

The *Peacock* on Stage and in Print: A Study of the 1920s New Drama Adaptations of  
*Southeast Flies the Peacock*

Thesis

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## Abstract

This thesis is a revisionist study examining the Chinese new drama, *xinju*, of the 1920s, a field that has suffered from relative critical neglect and oversimplification. Situating my study in the field of cultural production, depicted by Pierre Bourdieu as an “economic world reversed,” I continue to investigate how the “three principles,” identified by Michel Hockx as constituting the structure of modern Chinese cultural production, commanded different agents in the field of new drama to share and/or compete for symbolic, economical and political capitals. In so doing, this thesis problematizes a series of binaries, namely, “old”/“new,” “West”/“China,” and “professional”/“amateur,” which have unfortunately served as the foundations of the monolithic imagination of Chinese modernity since at least the May Fourth movement.

To sufficiently argue against such schematization, the focus of this thesis is on a particular set of texts—a series of new drama adaptations of the ballad, *Southeast Flies the Peacock* (*Kongque dongnan fei*) that were circulated either as script or stage performances, or both in the 1920s. Through a close examination of the production and consumption of these printed scripts and stage performances, this thesis reveals the constant confrontations, compromises, and negotiations between the binaries of the West and China, the iconoclastic and the traditional, the reformative and the conservative, and the “new” and the “old” during the early formation of Chinese new drama at the turn of the twentieth century. Chapter 1 contextualizes China’s new drama field in the 1910s

and the 1920s by tracing how various agents constantly repositioned themselves by teaming up with or attacking other agents in the pursuit of economic, cultural, and political capital. Chapter 2 examines both the promotions/reviews of the 1922 amateur version of *Southeast Flies the Peacock* and unmasks the fallacy that the 1922 amateur version was simply a Westernized and radically iconoclastic text that could only be appreciated by modern students. Chapter 3 connects Yuan Changying's three-act play, *Southeast Flies the Peacock* (written in 1929 and published in 1930) with the 1922 amateur production and thereby enhances my hypothesis on the dynamic relationship among the commercial, the amateur and the new professional dramas. Finally, in the Conclusion, this thesis compares Hong Shen's 1935 "Introduction to Drama," Ouyang Yuqian's "Talk about Civilized Drama" (published posthumously in 1980), and my own contextualization of *Peacock* in order to again stress the hybridity and fluidity of new drama against the rigidity of conventional narratives of new drama's development, and hopes to facilitate further studies on professionalization in the field of Chinese drama.

## Dedication

To my best friend, John Marcus Knight

## Acknowledgments

My very first idea for this thesis project was rooted in a book review of Haiyan Lee's *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*, that I wrote for an independent study course with Dr. Kirk Denton in the winter quarter of 2008. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Denton's insistent inquiry for critical reading, which guides me to read, to understand, to have dialogue with scholarly works and finally to ask "what else can I contribute to the field?" Dr. Denton's prudent reading of various "textual" materials in his classes, i.e. his "Popular Culture" seminar, also inspires me to be curious of, and to be fascinated with, everything that I encounter in life. Also, in spring 2008, Dr. Patricia Sieber's seminar, "Modern Adaptations of Traditional Texts," offered me an opportunity to develop my curiosities of the new drama adaptations of traditional works. My term paper for that course set up the primitive framework of this thesis project. Thanks to Dr. Sieber's patience, encouragement, and great help in locating materials, I was able to further pursue my ideas/proposals into a workable thesis project. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Mark Bender and Dr. Andrea Bachner for their courses that helped me "read" performances and allowed me to rehearse the methodologies I apply to this thesis. Finally, I want to again thank Dr. Denton and Dr. Sieber, as well as John Knight, for being my very first readers. I also want to acknowledge John Knight and Debbie Knicely for their warm and assuring words that accompanied me through my self-suspicion and frustration. All of you have helped make this thesis possible.

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## Introduction

Since the 1990s, scholars such as Tani Barlow, David Wang, Lydia Liu, Leo Ou-fan Lee, and Dorothy Ko have contributed revisionist examinations of modern Chinese history, literature (fiction), popular culture, women's studies, etc.<sup>1</sup> In their inspiring works, these scholars investigate the complexity and heterogeneity of Chinese modernity. They reveal the constant confrontations, compromises, and negotiations between the binaries of the West and China, the iconoclastic and the traditional, the reformative and the conservative, and the “new” and the “old” during the early formation of China's modernity at the turn of the twentieth century. Their revisionist scholarship questions such binaries, which have been the foundation of narratives of Chinese modernity since at least the May Fourth movement. During the past two decades, these sorts of fruitful and inspiring inquiries have been carried out in studies of other fields, including technology, film, and traditional opera.

Of particular note is Joshua Goldstein's *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-Creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937*. Goldstein's book is exclusively concerned with the “re-creation” of Beijing Opera in the late Qing and early Republican eras. His work problematizes the paradigm that automatically assigns “newness” to modern

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<sup>1</sup> See Tani Barlow, “Colonialism's Career in Post-War China Study,” in *positions* 1.1 (1993): 224-67. Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). David Der-Wei Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

intellectuals, students, and other emerging social groups, whereas “oldness” is used to describe conservative scholars, Chinese opera singers, and uneducated low-brows who only cared about the “immortals” and “eroticism” of traditional operas. Instead, Goldstein describes the striving of Chinese opera performers for “newness” in their re-creation of Beijing Opera: “old” agents rehearsing modern/Western ideologies (content, *ti*) on- and off- the traditional/Chinese stage (form, *yong*).

Goldstein’s approach encourages me to take a skeptical look at the legacy of Chinese new drama, a “new” theatrical form that emerged in the first two decades of the twentieth century and that is often contrasted with the “old” Beijing Opera. Goldstein’s investigation of the “newness” inscribed in “old” operatic performances serves as a mirror image for my study of Chinese new drama. I ask the following questions: who (what agents) upheld new drama? Did these agents uniformly rehearse the agenda of “being new?” If not, exactly how much “newness” was created and how much “oldness” resided in new drama? I suggest that simply categorizing these dramas as “new” blinds us to their heterogeneity and hybridity. My concern in this thesis is how the hybrid forces get manifested in various forms of new drama: the commercial civilized drama of the 1910s, amateur drama of the early 1920s, and new professional drama of the late 1920s.

Before investigating these specific questions, however, I should first step back and answer a much broader pair of questions: Does the Chinese new drama of the 1910s and the 1920s deserve close examination? And can the close reading of a few drama performances contribute to a discussion of general issues regarding Chinese modernity and its complex relations to national culture, commercialization, gender, and debts to

traditional Chinese, Japanese, and Western influences? My answer to both is “yes,” for the following reasons.

First, the still evolving genre of “new drama” up until the 1920s was an amalgamation of various influences, including Western spoken drama, Japanese *Shinpa*,<sup>2</sup> and traditional Chinese opera. The earliest constructions of new drama in the 1930s realized and incorporated this hybridization into the descriptions of the genre. In 1935, in his “Introduction to Drama” (*Xiju daoyan*), written for the *Compendium of Chinese New Literature* (*Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi*), Hong identified the first generation of new drama activists as “old and new drama players (*jiude yu xinde xizimen*).”<sup>3</sup> The “old players” included: Wang Xiaonong, aka, Wang Zhongxian, who in the Guangxu-Xuantong period (1875-1911) actively used traditional operatic performances<sup>4</sup> to propagate revolutionary messages in the foreign concessions in Hankou and Shanghai; and “players who hoped to reform Chinese old operas,”<sup>5</sup> such as Xia Yuerun who organized a new drama troupe, New Stage (*Xin wutai*), and built a new drama theater in Shanghai in 1908.<sup>6</sup> True, Hong later states that these old players’ new explorations were still circumscribed by Beijing Opera (*Beixi*) and therefore tended to be “incomplete” and immature. However, his account nonetheless stretches the history of Chinese new drama back to the late Qing period and thus saves the construction of new drama from repeating

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<sup>2</sup> Shinpa is “the first [theatrical form] to develop outside of the *kabuki* world after the Meiji Restoration as an attempt to modernize and westernize Japan’s drama.” See Benito Ortolani, *The Japanese Theatre: From Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1995), 233.

<sup>3</sup> Hong Shen, “Xiju daoyan” [Drama Introduction], in *Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi* [Compendium of Chinese New Literature], 10 vols. (1935; reprint, Hong Kong: Xianggang wenxue yanjiu she, 1935), 9:3762.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Such as, *The Peach Blossom Fan* (*Taohua shan*), *Cry the Ancestral Temple* (*Ku zumiao*); *Six Troops Anger* (*Liujun nu*), and *Zhang Song Present the Map* (*Zhang Song xian ditu*).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 13. These reformist players staged *New La dame aux Camélias* (*Xin chahua*), *The Black Record of Wronged Spirits* (*Heiji yuanhun*), *Eternal Regrets at the End of Ming Dynasty* (*Mingmo yihen*), and *Poor Flowers and Rich Leaves* (*Qiong hua fu ye*), etc.

the conventional narratives of Chinese modern fiction that claim no modern fiction existed prior to Lu Xun's 1918 "Diary of a Madman." That is to say, if the history of Chinese new drama is indeed longer than that of modern fiction, then we can assume that the content of new drama would preserve a good portion of traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, a close study of new drama productions can challenge the binary, often mistakenly upheld as the principle means to understand modern Chinese culture, of the "West/new" and "China/old."

Second, it was through the mediation of Japanese *shinpa* that Chinese new drama first made contact with Western spoken drama conventions and repertoires. If we take into account the influence that the Chinese operatic tradition has on traditional Japanese theatre, the formulation of Chinese new drama follows a route similar to that depicted in Lydia Liu's *Translingual Practices*: traditional Chinese cultural elements (operas) were first imported to Japan, where they combined with Western dramatic influences and developed into a Japanese-Western hybrid (*shinpa*) that was then imported back to China (new drama). Hong Sheng, in his construction, also recognizes the association between Chinese new drama and Japanese *shinpa*. Hong believes it was a group of Japanese overseas students, the "new drama pioneers (*xianfeng jia*)," who "bravely, not hesitantly, carried out a complete revolution of Chinese old operas" and "formed new dramas."<sup>7</sup> These students, Zeng Xiaogu, Ouyang Yuqian, Lu Jingruo, and Ma Jiangshi, assisted by a Japanese *shinpa* actor, Fujisawa Asajirō, founded the Spring Willow Society and staged *The Black Slave's Cry to Heaven (Heinu yutian lu)* in Tokyo in 1907, which was praised

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<sup>7</sup> Hong Shen, 9:3763.

as a “great artistic success.”<sup>8</sup> Ouyang Yuqian also confirms the close relationship between Japanese *shinpa* and civilized drama by comparing Ren Tianzhi’s acting method of improvised speech with the Japanese *shinpa* acting style.<sup>9</sup> In short, what can be classified as the three principle dramatic influences of Chinese new drama are identical to the three major cultures that have shaped Chinese modernity—namely, Western, Japanese, and traditional Chinese.

Third, new drama, a form of mass media that served both entertainment and educational roles, was shaped by a variety of agents: producers, performers, playwrights,<sup>10</sup> owners of theaters/stages, enlighteners, entertainers, and audiences. New drama also needed support from the commercial press to publish advertisements as well as critical reviews. Since the early 1920s, scripts (*juben*) of amateur drama and later new professional drama were often published in literary supplements (*fukan*) and the official journals of new drama societies, which increased the circulation of new drama among middle-/high-brow readers. In the process of producing, selling, and consuming new drama, individual performers, audiences, investigators, literary societies, and institutions sought to gain advantages in money, pleasure, reputations, etc. A study of new drama,

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<sup>8</sup> Siyuan Liu’s dissertation, “The Impact of *Shinpa* on Early Chinese *Huaju*,” nicely traces “the impact of Japanese *shinpa*, as well as that of Western theatre through *shinpa*” on Chinese new drama. Siyuan Liu further reveals that students in the Spring Willow Society “brought with them a set of Westernized theatrical conventions,” such as realistic lighting, scenery, and costumes when they came back to Shanghai from Tokyo, where they had indirectly received the Japanized conceptions of Western spoken drama. Furthermore, the repertoire of civilized dramas also shows the Japanese and Western impact upon “Chinese new drama, through the *shinpa*’s influence in adaptations of both *shinpa* versions of European plays and original *shinpa* productions such as *Hototogisu* (Cuckoo).” See Liu Siyuan, “The Impact of *Shinpa* on Early Chinese *Huaju*.” Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2006 346, 348-9.

<sup>9</sup> See Ouyang Yuqian, “Tan wenming xi” [On Civilized Dramas] in *Ouyang Yuqian quanji* vol. 6, [The Complete Works of Ouyang Yuqian] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1990), 186.

<sup>10</sup> The professional divisions between these roles were not yet formed in early civilized dramas. Usually, the organizer/initiator of a troupe played the multiple roles of producer, director, playwright/story teller, and actor. This phenomenon was changed in the second half of the 1920s when new professionals were predominantly responsible for scripts.

thus, also offers a platform in which to observe the heterogeneity of modern Chinese society in its early formation.

By applying the terms “producing,” “selling,” and “consuming,” I do not intend to conflate the new drama field with regular commercial production, nor do I wish to ignore the complex and dynamic relationship among what Michel Hockx defines as the “three principles”—the autonomous principle, the heteronomous principle, and the political principle—that constitute the structure of modern Chinese cultural production.<sup>11</sup> In emphasizing the (self) positioning of different agents as “new” or “old,” “Chinese” or “West,” “professional” or “amateur” in the field of new drama, I am indebted to the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his notion of literary “field.” Bourdieu was the first to develop the “autonomous (literary) principle” and “heteronomous (non-literary) principle” to construct the literary field of modern French society.<sup>12</sup> On the basis of the former principle, “symbolic capital” is produced and distributed prior to and superior to “economic capital,” which is related to the latter principle. Michel Hockx develops a critical appropriation of Bourdieu’s theory in his construction of the literary field of twentieth century China. Hockx points out that these two principles cannot sufficiently schematize Chinese literary practice because a third principle—political principle—“partly but not fully heteronomous, . . . motivates modern Chinese writers to consider, *as part of their practice*, the well-being of their country and their people.”<sup>13</sup> As a result, upon entering the literary field, Chinese writers (un)consciously tended to earn “symbolic

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<sup>11</sup> Michel Hockx ed., *The Literary Field of Twentieth-Century China* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii, 1999), 9.

<sup>12</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, (New York: Columbia University, 1995), 38.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Hockx, 9.

capital” under the rule of “autonomous principle,” “economic capital” under the rule of “heteronomous principle,” and “political capital” under the rule of “political principle.”

Building on Michel Hockx’s encompassing model of the literary field in twentieth century China, I frame my earlier positioning of “old” and “new” agents in the field of new drama by asking: (1) Where and how were the above-mentioned “agents” (self) positioned within the new drama field? (2) How did they strive to earn “economic capital,” “symbolic capital,” and “political capital?” (3) How did they strengthen (or alter) their own established positions vis-à-vis other agents/institutions to which they were either attached or which they contested?

Unfortunately, in spite of new drama’s inherent fluidity, current scholarship still tends to schematize it as grand and homogenous, without much contradiction or negotiation.<sup>14</sup> This schematization can be roughly framed as follows: early new dramas were freed from Chinese operatic conventions and developed into so-called “civilized drama;”<sup>15</sup> then, the predominance of profit concerns (the heteronomous principle) corrupted civilized drama and turned the “civilized” into “uncivilized”; and finally, the mature form of spoken drama, having first succeeded the transitional phase of amateur drama, was canonized by Hong Shen, Tian Han, Ouyang Yuqian and other new drama

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<sup>14</sup> In the past two decades, scholars focused on Chinese modernity have carried out numerous fruitful studies on mass print materials (Lee Ou-Fan’s *Shanghai Modern*), vernacular novels (Perry Link’s and Rey Chow’s studies on the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly school literature), early films (Zhang Zhen’s study on early Chinese films), as well as everyday life and other popular cultural models, and thereby uncovered the fascinating and heterogeneous modern society of the late Qing and early Republican era. More important, these studies have to some extent deconstructed May Fourth modernity, which was invented and exaggeratingly upheld as the only (homogeneous) modern discourse at that time. However, at present there is a dearth of such studies directly channeled to the field of Chinese new drama.

<sup>15</sup> As Ouyang Yuqian recalls, it was newspaper advertisements that first used the term “civilized” (*wenming*) to promote Chinese new drama in the 1910s. Later, new drama (new culture) advocates circulated this advertising term and canonized it into a sub-genre of modern Chinese literature—a harbinger of spoken drama. See Ouyang Yuqian, “Tan wenming xi,” 181.

advocates in Shanghai in 1928.<sup>16</sup> Such schematization simplifies the continuous negotiation and (re) alliance among “agents” and “institutions” as a straightforward evolution that ends up with “newness” triumphing over “oldness.” Moreover, it fabricates an artificial victory of “symbolic capital” and/or “political capital” over “economic capital” while leaving unspoken the complicated fluidity of their three-dimensional structure.<sup>17</sup>

To sufficiently argue against such schematization, I focus in this thesis on a particular set of texts—a series of new drama adaptations of the ballad, *Southeast Flies the Peacock* (Kongque dongnan fei, hereafter, *Peacock*) that were circulated either as script, or stage performances, or both in the 1920s. The ballad *Peacock* is recognized as the first long narrative poem in Chinese literary history. Along with *Song of Mulan* (*Mulan ci*) from the Northern Dynasty, *Peacock* is praised as one of the “Double Concertos” of Chinese ballad (*yuefu shuangbi*). The earliest extant text of this anonymous piece is believed to be contained in *New Recitations of the Jade Terrace* (*Yutai xin yong ji*), compiled by Xu Ling (507-538) around 535 to 545 CE with the title of “Jiao Zhongqing’s Wife” (*Jiao Zhongqing qi*). The poem tells of a family trauma that occurred in the Jian’an era (196-220 CE) at the end of the Han: Liu Lanzhi, the wife of

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<sup>16</sup> Tian Benxiang, Ge Yihong and other scholars hold similar narratives on the history of Chinese modern drama. Chen Xiaomei also somewhat shares this discourse, though she is aware of its problematic nature. Chen defines Chinese spoken drama as “a modern invention by May Fourth men of letters who imitated Western dramatic conventions as an alternative to traditional operatic theater.” At the same time, Chen acknowledges that this complexity impedes scholars from suggesting “a clearly definable and easily separable chronology of such a complex genre.” Despite the obscurity, Chen claims, along with other scholars, that the year 1928 “marks a turning point” because Hong Shen’s proposal of coherently using “spoken drama” to refer to the new theatric performance was settled upon by Ouyang Yuqian, Tian Han and other dramatists in the commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of Ibsen’s birth held in Shanghai. See Chen Xiaomei, “Twentieth-Century Spoken Drama,” in *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, ed. by Victor H. Mair (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 857.

<sup>17</sup> Michel Hockx, 17.

Jiao Zhongqing, is expelled by her mother-in-law, Mother Jiao, and is later compelled by her elder brother to remarry. But, being faithful to their feelings (*qing*), Lanzhi and Zhongqing commit suicide instead. After their death, the Jiao family and the Liu family agree to bury the couple together.

*Peacock's* eulogy of *qing* between the young couple, Lanzhi and Zhongqing, resides well within the iconoclastic discourse that first “modernized” *qing* into “love,” and then, in the 1920s, constructed a contradiction between the young couple’s freedom to love and patriarchal authority. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that since the 1915 eruption of the New Culture movement, many traditional *qing* stories, such as the story of *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*, aka, *The Butterfly Lovers (Liang Zhu)* and *Story of White Snake (Baishe zhuan)*, were adapted into film, popular fiction, and occasionally new dramas, and became masterpieces of anti-traditionalism.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, the flurry of new drama adaptations that *Peacock* experienced did not occur to *The Butterfly Lovers* and *Story of White Snake*; neither did the frequent film adaptations of those two “love” stories carry over to *Peacock*. In fact, *Peacock* was only adapted onto the screen once by a small film company, Peacock Film Company (*Kongque dianying gongsi*), in 1926 after a couple of new drama adaptations of *Peacock* had already been published or performed, but this film did not make much of an impact upon the “folk story fad” established by the Tianyi Film Company (*Tianyi dianying gongsi*) in the 1920s.<sup>19</sup> What made *Peacock's*

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<sup>18</sup> For example, in 1926, the Tianyi Film Company released *The Lovers (Liangzhu tongshi)*, and *The White Snake (Baishe zhuan Parts I and II)*. In 1927, Tianyi Film Company released *The White Snake (Part III)* one year after the first two adaptations. At the same year, Tianyi Film Company released *Shilin Sacrifices the Pagoda (Shilin ji ta)* which was also entitled *The White Snake!*

<sup>19</sup> Wu Yigong ed., *Shanghai dianying zhi* [The Catalogue of Shanghai Films], (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1999) and *Zhongguo dianying qikan quanzhi* [The Catalogue of Chinese Modern Film Journals] at <http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/index.htm> both record how the Tianyi Film Company adapted many “folk stories” into films and released them in Southeast Asia (*nanyang*) in the 1920s.

fate different from these other folk stories? Arguably, both *The Butterfly Lovers* and *Story of White Snake* were more popular than *Peacock* before the twentieth century since they were both adapted into traditional operatic performances and often staged in public whereas *Peacock* was only rarely adapted as a traditional opera.<sup>20</sup> Considering the close association between early Chinese film and traditional opera, it is not surprising that the Tanyi Film Company did not film *Peacock*. That is to say, within the overall trend of the modern adaptation of traditional stories, *Peacock*'s case is a particular one, because it is in the field of new drama that *Peacock*'s ready accommodation of the modern iconoclastic spirit was first discovered and repeatedly employed. In this regard, the new drama adaptations of *Peacock* provide an appropriate and representative niche to investigate the wider field of new drama in general.

It is important to note that the new drama *Peacocks* of the 1920s and 1930s were staged predominantly by “amateur” troupes. In the canonical view of the development of modern Chinese drama, “amateur” serves as an absolute alternative to the so-called commercial civilized drama of the 1910s. In this view, the former attracted only modern students and existed exclusively within the “ivory tower” of academia, whereas the latter was “civilizational” (i.e., enlightening) in the beginning but very soon fell into the abyss of money's corrupting influence. However, in my examination of *Peacock*'s “flight” over the amateur stage in 1922, it becomes clear that this “amateur” drama shared similar financial concerns and aesthetic standards with commercial civilized drama. This discovery in turn challenges another problematic binary, that of professional vis-à-vis amateur, which was constructed by both amateur drama activists and elite literary critics.

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<sup>20</sup> In fact, my current research has not encountered any traditional operatic adaptations before the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

That is to say, a close reading of the new drama adaptations of *Peacock* will intertwine concerns of “who are ‘old’ and who are ‘new’” with “who are ‘professional’ and who are ‘amateur.’” In so doing, this study envisions a broader scenario for the Chinese new drama field by stressing the interrelated influences of “economic capital,” “cultural capital,” and “political capital.”

Finally, in these new drama productions of *Peacock* the characters of Lanzhi, Zhongqing, and Mother Jiao were brought back to life and made relevant to a twentieth-century audience. To update the story, the conjugal *qing* between Lanzhi and Zhongqing was transformed into modern love, the malicious relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law was reinterpreted as “jealousy,” and the traditional format of a sad family story offset by an after-death reunion was transformed into a Western “tragedy” whose very form precluded a “happy ending.” Yet, the themes underpinning “love,” “jealousy,” and “tragedy” differ from version to version. From the 1922 *Peacock*, which was collectively composed by a group of female students, to the 1929 *Peacock*, which was written by the female dramatist Yuan Changying, the relationship between Lanzhi and Zhongqing evolved from one of mutual support within wedlock to the intense desire of courtship; “jealousy,” presented in earlier versions only subtly, was later given loud Oedipal overtones; and “tragedy” changed from strict pursuit of the classical Western format of a five-act tragedy to aspiring to reach a higher standard of tragic spirit, understood as the conflict between human beings and fate. These new drama adaptations of *Peacock* reveal the inadequacy of the stiff binary of “oldness” and “newness” to adequately capture a culture’s heterogeneity, which is often whitewashed by a monolithic discourse of “modernity.” In short, a study of the 1920s new drama adaptations of

*Peacock* shows the plasticity of a single text that can be remolded in multiple ways for differing purposes. More important, it shows that there is much negotiation and fluidity between the poles of binary constructs like “China/West” and “old/new.” In revealing their complex interrelationships, this thesis also questions labels such as “civilized drama,” “amateur drama,” and “professional drama,” which suggest that these genres are unrelated theatrical phenomena.

Despite the numerous dramatic adaptations of *Peacock* in the 1920s, only a few scholars mention the “*Peacock* fad” when they discuss Yuan Changying’s three-act *Peacock*, composed in Beijing in 1929 and published in Shanghai in 1930. Elizabeth Eide was one of the first Western scholars to write about Yuan Changying’s *Peacock*. In her article “The Ballad ‘Kongque dongnan fei’ as Freudian Feminist Drama,” published in *Republican China* in 1989, Eide includes a footnote to indicate authors/performers and performing/publishing dates of earlier adaptations of *Peacock* in the 1920s. Although Eide’s summary is overly general and sometimes inaccurate, her contextualization of the “*Peacock* fad” of the 1920s provides a starting point from which to further investigate, and hopefully improve, our understanding of Yuan’s version. The *Concise Listing of Chinese Modern Drama (Zhongguo xiandai xiju zongmu tiyao)*, edited by Dong Jian in 2005, supplements Eide’s account by offering entries on all the *Peacock* versions that include author(s), publisher/publishing journal, publishing date and a synopsis under each entry. Unfortunately, *Concise List* focuses only on script publication and does not examine stage performances. Combining Eide’s earlier contextualization with *Concise List*, we find that there were at least five “new drama” *Peacocks* in the 1920s: (1) in 1922, students of Beijing Women’s Higher Normal School composed and staged a six-act

*Peacock*, the script of which was revised by Chen Dabei as a five-act play and published in *Drama (Xiju)* later that year; (2) Feng Han published one act of a projected, but never completed, four-act *Peacock* in *Qinghua Literature (Qinghua wenyi)* in 1925 (Eide does not mention this adaptation in her summary); (3) in 1928, the Shanghai Book Bureau published Yang Yinshen's three-act play *Rock and Pampas Grass (Panshi he puwei)* (neither Eide nor *Concise List* mentions whether this script was ever staged); (4) Xiong Foxi wrote a one-act play, *Lanzhi and Zhongqing (Lanzhi yu Zhongqing)* in 1929, which was published in *Eastern Miscellany (Dongfang zazhi)* (vol. 26 no.1) (*Concise List* does not include this adaptation); (5) in 1929, Yuan Changying finished her three-act play in Beijing, and it was officially published as part of the *Modern Literature Series (Xiandai wenyi congshu)* by the Commercial Press in 1930.

My research confirms that the Beijing Women's Higher Normal School's *Peacock* and Yuan Changying's *Peacock* were both staged more than once by amateur student drama troupes in the 1920s and 1930s, respectively. By contrast, Feng Han's incomplete script and Yang Yinshen's three-act play were most likely only circulated as written texts and were, to my knowledge, never staged. As for Xiong Foxi's play, whether it was ever produced on stage remains unclear. In a preface to the published script, Xiong explains that *Lanzhi and Zhongqing* was "requested" by the Beijing Women's Association (*Beiping funü xiehui*), which invited Xiong to direct *Peacock* based on an existing five-act script. Although Xiong recognized the dramatic potential of this story, he openly criticized the five-act script for being "inappropriate" (*bude*) and "badly adapted." An actor, whose identity is unknown, then asked Xiong to write a new

play based on the *Peacock* story. Xiong published his one-act version in 1929.<sup>21</sup> It remains unclear whether Xiong later staged his play with the original group of actors attached to the Beiping Women's Association or simply suspended the project. The "badly adapted" script likely refers to the 1922 amateur *Peacock* because no other five-act adaptation appears to have been produced between 1922 and 1928. In addition, as Xie Bingying, a female student-cum-writer, suggests, the Beiping Women's Association was closely associated with female student groups,<sup>22</sup> and it is thus quite possible that some of these "actors" might also be from female amateur troupes and intended to use the script produced by their predecessors in 1922. If this hypothesis is correct, Xiong composed his one-act play with direct reference to the 1922 amateur *Peacock* (as well as of course to the original folk ballad). The amateur *Peacock* not only "flew" over the amateur stage, but also affected the likes of Xiong Foxi and his professional theater peers who had received academic training in America/the West in the early 1920s. Taking this hypothesis into account, in this thesis I question the tendency to romanticize the dramas composed by elite professionals as unprecedented and independent from their previous "immature" and "amateur" predecessors.

Limited by the availability of materials, I am unable to investigate in detail all five of the 1920s new drama adaptations. However, in looking at the trajectory of modern dramatic versions of *Peacock* from the 1922 amateur version to Yuan Changying's 1929 three-act play, this thesis presents an overarching view that perhaps compensates for any missing pieces. On the one hand, this thesis works against the

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<sup>21</sup> Xiong Foxi, "Lanzhi yu Zhongqing" [Lanzhi and Zhongqing], in *Dongfang zazhi* [Eastern Miscellany], (vol. 26, no.1), 1929.

<sup>22</sup> Shi Nan, *Zhongguo Diyi nü bing: Xie Bingying Quanzhuan* [The First Chinese Woman Soldier: A Biography of Xie Bingying], (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe), 2008.

binary of “professional” and “amateur,” preferring instead to focus on the fluid negotiation, rather than the abrupt break, between the 1922 amateur *Peacock* and the commercial civilized drama that flourished in the 1910s. To do so, I also present some background on the general development of new drama throughout the 1910s and the 1920s. On the other hand, this study also aims to clarify the subtle differences between various perspectives of “modernity” and “newness” that are often lumped together under a monolithic discourse. Comparison of Yuan Changying’s three-act *Peacock* with the 1922 amateur *Peacock* helps to understand the materializations of “love,” “tragedy,” and “anti-traditionalism” in different phases of China’s modernization process. Moreover, by positioning Yuan Changying’s three-act play as part of the interim phase between amateur drama and elite professional drama, I draw attention to the lingering continuity between Yuan’s *Peacock* and the amateur *Peacock*. For example, I suggest that, in its “obsession” with material “authenticity” and “realism,” Yuan’s *Peacock* has a lineage that can be traced back to the civilized drama tradition. The 1922 amateur *Peacock* thus serves as this thesis’ hub, connecting commercial civilized drama, amateur drama, and elite professional drama, genres that overlapped as well as contested with each other prior to, and during the beginning of, the canonization of Chinese spoken drama in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Having thus elucidated the grander goals and the framework of this thesis, I now define a series of terms, already alluded to above, related with the field of drama. At the commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of Ibsen’s birth held in Shanghai in 1928, Hong Shen proposed the term “spoken drama” in reference to the new theatrical

performances that were seen as an alternative to the Chinese operatic tradition.<sup>23</sup> Before this turning point and even for a couple years afterward, a series of terms related with “drama” (*ju*) and “opera” (*qu*) were borrowed, invented, defined, redefined, and used in rather confusing ways. For the sake of clarity and consistency, I use “new drama” (*xinju*) to refer to all new theatrical works that predominantly used dialogue and limited the amount of musical elements. *The Black Slave’s Cry to Heaven*, staged by the Spring Willow Society (*Chunliu she*) in Tokyo in 1907, is often thought of as the debut of new drama. The term “new drama,” sometimes interchanged with “modern play” (*xiandai ju*), continued to be used until the beginning of the 1930s. Throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century, the meaning of new drama was sometimes narrowed and thus overlapped with “civilized (new) drama” (*wenming xi*), “amateur drama” (*ai’mei ju*), and “modern plays” (*xiandai ju*). What follows is a brief review of the formulation of these terms in chronological order.

