lake," Tian's romance melodramas, the conflict revolves around lovers who are unable to reconcile their personal needs with the demands placed upon them by a decaying family system in which marriages are made for convenience rather than love. Tian does not depict ideal outcomes of those conflicts; the lovers are driven to suicide, succumb to fatal illnesses, or are left to face life alone. Though they initially embark on courses of independence and rebellion, the protagonists in all three dramas ultimately lose themselves in pursuit of dreams they cannot attain.
Tian's interest in adapting matters of contemporary importance to the stage also led him to turn his attention for a brief time to writing thesis dramas. The working class sisters in "Before Lunch", the peasant family of "View of a Riverside Village," and the painter Liu Shu-kang and his daughter in "Night Talk in Suzhou" are representative of the victimization of the common people by political, social, and economic forces they can neither understand nor control. In those dramas Tian depicts the insidious effects of ostensibly evil ideologies upon innocent characters. As a member of an underprivileged social class, Elder Sister in "Before Lunch" falls easy prey to the machinations of unscrupulous mentors; her Second Sister is driven to take a desperate political stance that results in her murder by government soldiers. The cruel economic system that forces young men to sell themselves to the highest paying warlord as the only means of staying alive is instrumental in effecting the deaths of the brothers in "View of a Riverside Village." "Night Talk in Suzhou" depicts the fortunate reunion of a father and daughter previously brought to ruin by war but not before the characters thoroughly discuss the destructive effects of warlordism. Tian thus incorporated the concept of the shaping of character by economic and environmental influences, a fundamental concept in Western dramatic realism, into Chinese dramaturgy.
Toward the end of the decade, Tian Han began to drift away from realism as a means of focusing attention on the social dilemmas of daily Chinese life and turned to creating dramas in which he used ostensibly realistic settings in combination with metaphoric action and poetic diction in order to create symbolic dramas that stood for referents beyond themselves. In his dramatization of the conflict between the Poet and Mei-ying in "Echoes of an Ancient Pond" Tian grappled with the implications of male and female responses to the nature of human impulse. The action of "Return South" is an ironic comment on the naivete of youth of the nineteen-twenties: Tian seemed to imply that the freedom for which those youths yearned was a sham that would cause them ultimately to suffer.

Tian Han's pioneering efforts in the theatre also led him to establish new practices in terms of production. Actors in Beijing opera were trained and performed according to lines of business similar to those to which Western actors adhered during the nineteenth century. An actor who portrayed xiao-sheng, that is, the stock type of the romantic young scholar, trained to perform that type of role; he did not alternate portraying xiao-sheng with performances of duan da roles in which he would be called upon to execute intricate acrobatics in military scenes. Although Tian had no Western model upon which to base his ideas, his organization of the South China Society bears a
surprising resemblance to contemporary repertory theatres. His actors were not given lines of business to which they were committed throughout their careers but were required to portray a range of roles that varied in age and type and, in some cases, sex. Actors and actresses occasionally rotated roles among themselves, depending upon the requirements of a season, as did Wan Lei-tian and Chen Ning-qiu for "Echoes of an Ancient Pond." Finally, by touring throughout the major cities of the Shanghai area and by encouraging women to enroll in his school and pursue theatrical careers, Tian Han was instrumental in popularizing the acceptance of sexually mixed casts on the Chinese stage, which for centuries had been primarily the province of men.

In the theatre, an art form that cannot exist without the presence of an audience, it is essential that the audience's assessment of a playwright's work be taken into account. In the hearts and minds of the young audiences who supported Tian Han and his acting companies, Tian's plays struck intensely responsive chords. Through his tours, his teaching, and his experiments in writing, Tian Han created new audiences for a form and style of theatre to which they had never before been exposed and, in so doing, not only genuinely moved the hearts of a decade of youthful theatregoers, but laid the foundation for a novel approach
to Chinese theatre and drama to which playwrights, performers, and audiences would continue to be committed throughout the twentieth century.
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