According to Ouyang Yuqian, the term “civilized drama” first appeared in newspaper advertisements<sup>24</sup> for the purpose of promoting new drama in the 1910s. Audiences very quickly adopted the term, and included civilized drama within a larger chain of “civilized” social phenomena. Later, new drama activists like Ouyang Yuqian recognized the popularity of this term and followed the advertisements and audiences in calling their own works “civilized drama.” That is to say, the term “civilized drama” was formulated in the following order: first through a circulation agent (advertisement), then reception subjects (the audience), and finally by new drama activists. As mentioned, new

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<sup>23</sup> See Chen Xiaomei, “Twentieth-Century Spoken Drama,” in *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, ed. by Victor H. Mair (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 857.

<sup>24</sup> See Ouyang Yuqian, “Tan wenming xi” [On Civilized Dramas] in *Ouyang Yuqian quanji* vol.6 [The Complete Works of Ouyang Yuqian] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1990), 181.

drama was not the only cultural phenomenon with the prefix “civilized.” Zhang Zhen explains that *wenming* was a loanword adapted from the Japanese term *bunmei*, which was hailed as “a key banner of the Meiji Reformation.”<sup>25</sup> The relocation of *wenming* in the late Qing and early Republican eras, as well as its proliferation through the booming print culture, went hand in hand with the public’s imagination of a “modern” China. As a result, civilized drama was part of a popular trend that included *wenming hunli* (civilized wedding), *wenming lian’ai* (civilized love), *wenming xuesheng* (civilized students), *wenming fu* (civilized clothes), and *wenming jiao* (unbounded women’s feet),<sup>26</sup> all united by the hope that a modern (non-Chinese) “spirit” could transform traditional (Chinese) culture from “backward” to “enlightened.”

After 1913, when various civilized drama troupes began to experience difficult commercial pressures, some new drama activists who were unwilling or unable to keep up with the competition, such as Chen Dabei, harshly criticized the “uncivilized” elements that were threatening to overrun the field of new drama. Instead, they promoted new types of dramas, which were to be performed for “art’s sake” rather than for “money’s sake.” As early as 1921 when The Demotic Opera Troupe (*Mingzhon xiju she*) was newly founded, Wang Youyou used the English-Chinese hybrid name, “Western Amateur” (*Xiyang de amateur*). Then, on June 30, 1921, Chen Dabei published “Drama Guiding the Society and the Society Guiding Drama” (*Xiju zhidao shehui yu shehui zhidao xiju*) in the journal *Drama (Xiju)* (vol.1, no.2). In this article, Chen openly opposes civilized drama, traditional opera, and the commercialization of drama and

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<sup>25</sup> Zhang Zhen. *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 99.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

proposes in its stead a variation on Wang Zhongxian's term: "amateur drama." On November 1, 1922, *Beijing Morning Supplement* (*Chenbao fukan*) started to serialize the second half of Chen's "translation"<sup>27</sup> of *Amateur Drama* (*Aimei de xiju*). In the introduction, Chen explains the origins and translations of "amateur" in Latin, French, Japanese, and Chinese, and explains why he translates "amateur" into the Chinese term, *aimeide*:

The term of "amateur," evolved from the Latin word "Amator," means people who love beauty; the French word "Amateur" refers to people who love art but do not make a living from art. Some Chinese people translate [amateur] into "clear guests" (*qingke*), "ticket friends," (*piaoyou*), and "guest actors" (*kechuan*), but all these are inappropriate. Because the word "amateur" does not refer to those *qingke* who accompany patrons (*guiren*) for fun, neither does it refer to those *piaoyou* and *kechuan* who only pick up what players say (*shi lingren yahui*). All people who are free to do research on art could be called amateur, amateur photographers, amateur sculptors, amateur painters, etc. Japanese people translate "amateur" into "plain people" (*suren*), but I am afraid that we cannot borrow it either. Because *suren* might be confused with vegetarians and people who wear plain colors in the Chinese context. Now, I tentatively translate "amateur" into *aimeide*. When others come up with a term that has a closer meaning and pronunciation to amateur than *aimeide*, I will be happy to follow.<sup>28</sup>

In his effort to rectify the name of *aimeide*, Chen depicts *aimeide* as a conception originally connected with Latin and French culture. Chen eagerly severs all possible connections between "amateur" and the Chinese tradition and stresses the distinction between *aimeide ren* with *qingke* and *piaoyou*, who are associated with traditional

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<sup>27</sup> Han Rixin, *Chen Dabei yanjiu ziliao* [Research Materials of Chen Dabei], (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1985), 17. Han Rixin categorizes *Amateur Drama* as one of Chen's translation works, which is, unfortunately rather misleading. When coming to read part of Chen's "translation," it becomes clear that Chen only borrowed, not translated, Western drama theories and applied these theories to his constructions of Chinese new drama. In his 1935 *Drama Introduction*, Hong Shen only mentions that Chen Dabei "wrote a long article, *Amateur Drama*, based on a couple American books," but does not identify what those books are.

<sup>28</sup> Chen Dabei, "Amateur Drama" [*Aimeide xiju*], *Chenbao fukan* [Beijing Morning Supplement] (April 20, 1921).

operatic culture. Chen entirely avoids addressing the “amateur” tradition in Chinese literati culture, to which, James Cahill’s *The Painters Practice: How Artists Lived and Worked in Traditional China* offers some nice observations.<sup>29</sup> Cahill argues that the “mystique” vision of Chinese literati’s artistic creations was part of the fantasy of Chinese literati’s own narratives of art.<sup>30</sup> Although Chen Dabei eagerly defines amateurs as “people who are free to do research on” Western art, such as drama, photography, and sculpture, his romanticization of amateur drama as art “for art’s sake” does not look much different from traditional Chinese literati’s “amateur” imagination.

After contextualizing the term *aimeide*, Chen Dabei assumes that it will be easier to understand “amateur drama” as *aimeide xiju*. He contrasts amateur drama with “professional drama” and argues for the popularity of amateur drama troupes in the West and Japan:

European countries and our neighbor Japan all have many amateur drama troupes . . . for example, “Tokyo Amateur Troupe,” “London Amateur Troupe,” . . . Crews in the same ship name their amateur troupes after their ship; soldiers belonging to the same camp name their amateur troupes after their country.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, Chen Dabei justifies amateur dramas’ development by citing psychological theories and Shakespeare, and calls for amateur drama among modern students:

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<sup>29</sup> James Cahill, *The Painters Practice: How Artists Lived and Worked in Traditional China*, (1995). James Cahill’s study is an inspiring work in terms of understanding the literati artists’ creations, in particular their paintings. Cahill examines the literati art practiced by scholar-officials in traditional China, and offers a revisionist glance at differences between the “theory” of literati artists’ work and the “reality” of their life. Generally speaking, literati artists created paintings and claimed that they did so to memorize friendship, to “lodge exhilaration,” and to share their interior values with “like-minded aesthetes.” However, Cahill’s study challenges such idealistic imagination of elite amateurs and argues that works of some artists were hardly amateur.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>31</sup> Chen Dabei, *Chenbao fukan*, (April 20, 1921).

Psychology tells us, “acting is originated from human beings’ instinct nature of imitation”... Not limited by the instinct of shame, I assume that every person in the world would become good dramatists . . . “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.” Here, Shakespeare wants to say that there is no real stage except for the world.

...

But under the current economic situation, the air of regular theaters is not clean. Therefore, it is not appropriate to have teachers and students perform on the same stage with professional actors. So, many students build “Laboratory Theatre” (*shiyanshi de juchang*) in their own schools. Most European and American schools have such theatres. If, one day, Chinese education develops, Chinese schools should have such theatres.<sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately, I have been able to find only fragments of Chen Dabei’s “Amateur Drama,” and cannot therefore pursue the relationship between Chen’s theory of amateur drama and the many Western sources he refers. However, at least in the Introduction, Chen does not mention any Western amateur drama movements or specific Western amateur drama theories. In fact, the subtitles of the second half of Chen Dabie’s “Amateur Drama” suggest that Chen’s work predominantly deals with technical issues, such as makeup, stage sets, and natural lightening. Also, when Hong Shen reviews The Demotic Opera Troupe, Chen Dabie’s “Amateur Drama” is only treated as one of the measures to produce “dramas on stage” (*wutaishang de xiju*) rather than “dramas on paper” (*zhimianshang de xiju*).<sup>33</sup> That is to say, Chen’s 1921’s construction is concerned with how to produce new (amateur) drama more than how to initiate an amateur movement. This situation changed when Chen later promoted the “amateur drama” movement in Beijing in 1922. The term “amateur” was clarified as meaning “non-profit.” In brief, when first translating “amateur” into Chinese, Chen initially claimed the artistic connotation of amateur as a “love art,” but when the Demotic Opera Troupe’s

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<sup>32</sup> Chen Dabei, *Chenbao fukan*, (April 20, 1921).

<sup>33</sup> Hong Shen, 28.

competition with civilized dramas became more acute, the connotation of “non-profit” took over as the defining feature of amateur drama.

In this thesis, I use the term “play” (*ju*) to refer to dramatic works written by elite professional dramatists in the second half of the 1920s and that circulated predominantly as scripts. In general, the number of performances based on these scripts is far fewer than the number of scripts published as books. After 1928, the term “spoken drama” became increasingly standardized, and the genre of new drama was canonized as “spoken drama.” The distinction between traditional operas and new dramas was so well established by this time that *ju* referred exclusively to spoken drama while *xi* signified traditional operas. Therefore, the term “play,” which used to be too general to identify a specific sub-genre, became in the 1930s a specific reference to theatrical performances other than traditional operas.

Before examining the “hub” of this thesis, the 1922 amateur *Peacock*, chapter 1 contextualizes China’s new drama field in the 1910s and the 1920s. My contextualization aims to initiate a dialogue with Ouyang Yuqian’s depictions of civilized drama’s three phases. In so doing, I aim to reexamine the fate of commercial civilized drama and amateur drama, which were predominated depicted as decadent by Ouyang Yuqian, Xu Banmei, and other civilized drama veterans/insiders. Specifically, this chapter constructs China’s new drama field in the 1910s and the 1920s by tracing how various agents constantly repositioned themselves by teaming up with or attacking other agents in the pursuit of economic, cultural, and political capital. I also examine how at the end of the 1910s Chen Dabei and Pu Boying affirmed their positions by promoting the amateur drama movement through the Demotic Opera Troupe and New China Drama

Association. Providing this context renders the appearance of the 1922 amateur *Peacock* as something not unexpected.

Chapter 2 examines both the promotions/reviews of the 1922 amateur *Peacock* published in *Beijing Morning Supplement* and Chen Dabei's revised script published in *Drama*. These rare materials unmask the fallacy that the 1922 amateur *Peacock* was simply a Westernized and radically iconoclastic text that could only be appreciated by modern students. Instead, the 1922 *Peacock* weaved modern, traditional, Western, Chinese, commercial civilized drama, and amateur elements together to present a rich hybridization of these seemingly opposite discourses. Furthermore, the correspondences between Chen Dabei and other members of the elite audience also spell out several distinct agendas latent beneath the shared label of "newness."

Chapter 3 first positions Yuan Changying's three-act play within the context of the national drama movement, which was initiated in 1926 by Yu Shangyuan, Wen Yiduo, Zhang Jiazhu, Xiong Foxi, etc. and supported by the Crescent Society. The connection between Yuan and other elite professional dramatists deconstructs, to some extent, the avant-garde position that later scholars, such as Eide and Jingyuan Zhang, bestow on Yuan. In fact, the awakening of female sexual subjectivity, embodied by Yuan's re-interpretation of the character Mother Jiao and claimed by Eide and others to be an example of Yuan's daringness, had already become a fairly popular theme for both elite writers and mass readers in the second half of the 1920s. Chapter 3 further identifies different connotations under the same terms shared by the 1922 amateur *Peacock* and Yuan's three-act play, such as "modern love," "jealousy," and "tragedy." Through a close reading of Yuan's adaptation, these content differences reveal the heterogeneous

possibilities inherent within a single term. Even more fascinating is that these different connotations, which Yuan developed out of the 1922 amateur *Peacock*, were presented through almost identical theatrical expressions, such as adding an outsider (Laolao in Yuan's and Aunt Li in the amateur version) to deliver a sympathetic message toward the victim of patriarchy (portrayed as Mother Jiao in Yuan's and Lanzhi in the amateur's). Thus, in chapter 3, I hope to show that Yuan's play was affected by the 1922 amateur *Peacock*, even though Yuan herself never acknowledged such influence.

Finally, in the conclusion, I compare Hong Shen's 1935 "Drama Introduction," Ouyang Yuqian's "Talk about Civilized Drama" (published posthumously in 1980), and my own contextualization of *Peacock* in order to again stress the hybridity and fluidity of new drama against the rigidity of conventional narratives of new drama's development. I also suggest avenues for future studies on professionalization in the field of Chinese drama. As a whole, this thesis aims to contribute to an overall understanding of how the fluid negotiations between "old" and "new," "professional" and "amateur," "West" and "China" were constantly rehearsed in the field of new drama, an insufficiently studied genre which, until now, has often been mistakenly depicted as either entirely Western or immaturely underdeveloped.

Chapter 1: Contextualizing China's New Drama Field of the 1910s-1920s:  
Civilizational, Professional and Amateur

The literary field is an interest community of agents and institutions involved in the material and symbolic production of literature, whose activities are governed by at least one autonomous principle that is fully or partially at odds with at least one heteronomous principle.<sup>1</sup>

—Michel Hockx

New China Drama Association (NCDA) believes that (new) drama is a bright star to lead human beings to the bright path, a sharp weapon to destroy various idols of the “old China,” and a weapon to create a “new China” that belongs to the world and to human beings. Similar to other new knowledge and new careers, drama deserves reform, creativity, and constant developments. In order to clear the turbid air of the old Chinese drama field, and to further bring fresh and beneficial air to blow in and formulate a new space, NCDA cannot stop from vehemently attacking all evil drama (forms).<sup>2</sup>

—Manifesto of New China Drama Association

Before delving into a textual analysis of the modern dramatic adaptations of *Southeast Flies the Peacock*, I first review the new drama field (*xinju jie*) formulated immediately after the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> In Tokyo, Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin, Guangzhou, Hankou and other cities, Chinese new dramas were staged in various performing

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Hockx ed., *The Literary Field of Twentieth-Century China* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii, 1999), 9.

<sup>2</sup> New China Drama Association, “Ben zazhi de zongzhi” [The Principle of This Journal], *Xiju* [Drama] 2.1 (1922).

<sup>3</sup> As Ouyang Yuqian, Xu Banmei, and other new drama veterans recall, the earliest new drama performances in China were produced by missionary schools located in the foreign concessions in 1890s Shanghai. Those new dramas were predominantly derived from their English/French textbooks and staged on holidays in garden parties (*youyuan hui*). Although Chinese students were involved in performances, they exclusively spoke Western languages. The audiences were limited to students, school board members and parents. Therefore, scholars tend to frame these early new dramas as “background” rather than mark them as the beginning of new drama. It is not until 1907 when the Spring Willow Society (*Chunliu she*) staged their first new drama, *The Black Slave's Cry to Heaven* (*Heinu yutian lu*), in Tokyo that Chinese new dramas were performed in Chinese and could claim a broader audience among the Chinese intelligentsia.

locations, such as traditional tea houses (*chayuan*), modern play houses (*xiyuan*), amusement parks (*wutai*), and university auditoriums (*dalitang*). In productions held at those venues, Chinese operatic celebrities (*laoban*) and amateurs (*piaoyou*), new-graduates from modern schools (overseas and domestic), popular fiction writers, Western/Japanese literature translators, revolutionaries, comprador merchants (*maiban shangren*), and drama extras (*linshi yanyuan*) were all involved in the making and presentation of new drama. Furthermore, these agents brought the institutions to which they were attached into the horizon of the new drama field: drama troupes (*jutuan*), drama societies (*jushe*), universities, acting schools, amateur drama clubs, journals, and entertainment businesses jointly participated in “producing” and “selling” new dramas to the audience.

To better understand the dynamicity of the new drama field, in this chapter I work against the canonical schematization of new drama and instead juxtapose civilized drama (1907-1924)<sup>4</sup> with the amateur drama movement advocated by Chen Dabei at the turn of the 1920s. I trace the four phases of civilized drama, paying attention to the ways different schools attempted to balance the conflicting pulls of symbolic, political, and economic capitals. Particularly, I look at the post-1913 civilized dramas produced by New People Society (*Xinmin she*) and People’s Voice Society (*Minming she*), whose condemnation by Chen Dabei served as the ideological basis for the amateur drama movement. Ironically, as chapter 2 will argue, Chen Dabei’s amateur drama both protested against, as well as drew inspiration from, civilized drama. In other words, I

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<sup>4</sup> Civilized drama itself is indeed severely stereotyped, simplified and thus misrepresented in both Western and Chinese academia. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to construct at length the overall picture of civilized drama. In the following section, I only focus on narrating the phase (1913-1924) when civilized drama “degenerated” into “uncivilized,” as new drama advocates, such as Chen Dabei, framed.

believe “civilized” (*wenming de*), “uncivilized” (*buwenming de*), and amateur (*aimei de*) drama should all be represented as links in an evolutionary chain. Through this contextualization of new drama, my close reading of the production and circulation of *Southeast Flies the Peacock* (as a five-act amateur drama in 1922 and a three-act new professional drama composed by Yuan Changying in 1929) in the following chapters will make better sense and demonstrate the fluidity in themes and concerns between these two modern/amateur adaptations and old/professional performance.

### **“Civilize” the new drama**

Unfortunately, current scholarship has generally not paid much attention to these questions. Perry Link and other scholars have suggested overlaps among works of vernacular fiction, early film, and new dramas because these three mass entertainment media shared and competed for limited financial support (capital), professional writers and/or actors (producers), and audience (consumers).<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, compared to the rapidly increasing academic studies of early films and, to a lesser extent, of vernacular fiction, new drama has been ignored. It is understandable that a lack of historical records (video/audio) of stage performances has frustrated scholars’ investigations, and the available memorials, journals, and other textual materials only present a fragmentary picture of new dramas. In addition to these textual difficulties, there is also a more basic problem in how to define the study of new dramas. In fact, new drama fell into the awkward position of being viewed as decadent and immature “low-culture” by elite intellectuals, while also being (mis-) interpreted as “high-culture,” loaded with

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<sup>5</sup> See Perry Link, “Introduction,” in *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 1-39.

enlightening/revolutionary messages, by audiences who only watch plays for fun. It may be precisely because of new drama's contradictory position of being viewed as both "vulgar" and "elite" that scholars have shown little interest in it. Accordingly, new dramas ended up not being "popular": the new dramas staged by the Spring Willow Society in Japan and by the Spring Willow Theatre (*Chunliu juchang*) in China had an "art for art's sake" seriousness but struggled at the box-office, which has meant that new drama does not qualify as a topic for later research.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, nor were new dramas considered "cultured," since those dramas produced by the New People Society and the New People's Voice Society were condemned by May Fourth intellectuals for their vulgar and uncivilized tricks (*baxi*).

Fortunately, the memoirs of early practitioners of new dramas such as Ouyang Yuqian, Zhu Shuangyun, and Xu Banmei can shed some light on the development of new drama. According to Ouyang Yuqian, new drama was called civilized drama in the early 1910s and experienced three major phases:<sup>7</sup> (1) period of formation (1907-1911), when Li Xishuang and Lu Jingruo founded the Spring Willow Society and staged the first Chinese-produced new drama *The Black Slave's Cry to Heaven* in Tokyo in 1907;

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<sup>6</sup> Ouyang Yuqian, 172-3. In fact, the Spring Willow Theatre evolved from the New Drama Association, which was founded by Lu Jingruo and Ouyang Yuqian. Since both Lu Jingruo and Ouyang Yuqian were members of the Spring Willow Society and staged Spring Willow style new dramas in Japan, it is not surprising to see that the Spring Willow Theatre reserved the performing tradition and troupe management of the Spring Willow Society in Japan. Basically, the Spring Willow new dramas (staged in both Tokyo and Shanghai) strictly expelled improvised speeches and maintained their repertoires with a good portion of Western/Japanese new dramas. However, the Spring Willow Theatre soon had to enlarge its repertoire by adding excerpts of *Strange Tales of Liaozhai* (*Liaozhai zhiyi*), *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng*), and *The Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan*), as well as *Sky Rain Flower* (*Tianyu hua*) and *Together Flies Away* (*Feng shuangfei*) which were directly adapted from the traditional genre of *tanci*. Therefore, spectators were exposed to both reformist messages and traditional operatic themes in even this most westernized drama troupe in China in the 1910s that most seriously carried out the agenda of "new" and "civilized." Yet, despite its constant adjustments for the audience's needs, the Spring Willow Theatre could still not escape bankruptcy.

<sup>7</sup> Ouyang Yuqian, 182.

meanwhile, in China, Ren Tianzhi founded the Progressive Troupe (*Jinhua tuan*)<sup>8</sup> and institutionalized civilized drama with two main features: improvised speeches and modern division of acts based on the linked-chapter form (*zhanghui ti*);<sup>9</sup> (2) period of maturity (1911-1918), when the Spring Willow Theatre, New People Society, People's Voice Society, Enlightenment Society (*Kaiming she*), and Enlightening People Society (*Qimin she*) were founded and actively involved in the new drama movement; and (3) period of decline (1918-1924), when the Spring Willow Theatre and People's Voice Society collapsed due to financial difficulties and new drama completely lost its audience in Shanghai.<sup>10</sup> Current studies tend to focus on the early formation of civilized drama, leaving its mature development either unaddressed or simply regarding it as degraded and decadent and thus irrelevant to the development of later spoken drama (*huaju*). To correct such a fragmentary view, I focus here on the civilized drama produced by the New People Society and People's Voice Society—the “black sheep” of later civilized dramas—in which the agenda of commercialization and professionalization generally

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<sup>8</sup> See Xu Banmei, *Huaju chuangshiqi huiyilu* [Memoir of the Founding Era of the Spoken Drama] (Beijing, Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1957), 24. In 1908, Wang Zhongsheng cooperating with Ren Tianzhi, staged *Joan Haste* (*Jiayin xiaozhuan*) in the Spring Spiritual (*Chunxian*) tea house. The performance impressed Shanghai local audiences with its new dramatic acting style, which drastically differed from both traditional Chinese operatic performances and new dramas presented in the Beijing operatic style by Wang Zhongsheng's Spring Sun Society (*Chunyang she*). Xu Banmei recalled that a veteran operatic performer, Xiong Wentong, described his experiences with *Joan Haste* as follows, “(You) cannot view it (Joan Haste) as an opera, you should watch it as if it showed real things. (Then), it is quite interesting to watch.” The success of *Joan Haste* encouraged Ren Tianzhi to found the Progressive Troupe in 1908, which first only toured outside Shanghai, but then moved into Shanghai and became very influential.

<sup>9</sup> Ouyang Yuqian also recognized that the Spring Willow School (*Chunliu pai*) distinguished itself from the Progressive Troupe's acting rules by strictly excluding improvised speeches as well as by greatly reducing scenes unrelated with the drama (*muwai xi*). However, the Spring Willow style was less popular than that of the Progressive Troupe because it predominantly staged Western/Japanese dramas and was thus perceived by the Shanghai local audience as a foreign-style troupe (*yangpai jutuan*).

<sup>10</sup> Ouyang Yuqian, 186. In 1918, the Smile Stage (*Xiao wutai*) became the only location left in Shanghai where new dramas were regularly given. However, later that same year, the Smile Stage went bankrupt and the last new drama stage was rebuilt as narrow alleyways (*nongtang*) for renting. Afterwards, the professional actors either sought new career paths or migrated to small cities to maintain their everyday needs.

overshadowed the agenda of enlightenment and education. It is in dialogue with these “notorious” civilized dramas that the amateur dramas of the 1920s and then spoken dramas in later years established their positions and drew their ideological capital.

### **The Mature Phase of Civilized Drama: From “Civilized” to “Uncivilized”**

From the outset, during its period of formulation and maturity, civilized drama encountered a series of production problems, including lack of scripts, actors and performance locations. Although civilized drama, in Zhu Shuangyun’s narration, arrived at its second climax<sup>11</sup> during the Jiayin Reformation (*Jiayin zhongxing*) in 1914, I believe the “family melodrama” (*jiating ju*) predominantly produced by the New People Society and People’s Voice Society after 1913 had already changed the *wenming*-ness<sup>12</sup> inscribed in early civilized dramas previously produced by the Spring Willow Society and the Progressive Troupe.

But, what is *wenming*-ness? Lydia Liu offers an interesting discussion of how the term *wenming* traveled between classical Chinese, modern Japanese, and modern vernacular Chinese. Lydia Liu connects the modern term *wenming* with other classical Chinese usages and presents a more comprehensive understanding of how *wenming*

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<sup>11</sup> As many scholars, such as Tian Benxiang and Cheng Long, point out, the first climax of new drama was achieved by Ren Tianzhi and his Progressive Troupe via their improvised speeches to propagate diverse revolutionary messages. In fact, Ren Tianzhi continued to act out, via new drama, the six major reformations in the fields of politics, military, religion, social morals, family and education raised by Zhu Shuangyun, Wang Youyou, Wang Huanshen and other new drama activists in 1906. Therefore, the new drama was considered “advanced,” “progressive” and “civilized” by both its audience and practitioners. However, after the 1911 Revolution overthrew the Qing, spectators’ passion for *Tianzhi* style drama (revolutionary drama) started decreasing because the revolutionary messages fleshed out by the new dramas became less relevant to common people’s post-revolutionary lives. As a result, only the family (sometimes combined with education) reformation agenda stayed alive, buttressed by the popularity of “family dramas” either translated from Western/Japanese dramas or composed by Mandarin Duck and Butterfly Fiction (*yuanyang hudie xiaoshuo*) writers like Bao Tianxiao in 1914.

<sup>12</sup> Zhang Zhen. *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 99.

circulated in Chinese historical contexts. The five meanings cited from classical records unanimously highlighted its “non-savage,” “cultural,” and “educational” qualities.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, once new drama was promoted and circulated as civilized drama, it immediately gained a share of “political capital” and became both “enlightened” and “enlightening”: on the one hand, the form of new drama bore witness to the fact that Chinese traditional opera (old) could evolve into Western modern drama (new); and on the other, the content propagated enlightening messages to the public.

Although the “*wenming*-ness” by no means uniformly manifested itself in the Spring Willow Society’s and Progressive Troupe’s new dramas, it is undeniable that pre-1913 civilized drama productions predominantly located their concerns in the educational level, not artistic value or entertainment. However, the “family melodramas” produced by the New People Society and the New People’s Voice Society rebalanced the slogan of “educate/enlighten the masses through entertainment” (*yujiao yule*) by emphasizing eye-catching stage settings as well as catchy and uncanny narratives for the sake of attracting “(female) petty urbanities” rather than didactically “educating” them. That is to say, the enlightenment agenda and, to a lesser extent, the artistic value, both yielded to the audience’s entertainment needs.

The victory of “attraction” over “education” after 1913 in civilized drama productions was grounded in a few powerful transformations that are far from being sufficiently addressed: (1) after 1913, civilized dramas were predominantly produced and

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<sup>13</sup> Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity--China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 308. Lydia Liu cites *wenming* from five historical classics and annotations. *Wenming* was referred to express the following semantic meanings: 1) 文采光明 from “天下文明者，阳气在田，始生万物，故天下有文章而光明也;” 2) 文德耀耀 from “经天纬地曰文，照临四方曰明;” 3) 文治教化 from “柔远俗以文明，慑凶奴以武略;” 4) 文教昌明 from “文明之世，销锋铸镝;” and 5) from “内文明而外柔顺，以蒙大难，文王以之。”

circulated by “literati businessmen” and comprador merchants rather than by elite intellectuals (e.g., Lu Jingruo and other Japanese overseas students) or revolutionary advocates (e.g., Ren Tianzhi); (2) post-1913 civilized dramas, based on relatively mature literary texts composed or translated by professional writers,<sup>14</sup> presented complete stories with detailed descriptions; and (3) professional actors paid more attention to acting than to being quasi-revolutionaries because their living now relied entirely on success at the box-office. In other words, civilized drama, after 1913, was neither the product of overseas students’ after-school passion, nor that of revolutionary propagandists. Instead, civilized drama was incorporated into the fascinating but intensively competitive mass cultural industry and developed into a commodity produced for, and consumed by, the audience.<sup>15</sup> As a result, the formerly passive audience, instead of “urgently” waiting to be enlightened, became active consumers whose ticket-purchasing power decided the life or death of a play. Clearly, this commercialization and subsequent professionalization are very intriguing parts of the short history of civilized drama because they arrayed the “three capitals” in a new order: economic capital (popularity)>symbolic capital (artistic value) >political capital (enlightenment). This new order was later constructed by May Fourth intellectuals as the target amateur drama and spoken drama needed to “rewrite.”

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<sup>14</sup> As Perry Link states, the abolition of the civil service examination in 1905 terminated the last hope of a good amount of men of letters from obtaining their elite (official) social status via their literacy. Thus, some of them became “professional writers” who literally sold words for a living by writing popular fiction for several newspapers at the same time.

<sup>15</sup> By locating new dramas staged in Shanghai in 1913 as the watershed of Chinese new drama, I do not deny that professional and commercial features in civilized new drama were produced pre-1913. Nor do I imply that the post-1913 new dramas were free of political (enlightening) ideology, or, furthermore, turned into an anti-enlightenment/ modernization/Westernization conservative organ in the way that later May Fourth radicals accused popular fiction (the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly fiction) in the 1920s and 1930s. These extremist assumptions would fail because new drama was formulated within an age of “newness” when Chinese culture simultaneously embraced two interrelated aspects of modernization, that is, the enlightenment and the vernacular. Therefore, my reading of Chinese new drama tends to investigate the diverse ways post-1913 new drama materialized how the enlightenment and the vernacular wrestled with and intertwined with each other, rather than how the former terminated the latter, or vice-versa.

However, my close reading of the amateur drama production of *Southeast Flies the Peacock* in Chapter 2, to the contrary, reveals that this new order heavily affected May Fourth drama practitioners' imagination of amateur drama as well as spoken drama.

In the beginning of 1913, civilized drama's development in Shanghai took a new form because its influential advocates and practitioners either left Shanghai<sup>16</sup> or were distracted, out of "curiosity" and the lure of potential profit, by other forms of the mass culture booming around them. The career of Zheng Zhengqiu best exemplifies such changes in Shanghai. Zheng Zhenqiu, then known as Zheng Yaofeng, first made his name in newspaper supplements as a critic of Beijing Opera.<sup>17</sup> In 1910, Zheng Yaofeng wrote a very positive review in *Lili's Opera Review (Lili suo jutun)* of Xu Banmei's performance in *The Tide (Meng huitou, Ushino)*. They became friends, and Zheng often accompanied Xu Banmei to watch new dramas staged by A.D.C. (Amateur Drama Club) troupes and Japanese modern dramas produced by traveling troupes of street performers (*jianghu ban*) in Shanghai.<sup>18</sup> Influenced by Xu Banmei, Zheng Zhengqiu finally turned from a traditional *erhuang* critic into a new drama activist. In 1913, driven by a curiosity for "Occidental shadow"<sup>19</sup> and their identification of "shadow-play"<sup>20</sup> with Chinese

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<sup>16</sup> Ren Tianzhi and his Progressive Troupe fled to Ningbo and the Wuhu area since the *Tianzhi* style speeches (also known as lectures in costumes, *huazhuang yanshuo*) finally bored Shanghai audiences because the Progress Troupe's content, best served to stir revolutionary spirit among the masses, became increasingly less relevant to people's life after the 1911 Revolution. Meanwhile, the Spring Willow Theatre went down to Hunan. Wang Youyou also arrived in Hankou and Hunan. These migrations expanded the new drama's influence nationwide and formulated a new wave of new drama fever in the Guangdong, Fujian, Henan, Hunan, Beijing, Sichuan, and Jiangzhe areas where not only Shanghai new drama troupes actively performed but also the local new drama troupes flourished.

<sup>17</sup> Zhang Zhen, 100.

<sup>18</sup> Xu Banmei, 37-9.

<sup>19</sup> When cinema was first imported into China, the common audience related cinema with Chinese puppet shadowplay, and thereby labeled the former as the Occidental version of the latter.

<sup>20</sup> Zhang Zhen, 98. As Zhang Zhen frames, "until the early 1930s, cinema in Chinese was predominantly called *yingxi*, especially in the South, before the term *electric shadows (dianying)* gradually became more standardized." Zhang further observes that both "before" and "even after Western cinema's arrival in

theatrical plays, Zheng Zhengqiu and Zhang Shichuan founded New People New Theatre Research Society, which cooperated with the Asia Film Company (*Yaxiya dianying gongsi*), run by an American-Russian investor, Benjamin Bradsky, near the Bund in the International Settlement of Shanghai. Zheng Zhengqiu's transformation from a civilized drama activist into a film maker not only led to China's earliest transnational film productions<sup>21</sup>; more importantly, it greatly influenced the production and reception of "family melodramas" in Shanghai after 1913.<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, the Asia Film Company soon went bankrupt because WWI interrupted the first wave of the global film industry. Zheng Zhengqiu and some of his cast members left the makeshift film studio, which always carried both the names New People New Theatre Research Society (*Xinmin xiju yanjiuhui*) and Asian Shadowplay Co,<sup>23</sup> after producing *The Difficult Couple* (*Nanfu nanqi*) and at least three other family melodramas.<sup>24</sup> In order to support his cast, Zheng Zhengqiu went back to the civilized drama circle and founded the New People Society, which staged "family melodramas" in Lanxin Theatre (*Lanxin daxiyuan*). In the same year, Zheng Zhengqiu's film partners, Jing Runsan and his nephew, Zhang Shichuan, founded the New People's Voice Society, which also produced Zheng Zhengqiu-style "family melodrama" because of its wide-spread popularity among its audience. In fact, the New People Society produced about

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China, the teahouse served as a venue for many kinds of shadowplays. The leather puppet show in particular, staged behind a screen illuminated by gaslight, has generally been considered by Chinese film historians to be the bedrock of the Chinese cinematic (un)conscious."

<sup>21</sup> In their cooperation, the Asia Film Company mainly contributed film-making equipment and cameramen, whereas New People New Theatre Research Society was in charge of providing film themes, casts and the film's distribution in China.

<sup>22</sup> Ouyang Yuqian, 200.

<sup>23</sup> Zhang Zhen, 102.

<sup>24</sup> Other films included *Old and Young Swipe Wives* (*Laoshao yiqi*), *Dissolute Buddhist Monk* (*Fengliu heshang*), and *Funny Love Affair* (*Huaji aiqing*).

30 melodramas in 1913 before merging with the New People's Voice Society.<sup>25</sup> To a great extent, these new dramas satisfied Shanghai petty citizens' desire for entertainment and "efficiency" since the synthesis of various elements (Chinese and Western, traditional and modern, written and performed) provided a kaleidoscopic view of the boundless universe (*daqian shijie*) through a familiar "family" story.

Actually, family melodramas were not the invention of Zheng Zhenqiu and his partners/competitors. The earlier civilized drama troupes, the Spring Willow Society and Progressive Troupe, also frequently staged new dramas about "families." By contrast, Zhang's family melodramas placed more emphasis on the why and how behind the binary of good versus evil. But those pre-1913 family dramas<sup>26</sup> differed from Zheng's family melodramas in that the former put absolute emphasis on satirizing evil (the laggard and traditional). Chen Long provides an excerpt from *Long Live the Republican!* (*Gonghe wansui*), a 12-act drama from the Progressive Troupe, that helps to justify this conclusion. Chen suggests the main gist of *Long Live the Republican!* is to exaggerate and expose the clown-like ugliness of corrupt late Qing officials. For example, when Zhang Xun sends his second wife out of Nanjing, his third wife elopes with his assistant. Then, after some officials go bankrupt following their escape to Shanghai, a certain official proposes donating their concubines and opening a brothel in order to meet their material needs.<sup>27</sup> Although the plot is rather poorly constructed, the audience still

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<sup>25</sup> Ouyang Yuqian, 205.

<sup>26</sup> I purposely refer to these new pre-1913 dramas centered on "families" with the literal translation of the Chinese term to distinguish them from "family melodramas" produced by the New People Society and New People's Voice Society after 1913.

<sup>27</sup> Chen Long, *Zhongguo jindai tongshu xiju* [Chinese Modern Popular Drama] (Taipei: Dongda tushu gufen youxian gongsi, 2002), 96.

enjoyed the play because the suffering and desperate look of late Qing officials on stage made the audience laugh and channeled the latter's anger toward the former.

True, the immature narrative skill and inexperienced stage presentation of early new dramas<sup>28</sup> should be taken into account, but, the main reason there was no need to elaborate why the "old" was evil and the "new" was good was the revolution. When the upheaval of revolution officially ended with the overthrow of the Qing, many of these binaries collapsed. Post-revolutionary everyday life, thus, required particular attention so that *new* "good" vs. "evil" antagonisms could be organically reconstructed. Accordingly, the life-and-death struggles between "progressive" and "laggard" through domestic petty conflicts became more familiar to the masses. Family melodramas produced by the New People Society and New People's Voice Society, therefore, exclusively shifted their concerns from propagating overt revolutionary messages (the educational objective) to telling uncanny stories, excessive representation, and clichéd moral polarization (the entertaining process).

Another reason why new dramas produced by the New People Society and the People's Voice Society were very popular can be attributed to their actors. As mentioned above, the actors in these two troupes participated in both film and drama productions; they were therefore more professionally trained than early new drama actors. Family melodramas provided for these actors a framework to represent and dramatize the kinds of characters that frequently made up the "melodramatic imagination."<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the

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<sup>28</sup> Such as the "lectures with costume" (*huazhuang yanshuao*) style hailed by the Progressive Troupe.

<sup>29</sup> Here, I borrow the term that Peter Brooks applies to describe the literature after French Revolution. See Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), vii. These characters included masters, servants, prostitutes, hooligans, peddlers, monks, policemen, opium-addicts, cheating gangs (*chaibai dang*), and housewives, etc.

New People Society and, later, the New People's Voice Society, attracted an audience who boosted (*pengchang*) new drama actors in the same way they did operatic performers, and were thus not threatened by box-office pressures as were other new drama troupes. The new drama actors, in turn, demanded of themselves to represent/imitate characters on stage more realistically and authentically (*geng zhenshi de*),<sup>30</sup> and thus further transformed new dramas from a lecture style into a representational style. As a result, family melodramas impressed the audience with their ability to “represent everyday life” and “shape typical characters,” thereby establishing a new genre that sought to *attract* an urban audience rather than simply “educate” them.

Therefore, because of its popularity, the “*wenming*-ness” of civilized drama was much less emphasized whereas its professionalism was increasingly heightened.

Unsurprisingly, the civilized dramas produced by the New People Society tended to cater to their audience by magnifying/enhancing the “vulgar” elements of their plays, such as elaborating adultery stories and forbidden love. In 1914, after the New People Society merged into People's Voice Society, this tendency of catering to the audience went to an extreme.<sup>31</sup> For example, Su Shichi's play openly staged the adultery between a “monk”

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True, these characters had been already presented by vernacular fictions and old plays. However, vernacular novels only offered textual narration for further stirring up readers' imaginations of those characters. Old plays, on the other hand, relied on costume and conventional gestures to help the audience confirm the identities of these characters. In contrast, post-1913 civilized drama, due to its lack of control in presentation, brought those “real life” characters on stage with much less media filtration than previous genres.

<sup>30</sup> Ouyang Yuqian, 214. Ouyang Yuqian particularly highlights a group of female impersonators, such as Wang Youyou, Ling Lianying, and Lu Zimei, etc., as well as Wang Wuneng and Lu Xiaowu's acting skills as Daoist monks.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 202. Most scholars, such as Ouyang Yuqian and Xu Banmei, still recognized Zheng Zhengqiu as a member of the intellectual class (*zhishi jieji*) despite his concern for commercialization, and thus lent Zheng Zhengqiu a complicated identity. On the other hand, they unanimously accused Jing Runsan, the owner of the New People's Voice Society, of being a comprador merchant whose sole purpose in running new drama troupes was to “collect good actors” to “make a profit.” If Zheng's family dramas were tainted with vulgarity and low-class-taste (*diji quwei*), then, the New People's Voice Society, according to Ouyang

and “nun” on stage. Plays produced by People’s Voice Society were immediately absorbed into the profit-dominated and entertainment-oriented cultural market where civilized drama had been competing with various entertaining venues for the same pool of cultural consumers.

Interestingly, compared to the overall scholarly silence on the New People Society and other new drama troupes’ contributions to institutionalizing civilized drama,<sup>32</sup> contemporaries and later scholars alike have expressed harsh criticism of family melodramas. The following three perspectives of post-1913 family melodramas were criticized in terms of the following aspects: (1) in terms of script-composing, civilized dramas only pursued uncanny plots and excessive narrations of violent and erotic “evil” but without concern for social meaning;<sup>33</sup> (2) although the New People Society discarded scenes-outside-curtain,<sup>34</sup> they still kept the improvised speech that directly addressed the audience, which was seen as being done for the sake of making the audience laugh rather than facilitating plot;<sup>35</sup> and (3) these civilized dramas also used cars, rifles, and other props in the name of realistically representing life. As Ouyang Yuqian complained, these

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Yuqian, entirely discarded “*wenming*-ness” and furthermore turned civilized drama into “meaningless” and “uncivilized” farces.

<sup>32</sup> When the New People Society was annexed by the New People’s Voice Society, some of its old members founded their own civilized drama troupes. For example, Su Shichi founded the Prosperity Society (*Minxing she*), which became the first troupe in Shanghai to have a heterogendered cast.

<sup>33</sup> Ouyang Yuqian, 200.

<sup>34</sup> Scenes-outside-curtain, aka *guochang xi* or *muwai xi*, refer to small plays staged during the intermission of regular scenes. They are often placed prior to important scenes to foreshadow the forthcoming plot. Before 1913, scenes-outside-curtain usually delivered a coherent narration of the plot for an audience that still lacked an understanding of new drama; on the other hand, these small scenes also alleviated the audience’s impatience when waiting for the changing of stage sets. In this way, scenes-outside-curtain, in the early period of the formulation of new drama, efficiently aided the circulation of new drama. However, after 1913, many civilized dramas turned scenes-outside-curtain into a venue for slapstick and graphic jokes in hopes of attracting a larger audience.

<sup>35</sup> Ge Yihong, 28. As Ge Yihong states, *Minxing she* frequently added snake tricks to their civilized dramas, which were completely apart from the plot.

stage props and modern stage designs, or forms/*yong*, newly imported from Japan,<sup>36</sup> were overly foregrounded and thereby usurped the content/*ti* of the civilized dramas themselves. As a result, both audiences and producers tilted their attentions to visual stimulus—“entertainment”—at the expense of spiritual inspiration—“education.” Thus, the educational goal of civilized dramas was violently subverted. Annoyed by this, many veteran civilized drama activists, such as Chen Dabei, harshly attacked these post-1913 civilized dramas as “uncivilized,” “savage,” “avatars of hooligans and cheating gangs,”<sup>37</sup> and “decoration for new amusement parks.”

In addition to these negative reviews, elites (both veteran civilized drama activists and new culture advocates) also claimed that the audience lost their genuine interest in “the production of civilized drama.” It is true that the lack of audience interest bankrupted Jing Yingsan and other owners of new drama troupes. What remains unclear, however, is whether the audience agreed with the elite about these “shortcomings” of civilized dramas; or just preferred films to civilized dramas because the former produced more visual stimuli and absorbed more modern techniques and thus became an updated version of civilized dramas.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See Li Hsiao-t'i, “Making a Name and a Culture for the Masses in Modern China,” *positions: east asia cultures critique*, 9.1 (2001): 32.

<sup>37</sup> Chen Dabei, “Weishenme wo bu zancheng zheyue de xiju” [Why I Do Not Promote Professional Drama] *Drama*, 2.2 (1922):14-5.

<sup>38</sup> As I allude earlier, the film companies and the civilized drama troupes often adapted the same popular novels. For example, before the 1926 film *Lonely Orchid* (*Kong gu lan*) was released, which was scripted by Bao Tianxiao and directed by Zhang Shichuan, a seven-act new drama *Lonely Orchid* was staged in 1913. This new drama was also adapted from Bao Tianxiao's translation of a Japanese novel, *Flowers in the Wild* (*Ye zhi hua*). Therefore, it is rather common to see that early films carried civilized drama plots to the silver screen. In order to save money, some small film companies only hired civilized drama actors as extras for filming. Therefore, it is also plausible for the audience to see the civilized drama actors on silver screen.

## When Civilized Became Amateurs

Although a variety of narratives about the demise of civilized drama in Shanghai have circulated, different sources generally agree that civilized drama declined in 1918. Shocked by the extent to which civilized dramas produced by the Prosperity Society (*Minxing she*), led by Su Shichi,<sup>39</sup> were commercialized, many civilized drama veterans, driven by their role as new culture advocates,<sup>40</sup> were in a panic over the new realities of civilized drama. Therefore, they felt obligated to incorporate drama reforms into the larger New Culture Movement, to rescue modern drama from the notorious entertainment market, and to oppose the corruption of civilized drama. As a result, many new drama societies, journals, and schools were founded in Shanghai and Beijing in the beginning of the 1920s. These “new” agents and institutions uniformly carried out the agenda of “reforming new drama” by promoting alternative dramatic productions (i.e. people’s drama and amateur drama) to replace professional civilized drama. Interestingly, this new trend in the new drama field was not the debut of the majority of these agents. Rather, many of the civilized drama veterans who were defeated by the commercialization of civilized drama and thus either maintained a low profile in Shanghai or left the city after 1913 reappeared in the new drama field and constituted the major force for the reformation of civilized drama. As I have already explained, these critics believed that in the previous decade, modern drama had degenerated from a “new,

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<sup>39</sup> Ge Yihong, 28-9. In Ge’s opinion, in 1914, People Prosperity Society (*Minxing she*) staged *Records of Revenge* (*Guobao lu*), which mainly represented “pornography, violence and superstition” on stage.

<sup>40</sup> In 1918, Hu Shi, Fu Sinian, and Ouyang Yuqian published a series of articles and called for “drama reform” in *New Youth* (vol. 5 no. 4). This could be viewed as the most direct example of the New Culture Movement reaching out to the Chinese drama field. As a result, Hu Shi’s construction of the evolution of Chinese drama (from Yuan song dramas to Ming *chuanqi*, then to the *erhuang* that flourished in the late Qing) received echoes in the new drama circle. Many new drama veterans, such as Wang Zhongxian and Chen Dabei, re-identified themselves as new drama reformers to push civilized drama forward.

enlightening and civilized” cultural form into a “fake, laggard, immoral” money-making machine, and thus should be led back to the orientation of pre-1913 civilized dramas (such as those staged by the elitist Spring Willow Society and the revolutionary Progressive Troupe). In other words, the overvalued market concern (economical capital) should be (temporarily) discarded from the new drama field so that “truth, virtue, and beauty” (symbolic/principle capitals) could again be upheld.

The most notable expression of this new force was the Demotic Opera Troupe (*Minzhong xiju she*, hereafter, DOT), the first new drama society founded after the May Fourth Movement. In May 1921, Wang Zhongxian (Wang Youyou) proposed the idea of founding DOT and invited Shen Yanbing, Chen Dabei, Xu Banmei, Ouyang Yuqian, Zheng Zhenduo, and Xiong Foxi<sup>41</sup> to participate. As Pu Boying recalls, DOT aimed, on the one hand, to issue a monthly journal—*Drama (Xiju)*<sup>42</sup>—and to publish other texts to “propagate real drama (*zhende xiju*) and theories related from fellow dramatists” and, on the other, to “stage new dramas that are either world famous or composed by society members.”<sup>43</sup> In terms of producing new drama, DOT aimed to replace civilized drama with “people’s drama” (*minzhong xiju*).<sup>44</sup> As Ge Yihong frames it, DOT embraced three

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<sup>41</sup> Ge Yihong, 49. Other members were Zhang Yuguang, Lu Bingxin, Zhang Jinglu, Shen Bingxue, and Teng Ruoqu.

<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, I have only been able to locate the first three issues in the second volume of *Drama* published by NCDA in Beijing in 1922. Through the manifesto of NCDA and some articles, I am able to reconstruct the agenda and activities of People Drama Society in Shanghai in 1921.

<sup>43</sup> Pu Boying, “Jinnian de xiju” [This Year’s Drama], *Xiju* [Drama], 2.1 (1922): 7-11. Although the term “fellow dramatist” (*tongren*) seemed to refer to a broader circle of new drama in Pu’s article, it was clearly defined in the manifesto of The Greater China Drama Society as “amateur troupes, amateur dramatists and dramatists who really/truly love dramas.”

<sup>44</sup> Inspired by Romain Rolland’s “people’s theatre,” DOT advocated “people’s drama” to replace the commercial civilized drama. By using the term of “people” (*minzhong*), DOT modified the audience for the new format of new drama. DOT suggested that the audience of civilized drama was defined as urban citizens who were privileged by their regular paycheck and working hours to conceive of civilized dramas as after-work activities for leisure and fun. Differently, People’s Drama, in DOT’s promotion, was particularly dedicated to workers who were the most exploited and positioned at the lowest level in the

goals: “to have the (popular) spirit for common laborers (*laogong*)”; “to have an independent spirit for not being dominated by the nation”; and “to provide appropriate entertainment” (*zhengdangde yule*) for “re-energizing” workers with “entertainment, capability and knowledge.”<sup>45</sup> Wang Zhongxian spelled out these three goals because he realized that any reformation of new drama had to *first* attract an audience and *then* educate them. However, these goals were rather poorly achieved in 1921 given that DOT only published 6 issues of *Drama* and did not produce any stage performances. Pu Boying attributed these shortcomings to the grand but impractical organization of DOT, an explanation I find legitimate. Indeed, DOT was very loosely organized. It had only thirteen members and they were located in northern China (Beijing), southern China (Shanghai), and even abroad (America and Japan). These members maintained their communication and society activities by writing letters to each other and to the editing group of *Drama* located in Shanghai. In Pu’s opinion, the disparate locations of DOT could aid in “formulating” and “propagating” new drama theories because various local experiences (*difang jingyan*) could enrich and accelerate the reform of new drama. However, the scattered living situation of society members rendered any type of stage performance impossible since they could not centralize enough producers and financial aid. Thus, DOT had to be reorganized for the goal of producing both theories and stage performances.

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hierarchy of urban society. Therefore, the new form of drama not only needed to be entertaining, but was also required to be informational and enlightening for city laborers to understand the urban society and further raise their social status and living standard. Here, the word “people” in DOT’s agenda already shared some similar connotation with the term “common people,” which was later used by the Left-wing intellectuals in the 1930s in a grander scale and to more intensive extent.

<sup>45</sup> Ge Yihong, 49.

Accordingly, in January 1922, Chen Dabei and Pu Boying transferred the headquarters of DOT from Shanghai to Beijing, and further reorganized the society into the New China Drama Association (NCDA).<sup>46</sup> In addition to DOT's original members, NCDA also recruited 48 collective units (*jiti*) and over 2,000 individuals<sup>47</sup> as new members and thus formed a much deeper and broader network than DOT. Meanwhile, Chen Dabei and Pu Boying took over *Drama* and issued the second volume in Beijing. The new issues released in 1922 continued to publish the association members' drama compositions, translations, and theories. More important, *Drama* started reporting on the amateur drama movements initiated by students nationwide, such as the compositions, performances and reviews of amateur plays by the Qinghua Boys' Army (*Qinghua tongzijun*) and Beijing Women's Higher Normal School (*Beijing nügao*) etc.<sup>48</sup>

Pu Boying, via *Drama*, voiced NCDA's urgent promotion of "the real, virtuous, and beautiful dramas," because this type of new drama was "a wheel that pushes society forward; an X-ray that searches for the root of society's sickness; and a mirror that

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<sup>46</sup> Han Rixin, *Chen Dabei yanjiu ziliao* [Chen Dabei Research Documents] (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1985), 6.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Ge Yihong, 54. In addition to this, many students' amateur drama clubs were founded in other modern schools, such as, Beijing University, Yanjing University, Yanjing Women's University, Jiaotong University, and Republican China University (*Minguo daxue*), etc. This amateur drama trend indeed responded to Chen Dabei's call. When Chen Dabei was still a member of DOT, he first outlined his proposal for the amateur drama movement and published a long article, *Amateur Drama* in 1921. Chen's messages of amateur drama spread quickly and were well responded to by modern intellectuals, because his investigation could be understood as a fight against the predominant forces in the new drama field, namely "reformed opera" (*gailiang xi*) and "civilized drama." These two types of popular dramatic performances, though self-proclaimed as "reformed" and "civilized," in the eyes of New Culture advocates, were already categorized as "monkeys in the process of human's evolution," (See Fu Sinian, "Xiju gailiang gemian guan" [A Comprehensive View on Theatre Reform], *Xin qingnian* [New Youth], 5.4 (1918): 349-60). Hence, they constituted a target of the May Fourth iconoclastic movement. That is to say, those modern hybridizations that bloomed in the 1910s were not tolerated within the 1920s new cultural revolutionary context. See also Joshua Goldstein's *Drama Kings* on this point.

reflects honestly and selflessly [i.e. reflects the society].”<sup>49</sup> Differing from the DOT’s call for a people’s drama “for laborers’ sake,” Pu suggested that new drama should serve people from all professions in society. This was a significant step showing that Pu (NCDA) pulled new drama further away from the audience/people/market, because Pu repositioned new drama from serving a concrete demographic audience (laborers) to “reflecting” an “imagined community.”<sup>50</sup> This repositioning rendered the goal of “appropriate entertainment,” upheld in the DOT manifesto, defunct after only one year. However, if entertainment was no longer valued, was it because the goal had already been achieved? Or, was the goal no longer necessary?

The three metaphors Pu uses to describe new drama are all derived from modern technology: wheels and mirrors were related to automobiles,<sup>51</sup> and the x-ray was one of the most advanced tools of Western medicine, used to “see through” bodies.<sup>52</sup> Through these metaphors, Pu challenged “tradition,” “visual pleasure,” and “money,” with which post-1913 civilized dramas were said to haven been overly concerned. First, new drama

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<sup>49</sup> Pu Boying, 1922.

<sup>50</sup> Lee Ou-Fan, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 46. Lee Ou-Fan argues that conceptualizing the nation as an “imagined community” in China in the late Qing and early Republican era “was made possible not only by elite intellectuals, . . . but also, more importantly, by the popular press.” Moreover, I want to highlight that the “imagined community” was not fixed; rather, it was continuously shaped and manipulated by subsequent narratives. But were elites self conscious that they were articulating and rendering certain narratives into “solid” truth? If so, did they explicitly explain this process to their audience, the masses? I don’t think they did. Here, Pu (NCDA), as well as other agents/institutions, identify themselves as people who “dig out the truth,” (reflect the society) rather than, people who “make the truth.”

<sup>51</sup> As I mentioned earlier, civilized drama performances at the New Stage after 1913 tended to bring a real car onto the stage as a stage prop. Such behavior was harshly criticized by Ouyang Yuqian for highlighting *yong* over *ti*. Ironically, when DOT promoted new dramas to replace civilized dramas, they again turned to the image of the “mobile car,” though this term was deployed at a theoretical rather than a material level. In other words, DOT actually turned to the modern image previously held by post-1913 civilized drama producers. This is a good example to show how DOT (new drama) and New Stage (civilized drama) (sometimes) shared similar modern imagination/images, even though the former claimed it “felt humiliated” to be compared to the latter.

<sup>52</sup> To some extent, the x-ray can satisfy Chinese fiction readers’ (both elite and low-brow) imagination of a supernatural power attributed to both spirits (*shenxian*) and ghosts (*guiguai*), which is to see through bodies, hearts, and souls, and thus know what common people cannot.

should forcefully, working as a wheel, push society forward. Therefore, any old or traditional operatic conventions that were preserved in civilized drama should be eliminated. Second, Pu Boying applied the clichéd May Fourth analogy of “new culture is medicine” to new drama’s social responsibility. Instead of tickling the audience’s fancy and providing fun and pleasure, new drama aimed to cut into the “body” and “soul” of society because it was severely ill. The pathological explanation of a sick society could only be achieved by harkening to a western medical technology. True, to formulate new drama as an advanced form of western medical technology would partially satisfy the May Fourth elites’ collective fantasy of Western modernity, which was seen as scientific, efficient, and accurate.<sup>53</sup> However, to the common audience, such a depiction disconnected “going to the theatre” (*ting/kan xi*) with entertainment or “buying pleasure” (*maile*). Instead, it linked “going to the theatre” with “being examined and being diagnosed.” Or, more simply expressed, since Pu wanted new drama to deal with serious issues of “life and death,” “pleasure” was now gone.

Finally, new drama should be entrusted to reflect social reality “honestly” and “without private (interest)” (*wusi*). Here, one aspect of “private interest” is the concern with financial profit. Undeniably, the final metaphor—mirror—is far less forceful/violent than the first two. Why does Pu make a softer adjustment at the end of his narrative? I assume it is related to Pu’s conservative attitude toward amateur drama.<sup>54</sup>

Although Pu, much as other members in DOT and NCDA, was outraged by post-1913

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<sup>53</sup> Lee Ou-Fan, 3. See Lee’s analysis of Mao Dun’s *Midnight* (*Ziye*).

<sup>54</sup> Civilized dramas staged in the late 1910s, as argued above, strove to represent reality on the stage for the sake of “representing social reality.” True, their superficial representation could not compare with the profound “reflection” that Pu hoped for. But, it would be difficult for Pu at that time to completely deny the efforts that different “amusement parks,” led by the New Stage, contributed to the evolution of traditional Chinese operas into modern Western plays.

civilized drama producers' "money worship," he did not entirely agree with Chen Dabei in terms of a full-fledged substitution of professional performance with amateur drama. In the DOT period, Pu published an article, "I Advocate Professional Drama" (*Wo tichang zhiye de xiju*) in the fifth issue of *Drama* (vol.1). Pu wrote, "It is really not enough to rely only on amateur forces to undertake the responsibility of developing new drama...After all, the major force is not the amateur but the professional."<sup>55</sup> To justify his belief, Pu further argued, "All people who achieve success in a certain art have to consider the art as the profession s/he aims to pursue for their whole life."<sup>56</sup> Here, Pu implies a doubt about amateur drama.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, instead of completely disregarding the possibility of professional new drama, Pu applies two traditional moral standards, honesty and lack of private concern, to constrain professional new drama from going to a commercialized extreme "art for money's sake."

In response to Pu Boying's rather discouraging tone on amateur drama, in 1922, Chen Dabei readdressed the difference between amateur drama and professional drama (both civilized dramas and reformed operas), and furthermore explained the reason why he preferred the former.<sup>58</sup> This short article clarifies how and where Chen tended to position amateur drama, Spring Willow style civilized drama, post-1913 civilized drama, and the future phase of the new drama—a mature (professional) new drama produced for and required by a new audience. Chen's arguments unfold in the following three steps.

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<sup>55</sup> Pu Boying, 1922.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ge Yihong, 52. As Ge Yihong states, Pu Boying also insisted that amateur drama troupes should be formulated by "people who do not make their living by acting," that is, "the intellectuals and modern students." This definition was opposed by Wang Zhongxian in Shanghai in 1921. Wang agreed that amateur drama troupes should not be business-like or make a profit. But Wang also maintained that amateur troupes "did not reject professional actors who had stage-performance experiences and were able to keep a clear head (from the seduction and corruption of civilized dramas)."

<sup>58</sup> Chen Dabei, *Xiju* [Drama], 2.2 (1922).

First, in the article Chen aims to target and attack what he opposed. Chen clarifies that what he particularly objected to was not “professional dramas and actors (*zhiye de xiju he zhiye de xiju de ren*) in general,” but those civilized new dramatists (*wenming xinju jia*) who “made their living off of drama but were not loyal to their profession.”<sup>59</sup> Then, Chen depicts how the field of professional civilized drama turned into a “stinky hell” because of these hooligan-like civilized drama professionals. To further distinguish the differences between himself and those “hooligans,” Chen explains why he had “jumped into the hell” before running away from it:

The profession of drama has been occupied by hooligans and cheating gangs. Therefore, people who still have self-respect want to escape from this profession. Except for those who have other ambitions (*bieyou huaibao*), who will like to squeeze into such a stinky place? I myself ran away from it because I was bothered by and even scared of the stench. The reason why I escaped [from the field of professional dramas], as explained above, is the exact reason why I am unwilling to advocate professional dramas. “If I don’t go to hell, who will?” My comrades and I [in the beginning] sacrificed our original professions and devoted ourselves to the new drama field. However, we now realize that staying in “hell” not only cannot save people, but we even cannot save ourselves. Staying in “hell” not only cannot save ourselves, but we will even seduce others into jumping into “hell.” What else can we do now if we don’t escape?<sup>60</sup>

In this rather dramatic rhetoric, Chen reveals a very elitist tone by highlighting how intellectuals sacrificed themselves for the masses’ enlightenment. Compared to the intellectuals’ original career, the new drama field was already “hell” even before the hooligans took over. However, Chen and his comrades still jumped into it because they had faith in saving more people (the masses). However, the “hell” was so fatal that Chen and others almost surrendered and turned into “ghosts.” As a result, Chen’s original goal

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<sup>59</sup> Chen Dabei, *Xiju* [Drama], 2.2 (1922).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

of saving people by means of reforming the new drama field completely failed. Instead, the post-1913 professional civilized dramas not only catered to the audience for profit, but also increased the masses' appetite for uncanny and immoral stories, playful tricks and slapstick, as well as to visual attractions. In doing so, the professional civilized performances "transformed" the masses, and "generated" new audiences for their performances, thus guaranteeing more economic capital in the long run. Chen suggests that this process was to "seduce the masses to jump into hell for more money." In other words, within the realm of civilized drama, would-be saviors became seducers and the mission of enlightening failed. Thus, Chen urges both the intellectuals/enlighteners and the masses/the enlightened to retreat from the "hell" of professional civilized new dramas. If professional civilized dramas lost both their producers and audience, as Chen wished, it would certainly be replaced.

Second, Chen hopes to introduce and position what was to be promoted. Interestingly, we encounter another medicine analogy when Chen constructs the interrelatedness among amateur drama, professional drama, the masses, and Chen and his fellow comrades:

Professional drama is like regular food while amateur drama is medicine for the cure. If a person is sick, s/he cannot avoid medicine. Certainly, medicine cannot replace food to feed people regularly. When the sickness is cured by medicine, people themselves will like to eat. Doctors should urge patients to take medicine but not eat for the time being, because eating food may make the sickness worse. [However], this does not mean that doctors object when patients eat regular food.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Chen Dabei, *Xiju* [Drama], 2.2 (1922).

Coming after the “hell” parable, Chen warns readers that the new drama field and its audience were terribly sick and required treatment. Agreeing with Pu Boying, Chen does not trust amateur drama as a “staple food” for the masses. But, he believes that both the masses and Chinese drama have been sick for a long time. When civilized dramas and reformed operas were first initiated, it was for the sake of “curing disease and saving people.” However, the past ten years of drama reformation only brought a rather embarrassing result: namely, “civilized drama was not civilized” and “reformed operas were not reformed.” Therefore, Chen, changing his role from that of “martyr” to “doctor,” felt obligated to find a more affective dose of medicine: amateur drama.

Finally, Chen proposes to reconnect with the past and prepare for what was to be formulated. The analogy of “medicine” and “staple food” clearly expresses that Chen’s reformation of new drama would not stop at amateur drama. Chen’s future goal is to “look for real comrades, arouse desire for composing and performing new dramas, and thereby nurture new audiences/masses” via the amateur drama movement. Therefore, both the audience and the producers of amateur drama were to become, in the future, the “foundation, wall corner, and igniter fuse” for the mature professional drama form. In order to better incorporate amateur drama into the whole process of drama’s evolution, Chen also connects amateur drama with history to better legitimize amateur drama. Chen believes that the forthcoming amateur dramas corresponded to the earliest civilized dramas staged by the Spring Willow Club in Japan because both were produced by amateurs and mainly circulated within groups of modern students. In spite of being

superficial and unconvincing, this connection has been accepted since the 1920s,<sup>62</sup> partly due to the fact that the commercialized civilized dramas could be discarded for the sake of conveniently depicting a neater picture of the evolution of Chinese modern drama.

## **Conclusion**

In short, Chen Dabei, Pu Boying and other new drama veterans promoted amateur drama as a temporary substitute for a professional civilized drama, in preparation for a more advanced and mature new drama format. Chen argued that amateur drama was urgently needed because civilized drama had committed a fatal sin. Since 1913, the production of civilized drama had been predominantly controlled by (comprador) merchants. Civilized actors, not unlike traditional operatic celebrities, made their living based on the amount of fans they could attract. Unsurprisingly, civilized drama soon “slipped into the money abyss,” became “filthy with the stench of money,” and only worshiped financial profit. Therefore, to continue the drama reformation, Chen separated “economic capital” from the other two capitals and furthermore targeted profit (economic capital) as the “demon” that should be exorcized from the new drama field. Likewise, those professional

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<sup>62</sup> In order to reconnect these two forms of new drama, Chen constructed the Spring Willow Club’s works as mature modern drama performances that filtered out all “dregs” of old plays and professional civilized dramas. But, Chen completely denied the fact that Spring Willow Club’s works often added, only for fun, singing and dancing scenes to the original plays, which were similar to the charges that Chen imposed upon later professional civilized dramas. To some extent, Chen redefined the Spring Willow Club’s works as performances devoid of faults made by later civilized dramas. Therefore, the works of the Spring Willow Club were presented by Chen as if they were produced after, rather than before, civilized dramas. In addition, Chen’s arguments connecting these two types of new drama were only based on the fact that they were both produced by students, which also raised my suspicions of Chen’s further hypothesis.

producers and actors were thereafter condemned as hooligans and cheating gangs, or immoral money-makers.<sup>63</sup>

More seriously, most civilized drama performances, under the pressures of the box-office, had to suspend the new drama evolutionary/revolutionary agenda and return to Chinese traditional operas in order to win the attention of petty urbanities (*xiao shimin*), as is shown by the frequent use of slapstick tricks and jokes in scenes-outside-curtain and improvised speech (*linshi yanshuo*). That is to say, the “heteronomous principle” (i.e. the concern for economic capital), threatened, and even usurped the rule of the “political principle” in the new drama field, and further obstructed new drama’s evolution towards integration with the grander process of Chinese modernization (or more specifically, “to be new”). To correct these “historical reactions,” Chen advocated amateur drama, pulling new drama away from market professionals and handing it to amateurs in modern schools. In so doing, Chen and other new drama veterans who had lost their positions in the new drama field since 1913 hoped to regain their “power” by repositioning themselves as amateur drama movement leaders/teachers and amateur drama theorists.

But several key questions remain unanswered. Was Chen’s amateur drama theory thoroughly carried out in the amateur dramas presented on stage? And were these

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<sup>63</sup> Ironically, Chen himself was a civilized drama veteran and was well known for his female impersonation in the first half of the 1910s. However, Chen, as well as his followers, tended to define himself as the soul figure of The New Drama Society and the editor of the journal, *Drama*, while leaving any mention of his popular professional acting experiences unaddressed. This is not unlike Chen Pingyuan’s observation on Li Dingyi, Bao Tianxiao, Zhang Henshui and other “old school” (*jiupai*) novelists’ “self-peripheralization.” Given that “professional actors” (*xizi*) are positioned even lower than “cheap writers,” Chen’s self-peripheralization of his earlier professional acting experiences was made even more forceful and urgent. See Chen Pingyuan, “Literary High and Low,” in *The Literary Field of Twentieth Century China*, ed. Michel Hockx, (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 124.

amateur productions<sup>64</sup> compatible with amateur drama's new position? As my reading of *Southeast Flies the Peacock* in the following chapters will show, elements and concerns of professional civilized drama were retained in amateur drama and thus reached out to a broader audience than "civilized students." After all, dramatic performance, to a degree greater than print culture, relies on both producers and consumers (the audience) to complete the cultural production. In other words, amateur drama producers still needed to first attract an audience before they could "cash in" the "political" and "symbolic capital" they valued. That is to say, the "three capitals" in the realm of amateur drama are interwoven in even more intriguing ways than in the literary field. Through my following close reading, I hope to highlight the inconsistencies and conflicts between amateur drama theories and productions in order to better understand how the "three capitals" were distributed, circulated, and transcribed in the amateur drama field even as amateur drama was being claimed and (mis)understood be a "money-free" ivory tower.

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<sup>64</sup> Amateur drama productions between 1921 and 1924 were either directly composed and directed by Chen and other amateur advocates or supervised by them.

## Chapter 2: To Beijing Flies the *Peacock*—The 1922 Amateur Production

*Southeast Flies the Peacock (Kongque dongnan fei)*

By the Fourth Year Students of the Chinese Department in Beijing Women's Normal Higher School

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—Copyright Claim by *Drama (Xiju)* (vol.2, no.2, 1922)

On January 1, 1922, *Beijing Morning Supplement (Chenbao fukan)*, hereafter, CBFK) began a new column, Amateur News (*Aimei de xiaoxi*), which was dedicated to promoting performances, research theories, and readers' communications relevant to the nationwide amateur drama movement. Chen Dabei published the first article, entitled "New Year for the Amateur" (*Aimei de xinnian*), which announced that students from Beijing Higher Normal School and Qinghua University would stage new dramas composed by Chen and Xu Banmei at Liulichang and True Light Cinema (*Zhenguang dianyingyuan*). In the article, Chen develops three layers of promotion of amateur drama: first, he generally encourages "youth" to explore "refined entertainment" during the New Year holidays and thus escape the seduction of traditional Chinese operatic entertainments, such as "*erhuang*, big drum, *bangzi*, *luozi*" performed in the "tea houses, amusement parks, and play grounds (*Zashua xichang*)"; then, Chen advertises the

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<sup>1</sup> Beijing Women's Normal School, "Kongque dongnan fei" [Southeast Flies the Peacock], *Xiju* [Drama], 2.2 (1922), 1-14.

amateur dramas to be performed on the following evenings in terms of their repertoires, casts, costumes, and ticket prices; and finally, Chen explains that the People Drama Society, cooperating with CBFK, would be paying more attention to the amateur drama practices and achievements. Meanwhile, Chen also bought an advertisement—taking up roughly 1/9 of the page—to promote the recent issues<sup>2</sup> of *Drama (Xiju)*, those produced after the New China Drama Association (NCDA) relocated to Beijing. In so doing, Chen aimed to highlight the “fruits” of, as well as enlarge the scale of, the amateur drama movement that had taken shape since the second half of 1920.

Chen’s wish to designate 1922 the “Year of Amateur Drama” was quite successfully achieved. The amateur dramas performed by Beijing Higher Normal School and Qinghua University received popular attention, as well as critical acclaim from Sun Jingzhang, Pu Boying, and Zhi Shui, who published their reviews right after the performances. Chen took a major role in compiling these reviews and responding to the audience/critic’s opinions of the performances. By the lunar New Year of 1922, CBFK promoted more amateur drama performances. Among them, it was the performances of the Beijing Women’s Higher Normal School (*Beijing nüzi gaodeng shifan xuexiao*, hereafter, BWHNS) between February 24 and 26 that attracted the most attention, for several reasons. First, the fact that a newly prominent social group, the “female student” (*nü xuesheng*), publicly performed on stage in the early 1920s constituted a rather sensational event because their public visibility was still a relatively new phenomenon.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The advertisement was the table of contents of *Drama* (vol.1 no. 6), which was published in early 1922.

<sup>3</sup> Given the relationship between the amateur drama movement and the modern school system, the public performances held by these amateur troupes were usually labeled “extra-curricular activities” rather than “selling talent” (*mai yi*), which was traditionally attributed to courtesan culture (The professional female troupes that developed in the later phases of civilized drama, *mao'er xi*, were often associated with this as

Second, the fourth-year female students of the Chinese department initially composed, cast, and directed one particular drama staged in this event, *Southeast Flies the Peacock* (*Kongque dongnan fei*; hereafter *Peacock*). Chen and other amateur drama advocates later revised and published the script and turned *Peacock* into an important piece of the amateur drama repertoire that would be reproduced by other amateur drama troupes.<sup>4</sup> This complicated process of composition, in which both the advocates/practitioners of amateur drama as well as the audience were actively involved, certainly enhanced and prolonged the social influence of the BWHNS' performances. Finally, BWHNS' performances included a wide range of dramatic sub-genres: a social scandal drama (*Ye Qirui*), a "historical" drama (*Peacock*), a comedy (*Love and Money, Aiqing yu jinqian*), and a serious drama (*Return, Guiqu*), and this variety would also have naturally contributed to their popularity.

Within the BWHNS' three-day drama festival, it was the six-act<sup>5</sup> play *Peacock* that attracted the most attention both at the time and from later critics,<sup>6</sup> perhaps because

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well). However, despite attempts to link female students' performances with school work, the performances were rather controversial because the female students exposed themselves (*paotou loumian*) to the "heterosocial world." Here, I borrow Haiyan Lee's term "heterosocial world" in order to describe the expanding social context for male and female. As Haiyan Lee puts it, "[a]long with parks, cafés, dance halls, and department stores, movie theatres are a mainstay of commercialized leisure culture; in aggregate, these public/commercial spaces make up what historian Kathy Peiss calls a 'heterosocial world,' where men and women form ever-widening social circles outside the bounds of marriage and family." See Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 130.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the other three dramas were also composed by this same group of female students. Yet, despite the attention other performances (particularly *Ye Qirui*) provoked at that time, they left almost no influence on the later narration of amateur drama.

<sup>5</sup> Noticeably, one of the drama reviews revealed that *Peacock* had six acts whereas the revised-then-published script included only five acts. This discrepancy will be explained later in this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> Soon after the BWHNS' performances, eleven articles (in the form of reviews, reports, and commentaries) about them were published in CBFK between February and April 1922; seven were dedicated to *Peacock*. In the current scholarship, Elizabeth Eide, Haiyan Lee, and Dong Jian all allude to this amateur adaptation in their studies on Yuan Changying's three-act drama script, *Peacock*, published in 1930 in Shanghai and later staged in Shanghai (1930) and Wuhan (1935). However, their research only treats this "complete" amateur drama (both staged in 1922 in Beijing and preserved as script in the journal *Drama*) as part of a repertoire of several modern adaptations of *Peacock* without further investigation. In some cases, the

*Peacock* reframed an “old” family story within the grand iconoclastic discourse of the day. The clichéd theme of an evil mother-in-law restricting the marriage and life of her young son and daughter-in-law appeared at a time when the “new drama” had already devolved into the notorious civilized drama. On the surface, *Peacock* testified to an ideal moment when “modernity” triumphed over “tradition”: the “old” domestic conflict was re-presented on the “new” stage for a modern purpose; the drama (script), an adaptation of a folk ballad initially circulated in the fifth century, experienced a rebirth through modern touches and was thereby “upgraded” into a Western-style tragedy; and, the producers of *Peacock*, the fourth-year Chinese female students, represented a modern, civilized, and “art for art’s sake” amateur possibility, an alternative that was superior to civilized drama, which had come to be seen as feudal, savage, and “for money’s sake.” However, when we subject *Peacock* (both its performance and its script) to a more fine-grained scrutiny, these binaries of old and new, and *Peacock*’s apparent slighting of tradition for modernity, become rather obscure and problematic. There remains a series of entangled issues that were touched upon by (amateur) dramatists, performers, critics, and common audiences but have not yet been addressed sufficiently from a scholarly perspective. Specifically, how does a narrative that dwells on family conflict (mother-in-law vs. daughter-in-law) and private *qing* (“love” between husband and wife) get expanded, publicized, politicized, and finally incorporated into the grand narrative of constructing a modern nation state? How are the “old China” and “modern West” inscribed in *Peacock*, and what is the relationship between them? How are the features of

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historical facts of this production are even misdated—e.g., the premiere date. In spite of the complicated process of *Peacock*’s production and circulation, my investigations have not revealed any specific study on this amateur production.

“old,” “China,” “modern,” and “West” presented on stage, by whom and in what form? How did the fourth-year female students of the BWHNS and the NCDA, led by Chen Dabei, collectively write *Peacock*? To answer these questions, in this chapter I discuss how *Peacock* was performed, received, revised, and textualized as a model script and as the “best fruit” of the amateur drama movement in the early 1920s. In so doing, I investigate how the poles of, “new” and “old,” “China” and “West,” and “professional” and “amateur,” coexist in an uneasy relationship in this drama, which Xu Dishan claimed to be “the first time that we [Chinese new drama] became alert to traditional stories (*gushi*).”<sup>7</sup> By highlighting the novelty of using traditional stories for new drama, Xu enthusiastically assigns *Peacock* a pioneering role in the development of Chinese new drama. But how was the pioneer spirit embodied in the play?

### **Female Students Staging “(Free) Love” in a Variety Performance**

Zhou Ying’s report conveys a comprehensive understanding of the BWHNS three-day drama festival. In order to raise money for a future field trip and promote amateur drama, these female students performed four dramas during a variety performance (*youyi hui*)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Xu Dishan, “Wo dui *Kongque dongnanfei* de tiyi,” [My Suggestions to *Southeast Flies the Peacock*], CBFK (March 5, 1922).

<sup>8</sup> I have been unable to collect sufficient materials to give a more complete picture of the form of variety performance in 1920s Beijing. However, articles published in CBFK between 1921 and 1922 show that most amateur drama performances were incorporated into variety performances and sometimes even arranged next to (in terms of both location and order) entertaining performances/activities, such as magic shows, martial art shows, and Western Opera shows. Chen Dabei, in “New Year for the Amateur,” claimed that such (entertaining) shows would be presented after the amateur dramas of Qinghua Boy’s Army (*Qinghua Tongzijun*) in order to “enhance the joy” (*zhuxing*). As suggested in the previous chapter, there were some student performances that could be roughly labeled “amateur drama” in the foreign schools of the Shanghai international settlements before the Spring Willow Society debuted its first modern drama in Tokyo in 1907. However, those amateur dramas were exclusively staged in the form of “reporting performance” (*huibao yanchu*) and were only staged on campus for students, faculty, and parents. Thus, those earlier amateur practices differed from the amateur dramas presented in the variety performances in the 1920s. The latter, though claimed as amateur drama, went out of the campuses, rented professional

held at the Ministry of Education Auditorium between February 24 and 26 in 1922. According to Zhou Ying, these four plays were composed by the group of female students and treated “social problems that were [urgently] in need of being resolved.” Although here “social problems” were rather ambiguously defined, it is not difficult to designate “(free) love” as the overriding social concern, given that the four plays centered on romantic relationships: eulogizing the younger generation’s “love” as being cruelly repressed by the traditional patriarchy in *Peacock*; or, as reflected in *Ye Qirui*, critically interrogating the problematic public relationship between male and female that was camouflaged by the discourse of “free love” and women’s emancipation.<sup>9</sup> These female students were fully aware of the intertwining paradoxical perspectives on “(free) love.” Namely, “free love,” if carried out appropriately, leads to healthy social intercourse and courtship between men and women as equal subjects; if not, “(free) love” could be easily manipulated as a grandiose reason for men philandering women. Hoping to reveal the danger of pseudo “(free) love,” the female students acted out their concerns on the amateur drama stage. In so doing, the BWHNS amateur troupe “performed” a substantial and comprehensive “modern project” that expressed their understanding of “love” and “society” (“what to represent”) and the genre of Western style (amateur) drama (“how to represent”), which raises the issues of “form” and “content.”

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performance stages (cinemas and auditoriums), and charged tickets from an audience that included high- and middle-brow urban citizens. More important, the amateur dramas performed in the early 1920s were juxtaposed against, and thus competed for an audience with, other entertainment media. In other words, the (college) students, from the very beginning, produced amateur dramas in the early cultural industry of the *real world*. All in all, the phenomenon that amateur dramas in the early 1920s relied on variety performances (a branch of China’s early cultural industry) deserves further investigation.

<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, because of a lack of resources, I am not able to further examine the other two plays. However, judging from the reviews of this three-day event, it is clear that it was *Peacock* first and *Ye Qirui* second, above the other two plays, which garnered the greatest response from students, middle-/high- brow audience/readers, and other New Culture advocates who constituted the major readership of CBFK.

The opening amateur drama of the three-day performance was *Ye Qirui*, a play based on the news story, “Tragic News about a Student Killing His Wife” (*Xuesheng mouhai faqi canwen*) that was published in CBFK’s Social News column on February 5, 1922.<sup>10</sup> Ye Qirui was a Beijing University student who pursued and proposed to his schoolmate, Xu Zhenhua, despite the fact that he had already married, by traditional arrangement, another woman. Xu’s father asked Ye to find ten people from his hometown to sign an assurance letter, guaranteeing that Ye would never allow a similar situation to happen again (e.g., having another wife). Also, Ye was required to promise to stay in Beijing permanently with Xu’s family. Ye first urged his arranged wife to divorce, a suggestion that was opposed by both his wife and his mother. Out of anger and desperation, Ye then killed his wife and fled to the south. Half a year later, he came back to Beijing and planned to visit Xu. However, before doing so, he revealed the secret of his crime after getting drunk with a Mr. Li, whose little sister happened to be Xu’s friend. As a result, when Ye arrived at Xu’s house to readdress the marriage issue, Xu confronted Ye with the details of his crime. In the end, Ye was “judged by his conscience (*liangxin*) and felt unbearable torture.”

Yuan Qinghui, in his review, assumes that the purpose for staging *Ye Qirui* was to stress three social values: “to force the male toward introspection,” “to awaken the female from (illusion),” and “to provoke common people’s thoughts on resolving social problems, such as, the open social intercourse between men and women (*nani shejiao gongkai*).” Yuan argues further that *Ye Qirui* reveals a dramatic case of a rather common social phenomenon and that, under the protection of the “public social relationship

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<sup>10</sup> Zhou Ying, “Nü gaoshi youyi hui xinju shuoming” [Illustrations on Beijing Female Higher Normal School’s New Dramas in Variety Performance], CBFK (February 23, 1922).

between men and women,” many “Ye Qiruis” were propelled by their unbridled desires to hurt various “traditional wives” and “modern lovers.” Despite the sensational nature of this play, Yuan’s review appeared only on March 8, well after the publication of reviews of *Peacock* by Shuo Shui, Xu Dishan, Wan Zhouyan, and Chen Dabei. That is to say, the editors of the Amateur Drama Column of CBFK singled out *Peacock*, rather than *Ye Qirui*, as the masterpiece of the amateur dramas most worthy of discussion. The belated response to *Ye Qirui* from intellectuals was inconsistent with the heated response to this sensational social event.<sup>11</sup> Despite the absence of reviews of this play, we should not undervalue its popularity and importance, especially considering that *Ye Qirui* was the opening play of the three-day event. As to why the reception of *Ye Qirui* among common audiences and the CBFK contributors was different, we may turn to Haiyan Lee’s arguments on the popularity of “free love”-cum-scandalous social events in the periodical press.<sup>12</sup> Lee notices the “typical” scandalous scenario in the 1920s was “a daughter’s rebellion against the family,” which later turned into “a liberated woman’s disastrous management of love life in the absence of familial supervision.”<sup>13</sup> The foci of such social events were usually women, as Lee notes, because “the generation of women who came of age in the May Fourth era seized upon free love as a powerful weapon in

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<sup>11</sup> Such conflict, to some extent, reflects that the audience of amateur dramas and the readership of CBFK (particularly the Amateur Drama Column) consisted predominantly of high-brow May Fourth intellectuals, who consciously suppressed the “scandal theme” inscribed in *Ye Qirui*, because it seemed to belong to the “seductive” and “traditional” dregs of the civilized dramas and popular vernacular novels. In 1919, Qian Xuantong developed the label of “the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly style” into “the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School” and included in this school the “black-curtain” (scandal theme) fiction that “poisoned young people with its depiction of gossip, licentiousness, and the corruption of officials.” See Xu Xueqing, “The Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School,” in *Literary Societies of Republican China*, ed. Kirk Denton and Michel Hockx, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 47-79.

<sup>12</sup> Haiyan Lee, 152.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

the struggle for individual rights and autonomy.”<sup>14</sup> Yet, in the eyes of public opinion, the character of the modern lover, Shen Chunhua, would be judged a “scandalous woman” who symbolizes obscenity because of her involvement in a love affair. This was exactly what the intellectual reviewers opposed and urgently sought to eliminate. Therefore, although the focus of charges against the play was the pseudo-May Fourth male student, the ambiguity of Shen Chunhua’s identity disqualified the play as an amateur model. In contrast, the female protagonist in *Peacock*, Lanzhi, strives for “love” under the protection of a legal wedlock. Hence, Lanzhi’s bold expression of love to her husband and her desperate struggles with Mother Jiao to maintain her marriage would be mainly viewed as iconoclastic behavior, but such behavior would not invoke a sexually scandalous interpretation.

That is to say, *Peacock* offered a more stereotypically iconoclastic narrative of “(free) love” and stirred heated discussion in the Amateur Drama Column in CBFK. Ironically, the irresolvable conflict between mother-in-law (parental authority) and the young couple (the ideology of conjugal love and middle-class domesticity) was a less controversial theme than that of the tension between male and female in the modern “heterosocial world” in *Ye Qirui*. *Peacock* develops the iconoclastic theme more comfortably than *Ye Qirui*: the parental authority represses the younger generation’s freedom of choosing their marriage partners, which was, as Haiyan Lee puts it, “a fundamental right in the sense that individuals, inasmuch as they are autonomous moral agents, have the inalienable right to act without deliberate obstruction from others,

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<sup>14</sup> Haiyan Lee, 152.

including parents.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, patriarchal repression—namely Mother Jiao’s abuse of Liu Lanzhi as a daughter-in-law, Liu Lanfang’s (Liu Lanzhi’s brother) intolerance of Liu Lanzhi as a returning sister, and Jiao Zhongqing’s early condemnation of Liu Lanzhi’s second marriage—leads dramatically to the death of the female protagonist,<sup>16</sup> who becomes a “woman martyr.”<sup>17</sup> For these reasons, Chen and other intellectuals likely overlooked *Ye Qirui* and promoted *Peacock* as the most important piece of BWHNS’ three-day festival.

### **(Elite) Audience Reviewing *Peacock***

The May Fourth elite concurred that *Peacock* was a successful drama that embodied an iconoclastic spirit within an “old” poem. However, behind the unanimous endorsements of the play among amateur drama activists, reviewers, and intellectual audience members lay quite different agendas that have, unfortunately, been lumped together into a monolithic discourse of anti-traditionalism. I would argue that part of the charm of the amateur *Peacock* is a certain plasticity that accommodates a variety of opinions and subtle bifurcation in interpretation. In what follows, I discuss “how” the amateur *Peacock* was perceived and promoted to support different agendas.

Zhou Ying’s review, for example, applauds the “contemporariness” of this “old” story by arguing that “although the [*Peacock*] story occurred 2,000 years ago, it is still

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<sup>15</sup> Haiyan Lee, 8

<sup>16</sup> Unlike the ballad, the amateur play explicitly informs us that Lanzhi commits suicide, whereas it maintains ambiguity regarding the final fate of the male protagonist, Jiao Zhongqing. Below I develop a discussion of this adaptation.

<sup>17</sup> As Hua Lan and Vanessa Fong allude, the May Fourth offensive attack on Confucianism was predominately conducted over the bodies of “new women martyrs.” See Hua Lan and Vanessa Fong eds., *Women in Republican China: A Source Book*, (Armonk: ME Sharpe, 1999), 75. Significantly, Liu Lanzhi’s traditionality is greatly decreased in the amateur version; she is “modernized” not only in the script adaptation, but also in the performance style. Again, I elaborate on this below.

quite compatible with what is happening now in bad families.”<sup>18</sup> Zhou defends the appropriateness to stage *Peacock* because its core concern was to reflect the “darkness” of the patriarchy, a social structure shared by both past and present families. Therefore, Zhou places his critical concern on Mother Jiao, the “atrocious and evil mother-in-law,” charging her with restricting the “love between a young couple” and, further, causing the death of Liu Lanzhi, a “beautiful and virtuous wife.”<sup>19</sup> Predictably, by focusing on the family conflict between the older patriarchal authority and the aspirations of the younger couple, Zhou hopes to foment condemnation against “traditional values” and more sympathy toward “rebellious daughters and sons” from “comrades who are particularly interested in drama.”<sup>20</sup>

Although sharing Zhou’s polemical inclinations, Chen Dabei centers his promotion of *Peacock* on issues of “literary history,” “tragedy,” and “reception” rather than highlighting the “modern” iconoclastic spirit within an “old” text. In his article “Welcoming the Composition of Two Scripts” (*Huanying liangge chuangzuo de juban*), Chen declares that *Peacock* was selected by the journal *Drama* as the “model script” for its second issue.<sup>21</sup> Chen writes that *Peacock* could both attract and attest to the civilizational level (*wenming chengdu*) of its audience (*kanke*):

[The script of] *Peacock* was collectively composed by the fourth-year students of Beijing Women’s Higher Normal School and has been promoted among Beijing students. This play is adapted from an old poem; therefore, it preserves the [aesthetic] meanings of [Chinese] classical poetry. Also, the [story of the] original poem is so full of misery that readers sometimes feel it is unbearably sad to read. Now, if the fourth-year students perform this piece of tragedy in a lively

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<sup>18</sup> Zhou Ying, (February 23, 1922).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> The “model drama” published in the first issue of *Drama* was Chen Dabei’s *Patriotic Mob* (*Aiguo Zei*).

manner, I am afraid that the audience will shed tears like raindrops. However, the tears from watching tragedy are different than tears shed on other occasions, in fact, they are sweet amidst bitterness. Why are they different? . . . I suppose that the sweet feeling from watching tragedy is similar to the joy of sacrificing ourselves for other people's sake. Therefore, it is a kind of sympathy that is pure, holy, and is the very feature that differentiates human beings from other species in the world. . . . Therefore, as someone once mentioned, "To evaluate the civilizational level of a certain culture one first needs to find how much tragedy that culture has." That is to say, the higher the civilizational level of a culture, the more tragedy that culture produces.<sup>22</sup>

In his review, Chen introduces the complex process of *Peacock's* composition: a confluence of forces that included the traditional literary heritage, amateur drama practices,<sup>23</sup> and the incorporation of a variety of audience's reviews.<sup>24</sup> Chen's promotion of *Peacock* is not simply for the sake of endorsing a single discourse; rather, it is a site where Chen is able to embrace and manipulate "literary history," "tragedy," and "reception" under the theme of "civilization." First, Chen explains that the amateur *Peacock* is loaded with "classical poetic flavor" because it was adapted from "an old poem."<sup>25</sup> The presentational style (i.e. classical poetic style) of the play, in Chen's opinion, nevertheless, does not hinder the play from presenting the "darkness" of the traditional patriarchal family. In drawing attention to this facet of the drama, Chen seeks

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<sup>22</sup> Chen Dabei, "Huanying liangge chuanguzu de juban" [Welcome the Composition of Two Scripts], CBFK (February 24, 1922).

<sup>23</sup> In which amateur students draft the script and mentors revise and publish it.

<sup>24</sup> Although the reviews published in CBFK are all written by May Fourth intellectuals, Chen Dabei is certainly aware of the complicated demography of amateur drama's audience. In Chen' and Shuo Shui's reviews, it is clear that elite intellectuals as well as a low/high-brow audience consume the drama together.

<sup>25</sup> Chen Dabei and Zhou Ying both highlight *Peacock's* background as a narrative ballad, which suggests that the ballad was perhaps less popular for modern readers than is generally assumed in literary histories. Although terms such as "burying together," "connecting trees," and "butterflies" (metaphors for the dead lovers Liu and Jiao) were quite common in the Chinese folk narrative tradition, it was not until the May Fourth generation of the 1920s that *Peacock* was fully canonized. Hu Shi's 1928 *History of Vernacular Literature* (*Zhongguo baihua wenxue shi*) dedicates an entire section to investigate the textualization of *Peacock* and quotes the entire poem. It would therefore appear that the "popularity" of this traditional ballad is really a modern phenomenon. The various dramatic adaptations of *Peacock* between 1929 and 1930, a trend I alluded to in the Introduction, are part of this modern canonization of a traditional text.

to assert an alternative “tradition” that was either suppressed or overlooked in the classic canonization standards of traditional Chinese literature. Chen wants to advance the “iconoclastic” movement by positioning the “(new) cultural rebellion” within the history of “traditional Chinese literature,” the very target that New Culture advocates aimed to overthrow.

Second, and different from Zhou Ying’s critical association of the “misery” and “darkness” common to both traditional and modern families, Chen views the “misery” depicted in *Peacock* as “tragedy,” an embodiment of human sympathy, and a sign of “civilization.” In Chen’s mind, *Peacock* (both the old ballad and the new amateur drama) is valuable and meaningful in terms of cultivating “civilization” in the collective consciousness of Chinese audiences because of its “tragic” nature.<sup>26</sup> In this respect, Chen’s reading responds well to Hu Shi’s emphasis on “tragedy” in his “Evolutionary Concept of Literature and Theatre Reform.”<sup>27</sup> As Patricia Sieber reads it, Hu Shi’s contribution to the discourse of “tragedy” is only one key of the chain that links Chinese literature with world literature. Coming after Wang Guowei, Hu Shi further develops Wang’s initial hybridization of Chinese literature and Western literary theories. In particular, Hu Shi transforms Wang’s classical method of paralleling literary genres with history into an agenda of Westernization/modernization—namely, to match up Chinese

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<sup>26</sup> Needless to say, Chen’s promotion of “tragedy” and “civilization” sufficiently expresses his resentful criticism against the used-to-be dominant professional dramas that practiced “cheap humor”/slapstick to “trick” the audience, which not only rendered dramatic performance but also Chinese culture “uncivilized.”

<sup>27</sup> Hu Shi expressed a similar statement in “Evolutionary Concept of Literature and Theatre Reform,” (*Wenxue jinhua guan yu xiju gailiang*), which was published in a special issue of *New Youth* in Drama Reform (vol. 5, no. 4, 1918). Hu Shi read “tragedy” in the Chinese literary context as stories without “reunions” or “happy endings.” Furthermore, Hu believed that “the most sincere and deepest emotion does not develop when people are smiling, but at the moments when people are sad.” Placed under the narrative of modern world literature, Hu believed that “tragedy” most commonly occurred to individuals when they “lose ambition, are deprived of human nature, and are sinking in evil.”

drama with the Western conception of “tragedy.”<sup>28</sup> Similar to Hu Shi, by defining *Peacock* both as an “old poem” and an amateur drama, Chen finds for his Western dramatic/critical theory an indigenous literary “host.” In Chen’s review, the strict poles between “West/New” and “China/Tradition,” instead of being as incompatible as water and fire, are blurred and moderated.

Finally, Chen endorses the amateur version of *Peacock* in hopes of cultivating an audience otherwise severely corrupted by traditional Chinese operatic performances and “civilized drama.” This endorsement reiterates Chen’s overriding goal for amateur drama in general: to cultivate a civilized audience for a future “modern drama” that is mature and healthy. In pursuit of this goal, Chen proceeds to a discussion of how that drama will be received:

There is a bad habit in Chinese theatre that needs to be urgently abolished. Whenever there are some tragic performances on stage, a group of lechers (*Dengtuzi*)<sup>29</sup> start looking at the women guests who shed tears. Once, in Shanghai, I saw those *Dengtuzi* whistling and laughing at female audience members, which made those women feel very embarrassed. Some women in the audience stayed calm, as if struggling to endure torture. As a result, those *Dengtuzi* felt even more excited and enraptured. The holy theater was altered into a place of cruelty. How can Republican China not be deeply disturbed! When the amateur drama *Peacock* is staged in the auditorium tomorrow night, the audience who hears the sad tone of Liu Lanzhi will naturally cry. Let’s see how many people will laugh at the audience members who wipe their tears (I suppose that no one will dare to whistle thanks to the high-pressure police force)! Then we can measure the intelligence level of tomorrow night’s audience!<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Patricia Sieber, *Theatres of Desire: Authors, Readers, and Reproduction of Chinese Song-Drama 1300-2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 30.

<sup>29</sup> The term *Dengtuzi* is originally from Song Yu’s “Dengtuzi haose fu” [*Fu* on the licentious Master Dengtu]. In that piece of *fu*, Song Yu defends himself from Master Dengtu’s charges of being licentious. Song Yu points out that he is indifferent to a comely neighbor over three years whereas Master Dengtu has five children with his ugly looking wife. Therefore, Song Yu suggests that it is Master Dengtu who is more licentious. Later, the name *Dengtuzi* often refers to people who are licentious. See Xiao Tong (501-531), *Wenxuan* [A Selection of Literary Works], vol. 19, (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1988-1994).

<sup>30</sup> Chen Dabei, (February 24, 1922).

Chen harshly criticizes the “uncivilized” habits of Chinese audiences whose vulgar behavior negatively affected stage performances.<sup>31</sup> While Chen’s prediction could be understood as his condemnation of the backwardness of traditional theater, it can also be seen as a statement on the circulation of amateur drama, showing that it was not an “ivory tower” activity engaged in solely by elite students. Chen’s memory of watching plays (*kanju* or *tingxi*) in Shanghai likely occurred in theaters and tea gardens where civilized dramas and revised operas were performed. In fact, in the early twentieth century, women were only allowed to attend these public performances in cities such as Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai, and the majority of those who did attend were prostitutes and courtesans. Only later did urban women “slowly” walk out of the domestic sphere and enter public spaces such as the theaters, cinemas, dancing halls, etc. In fact, Chen’s depiction of a female audience being whistled and laughed at perfectly exemplifies Laura Mulvey’s theory of a “male gaze” centered around a hierarchy of an active male spectator and the passive female object of his gaze.<sup>32</sup> This phenomenon, which Chen saw as a “bad habit” cultivated in viewers of civilized drama and operatic theatre, not only did not disappear in amateur drama, but was actually enhanced, especially for a play like *Peacock* whose cast consisted exclusively of female students.

In addition, Chen’s construction of amateur drama is also shaped by the way he sees traditional operas and civilized drama. He predicts that the audience of *Peacock* would be moved by the tragedy after “hearing the sorrowful tone of Liu Lanzhi,” an

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<sup>31</sup> Shuo Shui, in his review “After Watching Southeast Flies the Peacock on the Night of the 25<sup>th</sup>,” (*Kanle er shi wu wan Kongque dongnan fei yihou*) mentions that the audience was too loud and that the theater management was rather messy. As a result, Shuo Shui could not understand the dialogue in certain scenes.

<sup>32</sup> Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* (16:3): 6-18.

interesting mélange of the Western notion of catharsis with the *pengchang* tradition of the leading actress. Chen also labeled the audience as “guests who look” (*kanke*) rather than “guests who listen” (*tingke*), which is used in the Chinese story-telling/operatic tradition, suggesting the hybridity of his understanding of drama as both a vocal-based and visual-based art. However, civilized drama and revised Beijing operas had already anticipated this shift; the later phase of civilized drama in particular was heavily invested in dazzling visual effects, using them to attract an audience.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, Chen’s identification of the audience of amateur drama as people who mainly hoped to satisfy a visual desire inherited more than it departed from the tradition of commercial civilized drama. Furthermore, Chen’s view of the audience as *kanke* who were predominantly entertainment consumers also goes against the grain of the later construction of amateur drama in the historical narrative of Chinese modern drama;<sup>34</sup> the latter stresses the absolute educational/enlightening discourse of amateur drama while overlooking its entertaining nature, and it mistakenly sees its audiences as eager recipients of the enlightenment message.

If we seize upon Chen’s claim, made during his promotion of the script of *Peacock* before its premiere, that whatever amateur drama inherited from commercial civilized drama was done unconsciously and was thus obscure, then Shuo Shui, Xu Dishan, and Chen himself in their reviews of the stage performance, explicitly imposed upon the amateur *Peacock* the standards of evaluating professional civilized drama. In his review, Shuo Shui first explains that the amateur *Peacock* was staged after “one extra

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<sup>33</sup> Chen Long, *Zhongguo jindai tongsu xiju* [Chinese Modern Popular Drama] (Taipei: Dongda tushu gongsi), 37.

<sup>34</sup> Ge Yihong, *Zhongguo huaju tongshi* [History of Chinese Spoken Drama] (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1990), 52.

play (*fuju*), two dancing scenes, and one slapstick play (*quju*).”<sup>35</sup> To present an amateur drama in the context of other entertaining performances was not the invention of the BWHNS; instead, it was a common practice of most amateur troupes. Indeed, this phenomenon could be traced back to performance conventions of the previous decade, when civilized dramas were often inserted into a series of Beijing operas, with the former viewed as the modern/Western alternative to the latter. Thus, when the BWHNS amateur troupe staged Chen’s plays during the New Year, “a magic show, operas, and martial arts performance were also staged for the purpose of promoting amateur dramas.”<sup>36</sup> This particular arrangement further confirms my thesis that amateur drama performances were not entirely devoid of a commercial/market concern; they not only tolerated being grouped with other performances that valued entertainment over enlightenment, but also relied upon those shows to attract an audience. True, since they did not share the stage with traditional operatic performances, they appeared to follow Chen Dabei’s original goal of cultivating modern students with “civilized” leisure activities<sup>37</sup> for a “civilized” society. However, with its intense concern for the stage *performance* and props (while leaving the narrative adaptation of *Peacock* barely discussed), the “civilization” that the amateur drama pursued seems not to be much different than that of the civilized drama in the 1910s.

Shuo Shui’s chief concern in his review is with the female students’ impersonations of male characters; he even suggests that the ability to act like a man

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<sup>35</sup> Shuo Shui, “Kanle ershiwu wan *Kongque dongnan fei yihou*” [After Watching *Southeast Flies the Peacock* on the Night of the 25<sup>th</sup>], CBFK (March 3, 1922).

<sup>36</sup> Chen Dabei, “Aimei de xiaoxi” [Amateur News], CBFK (January 1, 1922).

<sup>37</sup> Further investigation is needed to flesh out the connotations of “leisure,” which, owing to its debt to the mass media and urbanization, first became available to petty urbanites at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

should become the standard to evaluate an actor's talent and serve as the determining factor for the quality of an entire play.<sup>38</sup> Shuo Shui highly praises the female student who played Liu Lanzhi's brother, Liu Lanfang, because she "impersonated a male very fastidiously . . . Her body postures and spirit were all like a man's." Shuo claims that she was a "promising acting master!" In contrast, the female student who played Jiao Zhongqing did not convince the audience with her male-impersonation, and Shuo criticizes her for playing an "inappropriate role" that undercut the whole play:

[Particularly] in the sixth act, Jiao Zhongqing was supposed to express her nearly unbearable pain [from learning that Liu Lanzhi committed suicide] by letting out a series of manic laughter to Mother Jiao. However, her femininity and delay (*chixing*) often worked against the miserable fate of the character. As a result, the audience all burst into laughter when "Jiao Zhongqing" was crying on stage.<sup>39</sup>

Shuo also carefully examines *Peacock's* stage props and costumes. He points out that the amateur troupe used traditional costumes because "the author(s) presumably tended toward a reconstruction of the historical background of *Peacock*, since it was adapted from an old poem." However, Shuo does not think it was necessary to limit the play within a fixed spatial and temporal "tradition" because the intention of the play was to show that "under the patriarchal family structure, no real love (*lian'ai*) is allowed."<sup>40</sup> If the play were set in a contemporary context, it would be just as meaningful, Shuo says. Besides, in spite of the troupe's intentions, funding constraints meant that the costumes and stage props were neither "authentic" nor compatible. Chen Dabei, in fact, was to later feel regret for the BWHNS' insistence on "traditional costumes" when he directed

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<sup>38</sup> Shuo Shui, (March 3, 1922).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

the Shanxi Student Union drama troupes' performance of *Peacock* in Beijing in April 1922. Chen believed that traditional costumes did not enhance the “authentic/realistic” flavor of the amateur *Peacock*; in fact, it was only for the lack of anything better that the production used Beijing opera costumes, which explains why Shuo Shui discerned an “overtly heavy old operatic air” hovering over the whole play.<sup>41</sup> In addition to these shortcomings with the costumes, Xu Dishan and Wan Zhuoheng also point out that the stage props were faulty because, although the play emphasized its Eastern Han era setting, the audience could still see a “1920s clock placed above the Tang paintings in Jiao’s house.”<sup>42</sup> Ironically, these careless mistakes were almost identical to those committed by the smaller-scaled professional civilized drama troupes in the 1910s.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, Xu Dishan sympathizes with the difficulty amateur troupes faced in staging “old” plays because “our nation does not have completely-built historical museums which the amateur troupe might consult in constructing the everyday life of the past.”<sup>44</sup> To compensate for this shortcoming, he suggests the amateur troupe “borrow-back” from Japan:

In terms of costume and stage set, I do have something to contribute. Although I said [the mistakes] were unavoidable, we still could do further research and achieve the goal of “although it is not accurate, it will not be too far away from [the original scene].” All we need to do is to observe contemporary Japanese daily life and clothes, from which we can see a few characteristics of our ancient Chinese past.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Shuo Shui, (March 3, 1922).

<sup>42</sup> Xu Dishan, (March 5, 1922).

<sup>43</sup> Chen Long, 42.

<sup>44</sup> Xu Dishan (March 5, 1922).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

Perhaps underpinning Xu's suggestions on building an authentic Han-era stage lay his anxieties about building a modern nation-state. In this light, Xu's call for "building museums" in his review of the amateur *Peacock* was not off-topic: it reveals Xu's goal to promote amateur drama as an "exhibitionary space," not unlike a museum, that would serve to entertain and educate the masses and constitute a form of civil society (one of the essential parameters of China's modernization) for the emerging modern nation-state. As a modern "exhibitionary space," amateur drama could effectively eradicate the dregs of China's traditional forms of mass entertainment, and transform the audience from simply seeking "lascivious and obscene" sensational stimulation to actually acquiring knowledge from a play. Thus, Xu's comments present a step-by-step path for accelerating China's modernization, from developing a civil society, to promoting "civilized" leisure activities, and finally to assisting the amateur troupe in effectively presenting an Eastern Han household on stage.

Although Xu does not deny that the "power" of *Peacock* lay chiefly in its indictment of the patriarchal clan system, his review noticeably does not concentrate on these iconoclastic touches within traditional literature. As mentioned above, Xu concedes that he only intended to contribute a few suggestions regarding "stage set and costume." At the end of his review, he also admits: "my review is not going to criticize anything. I heard [Chen] Dabei<sup>46</sup> mention that *Peacock* has already been sent to the journal *Drama*. Therefore, *Peacock* will most likely have a second stage performance. I

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<sup>46</sup> Judging from the way that Xu addressed Chen Dabei, it appears that Xu Dishan already claimed a certain position among Beijing's May Fourth intellectual circle in 1922.

hope, by then, *Peacock* will have a more appropriate stage set.”<sup>47</sup> Xu’s emphasis on the “authenticity” of set design carries with it significant overtones. For Xu, the “traditional China” inscribed within *Peacock* is not some abstract evil monster that suppressed the younger generation’s desire to love freely. In other words, Xu does not simply reduce “traditional China” to an imaginary monolithic target of iconoclastic attack; rather, he looks for historical authenticity, suggesting that a national historical museum, modeled after those in Japan, would offer an important resource to achieve this goal.

Interestingly, in Xu’s review modern Japan is less related with modern drama development than with history and archeology, and is therefore less a signification of a non-Western “West” than a signification of a non-Chinese “traditional China.”<sup>48</sup> As Xu implies, Japan was a modern nation state where both Oriental (Chinese) and Western civilization cohabitated and the former’s influence was no less significant than the latter. In other words, modern Japan, though worshipped by May Fourth intellectuals as a model for China’s modernization, for Xu is also an inheritor and preserver of traditional Chinese culture. To some extent, this duality comforted May Fourth intellectuals’ unspoken

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<sup>47</sup> Xu Dishan, (March 5, 1922). In fact, Xu’s specific suggestions on stage sets and clothes further reveal that his expert specialization was not in literature. Xu suggested that a chair should be replaced with a “bed” because the story occurred in the Eastern Han era when chairs were not commonly used. As to the stage setting of the Jiao family house, the amateur troupe should consult a “painting of fellow villagers” and a “painting of the well-field system” and simplify the wall paintings. In addition, Xu suggested that the costume in *Peacock* should refer to “pictures from *Xiaotang* Mountain, stone carvings in the *Wuliang* Shrine, stone figurines from King Lu’s tomb, as well as recently unearthed Ming utensils.”

<sup>48</sup> I apply the term “non-western West” to suggest the particular position that Japan took in modern Chinese intellectuals’ mapping of the modern world. Although Japan is of course part of the non-Western world, its successful modernization and Westernization as well as its translation of “the West” to China turned Japan into a “West” that was familiar and therefore easier for Chinese intellectuals to imagine and imitate. Similarly, a conception of modern Japan as a “non-Chinese China” repeated this logic. Only modern Japan was understood to have preserved the long-gone “Chinese traditions” that had faded out in the 1920s because “our (Chinese) nation,” as an “immature” modern nation-state, was not able to protect and preserve its cultural traditions against the onslaught of some May Fourth intellectuals who, inspired by the grand discourse of iconoclasm, over-enthusiastically labeled all “tradition” as “savage.” It was therefore from this perspective of Japan as a “non-Chinese China” that Xu suggested the amateur *Peacock* turn to Japan in order to reconstruct the authentic everyday life of Eastern Han China.

anxieties regarding national pride and cultural inheritance. After all, the cultivation of nationalism among its citizens is an essential feature of the modern nation-state. However, in the face of the traumatic history of China since the middle of the nineteenth century, May Fourth intellectuals felt psychologically humiliated and thus could not focus their national pride on their pre-modern past. Seen from this perspective, Xu's stress on the similarity between the common people's life style during the Eastern Han and the everyday life of modern Japanese not only comforted his own anxiety but also conveyed a sense of the ever-lasting influence of China's glorious traditions. In short, Xu's view was that the amateur drama *Peacock* should first and foremost exhibit the long and influential culture of "traditional China," from which national pride and mass patriotism would naturally arise. Furthermore, the glory and advancement of "traditional China" offered Xu, the performers and audience of *Peacock*, and the May Fourth generation in general, an adequate reason for their persistent, though with differences in extent, fascination with "traditional China."

Another focus of reviews of *Peacock* was on how the melodramatic binary between "evil cruelty" and "virtuous weakness" was carried out. Although both Shuo Shui and Xu Dishan claim that they chiefly applied "realism" and "authenticity" to determine the merits of *Peacock* in its casting, stage props, and background, they were also very concerned with the melodramatic contrast between "virtue" and "evil." Shuo acknowledges that "Liu Lanzhi" played a satisfying leading role partly because she was able to share with the audience the real tears, laughter, shyness, and intimacy of her conjugal relationship with Jiao Zhongqing as well as her sisterhood with Jiao Zhongqing's younger sister. Shuo comments on how Liu Lanzhi's gestures and actions

in Act 5, when she gets ready to leave Jiao Zhongqing, properly reflect her chagrin and deeply affected the audience. In addition, Liu Lanzhi's suppressed and tragic life on stage confirmed with the "melodramatic imagination"<sup>49</sup> that the world is "a place of torment,"<sup>50</sup> where the evil perpetually abuse the virtuous, and thereby won both the audience's sympathy and the critics' praise. By contrast, the actress who performed Mother Jiao was, in Xu Dishan's opinion, rather unsatisfying because "she was not able to fully express Mother Jiao's cruelty and shrewdness as described in the original poem: 'After mother heard about it, she became very mad and started pounding on the chair.'"<sup>51</sup> As a result, Liu's tragic life could not be fully expressed on stage, which further weakened the play's power to move the audience. Thus, like Shuo Shui, Xu Dishan also relies heavily on the melodramatic contrast between "good" and "evil" to evaluate the artistic values of *Peacock*. That is to say, although May Fourth intellectuals, in their drama reviews, aimed to inspire the masses to realize the cruelty of patriarchy by retelling *Peacock* as Liu Lanzhi's tragic story, they still expected, not unlike the mass audience itself, to watch a series of melodramatic conflicts rehearsed on the amateur stage.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), vii. Peter Brooks views melodrama "less as a genre than an imagination mode." Via his study of this rather neglected genre, Brooks hopes to understand "great writers who could not be wholly constrained within a realistic aesthetic" because melodrama "appeared to be connected to our response to popular forms of representation that we held to be not quite respectable yet found animating and somehow necessary."

<sup>50</sup> Paul Pickowicz, "Melodramatic Representation and the 'May Fourth' Tradition of Chinese Cinema," in *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-Century China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and David Der-wei Wang (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 302.

<sup>51</sup> Xu Dishan (March 5, 1922)

<sup>52</sup> Peter Brooks' discussion of the relationship between "the tragic" and "the melodramatic," in *The Melodramatic Imagination*, nicely illuminates such hybridization, "[t]he drama of virtue misprized and of innocence wronged, is particularly presented as tragic. So is the drama of disaster...the intrusion of natural cataclysm or abused event, or the fall of public personages whose abrupt eclipse, or assassination, leads to

### (Re)/Writing the Amateur *Peacock* Script

On April 7, 1922, two months after the BWHNS' performance, the Shanxi Student Union amateur troupe staged *Peacock* as part of the Variety Performance held at Beijing Higher Normal School.<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately, this second production did not receive much attention, though one critic, Xiao Jianbai, wrote a review in which he criticized the production's use of contemporary costumes:

I believe that whether it is a realistic (*xieshide*) or impressionistic (*xieyide*) drama, the most important goal is to be "real" (*zhen*). What we are opposed to in "old drama" (*jiuxi*) is its "lack of authenticity" (*jia*). Now, I think no one will deny that *Peacock* is an old play. And since *Peacock* is an old play, the costumes should be in the traditional style. . . . Also, the key issue of this play is to reveal the faults and the vicious force of old families. Thus, using a historical story is more efficient to warn our peers today. Otherwise, why not directly compose a modern and symbolic play in which we may casually determine the costume style?<sup>54</sup>

Here, Xiao deepens his criticism by directly questioning if *Peacock*, with contemporary costumes, was still a "new drama." He believes that only by representing "realness" on stage were new dramas able to defeat old plays. Seen in this light, the Shanxi Student Union's performance failed to preserve the general essence of the new drama. Indeed, Xiao's harsh words regarding the use of contemporary costumes are not only directed against the Shanxi Student Union's performance, but also criticize the published script of *Peacock* since the Shanxi amateur performance strictly adhered to the stage directions

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their automatic classification as tragic figures. The relevant aesthetic in most of these instances may be less tragedy than melodrama." See Peter Brooks, 203.

<sup>53</sup> In fact, *Peacock* was only one of the amateur dramas staged during this two-evening event. On April 7, *Peacock* was staged with *Patriotic Mob* (*Aiguo zei*) and *Rickshaw Puller* (*Renli chefu*). On April 8, three more plays were staged: *Mother* (*Muqin*), *The Last War* (*Zuihou de zhanzheng*), and *Hatred of Red Clipper* (*Chi qian hen*).

<sup>54</sup> Xiao Jianbai, "Wode fandui shizhuang de *Kingque dongnanfei* de yijian" [My Oppositional Opinions on *Southeast Flies the Peacock* in Contemporary Costume], CBFK (April 11, 1922).

added to the newly-published script.<sup>55</sup> The published script of *Peacock* did indeed make some significant changes, but what specific revisions were made, by whom, and why?<sup>56</sup>

Around March 14, 1922, the revised script of *Peacock* was published as an amateur drama in the second issue of *Drama*.<sup>57</sup> Authorship of the script was still attributed to the fourth year students in the Chinese Department of BWHNS.<sup>58</sup> However, Chen Dabei's March 1, 1922 response letter to Shuo Shui's February 26 review revealed there were more agents involved in the process of writing and publishing the script:

In the past two days, I revised the script of *Peacock* for the purpose of publishing it in *Drama* (vol. 2, issue 2). Now I have read Mr. Shuo Shui's play review and comments on "old costume," "tailoring the old poem [for modern adaptation]," and "[dramatic] conflict," I feel quite happy that [Mr. Shuo Shui] has similar opinions to my own. I am wondering if it is possible for Mr. Shuo Shui to send me another [script] review after reading the one published in *Drama*?<sup>59</sup>

From these comments, it would seem that although Chen had already finished his revision before reading Shuo Shui's review, Shuo Shui's comments on the stage performance would also be reflected in the revised version since Chen claimed they had similar opinions regarding "old costumes," "tailoring the old poem," and "writing dramatic conflict." Later, Chen openly admits that some of his revisions were based on feedback to the stage performance of February 25:

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<sup>55</sup> Xiao claimed that he did not accuse Chen Dabei of doing so because he believed the published script was also affected by people other than Chen.

<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, apart from Chen's own comments, I know of no other materials that can identify the impetus behind these revisions. I assume that Chen did not alter the script much from the way it was originally composed by the BWHNS' amateur troupe because both Chen and *Drama* credited the script as a work collectively composed by those students. In contrast, Chen clearly labeled his individual authorship on other amateur dramas staged by amateur troupes at Qinghua University and the Beijing Higher Normal School. In regards to *Peacock*, unless stated otherwise, I am assuming that those modern touches were made by the students themselves.

<sup>57</sup> The advertisement of *Drama* (2:2) was first published in CBFK on March 14, 1922, while the advertisement column of CBFK still promoted *Drama* (2:1) on March 13, 1922.

<sup>58</sup> BWHNS, "Kongque dongnanfei" [Southeast Flies the Peacock], *Xiju* [Drama] (2:2) 1922.

<sup>59</sup> Chen Dabei, "Dabei fubai," [Chen Dabei's Response to Shuo Shui's Review], CBFK (March 3, 1922).

Last time when [Beijing] Women's Higher School performed *Peacock* they only borrowed Beijing operatic costumes because they could not prepare the ideal costumes and stage equipment. Those operatic costumes were not only inconvenient for students to imitate ancient people's postures, but also led the audience to think of the percussive music of old drama... [During that performance,] the louder people on stage cried, the harder the audience off stage laughed, to which, I assume, the inappropriate costume contributed. Therefore, I deleted stage instructions with "old style" from the revised script when publishing it, lest [*Peacock*] become unduly limited by a historical framework.<sup>60</sup>

Chen also required the following contemporary stage setting for all five acts in the published script: "middle class (*zhongchan jieji*) living room, bedroom, and study." The "middle class" designation presented another obstacle for future productions to construct an Eastern Han-era household. Unlike with these clearly-stated revisions regarding costumes and stage settings, Chen did not explicitly mention the fact that he changed the structure of *Peacock* by turning a six-act play into a five-act play, something that one might assume warrants explanation. In his review, Shuo Shui had criticized the structure of the amateur *Peacock* because "the play was prolonged into six acts, each of which lasted only eight to nine minutes, which was not efficient. I believe that the play should modify the original poem to a greater degree and add more 'small conflicts' to the original plot in order to complicate it."<sup>61</sup> Thus, Chen's tailoring of the script suggests a consensus with Shuo's views of the deficiencies of the six-act structure. But why did Chen *specifically* settle upon the format of a five-act play?

I would suggest that Chen's modification is consistent with May Fourth intellectuals' enthusiasm for tragedy. As mentioned above, Hu Shi and Chen Dabai generally view tragedy as superior to comedy because it helped raise an audience's

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<sup>60</sup> Chen Dabai, "Shan'xiren he aimei ju," [Shan'xi People and Amateur Drama], CBFK (April 6, 1922).

<sup>61</sup> Shuo Shui, (February 26, 1922).

“civilizational level.”<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, by aligning *Peacock* with “tragedy,” Hu and Chen aimed to connect Chinese literature to “world literature” and to connect China to the world through “modernity.” Amateur performers, audiences, and reviewers had read *Peacock* as a “tragic play,” stressing its tragic story without a happy ending. When revising the original amateur script, Chen further shaped *Peacock* into a Western-style tragedy by having it conform to the standard five-act structure.<sup>63</sup> Chen was not alone in his desire to model Chinese drama after the requirements of Western “tragedy.” Indeed, this had been a long-standing goal in the “modernization” of Chinese drama ever since the adaptation and circulation of early Chinese song-dramas in Western Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>64</sup> In that earlier wave of circulating Chinese song-dramas, Western critics, as Patricia Sieber argues, had mixed opinions about whether Chinese song-dramas lacked necessary Western/Greek tragic forms. Some, like Du Hald, “tolerated” *Orphan of Zhao*’s violation of the “three unities” because of its extremely early date of composition.<sup>65</sup> Others, such as John Francis Davis who “proceeded along formalist” criteria, more actively strove to “reform”/ “modernize” Chinese song dramas

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<sup>62</sup> More specifically, the genre of comedy was seriously damaged by the earlier professional civilized dramas. Those comedies either completely ignored comedy’s “satiric” spirit or exaggerated the characters and turned comedy into farces.

<sup>63</sup> In fact, my reading reveals that even more efforts were done in the published script in terms of obeying classical/Greek forms, although these efforts were not always successfully maintained throughout the script. For example, all acts of the play occur in Jiao’s household except for the fourth act, which was located at Liu Lanzhi’s brother’s household. This shows Chen’s efforts to adhere to the “three unities.”

<sup>64</sup> Patricia Sieber traces how *Orphan of Zhao* (*Zhaoshi guer*) was adapted and circulated in eighteenth-century Western Europe as *The Chinese Orphan: An Historical Tragedy* (Htchett, 1754), *The Orphan of China: A Tragedy in Five Acts* (Voltaire, 1755), and *The Orphan of China: A Tragedy* (1756), etc. Although the conception of “tragedy” was still in the process of formulation in the West, to match up with a general idea of “tragedy” had already become the main standard to judge the aesthetic value of early Chinese song-dramas. See Patricia Sieber, 17.

<sup>65</sup> Patricia Sieber, 17.

by establishing “European characteristics of tragedy in Chinese plays.”<sup>66</sup> Interestingly, this accommodation of Chinese drama to Western forms gets repeated much later in China with both the composition of the original amateur script of *Peacock* and Chen Dabei’s published revision. However, “tragedy” obtained new connotations in the particular climate of May Fourth iconoclasm, thus requiring some substantial changes to the original ballad in the process of adaptation—most strikingly, the elimination of the “reunion after death” of the two lovers and the narrative emphasis on Liu’s sacrifice as a woman, themes that were first developed in Mandarin Duck and Butterfly fiction and later transformed into the discourse of “free love” in the May Fourth era.<sup>67</sup>

In the original poem, the “tragic” story of Lanzhi and Zhongqing was tempered by the supernatural/symbolic afterlife reunion of the lovers after they commit suicide for the sake of their *feeling*:

Two families implore to bury them together,  
Underneath Mountain Hua were they buried,  
In east and west plant pines and cypresses,  
To left and right grow *wutong* trees.  
Branches cover branches and leaves interlace leaves.  
Among trees fly a pair of birds,  
Named as *yuan* and *yang*,  
Raising heads  
Those two birds sing to each other,  
Night after night until four o’clock in the morning.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Namely, “unity and integrity of action; natural and uninterrupted course of events; properly divided scenes and acts; natural expression of sentiments with a focus on virtue despite the occasional lapse into gross indecency...” Sieber particularly notices that “Davis conceded that he had to re-label the prologue (*xiezi*) as an act in order to arrive at the classical five acts of tragedy.” See Sieber, 17.

<sup>67</sup> Ray Chow, *Women and Chinese Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 35.

<sup>68</sup> Xu Ling (507-583). “Kongque dongnan fei” [Southeast Flies the Peacock], in *Yutai xin yong ji* [New Recitations of the Jade Terrace], 10 vols, (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1919), 53. Noticeably, the amateur *Peacock* explicitly used the word “love” (*ai*), rather than “feeling” (*qing*) to describe the conjugal relationship between Lanzhi and Zhongqing.

In Xu Ling's commentary, the scene of Lanzhi and Zhongqing's "being buried together" was itself an intertextualization of a story collected in *Old and New Records (Gujin yuelu)*, in which a young beauty jumped into the coffin of a scholar who died because of his strong *feeling* for her. Later, the beauty and the young scholar were buried together nearby Mountain Hua.<sup>69</sup> Actually, burying two lovers together who were not able to be married is one of the most common features of traditional Chinese love stories, which achieved their apogee in *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*, aka, *The Butterfly Lovers*.<sup>70</sup> In fact, the story of *Peacock* first enjoyed great popularity<sup>71</sup> because it shared with *Butterfly Lovers* a nearly identical folk story formula: a young couple cannot pursue their true "feelings" for each other because of patriarchal suppression, embodied by either parents or a mother-in-law, and must sacrifice their present lives for a possible reunion in the after-world. To be sure, May Fourth intellectuals first identified and then exaggerated this conflict between a rebellious spirit secretly growing in the young couple's hearts (new) and the evilness represented by parental authorship (old). The reunion ending was therefore fundamentally contradictory to the radical revolutionary discourse; the very idea of an after-life reunion was an evil fruit of Chinese superstition, which the enlightening elite of the day urgently attacked by invoking Western scientific

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<sup>69</sup> Xu Ling, 53. Xu commented, "During Emperor Shao's reign during the Song Dynasty, a scholar from Nanxun went to Yunyang, passing by Mountain Hua. He saw a girl around 18 to 19 years old living in the guest house and fell in love with her. Without any other reason, this scholar soon felt pain in his heart. The girl heard about this and felt very touched, thus, took off her *bixi* (a female ornament covering from the waist to legs) and asked her mother to place it underneath the scholar's bed. The scholar later saw the *bixi*, then ate it and died. When the scholar was buried, his coffin passed by Mountain Hua. Once arrived at the door of the girl, the girl came out and sang, 'Since you died for me nearby Mountain Hua, what am I still living for? If you feel happy to see me again, please open the coffin for me.' Then, the coffin suddenly opened. The girl jumped into the coffin and was buried together with the scholar. Later their tomb was named 'Goddess tomb.'"

<sup>70</sup> There are various adaptations of the *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* story: operas, vernacular novels, modern plays, violin concertos, and, more recently, operatic films.

<sup>71</sup> Chen Long, 107.

civilization.<sup>72</sup> Seen from this vantage point, the “joint burial” scene had to be banished from *Peacock*, either on stage or in print.

In addition to making *Peacock* conform to the standards of a modern/Western tragedy, practical difficulties related to staging an “after-life reunion” scene in an “authentic” and “realistic” way also likely necessitated such a deletion. If the chairs, paintings, and costumes in the amateur *Peacock* had already invited criticism from Xu Dishan and Shuo Shui because their styles were not compatible with the Eastern Han era, how could an Eastern Han tomb, as well as pairs of *wutong* trees and mandarin ducks, be exhibited on stage? Incorporating the “after-death reunion” would have caught the amateur *Peacock* in a dilemma: on the one hand, with the abundance of props necessary to perform this scene realistically, the play would set itself up for accusations of adhering to the commercial ethos of later professional civilized drama, which invested in stage sets and props in the name of creating a modern “realistic” stage; on the other hand, if the “after-death reunion” were presented “symbolically,” without stage props, the amateur *Peacock* could be seen as suffering from the “backward” style of Beijing opera. That is to say, although the performing and staging conventions established by Beijing opera and professional civilized drama were viewed as standards to be avoided, neither the female students who first composed the amateur *Peacock* nor Chen Dabei were able to generate an alternative imagination of stage performance, and so the only choice for them was to eliminate the “after-death reunion” scene.

Ironically, although Chen optimistically promoted amateur drama as being more civilized than both professional civilized drama and opera, and hence the only possibility

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<sup>72</sup> Lu Xun once generally attacked the “happy ending” in pre-modern fiction. See Lu Xun, “Lun zhengle yan kan” [On Opening Eyes to See], *Fen* [Tomb] (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1980), 125-31.

for continuing new drama's development, both the stage performance and script composition of *Peacock* were circumscribed by the very conventions that amateur drama claimed to dissolve. Therefore, *Peacock*'s deletion of the "after-death reunion" of Lanzhi and Zhongqing was not simply a revolutionary gesture in terms of either drama reform or May Fourth iconoclasm; it also implicitly reflected amateur drama's debt to and inheritance of "old"/ "uncivilized" stage performances because amateur dramas, just like their old rivals, *first* needed to attract an audience *before* they could cultivate/civilize that audience. Leaving out the "after-death reunion" of Lanzhi and Zhongqing made "a couple committing suicide" the dramatic climax of *Peacock*. Yet, in the published script, this dramatic ending becomes more complicated. In Act 5, Zhongqing goes mad after he meets Lanzhi again before her second marriage. Zhongqing accuses Lanzhi of betraying their love. Although Zhongqing recites what Lanzhi told him, "River Lu is the place I will bury myself,"<sup>73</sup> he does not believe her until he receives a letter from Lanzhi that confirms the news of her death. Then, in unbearable pain and guilt, Zhongqing passes out in Mother Jiao's arms.<sup>74</sup> In other words, it is the melodramatic death of the female character that predominantly bears the realization of a "tragic ending," while Zhongqing's death remains obscure.<sup>75</sup> The ambiguity of Zhongqing's death, which was clearly described in the old poem, weakens Zhongqing's devotion to their "reciprocal feeling/love" (*liangqing xiangyue*) and brings Lanzhi to the very center of the play.

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<sup>73</sup> BWHNS, Act 5.

<sup>74</sup> True, Mother Jiao's emotional crying out of "how come I killed my own son" may have led the audience to assume Zhongqing's death. However, it could alternatively be interpreted as simply Mother Jiao's confession. Were someone able to write a sequel to the amateur *Peacock*, it would be possible to have Zhongqing come back to life and join the revolutionary torrent.

<sup>75</sup> Admittedly, the old poem *Peacock* also placed its major focus upon Lanzhi's domestic life when Zhongqing served away from home until their reunion after death.

Hence, a subtle alternation occurs to the character of Lanzhi in the printed script of *Peacock*: her role shifts from that of a “women of misery” into a “sacrificed woman,” thus revealing the play’s debt to the contending discourses about women in the post-May Fourth era. The amateur *Peacock* borrowed chiefly from the Butterfly style of love stories popular at the time. Just as professional civilized drama had been closely connected to popular novels after 1914 (*Jiayin zhongxing*), so too was amateur drama. Although *Peacock* obtained its popularity and critical attention partially due to its being “the original composition” of a group of female students, it is difficult to ignore the influence of Butterfly fiction on the play. As Rey Chow puts it, the sacrifice/death of women often “constitute[s] what are generally and imprecisely summed up as ‘sad endings’” in “the first major wave of Mandarin Duck and Butterfly literature,” love stories that “thematized the freedom of marriage.”<sup>76</sup> Chow further observes that:

These “love” stories often take place in the consistent absence of the women’s beloved, who “participate” only by being weak, sick, dead, far away, or a foreigner untouched by Confucian culture. The women are left to struggle alone in the main parts of the dramas. For them, “love” is not a cherished stage of being endowed with the meaning of a “completed” life; it is rather a disaster that befalls them in a world in which they are supposed to live by hiding not only their minds, but also their bodies.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Rey Chow, 36. We can trace back the center position of “sacrificed women” even further to “traditional” literature. As the *Mountain Hua* story unfolded, “beauty” first caused the death of the “scholar” and then committed her own sacrifice to the “scholar.” Thus, to some extent, the death of the “scholar” simply functions as a reason for the beauty to “solo” her virtue and chastity. Furthermore, the inclination to center on the “female sacrifice” was also shared by a certain Western love story’s translation at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that significantly affected the production of “Butterfly Literature.” For example, Marguerite in *La dame aux Camélias*, as Lee argues, was forced to accept the “relativity (and marginality) of the former (the hypergoods—love, devotion, and companionship) and succumbs to the latter’s (bourgeoisie).” (See Lee, 100). Marguerite’s concession to Armand Duval’s father (sacrifice) was tragically dramatized in *Peacock* when Lanzhi sacrificed her life to resist her second marriage.

<sup>77</sup> Rey Chow, 69.

In this sense, the amateur *Peacock*, in both the collective composition and Chen's revision, roughly fits within Chow's label of "Butterfly love story." In the play, Lanzhi dies alone and thereby completes her role as a "sacrificed woman." But what exactly does Lanzhi sacrifice herself for? The play does not glorify Lanzhi's and Zhongqing's marriage as a product of the "freedom to love," as did later adaptations.<sup>78</sup> Instead, the "love/feeling" between the couple is the product of her legitimate marriage, which was later forcefully interrupted by Mother Jiao because their conjugal intimacy (the foundation of a relationship between a modern couple) seriously threatened her relationship with her son (the foundation of the patriarchal clan).<sup>79</sup> Mother Jiao accuses Lanzhi of poisoning her relationship with her son: "What did I do to you that was so terribly wrong? Why did you spend all night to make me look bad in front of my son?"<sup>80</sup> As a result, Lanzhi and Zhongqing compromise their marriage for the sake of filial piety and accept their separation. Lanzhi is certainly wounded by Mother Jiao's mistreatment and Zhongqing's divorce, but it is when her brother—yet another representative of the patriarchal clan system—forces her to remarry that Lanzhi finally decides to commit suicide. Therefore, Lanzhi's death is a sacrifice to both her own sense of chastity and her loyalty to her wedlock with Zhongqing.

Tellingly, Lanzhi's death for chastity and loyalty contradicts the stereotypical May Fourth woman who dies for the "freedom to love." The elite reviewers often eagerly underscored Lanzhi's sufferings as a victim of the patriarchal family, and they

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<sup>78</sup> Yuan Changying's adaptation of *Peacock* in 1929, which the next chapter closely examines, did so.

<sup>79</sup> Mother Jiao's harsh criticisms of Liu for not meeting her expectations regarding housework are undermined by the fact that Aunt Li, a neighbor, praises Liu as a perfect wife in the first scene. Indeed, Aunt Li is a new character inserted into the amateur play and her basic function is to explain Liu's virtues.

<sup>80</sup> BWHNS, Act 3.

would not allow readings that actively identified Lanzhi as a virtuous woman. Instead, they were inclined to symbolize Lanzhi's mother-in-law, husband, and brother as the authorities who together are responsible for Lanzhi's death. However, such an anti-traditionalist reading overlooks Lanzhi's own power to choose between either completely breaking through or surrendering under the shackles of patriarchy. In short, reviewers' neglect of what Lanzhi thinks contradicts the "freedom" and individual subjectivity that the May Fourth discourse promised to "Lanzhi." Such contradiction surfaced in the late 1920s when the May Fourth discourse placed more stress on libertarian individuality.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, later adaptations, such as Yuan Changying's three-act play, wrote rather different on the reasons for Lanzhi's death.<sup>82</sup>

Nevertheless, their conjugal relationship undeniably responded to the overriding discourse of "freedom to love/marry," which Haiyan Lee sees as intertwined with society and the nation:

Romantic love is, therefore, a double-edged enterprise: on the one hand, it is about the thrills of courtship and heterosexualibility; on the other hand, it is about rebelling against parental authority and the courage to plunge into the exhilarating realms of "society" and "nation." In the latter sense, the numerous stories of "free love" produced in the 1920s are often less about freedom of love or marriage per se, and much less about libertarian sexual practice, than about the severance of ties with family, tradition, and locality and the forging of a national community whose claim on individual identity must override particularistic bonds.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> The May Fourth romantic-iconoclastic discourse became very complicated in the late 1920s. The Romantics who strove for subjectivity were also influenced by Leftist discourse that presented individuals as subjects within the collective.

<sup>82</sup> I have already alluded to Xiong Foxi's adaptation in the Introduction. Chapter 3 closely reads Yuan Changying's adaptation.

<sup>83</sup> Haiyan Lee, 96.

In *Peacock*, the romantic “love” between Lanzhi and Zhongqing is depicted in the second act, which addresses their resistance against patriarchal authority more than any “libertarian” sexual desire/practice. In Act 2, when Zhongqing comes home from work, he finds Liu crying in their bedroom because of Mother Jiao’s cruel mistreatment. Zhongqing addresses Lanzhi with “my love” (*wode airen*) and tries to persuade her to show more tolerance to Mother Jiao because “it is always difficult to be a daughter-in-law. How much bitterness is inscribed into the word ‘virtue?’”<sup>84</sup> Here, Jiao’s conjugal “love” for Liu is easily overwritten/overtaken by his sympathetic understanding of the difficulties of being “virtuous” within the patriarchal family. Zhongqing thus positions himself as an understanding husband rather than as a passionate lover. In other words, “love” for Lanzhi and Zhongqing more often takes the form of sympathy with each other’s fates in the patriarchal system than passionate feelings and desires of two individuals who hold “free love” as the core of their individuality. Furthermore, in Act 5 when Lanzhi dies and Zhongqing passes out, Mother Jiao blames herself for doing something that “killed my own son.” Hence, the fact that Lanzhi and Zhongqing “died” for each other is again overshadowed by Mother Jiao’s belated realization/confession. The fact that the young generation’s “love” inspired both Mother Jiao and readers to confront a crime committed by the patriarchal system shows that the individual romantic love flowing between Lanzhi and Zhongqing was a means for amateur dramatists to express the urgency and necessity of the “anti-tradition” movement. In other words, the tragic ending—Lanzhi’s death, Zhongqing’s passing out, and Mother Jiao’s confession—

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<sup>84</sup> BWHNS, Act 2.

not only provoked tears from the readers/audience, it inspired them to advance the iconoclastic cause.

In spite of its “tragic” features, which Chen and the student amateurs either excavated from the old ballad or invented by referring to theories of Western tragedy, Mother Jiao’s abuse and suffocation of the young couple contributes to making *Peacock* not just an anti-traditional family tragedy, but also, unintentionally, something of a comedy in the professional civilized drama mode. The evil character Mother Jiao is greatly exaggerated and even becomes a caricature not unlike the clichéd negative character-types popular in civilized drama. This characterization can be seen in Mother Jiao’s abusive language<sup>85</sup> and her attempt to commit suicide in Act 4. Similar to the evil women in professional civilized dramas, Mother Jiao mostly speaks in a vulgar language when criticizing Lanzhi. For instance, she calls Lanzhi a “fox spirit” (*huli jing*) and a “cheap thing” (*jian dongxi/jianhuo*) to suggest that Lanzhi flaunted her sexuality in front of Zhongqing. In Act I, after Aunt Li praises Lanzhi as a “perfect person” (*quanren*) who “looked very beautiful,” “was very capable [in doing housework],” and “was able to

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<sup>85</sup> Before investigating Mother Jiao’s language, it is necessary to have an overall look at the linguistic style of the play. Noticeably, the linguistic registers throughout the printed script are not consistent, which suggests that both Chen and the amateur students were still in the middle of experimenting with vernacular language in the beginning of the 1920s. My reading encounters the following language formats: (1) the dialogues used between different characters are basically written in the modern vernacular language that shares most of its vocabulary and syntax with Mandarin. However, those lines are rather poorly composed; for instance, in Act 2, when Lanzhi complains to Zhongqing about her unhappy marriage life, the authors rather roughly translated the lines in the old poem (十三能织素, 十四学裁衣, 十五弹箜篌, 十六诵诗书, 十七为君妇, 心中常悲苦) into Western-style vernacular language (十三岁学了织布, 十四岁就能裁衣, 十五岁去学弹琴, 十九岁回[会]背诗书, 十七岁嫁到你们家, 没有一天过过快活的生活!); (2) all phrases used to express stage directions are framed as narrative conventions present in the story-telling tradition/vernacular Chinese novels, such as, “show a surprising expression,” (作惊状) “Shocked, and then slowly shake head,” (惊诧, 频频摇头) “Zhongqing immediately stands up and reaches his hands to support Lanzhi. [However, Jiao] sees mother staring at him, [so] he has to withdraw his hands, pats off the dust on his knees, and shows a scared face. Zhongqing’s mother sits down” [仲卿急爬起, 伸手欲扶兰芝, 见母瞪目, 只得将手缩回, 拍膝间尘土, 并作惶悚状. 仲卿母坐下].

compose poems,” Mother Jiao humiliates Lanzhi by saying that she is not even as good as a pig or a dog raised at home.<sup>86</sup> Mother Jiao’s character takes shape through a series of shrew-like curses and irrational actions, until it reaches a climax in Act 4 when she threatens to die in front of Zhongqing if he does not divorce Lanzhi:

[Mother Jiao]: Well! Well! Your heart was only with her [Lanzhi], though you tricked me [to believe that you supported my side] by your words. All right! What advantages are there if I, a miserable and lonely widow, still live in this world? I’d better follow your dead dad now! ([Mother Jiao] stands up and is going to knock her head on the wall). . . . Let me, let the hateful old woman die, then you can enjoy your [marriage/sexual] life (*kuaihuo kuaihuo*). Let me go! It is good to let me die!<sup>87</sup>

Although the old poem also depicts Mother Jiao as a mean mother-in-law, her actions and lines there reflect her position as the head of the patriarchal family and are rendered stringent and authoritative. However, the amateur *Peacock*, inheriting the conventions of professional civilized dramas, turns Mother Jiao into a mad and ridiculous figure vulgarly cursing and acting like a clown. Although criticized as cheap tricks to provoke the audience’s laughter, Chen makes use of these dramatic conventions from civilized drama because they were the only method for shaping negative characters available to the amateur stage. Arguably, in surrendering to the conventions of civilized drama in its caricature depiction of Mother Jiao, the tragic features of the amateur *Peacock* were compromised.

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<sup>86</sup> BWHNS, Act 1.

<sup>87</sup> BWHNS, Act 4.

## Conclusion

*Southeast Flies the Peacock* was first composed and staged by the fourth year students from Beijing Women's Higher Normal School and later revised and published in *Drama* in 1922. The complex circulation of this particular amateur play, both on stage and in print, involved (amateur) students, audiences, amateur drama advocates, and the May Fourth intellectuals who were loosely connected to it through CBFK and *Drama*.

Although amateur drama was promoted as a new form of drama that would eradicate all of the uncivilized conventions previously employed on the new drama stage, this chapter has shown that the production and consumption of amateur dramas were far more complicated processes than the promoted ideal. In particular, those pairs of contesting discourses—"old" and "new," "China" and "West," as well as "professional" and "amateur"—were all entangled in complex ways, making *Peacock* a hybrid "exhibition" of elements from both.

Meanwhile, the amateur *Peacock* did not offer a free "exhibition." That is to say, the commercial concern was not only not excluded from the female students' performance, but accounted for a substantial part of their amateur activity. Before *Peacock* was staged, Zhou Ying claimed that the Beijing Women's Higher Normal School's students hoped to raise money for both the charity and the self-improvement of their amateur troupe from this three-day event. *Peacock* did not mean to serve a small group of modern students as non-profitable self-entertainment. Instead, those female students hoped to attract a good size audience and make their fund-raising activities worthwhile. Therefore, the students invited magicians and dancers to warm up the stage (*nuanchang*) and occupy the audience's attention before they performed their amateur

dramas. Although Chen Dabei repeatedly criticizes earlier civilized dramas because they use abrupt tricks to attract an audience, he does not negate the amateur students' similar arrangements. Moreover, Chen promotes the amateur drama by advertising magic shows and dancing shows as the selling point. Later, when he published the revised script of *Peacock*, Chen also claimed the copyright, "all rights are reserved by New China New China Drama Association...No one whatsoever without permission of the New China Drama Association, whether Amateur or professional, for benefit-making or for charity, can reproduce or perform this play."<sup>88</sup> In so doing, Chen assures the amateur students and himself both "cultural capital" and "economic capital." Also, when the elite audience reviewed the amateur *Peacock*, they paid particular attention to costume, stage setting, female students' male impersonation, and the melodramatic plot between evil and virtue. In fact, these critical foci of the elite reviewers are identical with goals that the professional civilized drama pursued after 1913.

Although Chen Dabei, Xu Dishan, Zhou Ying, and Zhi Shui all praised *Peacock* as a modern appropriation of an old story, they each approached the play from different angles and spelled out different connotations for its "newness." The success of *Peacock* was viewed as a cultivation of the common audience's "civilizational level," an "exhibition" of Chinese history to compensate for the lack of a national history museum, and a stage where female students could "safely" practice their public visibility within the newly-formed "heterosocial world." Furthermore, when the script of *Peacock* was published and later used as a model for further stage performances, Chen incorporated the Western dramatic theory of "tragedy." Thus, *Peacock*, a traditional sad ballad from the

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<sup>88</sup> BWHNS, 1922.

sixth century, became, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a five-act “tragedy” in which the format of classical Western tragedy, images of traditional virtuous women, modern lovers from Butterfly love stories, May Fourth iconoclasm, and presentational conventions of professional civilized dramas contest and overlap with each other.

Chapter 3: Making the Most Famous “Peacock”—  
Yuan Changying and Her Three-Act Play, *Southeast Flies the Peacock*

Mothers take pain and trouble to raise their sons. Once they [sons] are occupied by women who used to be outsiders, mothers naturally feel indignant. . . . If those mothers are still young, of quick temper, and happen to be widowed, tragedies like what happened to Zhongqing and Lanzhi are unavoidable.<sup>1</sup>

—Yuan Changying

In the winter of 1922, the amateur production of *Southeast Flies the Peacock*, as both performance and published script, provoked a myriad of responses from students, amateur practitioners, and urban citizens. Most of these historical moments were constructively “documented” in the Amateur Drama column in *Beijing Morning Supplement* (*Chenbao fukan*) and the New China Drama Association’s official journal *Drama* (*Xiju*). Thus, paring with CBFK, those amateur performances held in various performance arenas first attracted and then cultivated students in Beijing as both readers of the middle/high brow *Supplement* and as an audience for amateur drama. It is precisely because of this overlap between readers/audience that the story of *Peacock* was adapted as a new drama at least four more times and as a film once in the 1920s.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Yuan Changying, “Kongque dongnan fei” [Southeast Flies the Peacock], in *Kongque dongnan fei ji qita dumuju* [*Southeast Flies the Peacock and Other One-Act Plays*], (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1930), 1.

<sup>2</sup> As I mentioned in the Introduction, in 1925, Feng Han planned to write a modern version of *Peacock* but in fact only published the first act of a four-act play in *Qinghua Literature* (*Qinghua wenyi*); then, in 1928, Yang Yinshen’s three-act play *Rock and Pampas Grass* (*Panshi he puwei*) was published by the Shanghai Book Bureau; next, in 1929, Xiong Foxi published a one-act play, *Lanzhi and Zhongqing* (*Lanzhi he Zhongqing*), written for an unknown women’s organization and published in *Eastern Miscellany* (*Dongfang zazhi*); and finally, in the same year, Yuan Changying wrote a three-act play, *Southeast Flies the Peacock*, and had this script published in Shanghai in 1930 by the Commercial Press. The filmed version of *Peacock* was produced by the Peacock Film Company in 1926 in Shanghai. Unfortunately, the original film reel is

Among these various adaptations, it is Yuan Changying's three-act play *Southeast Flies the Peacock* that attracts the most attention among later critics and researchers. However, although the script has been given much attention, few have ever addressed the actual stage performances of Yuan's play. According to Ge Yihong, soon after the script was published, the Shanghai Chengzhong Middle School (Chengzhong zhongxue) staged Yuan's play.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, faculty members and students in National Wuhan University (*Guoli Wuhan daxue*) staged the play in 1935 when Yuan was teaching English literature there. Although this 1935 production was harshly criticized because the play's theme was considered irrelevant within the context of the nationwide Anti-Japanese movement, it was nevertheless Yuan's *Peacock* that became the best known as well as the most controversial modern adaptation, and thereby solidified *Peacock's* place in the history of Chinese modern drama and literature.

Despite the history of previous performances of the *Peacock* story, contemporary research has focused on Yuan Changying's script. Yuan's play is predominantly consumed today more as a literary text than as a piece of dramatic performance. Admittedly, the dearth of studies on stage productions of *Peacock* might be due to a general bias in the field of Chinese literature toward written texts over stage/oral performances. However, there are likely more specific and nuanced reasons underpinning the reception of Yuan's *Peacock* both now and in the 1930s. As a female playwright associated with the Crescent Moon Society, Yuan readily received attention from the (reading) public. Her identity as a female member of a certain "reactionary

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no longer available. My current research only encounters the film script and the *Special Issue* published by the Peacock Film Company to promote this film.

<sup>3</sup> Ge Yihong, *Zhongguo huaju tongshi* [History of Chinese Spoken Drama], (Beijing: Wunhua yishu chubanshe, 1990), 67.

comprador bourgeois writers' clique"<sup>4</sup> inherited the sensational aura earlier imposed on the female students from Beijing Women's Higher Normal School who collectively composed the amateur *Peacock* in 1922. Yet, whereas the 1922 amateur version claimed collective authorship, attention now focused on Yuan as an individual. True, Yuan's existing reputation in the 1920s-1930s' literary field may also have contributed to the popularity of her script,<sup>5</sup> but so undoubtedly did the "women's culture" movement booming in Chinese cities during the early 1930s. As Dooling observes:

By the early 1930s, a substantial increase in female literacy and an expansion of employment opportunities for women, who could now be found in factories, schools, and department stores, had created a new social atmosphere in international cities like Shanghai...In 1929, the first issue of an ambitious journal entitled *Women Writers Magazine* appeared on Shanghai newsstands and contained the following statement of purpose: "By responding to current trends, this magazine is the only existing vehicle devoted to the promotion of the new women's culture movement (*xinnüxing wenhua yundong*). The content is dedicated exclusively to masterpieces of literature and art by Chinese and foreign women. The contributors are all famous contemporary women poets, writers, playwrights, painters, and musicians."<sup>6</sup>

Roughly at the same time when Yuan published her play, the reading public was cultivated to pay particular attention to "women playwrights" and other women artists. Thus, it is plausible that Yuan's play was considered to be "good and worth reading."<sup>7</sup> Finally, Yuan's adaptation of the *Peacock* story made Mother Jiao the center of the play

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<sup>4</sup> Lawrence Wang-chi Wong, "Lions and Tigers in Groups: The Crescent Moon School in Modern Chinese Literary History," in *Literary Societies of Republican China*, ed. Kirk Denton and Michel Hockx, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 279.

<sup>5</sup> The below section will elaborate this issue.

<sup>6</sup> Amy D. Dooling and Kristina M. Torgeson, *Writing Women in Modern China: An Anthology of Women's Literature from the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 28.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 29. Dooling also cites an article written by a reporter who visited the Women's Bookstore in 1936. In the article, a young assistant editor who also doubled as bookstore clerk says, "Are you interested in purchasing books? Please, take a seat and have a good look around...over here we have a collection of works written and selected by Miss Lu Yi [the pen name of Su Xuelin]. They are all very good and worth reading."

and transformed her from a representation of evil into a victim of the patriarchal system, who suffered subtle yet inhuman torture from being a widow and from having “incestuous” feelings toward her son. Such alterations imbued Yuan’s script with a psychoanalytic overtone, the likes of which are more often found in fiction, and may have insured her play a more contemporary appeal.

Despite these advantages, when Yuan’s play was staged by the Shanghai Chengzhong Middle School and National Wuhan University, the production became very complicated. Due to a lack of materials, certain issues surrounding the productions have remained obscure: whether Yuan was involved in the stage productions; whether the performances were open to the public; whether further adaptations were required and rehearsed. Unable or unwilling to address these issues, researchers have until recently tended to focus only on the written script. In this chapter, however, I compare Yuan’s script with the 1922 amateur *Peacock*, but also do a close reading of the professional dramatists’ groups, i.e. China New Drama Society and the Crescent Moon Society, to which Yuan was only loosely organizationally attached but closely ideologically associated. In so doing, I aim to read Yuan’s *Peacock* within a diachronic framework by identifying the internal connection between Yuan’s *Peacock* and the 1922 amateur *Peacock*. Also, in the synchronic comparison of Yuan with other new professional playwrights, this chapter offers an overall description of the new professional drama movement. Specifically, I align Yuan’s new professional adaptation with the “*Peacock* fad” in Chinese new drama field in the 1920s, and challenge readings that overly exaggerate the particularity of Yuan’s *Peacock*. Moreover, by analyzing new professional drama societies’ dialogue with drama “laymen”/ “amateurs,” I continue to

challenge the standard narrative of Chinese new drama that only constructs isolated phases while completely neglects the continuity running through the commercial civilized drama, amateur drama, and new professional drama. But before we examine Yuan's play, let us first turn to the state of Chinese new drama in the previous decade.

### **After Amateur Drama: A New Professional Drama—The National Drama Movement**

In the summer of 1922, merely four months after the flourishing of amateur drama during the Western and lunar new year, a time when Beijing Women's Higher Normal School, Qinghua University, Beijing University, and China University staged many new dramas,<sup>8</sup> Chen Dabei warned that amateur drama in Beijing risked "bankruptcy." Chen blamed the sorry state of amateur drama on the interference of pseudo-amateur practitioners, who, like the professional civilized dramatist before them, did little serious preparation and performed plays that amounted to little more than improvised farces.<sup>9</sup> Chen called for a more sincere and serious devotion to the field of new (amateur) drama. Strictly speaking, Chen's complaint about the state of new (amateur) dramatists was not entirely true if one takes into consideration drama societies other than the New China Drama Society and places other than Beijing. In fact, by the time Chen made his complaint, new cultural groups had already emerged and more foreign-educated professionals had become involved in the field of Chinese new drama. In this sense, Chen Dabei's original idea that amateur drama would be a transitional phase toward the goal of a more advanced and professional drama field had, to a degree, already been achieved by the new drama

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<sup>8</sup> Chen Dabei, "Aimeide xiju zhi zai Beijing," [Amateur Dramas in Beijing], CBFK (June 22, 1922).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

advocates; the newly emerging cultural groups composed their own scripts and staged dramas in a more professional way because of their Western dramatic/literary backgrounds. However, Chen Dabei was noticeably absent from the group that replaced the New China Drama Society and that eventually became the main supportive force for Chinese new drama. Therefore, to continue our discussion of the new drama environment in which Yuan's play was finally produced, we need to first shift our attention to what was then the emerging force in the new drama field, namely, the professional dramatists' cooperation in the Crescent Moon Society (*Xinyu she*) and New Drama Association (*Zhongguo xiju she*) in Beijing.<sup>10</sup>

The Crescent Moon Society's<sup>11</sup> involvement with Chinese new drama can be traced back to 1924 when Xu Zhimo, Lin Huiyin, Zhang Xinhai, and other members of the Crescent Moon Society staged *Chitra* (*Qi jue la*) in Union Small Auditorium (*Xiehe xiao litang*) to celebrate Tagore Rabindranath's birthday on April 8, a performance that Xu classified as a work by "laymen."<sup>12</sup> Realizing his "uselessness" in composing and staging new drama, Xu sought help from Zhang Jiazhu, Wen Yiduo, Yu Shangyuan, and Zhao Taimou, etc., all key members of the Qinghua New Drama Society (*Qinghua xinju*

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<sup>10</sup> In this chapter, the notion of "professional" has a different meaning from that used in previous chapters. "Professional" here refers to the "charisma" and superiority claimed by a group of elite intellectuals who received formal academic training in composing, staging, and performing modern drama in the West. Dramatically different than earlier professional civilized drama practitioners, these elite professional dramatists sought cultural capital, not economic capital, from being professional.

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence Wang-chi Wong, 282. Although, as Wong points out, "the 'alleged' members of the so-called Crescent Moon School (*Xinyu pai*) have strongly denied the existence of such a school," Xu Zhimo acknowledged the foundation of the Crescent Moon Society in 1923 and further reviewed its development from "dinner gatherings," to "Crescent Moon Society," and then to "No. 7 Club (*Qihao de julebu*)" in the article of "Jukan shi ye" (The Founding of *Drama Supplement*) in 1926. See Xu Zhimo, "Jukan shi ye," [The Founding of *Drama Supplement*], in *Guoju yundong* [National drama movement], ed. Yu Shangyuan, (Beijing: Xinyue shudian, 1927), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Xu Zhimo, "Jukan shi ye," 5.

she) and Chinese Drama Reform Society (*Zhongguo xiju gailiang she*),<sup>13</sup> who had either received formal drama training overseas or had much experience in the drama world.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, these drama activists—Yu Shangyuan, Zhang Jiazhu, Zhao Taimou, Wen Yiduo, and later Xiong Foxi—were influenced by John Synge, William Yeats, and the Irish Drama Movement, and thus conceived the future Chinese new drama in terms of a “National Drama Movement” (*guoju yundong*).<sup>15</sup> The Chinese New Drama Reform Society also laid out a specific agenda for their movement: (1) founding a journal, *Puppet*, to propagate their dramatic theories; (2) forming the Beijing Art Institution to train performers; (3) establishing museums and libraries to raise funds to send students abroad; and (4) inviting select drama directors (e.g., Gordon Graig, Reinhardt, and Norman Geddie) to China to give lectures.<sup>16</sup> When Yu, Zhao, Wen, and Zhang came back to Beijing from their study in the U.S., they very soon realized that they also needed help from an established cultural force, such as the Crescent Moon Society, to achieve their long-term goals. Yu wrote to Hu Shi and Xu Zhimo to propose cooperation between themselves (the professional dramatists) and the amateur performers from the Crescent Moon Society.<sup>17</sup> As a result, with the help of the Crescent Moon Society, Yu, Zhao, and Wen founded the Chinese Drama Society and Beijing Art Institute in 1925, and then in 1926 started issuing *Drama Supplement* (*Jukan*), which was attached to *Beijing Morning*

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<sup>13</sup> According to Dong Baozhong, Yu and other overseas students in America founded the Chinese New Drama Reform Society and adapted the Chinese play *Yang Guifei* for an English performance in New York. See Dong Baozhong, *Wenxue, zhengzhi, ziyou* [Literature, Politics and Freedom], (Taipei: Xielin yinshuguan, 1978), 80.

<sup>14</sup> As Wong points out, Yu Shangyuan majored in drama in Pittsburgh, while Zhang Taimou and Xiong Foxi studied drama in New York. Wen Yiduo started to write and perform drama in 1913 when he was only 14 years old. See Lawrence Wang-chi Wong, 286.

<sup>15</sup> Dong Baozhong, 79.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Wang-chi Wong, 287.

*Post (Beijing chenbao)*. The 16 issues in total of *Drama Supplement* addressed a range of topics; such as, the future of Chinese drama, the revision of Chinese old operas, etc.<sup>18</sup>

However, the issue discussed most prominently in *Drama Supplement* was the National Drama Movement. Yu defined national drama as plays that “Chinese people performed and staged for a Chinese audience by using Chinese materials.”<sup>19</sup> Ironically, it was the students who had studied in the West who were most emphatic about restoring “Chineseness,” suggesting that the main target of reform was no longer “tradition” or “old China.” In other words, the National Drama Movement, at least on the surface level, suspended the iconoclasm of previous new dramas, and instead carried out the agenda of restoring “Chineseness” by staging Chinese plays for Chinese audiences.

What caused these drama experts trained in the U.S. to align with “China” after coming back to Beijing in 1925? And what specific Western dramatic influences did Yu and his fellow students hope to either avoid or embrace for the future development of national drama? Yu clarifies that it is the “aberrant” development in China of Ibsen-inspired drama (i.e. social problem drama) that he specifically opposes:

In the dawn of the New Culture movement, Ibsen’s dramas were introduced to China with great fanfare. True, Western drama’s renaissance in China mostly benefited from Ibsen’s introduction. However, Ibsen and his dramas soon went astray (when they were promoted and circulated in China). We only captured the microscopic details in Ibsen’s works while neglecting his grander view of drama in general. Thus, the Chinese drama field, like the Western drama field in the past, only pointed its compass to the very surface level. Political problems, family problems, professional problems, smoking and alcohol problems,<sup>20</sup> etc., all kinds of problems usurped the major goal of drama. Lecturers, elocutionists, and

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<sup>18</sup> Dong Baozhong, 80.

<sup>19</sup> Yu Shangyun ed., *Guoju yundong* [The National Drama Movement], (Beijing: Xinyue shudian, 1927), 1.

<sup>20</sup> When Yu, Zhao, Wen, and other overseas students studied in America, they experienced the period of Prohibition. It is said that they often sneaked into small restaurants and drank while they drafted plays staged in New York and planned the future of Chinese dramas. See Dong Baozhong, 79.

preachers, one after the other, jumped onto the stage, read aloud their scripts, and sermonized their morals. As a result, art and life were turned upside down. They do not know how to explore the profundity of people's hearts, or how to express the power of life. But they tend to make use of art to improve people's morals and life. The result is that life becomes more and more complicated, and drama becomes more and more trivial. Once "problems" were dissolved into mundane trivialness, drama faded away from our society.<sup>21</sup>

Since the publication of the translation of *A Doll's House* in *New Youth* in 1918, May Fourth intellectuals, both drama experts and "laymen," were actively involved in composing new dramas that reflected various social problems, thereby creating a genre later labeled as Chinese "problem plays (*wenti ju*)."<sup>21</sup> Most of these plays circulated only as printed scripts and their purpose was to reveal, discuss, and resolve social problems and enlighten the masses. In spite of their popularity and progressive nature, Yu suggests that problem plays fell into the trap of representational "trivialness" and improvised speeches. Although Yu did not clearly define the origins of these mistakes, it is not too far-fetched to trace them back to influences from civilized dramas of the previous decade. It is likely due to these faults that problem plays confused, to use Yu's words, the natural relationship between life and art, and finally devolved into miscellanies of various speeches, theories, and manifestations of the trivialities of everyday life. To some extent, after exploring and experimenting for more than a decade, new drama returned to its starting point with Ren Tianzhi's Progressive Troupe productions of improvised speeches for the sake of revolution. Hence, Yu openly criticized and opposed the overdose of Ibsen in China and called for the reconstruction of Chinese new drama.

Agreeing with Yu, Zhao Jiazhu proposed specific measures that drama lovers should take to construct a national drama. Interestingly, Zhao sought help from both

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<sup>21</sup> Yu Shangyuan, 3.

Western modern drama and Chinese operatic traditions because both had “conventions.”

Zhao argued:

What Western drama has are methods of composing scripts. Genius or not, your works will be all right as long as you follow the composition methods, although sometimes this kind of work will suffer from mediocrity. . . . Specifically speaking, to save Chinese plays, China still needs to borrow Western methods . . . Chinese old plays [also] have a feature, that is, conventionalization. . . . I suggest that new drama absolutely should preserve such a feature. Art in nature is composed by conventions.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike previous New Culture advocates who negatively viewed Chinese old plays as tricks (*baxi*), Zhao located a similarity in “conventions” between Western modern drama and Chinese traditional operas. In Zhao’s opinion, Chinese old plays had their stage conventions and Western drama had its compositional conventions. The former echoes Wen Yiduo’s call for a “pure form of art” (*yishu de chun xing*)<sup>23</sup> and the latter offers a good framework to tell a story. If the new National Drama were able to absorb both of these traditions/conventions, Zhao hoped, it would be best positioned to balance form and content, an issue that had long hounded the history of both Western and Chinese drama.

However, this artistic melding of Chinese form and Western content might lead to a mechanical combination of Western plus Chinese, or Western “ism” plus Chinese “bodies.” Wen Yiduo’s rather open criticism of Guo Moruo’s plays reveals his concern on what level the hybridity of West and China, new and old, should be embodied by national dramas:

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<sup>22</sup> Zhao Taimou, “Guoju” [The National Drama], in *Guoju yundong* [the National Drama Movement], ed. Yu Shangyuan, (Beijing: Xinyue shudian, 1927), 14.

<sup>23</sup> Wen Yiduo, “Xiju de qitu” [Drama Gone Astray], in *Guoju yundong* [the National Drama Movement], ed. Yu Shangyuan, (Beijing: Xinyue shudian, 1927), 50.

Overall, what we need to oppose is not the fact that plays address certain social problems. If a problem exists first, and [someone] casually composed a play to discuss that problem, then we look down on the genre of plays too much. What we now truly need is plays. If those “plays” that only pull together Qu Yuan, Nie Ying, Zhuo Wenjun, and other historical figures to preach socialism, democracy, or issues of women’s liberation could be called plays, or even lyric drama, I am afraid that we would rather not have those “plays.”<sup>24</sup>

Wen here views Guo Moruo’s historical play (*lishi ju*) as a Chinese bottle filled with Western wine and therefore undesirable. Su Xuelin also criticized Guo’s plays, sarcastically writing that they “either expressed Guo’s own opinions or propagated certain ‘isms’ using historical figures as mouthpieces.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, Guo’s plays could at best be labeled “idealist plays” (*lixiang ju*) or “exhortatory plays” (*jiaoxun ju*), but not “historical plays.”<sup>26</sup> If a writer as well known as Guo Moruo failed to live up to Wen’s and Su’s expectations for a “dramatist who writes historical plays” and was the butt of their satirical scorn, whose work would be admired? What dramas merited the label of “historical play?”<sup>27</sup>

### **Yuan Changying: The First Female Playwright of the May Fourth Era**

With the help of Xu Zhimo, Yu Shangyuan, Zhao Jiazhu, Wen Yiduo, and others who had studied drama abroad founded the Chinese Drama Society and Beijing Art Institute, issued *Drama Supplement* between 1925 and 1926, established a social network with the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Su Xuelin, *Zhongguo ershanshi niandai zuojia* [Chinese Writers in the 1920s and the 1930s] (Taipei: Chunwenxue chubanshe, 1979), 487.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> See Su Xuelin, “Yi gushi wei ticao de juzuojia” [Dramatists Who Write Historical Subject Themes], in *Zhongguo ershanshi niandai zuojia*, 483-95. Su here closely examines plays composed by Guo Moruo, Wang Duqing, Lin Pulin, Chen Dabei, Gu Yiqiao, Yang Hui, Chen Baichen, Xia Yan, Yuan Changying, and Ouyang Yuqian. Among those dramatists, Su highly praises Yuan Changying’s *Peacock* and Ouyang Yuqian’s *Pan Jinlian*.

Crescent Moon Society, and partially achieved their goal of developing Chinese new drama in the way they had conceived it while in America.<sup>28</sup> Considering that most members of the Crescent Moon Society also received an overseas education, a strongly Western air (*yangwei*) understandably hung over the National Drama Movement. Although the Western and elitist reputation of the Crescent Moon Society and China New Drama Society needs further investigation, it is clear that their claims and agendas would be particularly attractive to those who had an overseas education background and similar experiences. Yuan Changying was, in fact, one of them.

Su Xuelin, a good friend and colleague of Yuan at National Wuhan University, is one of the most reliable sources for details regarding Yuan's biographical background and writing career. According to Su, Yuan was born in Hunan and later moved to Shanghai. Yuan studied drama and literature abroad twice from 1916 to 1921 and 1926 and 1928. During her studies abroad, "Yuan met the economist Yang Duanliu, her future husband, and Chen Yuan, whose journal *Contemporary Review* (*Xiandai pinglun*) would later feature Yuan's work."<sup>29</sup> After returning to China, Yuan taught at the National University of Law and Political Science (*Guoli Beijing zhengfa daxue*), and the China

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<sup>28</sup> However, Beijing had not been the students' first choice as a location for these activities. Instead, it was Shanghai that initially attracted Yu, Zhao, and Xiong to come back to pursue their drama careers. Unfortunately, their plan to have Shanghai serve as the base of Chinese new drama was aborted by the May 30<sup>th</sup> Incident, which negatively influenced the city's artistic atmosphere. The students then felt compelled to move to Beijing. There are at least three reasons why Shanghai was so alluring for the overseas drama students: (1) thanks to its early exposure to global culture, Shanghai was the city that offered the most fantastic view of the boundless universe (*daqian shijie*) in 1920s' China; (2) Shanghai had been the cradle of civilized drama in the 1910s and therefore better prepared for the further developments of new drama; and (3) Tian Han founded the Southern Society in Shanghai. Tian's passion for new drama and the achievements of the Southern Society (*nanshe*) were recognized and admired by those drama lovers. Therefore, Shanghai initially seemed to be the ideal locale for those new drama-major overseas students to land.

<sup>29</sup> Amy D. Dooling and Kristina M. Torgeson, 210. Dooling indicates that the source is from Su Xuelin.

Institute (*Zhongguo gongxue*).<sup>30</sup> Different than Su, Dooling and Torgeson suspect that, sometime between 1921 and 1926, Yuan also briefly taught English literature at Beijing Women's Normal Higher School,<sup>31</sup> and was known as the first female scholar specializing in Shakespeare. If true, Yuan was likely exposed to the 1922 amateur *Peacock* before writing her own *Peacock*. In short, Yuan had already established herself in the literary field by means of her own scholarly work and her social network. One year after the play was published, Yuan taught French literature at National Wuhan University, where she, together with Ling Shuhau and Su Xuelin, enjoyed the title of "three female talents of *Luojia*" (*Luojia san nüjie*).<sup>32</sup> While teaching in Beijing and Wuhan, Yuan also established a close relationship with the journal *Crescent Monthly* (*Xinyue yuekan*). In a private letter to Li Qi, Xu Zhimo mentioned that Chen Yuan (Chen Xiyi), Ling Shuhua, Su Xuelin, and Yuan Changying all agreed with his positive evaluation of Li's play *X-Ray Room* (*Zhao X guang shi*), which nevertheless differed from Liang Shiqiu's.<sup>33</sup> The fact that Xu listed Yuan with Chen and Ling, suggested that he viewed her as a good playwright and member of the core clique of the Crescent Moon Society. Meanwhile, Su suggests in her memoir that she knew Yuan in 1927 when Yuan had asked Su to contribute articles to *Crescent Monthly*.<sup>34</sup> Considering Yuan's relationship with the Crescent Moon Society around 1927, we can assume that Yuan's plays were influenced by Yu's agenda for the national drama movement. Indeed, Yuan's

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<sup>30</sup> Jos Schyns, Su Hsueh-Lin, and Chao Yen-Sheng eds., *1500 Modern Chinese Novels & Plays* (Ridgewood: The Gregg Press, 1965), 116.

<sup>31</sup> Amy D. Dooling and Kristina M. Torgeson, 210

<sup>32</sup> Pi Gongliang, "Luojia san nü jie" [Three Female Talented of Luo] in *Wuhan chunqiu* [Wuhan's Spring and Autumn], 24 (June), 1996, 14-7.

<sup>33</sup> Lawrence Wang-chi Wong, 293.

<sup>34</sup> Su Xuelin. *Fusheng jiusi* [The Ninety-Four Years' of Floating World] (Taipei: Sanmin congkan, 1991), 106.

*Peacock* largely satisfies the requirements raised by Yu, Zhao, and Wen for the future of new drama: *Peacock* was adapted from an old narrative poem that had been canonized as a masterpiece of Chinese vernacular literature by Hu Shi and adapted into a series of modern dramas;<sup>35</sup> it fuses Western play-writing rules for tragedy (i.e. three principles) and Chinese operatic conventions (i.e. Mother Jiao's prolonged monologue under the spotlight); and, finally, it does not simply manipulate characters as the mouthpiece of any popular "ism;" Yuan voices her concrete concerns about women's liberation and patriarchal suppression not with a "historical puppet" (as in Guo's pseudo-historical plays), but with the vivid individual subjectivity of Mother Jiao.

It is perhaps because Yuan's work proved so compatible with the goals of the New Drama Movement that it enjoyed such acclaim. Su identified Yuan Changying as "the only female writer who does research on drama" in the 1920s and 1930s, and believed that Yuan's plays were "the valuable harvest of our barren drama field."<sup>36</sup> Tian Qin shared Su's appreciation, defining Yuan as "the first woman writer who pursues the career of drama composition."<sup>37</sup> Tian believed that Yuan was not only a female pioneer in the field of new drama, but that her plays, in particular *Peacock*, "surpassed the average male dramatists' works."<sup>38</sup> Among more recent scholarship, Dooling and Torgeson also comment favorably on Yuan and her writing: "along with Bai Wei, Yuan Changying was one of the most gifted female playwrights of the May Fourth era...her

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<sup>35</sup> Hu Shi, *Baihua wenxue shi* [The History of Vernacular Literature] (Beijing: Xinyue shudian, 1928), 60-85.

<sup>36</sup> Su Xuelin, *Zhongguo ershanshi niandai zuojia*, 509. See Yuan Changying, *Southeast Flies the Peacock and Other One-Act Plays* (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1930). Those 'other' one-act plays include *A Real Poet (Huo shiren)*, *In the End, Who is a Star (Jiujiang shei shi saobaxing)*, *A Warrior (Qianfang zhanshi)*, *A Kiss before Marriage (Jiehun qian de yiwen)*, and *Man's Fate (Ren zhi dao)*.

<sup>37</sup> Tian Qin, *Zhongguo xiju yundong (Xin zhongguo xiju jianping)* [Chinese Drama Movement (The Brief Review of Chinese New Dramas)] (Chongqing: Commercial Press, 1944), 63.

<sup>38</sup> Tian Qin, 63.

well-crafted plays reveal an unusually sophisticated sense of dramatic form and dialogue.”<sup>39</sup> In sum, consistently positive reviews such as these have crowned Yuan as arguably the most high-profile female playwright in the history of modern Chinese literature.

### **Raising Heads to Sing, Yuan Changying’ *Peacock* and the 1922 Amateur *Peacock***

Attached to the published script of *Peacock* in 1930 are two prefaces by the author. The first of which explains why and how Yuan developed “an extraordinarily excellent poem” (*juemiao haoshi*) into “extraordinarily good materials for tragedy” (*juehao de beiju cailiao*), in which Mother Jiao obtains more sympathy from readers than vituperation.<sup>40</sup> The second preface tells readers how the script had been circulated within Yuan’s drama circle and commented on by Su Xuelin, Yang Jinfu, and Hu Shi before it was finally published in Shanghai in 1930. These two prefaces publicize the composition process, or at least what Yuan was willing to share with readers. More important, though, they also offer later researchers a glance at *Peacock*’s popularity with the May Fourth generation. Therefore, Su Xuelin, Tian Qin, Elizabeth Eide, Jingyuan Zhang, Haiyan Lee, Haiping Yan, and others all closely examine these two short messages in order to form a more comprehensive conception of Yuan, *Peacock*, and Chinese new drama in the beginning of the 1930s.<sup>41</sup> What, exactly, do these prefaces reveal?

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<sup>39</sup> Amy D. Dooling and Kristina M. Torgeson, 209.

<sup>40</sup> Yuan Changying, 1.

<sup>41</sup> See Su Xuelin, “Yi gushi wei ticao de juzuoqia,” in *Zhongguo ershanshi niandai zuojia*, 483-95. Tian Qin, *Zhongguo xiju yundong (Xin zhongguo xiju jianping)*, 62-77. Elizabeth Eide, “The Ballad ‘Kongque dongnan fei’ as Freudian Feminist Drama during the May Fourth Period.” *Republican China* 15. 1 (Nov. 1989): 65-71. Jingyuan Zhang, *Psychoanalysis in China: Literary Transformations 1919-1949* (Ithaca: East Asia Program Cornell University, 1992), 62-77. Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 199-205. Amy D. Dooling and

Within the first two sentences of Preface I, Yuan expresses her long-time fondness for *Peacock* as an excellent presentation of poetry and praises its inherent amenability for transformation into a modern tragedy:

I have long been reading *Southeast Flies the Peacock*, and I just love this extraordinarily excellent lyric. Recently, I have been doing research on drama. More and more, I feel this [ballad] is excellent material for tragedy. However, I am scared to start [any adaptation].<sup>42</sup>

Although not noted by other researchers, in my reading Yuan's opening accomplishes a certain "rectification of names" (*zhengming*) for her planned project of "writing new plays based on old themes" (*jie jiuti xie xinzu*). Considering Yuan's close fellowship with Su and the Crescent Moon Society, and Su and Wen's earlier harsh criticism of Guo's pseudo historical plays, it is not surprising to see that Yuan is very cautious about using traditional materials. Therefore, Yuan emphasizes the internal adaptability of *Peacock* from a traditional ballad to a modern tragic drama as the force driving her to recreate this three-act play. In this respect, Yuan's work fundamentally differs from Guo's indulgent use of historical female characters as stage props to propagate "isms." Yuan indeed endorses the literary imagination of National Drama proposed by the Chinese New Drama Society. She argues that writing modern dramas on Chinese (traditional) themes is a way to discover and enhance the already-existing bond between traditional "China" and the modern "West," rather than a way to invent a connection from nothing. In fact, Yuan was not alone in this. In 1927, Ouyang Yuqian staged his most successful theatrical adaptation, *Pan Jinlian*, at the Dragon and Fish Art Festival

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Kristina Torgeson, *Women in Modern China: An Anthology of Women's Literature from the Early Twentieth Century*, 210.

<sup>42</sup> Yuan Changying, 1.

organized by Tian Han and the Southern Drama Society. Pan Jinlian, a femme fatale demonized in the classic novel *The Water Margin*, is now “given voice and allowed to turn her confession of crime (of loving Wu Song as well as murdering her husband) into both a climax of erotic gratification and a *j'accuse* against patriarchy.”<sup>43</sup> Similarly, from Su’s perspective, Xiong Foxi’s one-act play, “Lanzhi and Zhongqing” (*Lanzhi yu Zhongqing*) also stresses its characters’ psychological dimensions.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, Xiong’s dramatic exploration is limited by an overly simple plot. The success of Yuan’s *Peacock*, in the view of most critics, was that she portrayed Mother Jiao’s inner world in a further and more mature way.

When examining the natural bond between the West/modern and China/old inscribed within Yuan’s play, Elizabeth Eide, Jingyuan Zhang, and, to a lesser extent, Haiyan Lee, all focus on the transformation of the Mother Jiao character. In so doing, these scholars tend to overly emphasize this single characteristic of Yuan’s play. It is the theme of Mother Jiao’s “incestuous” feelings for her son<sup>45</sup> that Yuan focuses on to reinterpret a commonly held stereotype about the malicious relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. In other words, Yuan “rehabilitates” the shrew Mother Jiao by depicting her sympathetically through the lens of Freudian psychoanalytic theory. To put it simply, tradition/old obtains new meaning within a Western/new framework. In order to make this argument, these scholars draw evidence from the following passage in Preface I:

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<sup>43</sup> Haiyan Lee, 204. In this play, Zhou Xinfang played Wu Song and Ouyang Yuqian starred in the leading female role as Pan Jinlian. The next year, *Crescent Monthly* published Ouyang Yuqian’s script and incited a sensational response from the modern drama circle. Although Yuan did not mention the influence of her own play, it is not surprising to see the inspiration for Ouyang Yuqian’s *Pan Jinlian* in Yuan’s *Mother Jiao*.

<sup>44</sup> Su Xuelin, *Zhongguo ershanshi niandai zuojia*, 487.

<sup>45</sup> This interpretation is apparently influenced by the Freudian “Oedipus complex.”

Of course, from ancient times, mothers-in-law in China have had absolute authority over their daughters-in-law. Mother Jiao's dismissal of Lanzhi could be nothing more than an assertion of such authority. But such answers do not satisfy me. I knew there were psychological factors in human relations. Mother Jiao's dislike of Lanzhi was natural from the psychological perspective. My own experience and my observation of others told me that the reason why female in-laws do not get along well with each other is jealousy.<sup>46</sup>

Yuan's repeated invocation of the term "psychological" (*xinli de*) is the impetus, no doubt, of later scholars' Freudian readings of the play. For example, Eide emphasizes the uniqueness of *Peacock* by writing that "to interpret female frustration as a perversion of natural desires was less common"<sup>47</sup> in the My Fourth period. She labels Yuan's *Peacock* the "first self-consciously feminist appropriations of Freudian themes in Chinese."<sup>48</sup>

Jingyuan Zhang provides a similar reading, but with more intensive elaboration:

Yuan used the term "*chicu*" for jealousy, a term that refers only to sexual jealousy. Yuan suggested that a sexual tension existed between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.<sup>49</sup>

Although I recognize the value of their observations, I feel that these scholars have reduced the multiple and hybrid circulations between West/modern and China/old in Yuan's play to a single possibility, and Yuan's efforts to fit traditional Chinese sad stories into the Western dramatic framework of tragedy with respect to the material authenticity of the Eastern Han era and the May Fourth iconoclastic spirit have not been sufficiently addressed. Ignoring Yuan's emphasis on these perspectives unfortunately evades the internal connection between Yuan's *Peacock* and the amateur *Peacock* of

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<sup>46</sup> Haiyan Lee, 201.

<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Eide, 69.

<sup>48</sup> Lee Haiyan, 204.

<sup>49</sup> Jingyuan Zhang, 80.

1922, and even the civilized drama tradition, thus leading to the (mis)conception of Yuan's *Peacock* as an unprecedented, bold, feminist awakening that was formed, understood, and appreciated only by an elite bourgeois clique. As a result, various narratives of *Peacock* from Yuan herself, Yuan's fellow new professional playwrights/writers, as well as Tian Qin's construction of Chinese modern drama all suspiciously avoid discussing the implicit connection between Yuan's *Peacock* and its previous amateur version. In order to clarify these cloudy issues, this study shifts the focus from the eye-catching "incestuous" taboo to the play's more "clichéd" features—the "obsession" with the tragic, the iconoclastic, and the material "authentic," and hopes to not only examine the connections between Yuan's play and the amateur *Peacock* based on these three locales but also to offer an explanation in regard to current scholarship's hesitance of reading Yuan and her *Peacock* as one step in the process of modernizing *Peacock*.

Although rendered hazy by most scholarship, the implicit connection between Yuan's professional version and the amateur version of 1922 still "reaches" us via a series of narrative and dramatic "channels," including Yuan's two prefaces, the substitution of Mother Jiao's solo mourning for Lanzhi and Zhongqing's after-death reunion as the ending of the play, intensive depictions of Mother Jiao's "jealousy" of Lanzhi, the newly-invented character of Laolao, and the stage-set descriptions of each act. Interestingly, some of these "channels" have been already examined by Eide<sup>50</sup> and

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<sup>50</sup> In fact, Eide also realizes that Yuan still carries out the iconoclastic spirit in her *Peacock*. However, Eide does not look at this perspective closely because she considers the iconoclastic spirit in Yuan's *Peacock* to be Yuan's conservative withdraw from the feminist approach. That is to say, in Eide's study, the iconoclastic gesture has already become commonplace and thus compromises Yuan's avant-garde position at the very end of the 1920s.

Jingyuan Zhang to serve their readings of Yuan's *Peacock* as a (feminist) awakening that are inspired by a Freudian psychoanalytic framework. Here, I want to revisit these details and address other agendas inscribed in Yuan's *Peacock*, i.e., to compose a tragedy, to carry out the iconoclastic spirit, and to create an exhibitionary space. In short, my goal is to bring what is now in oblivion up to surface and turn the implicit into the explicit.

Let's continue our reading of Yuan's Preface I. As Jingyuan Zhang has observed, Yuan "did not mean to imply that an actually incestuous relationship existed between the mother and her son."<sup>51</sup> Yuan explicitly explains in Preface I:

Mothers take pain and trouble to raise their sons. Once they [sons] are occupied by women who used to be outsiders, mothers naturally feel indignant. . . . If those mothers are still young, of quick temper, and happen to be widowed, tragedies like what happened to Zhongqing and Lanzhi are unavoidable.<sup>52</sup>

Although at the end of Preface I Yuan mentions the story of Oedipus, her focus is on the tragic features of Oedipus, rather than on the Freudian "incestuous" tension between mother and son. In the final third of Preface I, Yuan endorses Victor Basch's<sup>53</sup> theory of tragedy and briefly outlines her professional understanding of Western dramatic theory by ranking the three struggles that are often depicted in tragedies. In Yuan's opinion, the highest struggle is between human beings and fate, as depicted in the Greek tragic stories of Oedipus and Prometheus. The other two struggles respectively occur between a human being and himself, as represented by the Greek play *Ajax* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, or between a human being and others, as represented by the conflict between

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<sup>51</sup> Jingyuan Zhang, 80.

<sup>52</sup> Yuan Changying, 2.

<sup>53</sup> Yuan Changying, 3. Yuan identifies Victor Basch as a professor of Aesthetics at Paris University.

King Lear and his daughter Cordelia.<sup>54</sup> Yuan concludes by lamenting the difficulties playwrights face in reaching the high standards of tragedy. Despite these difficulties, she expresses a nearly irresistible urge to “break the taboo that should be inviolate,”<sup>55</sup> which she spells out as “writing a tragedy.”

To carry out the goal of “writing a tragedy,” Yuan rewrites the ballad *Peacock*’s plot of burying Lanzhi and Zhongqing together, and places their suicide at the beginning of Act 3. Similar to the 1922 amateur *Peacock*, Yuan deletes the symbolic reunion of Lanzhi and Zhongqing after their death, i.e., the *wutong* trees growing interlaced. But, instead of getting rid of all traditional symbols of feeling/love, Yuan modifies the image of “mandarin ducks”<sup>56</sup> and presents them as a bad omen of Lanzhi’s and Zhongqing’s immutable fate, not a positive symbol of an after-death reunion:

LaoLao: Hua said those ducks look like they’re about to die and pestered me into coming to look at them. But I am so tired I can’t walk any farther. She’ll have to go on by herself.

Matchmaker: What? That pair of mandarin ducks at Clear Water Pond is going to die?!

LaoLao: Hua says they are lying there under that *wutong* tree barely breathing!

Matchmaker: Laolao, this is a bad omen! Do you still remember the sash that Miss Lan embroidered for the Young Master Jiao?<sup>57</sup>

Not only do Laolao and the matchmaker sense such a “bad omen,” Lanzhi and Zhongqing also realize that their life seems to be associated with those mandarin ducks:

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<sup>54</sup> Yuan Changying, 4-5.

<sup>55</sup> Yuan Changying, 6.

<sup>56</sup> One pair refers to the artificial ducks on the embroidered sash that Lanzhi made for Zhongqing, and the other pair is raised in Clear Water Pond where Lanzhi and Zhongqing finally commit double suicide.

<sup>57</sup> Amy Dooling and Kristina Torgeson, 245.

Lan: I am willing to kiss you to death in the fiery white flames of the sunlight! I am willing to be purified with you in the mouth of a blood-red volcano!

Zhong: Flesh and bones, blood and soul, forever, forever, fused as one!

Lan: Just like the pair of mandarin ducks of Clear Water Pond who died with their necks entwined in the quiet current!

Zhong: [*Releases his embrace*] What? That pair of ducks at Clear Water Pond is dead?

Lan: They died beneath the *wutong* tree. My brother picked them up and flung them into the deep end of the pond! They sank into the pure silent stillness!

Zhong: [*Takes out the betrothal sash from his pocket, looks at it under the faint moonlight. Lan leans forward.*] It is no wonder that before they died, this sash had become so completely tattered.<sup>58</sup>

By switching the mandarin ducks' order of appearance in the play, Yuan nicely transforms the "mandarin ducks" from a symbol of "superstition" and "happy ending" into an allegorical device to elicit the tragic death of Lanzhi and Zhongqing. Compared to the 1922 amateur Peacock's complete deletion of the *wutong* trees and mandarin ducks, Yuan's *Peacock* in fact makes better use of the traditional image of feelings/love to serve the goal of "writing a (Western) tragedy." Admittedly, Yuan's fusing of the traditional Chinese images with Western tragedy is more organic and natural than that of the female amateur students and Chen Dabei. However, it would be unfair to completely neglect the amateur *Peacock*'s contribution to "tragedizing" *Peacock* because it was the 1922 version that first edited out the after-death reunion of Lanzhi and Zhongqing.

Here I turn my attention to the final scene of Yuan's *Peacock*. Scholars have discussed this scene in terms of Yuan's expression of a feminist awakening by "rehabilitating" Mother Jiao as a tragic character, the victim of patriarchal suppression. Although I agree with this analysis, here I want to investigate the "originality" of Yuan's final scene by comparing Mother Jiao's hysterical break down in Yuan's play and her

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<sup>58</sup> Amy Dooling and Kristina Torgeson, 249-50.

regretful confession in the 1922 *Peacock*. Thus, it is necessary to juxtapose these two scenes:

Mother [Jiao]: [...*She struggles to get up from the overgrown grass and snatches up the sash as if mad, or in a trance. An expression of kind motherly love suddenly appears on her face. A bunch of dry grass happens to be nearby. She smiles, gathers it up, and ties it with the sash.*] My darling, see how pretty you look!...What beautiful hair you have! Just like your father's!...Here! Drink some milk. [*Holds the dried grass up to her breast as though she is nursing it*]...[*The moonlight illuminates the sky. She is startled. She looks closely at the dried grass and suddenly throws it away from her, crying out in shock.*] Whose son is this? This is rice straw! My son! My son is dead!<sup>59</sup>

Mother Jiao: My son! I hurt you! I killed Lanzhi! Please come back! My good son, don't you want your mom?

Zhongqing: Oh [*soft voice*]! Oh! [*Yell loudly*] Lanzhi...Lanzhi, wait for me! I am coming! Soon we will see each other! [*Pass out. Mother Jiao and Jixiang cry*]

[*The curtain starts falling*]

Mother Jiao: My son! My dear son! How come you leave your mother? Oh! I killed my good son with my own hands!<sup>60</sup>

In the 1922 version, quoted second, Mother Jiao holds Zhongqing's unconscious body and confesses that she just has killed her own son. Although she is desperate, Mother Jiao seems to be sober enough to realize that she mistakenly hurt her only son, and even to demonstrate a self-awareness of having been a tool of the patriarchy. But Mother Jiao's confession comes a little bit too late because Lanzhi is already dead and Zhongqing has passed out, and her confession cannot rescue her from being viewed as an evil mother-in-law. However, that evil image is mollified by her regretful self-accusation. Despite the abruptness of her confession, the 1922 amateur *Peacock* tries to point out that "evil" comes from the patriarchal suppression of Mother Jiao's mind. That is to say, the

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<sup>59</sup> Amy Dooling and Kristina Torgeson, 252.

<sup>60</sup> Beijing Women's Normal Higher School, "Kongque dongnanfei" [Southeast Flies the Peacock], in *Xiju* [Drama], 2.2 (1922), 14.

female amateur students had already hinted at sympathy for Mother Jiao as a victim of tradition, though they did not do so as consistently or forthrightly as Yuan did seven years later.

To some extent, the final scene in Yuan's *Peacock* looks like an "updated" version of the 1922 amateur *Peacock*, rather than an "original" adaptation of the ballad *Peacock*, because these two plays share the core idea of placing Mother Jiao at center stage. In my opinion, the ending scene of Yuan's *Peacock* only *enhances* the sympathy for Mother Jiao and the iconoclastic spirit already present in the amateur version. Mother Jiao, under Yuan's pen, wavers between being insane and sober. She first nurses a bunch of dry grass as if it was her own son, and then feels desperation upon realizing that her son is already dead. After providing Mother Jiao a few opportunities to voice her miserable life as a widow, Yuan leaves the entire stage for Mother Jiao and her mumbling monologue and suggestive body language (e.g., nursing her imaginary son). Here, Mother Jiao is no longer a puppet who is manipulated by the patriarchy to "kill" her son and daughter-in-law; she is a victim who is transformed into a mad, hysterical woman by the suppressive patriarchy who insanely confuses her son with dry grass. I hesitate to read Mother Jiao's insane behavior in Yuan's version (e.g., the motherly look and her nursing action) as "incestuous" desires for her own son. Instead, I suppose that Mother Jiao's insanity is a desperate response to being completely deprived by the patriarchy of both womanhood<sup>61</sup> and motherhood.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, Mother Jiao's insanity reflects both Yuan's attack on patriarchal power and on Chinese tradition. But these agendas were

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<sup>61</sup> Mother Jiao is forced to maintain the role of a chaste widow in her early thirties.

<sup>62</sup> In the end, Mother Jiao forever loses her son because of her contorted and uncontrollable jealousy of her daughter-in-law.

already addressed in the 1922 version. Again, the final scene of Yuan's *Peacock* offers evidence for making an inherent connection between the 1922 amateur *Peacock* and Yuan's new professional play.

A deeper analysis reveals still more connections between Yuan's *Peacock* and the amateur *Peacock*. In fact, Mother Jiao's "jealousy" of Lanzhi was also addressed in the amateur version well before Yuan claimed this as her unique approach to adapting the ballad in Preface I. In the amateur *Peacock* (Act 3), Mother Jiao blames Lanzhi after Zhongqing tries to convince Mother Jiao to treat Lanzhi kindly: "What did I do wrong to you? Why do you falsely charge me in front of my son and make my good son argue with me?" Here, Mother Jiao feels furious because *her* "good son" confronts her in order to protect another woman (Lanzhi). The mother-son bond is violated by Lanzhi, an outsider who only recently joined the Jiao family after her marriage to Zhongqing. This scene in the amateur *Peacock* exactly "predicts" Yuan's later explanations of the mother-in-law's "jealousy" in her preface, in which she writes: "once they [sons] are occupied by women who used to be outsiders, mothers naturally feel indignant."<sup>63</sup> Even more "coincidentally," in the amateur *Peacock*, Mother Jiao confirms her decision to expel Lanzhi after Zhongqing returns home from the *yamen*. Unbearable to Mother Jiao, Zhongqing heads straight to Lanzhi's room before greeting her. Yuan develops this detail in her play as the "last straw" for Mother Jiao's hysteria by letting a servant reveal Zhongqing's preference for his wife over his mother.<sup>64</sup> In short, although the amateur *Peacock* does not develop Mother Jiao's "jealousy" into the principal source of

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<sup>63</sup> Yuan Changying, 2.

<sup>64</sup> As Haiyan Lee puts it, Mother Jiao torments Lanzhi because she views "Lanzhi's presence in the family as an alternative center of emotional gravity, not from any (imaginary) act of ritual impropriety or disobedience." See Haiyan Lee, 203.

*Peacock*'s dramatic conflict, it is clear that the female amateur students were also aware that Mother Jiao envies Lanzhi for her intimacy with Zhongqing.

Regarding the character of Mother Jiao, Elisabeth Eide and Haiping Yan, in their respective research, nearly exclusively explore how Yuan shapes Mother Jiao as a female embodiment of hysteria, as well as victim of, and rebel against, the suffocating nature of patriarchal authority. In order to highlight the omnipresence of patriarchal power and Mother Jiao's unbearable pain, Yuan adds an elderly widow, Laolao, who understands and shares similar feelings with Mother Jiao. Eide highly praises Yuan's invention of this new character. Yuan enhances the theme that it is Mother Jiao (mother-in-laws) and not Lanzhi (daughter-in-laws) who is the most desperate victim of the patriarchal system. She does this through Laolao's sympathetic narration of Mother Jiao in Act 2:

Laolao: You [Mei, Zhongqing's younger sister] only see the surface! In their heart of hearts, how many mothers and daughters-in-law are at peace with each other? As for those mothers with many children, or with husbands, it's a different matter. In short, as long as there is some place for our hearts to go, they will behave... Your poor mother! I knew she was suffering, but I always hoped she would have the strength to control her feelings!<sup>65</sup>

Laolao not only speaks out the sufferings hidden behind Mother Jiao's cruelty, but also offers Mother Jiao a solution, the only outlet from her suffocating widowed life: "to raise her children and wait for raising her grandchildren."<sup>66</sup> Meanwhile, the character of Laolao is an essential formal dramatic expression. As Eide observes, Yuan's cast consisted almost exclusively of women, of which, Laolao, "in addition to being a foil to

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<sup>65</sup> Amy Dooling and Kristine Torgeson, 239.

<sup>66</sup> Elisabeth Eide, 67.

Jiaomu, almost substituted for a Greek chorus or the Sichuan opera's *bangqiang*.”<sup>67</sup>

Craftily written as it is, Yuan's invention of the character of Laolao, nevertheless, again seems to have her model in the 1922 amateur *Peacock*. As I discuss in chapter 2, the amateur students create Aunt Li, a neighbor, in Act 1 to elaborate on how virtuous, beautiful, diligent, capable and talented Lanzhi is. Aunt Li's brief comments sympathetically present Lanzhi's virtues and further suggest Lanzhi's chagrin under Mother Jiao's mistreatment. Therefore, Aunt Li serves a similar role as Laolao in Yuan's *Peacock* in that they both function as a “Greek chorus or the Sichuan opera's *bangqiang*” for the central victim—namely, Lanzhi in the 1922 amateur *Peacock* and Mother Jiao in Yuan's *Peacock*. True, Yuan shapes Laolao as a full character who is active throughout the entire play, whereas Aunt Li in the amateur version only appears in Act 1; the former is a more developed character than the latter. However, the similarity of those two characters, once again, reveals the internal connection between the amateur *Peacock* and Yuan's *Peacock*.

Yuan's *Peacock* not only shares similar ideas and methods with the 1922 amateur version in terms of developing “new” dramatic plots out of the “old” poem, it is also “obsessed” with presenting an authentic Eastern Han scene on stage, something the amateur students had hoped to achieve in their performance.<sup>68</sup> Yuan clearly expresses this intension in Preface II, which, unfortunately, has not attracted much attention from the current scholarship. Preface II is a very humble dedication to Su Xuelin, Yang Jinfu,

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<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Eide, 67.

<sup>68</sup> Although Chen Dabei transformed *Peacock* into a current-costume play (*shizhuang ju*) in his revised script, his ideas only invited Xiao Jianbai's criticism. Also, Chen admits that the reason why he made such revisions is because the amateur troupe was not able to provide authentic stage sets and costumes.

and, particularly, Hu Shi. Yuan quotes a long passage in a letter from Hu Shi, in which he discusses the appropriate stage props and costumes:

Ms. Changying:

It is not easy to answer those two issues (the life style and costumes of the *Peacock's* era) that you have raised. (1) the life style in the *Peacock's* era is similar to contemporary Japanese life in that it is the custom of both to sit on the ground. But, a couple sentences in the ballad already allude to a certain type of bed that was used like today's chairs, such as "Mother punched the bed," "little sister-in-law is only as tall as the bed," "the match-maker takes off from the bed," and "move my colored glaze bed to place it under the eastern window," etc. . . . I guess since the south was humid, people could not simply sit on the ground. Therefore, the bed is used as, and should be viewed as, the ancestor of chairs. What ancient time called *an* is similar to today's Japanese table. The idiom "holding the tray up to the eyebrow" (*ju'an qimei*) already reveals that *an* is small and easy to move. The common use of table and chairs started during the Tang-Song period. . . . Now, they are exhibited in the Beijing History Museum.<sup>69</sup>

Interestingly, Hu Shi's comments are almost identical to those in the drama reviews of the amateur *Peacock* published in *Beijing Morning Supplement* in 1922. The only noticeable difference is that now Hu Shi, who had previously dedicated an entire section to the historical formulation of the ballad *Peacock* in *The History of Vernacular Literature*, has replaced Xu Dishan as the reliable resource for Yuan's consultation. Yuan frankly admits that "in terms of stage set, I revised my play based predominately on Mr. Hu's suggestions in the letter."<sup>70</sup> Indeed, Yuan offers detailed directions for the stage set and costumes of Act 1:

Act I: Zhongs' [Zhongqing's] bedroom, prior to his wedding. The floor of the room is covered with straw mats. A small bed is placed in the right corner against the back wall. In the center of the room is a small round table with a tea set on it. Chairs [small beds] are scattered about the room. One or two small clothing

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<sup>69</sup> Yuan Changying, 7.

<sup>70</sup> Yuan Changying, 8.

trunks are placed against the left wall. Next to the right-hand wall is a square desk on which lie books, brushes, ink, and a mirror.<sup>71</sup>

Here, Yuan follows Hu Shi's suggestions to set straw mats, a small table (*an*), and small beds (*chuangta*) on stage to "exhibit" the Eastern Han life style. Yuan's efforts to stage the *Peacock* story authentically echoes Xu Dishan's and Hu Shi's conception of the new drama/modern play as the "exhibitionary space"<sup>72</sup> for demonstrating the long tradition of Chinese culture. Although the standard literary history rarely addresses the "exhibitionary" feature of the new drama, commercial civilized drama activists, amateur students, and, to a lesser extent, new professional playwrights all consciously projected their ethnographic explorations onto the genre of new drama.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, in regards to her care on stage sets and costumes, Yuan, as a new professional playwright, shares similar concerns of material "authenticity" and "realism" with those drama "laymen"/"amateurs" such as Xu Dishan, who openly admits his lack of drama knowledge. Moreover, Yuan's eagerness to present the "authentic" Eastern Han China on stage also suggests ties to the post-1913 commercial civilized dramas, which invested in extravagant stage designs and props in the name of realistically representing life. As I suggest in chapter 1, those commercial civilized drama performers/producers' efforts to

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<sup>71</sup> Amy Dooling and Kristina Torgeson, 213-4.

<sup>72</sup> See my discussion in chapter 2.

<sup>73</sup> Ironically, it was the new professional playwrights who held the smallest power in preserving the exhibitionary feature of new drama because of the professionalization in the modern literary/new drama field. The new professional playwrights became highly professionalized in writing scripts and greatly reduced their involvement in stage performances and directions. Unlike the amateur students who wrote the script and played *Peacock* on stage, Yuan is only known to be responsible for the script of *Peacock*. It is unclear whether Yuan ever participated in the two stage performances at Shanghai Chengzhong Middle School and National Wuhan University. Opposite to their original goal of pursuing drama, the majority of new professional playwrights were labeled as professional writers and their plays were received as fiction-like texts soon after the National Drama Movement. But, there were a couple exceptions, such as Tian Han and Ouyang Yuqian. Both Tian and Ouyang were still active in producing new dramas in the late 1920s thanks to their long-term relationship with commercial civilized drama troupes and the drama institutes they founded.

set up the new drama stage with authentic props should not be simply viewed as a fashion for the sake of entertainment. Rather, their pursuit of material realism reflected their “civilizational” imagination of the civilized drama—namely, to reform and to “modernize” the theatrical space, *xitai/wutai*, by transforming it into a miniature of real life. Interestingly, Yuan’s search for the real life of the Eastern Han era in *Peacock* repeats this agenda because she also strives to construct the Chinese tradition (a bygone era) on the new professional drama stage (the contemporary dramatic reality).

Despite the similarities discussed above, the conventional narrative of Chinese new drama often romanticizes new professional plays as individual playwrights’ original masterpieces, marking a new, more mature phase in the development of new drama. However, the formal and thematic connections between Yuan’s *Peacock* and both the amateur *Peacock* and the commercial civilized drama tradition reveal a rather different scenario for the Chinese modern drama field. In my opinion, it is the play’s connection with the past, not a break with it, which should become the trademark of Yuan’s *Peacock*. Similarly, it should be the fluid continuity, rather than abrupt fracture, between the civilized drama, amateur drama, and new professional drama that dominates the narrative of Chinese new drama.

After examining the substantial connection between Yuan’s *Peacock* and the amateur *Peacock*, I think it is time to ask why neither Yuan, nor her fellow new professional dramatists, nor modern literary historians ever address this issue. I do not want to go to another extreme and unsympathetically call Yuan’s *Peacock* plagiarism because, after all, she nicely explores the awakening female (sexual) subjectivity under the “rehabilitated shrew,” Mother Jiao, and depicts the desire-based “modern love”

between Zhongqing and Lanzhi, two modern issues that the amateur *Peacock* in 1922 did not develop.<sup>74</sup> Instead, by scrutinizing these two versions of *Peacock*, I hope to reveal the implicit principle that dominates the narrative of Chinese new drama, and in an even broader sense, modern Chinese literature, which is the preference to identify “fathers” over “mothers” in literary genealogical constructions, a paradigm which includes the preference for the West over China as the source for an imagined modernity.

Yuan’s short-term career as a playwright started after she came back to China from France. At that time, she already knew some key figures of the Crescent Moon Society, such as Chen Yuan, Ling Shuhua, and Xu Zhimo, and was thus identified as a peripheral member of this “bourgeois clique.” In fact, after Yuan’s *Peacock* was published as a volume of the *Modern Literature Series*, it was the *Crescent Moon Monthly* that first published a review of Yuan’s *Peacock* written by a certain Hao Wen.<sup>75</sup> In the review, Hao Wen mostly praises Yuan’s modern adaptation of Mother Jiao. The only criticism he raises is that there is too much psychological description and not enough

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<sup>74</sup> The conjugal intimacy between Zhongqing and Lanzhi is far more sexually-oriented in Yuan’s play than in previous modern adaptations. At the end of Act 2, before Zhongqing and Lanzhi’s double suicide, Zhongqing graphically expresses his sexual desire to Lanzhi, to which Lanzhi responds in a similar way. Those bold depictions recast the relationship of conjugal intimacy and mutual respect and cooperation (*xingjing rubin*) in the 1922 amateur drama to one of sexual desire and possession. That is to say, a “love” grows between the married couple that is not concerned with either praising the functionality of the new nuclear family or embodying a harsh attack against the traditional patriarchal system. Instead, it is a “love” based on desire. Admittedly, the “love” between Zhongqing and Lanzhi, as well as Mother Jiao’s temperament, is greatly transformed from the 1922 amateur drama to Yuan’s *Peacock*. However, such transformations are likely less related to the move from amateur to professional drama than to that of social trends, particularly, the reception of psychological theory in the 1920s. Both the amateur and professional *Peacock*, however, reflect social trends concerning love and sexuality. As Jingyuan Zhang describes, a large number of intellectuals during this time possessed foreign language skills, such as English, French, German, Russian, and Japanese, which would facilitate their reception of Freudian and other psychoanalytic theories. Similarly, common readers in China’s metropolitan cities were also exposed to Freud. Advertisements for popular readings, such as *The Diary of a Young Girl*, “capitalized on Freud’s name by advertising the fact that Freud had written a preface to the book.” See Jingyuan Zhang, 5-35.

<sup>75</sup> It is also the only review published in the 1930s that my current study is able to identify.

“Movement Dramatique (*xijude dongzuo*)”<sup>76</sup> in the play, which renders *Peacock* more like a novel than a drama, in spite of the stage settings, costume designs, and divided acts. Compared to the 1922 amateur *Peacock*, which attracted over 2,000 spectators and a week’s worth of reviews/promotions in *Beijing Morning Supplement*, Yuan’s *Peacock* elicited only a small-scale readership—namely, the “fans” of the Crescent Moon Society. Therefore, I hypothesize that Yuan’s *Peacock* was relatively unknown to the public in the early 1930s, and its being exclaimed as the most famous *Peacock* did not come until the 1940s when Tian Qin labeled Yuan as the “first female playwright of the May Fourth era.”<sup>77</sup> That is to say, when Yuan published as a playwright, she was only nominally associated with the Crescent Moon Society and the New Drama Association. Therefore, in contrast to her silence on the 1922 amateur *Peacock*, Yuan, in her preface I, clearly expresses her knowledge that Xiong Foxi had just published a one-act play, *Lanzhi and Zhongqing*, in 1929. Yuan further claims that she did not read Xiong’s script out of fear that she would be overly influence by it. Yuan’s acknowledgement of Xiong’s play shows that she did not mind being compared with her fellow new professional playwrights; she positions her *Peacock* in the pool of new professional drama compositions produced by new professionals who were attached to the Crescent Moon Society and the New Drama Association.

Conscious of Yuan’s close relationship with the “bourgeois clique,” later critics, especially those in the PRC, were perhaps unlikely to investigate any possible connection

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<sup>76</sup> Hao Wen, “Kongque dongnanfei ji qita” [Southeast Fly the Peacocks and Others], in *Xinyue yuekan* [Crescent Moon Monthly] vol.3, (Shanghai: Xinyue shudian, 1930).

<sup>77</sup> Tian Qin, in *Zhongguo xiju yundong*, not only quotes Yuan’s preface in great length, but also offers a detailed synopsis of Yuan’s *Peacock*. Tian’s introduction of Yuan’s plays seem to me as a descriptions of his new discovery more than the review of an established repertoire of Chinese new drama. Tian’s exclamation of Yuan’s *Peacock* was confirmed by Su Xuelin two decades later, in 1960s, when she constructs Chinese literary history in Taiwan. See Tian Qin, 63.

between the elite new professional drama, Yuan's *Peacock*, and the amateur drama, which was produced anonymously and promoted by Chen Dabei. This raises the interesting phenomenon of the authorship of the 1922 *Peacock*. Although Chen Dabei claimed that the female amateur students produced the 1922 *Peacock*, in the very few times it is mentioned by Elizabeth Eide, Ge Yihong, and Dong Jian, the amateur *Peacock* is always first associated with Chen Dabei and then with the female amateur students.

Obviously, modern literary (drama) history applies a very different description to the 1922 female students' amateur performance than the Spring Willow Society's new drama produced in 1907 in Tokyo. Although both amateur dramas served as the civilized alternative to "oldness"—the traditional operas and the commercial civilized dramas, respectively—the standard narratives of Chinese modern drama crowns the Spring Willow Society, a male amateur troupe, as "fathers" of new drama and leaves in oblivion the female amateur troupe attached to Beijing Women's Normal Higher School. The different attitude toward these two amateur troupes influences the way scholars have treated their respective plays. Standard literary histories exclaim *The Black Slave's Cry to Heaven*, an amateur adaptation from a Japanese translation of the Harriet Beecher Stowe novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as one of the earliest efforts of drama modernization. By contrast, *Peacock*, the female amateur dramatic adaptation, has not received much critical attention until very recently. Therefore, I suggest that constructions of new drama are still influenced by the problematic desires of "patriarchy" and simplistic views of Westernization, which are the foci of revisionists' criticism in fiction and other sub-fields of modern Chinese culture.

## Conclusion

Among five modern dramatic adaptations of the ballad *Peacock* in the 1920s, it is Yuan's three-act play that has clearly gained the most attention from contemporary scholarship. Yet, as controversial as it might seem, *Peacock* did not receive much public response, neither when it was first published as a script nor after its two stage performances. In fact, I can only locate a very short review of Yuan's script, which was published in *Crescent Moon Monthly* in 1930. As for stage performances, Ge Yihong is, as far as I am aware, the only source to claim that *Peacock* was once staged by students in the Shanghai Chengzhong Middle School. The second performance, offered by faculty members and students in National Wuhan University in 1935, received only harsh public criticism. Not surprisingly, Yuan's minute psychoanalytic descriptions of Mother Jiao as a sexually suppressed woman suffering in her widowhood deviated too much from ethos of the Anti-Japanese war effort then developing nationwide. In the middle of the 1930s, a work such as *Peacock* was not appropriate for the Chinese people, who felt invaded, humiliated, and trapped by war. Thus, ironically, despite Yuan's self-positioning as a professional modern dramatist, her *Peacock* was never successfully produced and circulated as a stage performance, whereas the Beijing Women's Higher Normal School's amateur troupe, led by Chen Dabei, accomplished a relatively more complete and professional production and circulation of *Peacock*. In other words, the binary of amateur and professional is an inadequate framework with which to understand these different versions. Instead, the fluid alternation of the connotation of "professional," in tandem with the overlapping features that both amateur drama and Yuan's plays inherited from earlier civilized drama, suggests a greater complexity and adaptability in the development of Chinese new drama

than is usually presented in scholarship. Although it is Yuan's *Peacock* that wins the best reputation and arguably displays the highest aesthetic value, I propose to situate Yuan's modern play within a chain of modern dramatic adaptations of *Peacock*, placing it squarely within the transition of different social discourses, especially those that deal with changes in the connotation and signification of such tricky terms as "modernity," "West," "Chinese," "tradition," etc., as part of the negotiation and contestation between various agents in the worldwide literary field.

## Conclusion

On the evening of February 25, 1922, the female amateur students of Beijing Women's Normal Higher School staged a new drama, *Southeast Flies the Peacock*, at the auditorium of the Ministry of Education, attracting an audience of nearly two thousand and provoking a week's worth of promotions/reviews from *Beijing Morning Supplement*. About two weeks after their stage performance, Chen Dabei published his revised script of the play as a model text for amateur drama. Chen's published script, to a degree, prolonged the artistic life of the amateur *Peacock* by transforming a stage performance, whose circulation was circumscribed by temporal and spatial elements, into textual material that could be easily referred to by later adaptations. Indeed, four more new drama adaptations, as this thesis has traced, were later produced either in print or on stage, and together constitute the "*Peacock* fad" of the 1920s. Viewing these new drama adaptations as integrated organs of a cultural phenomenon, rather than manifestations of simple coincidence, this thesis has investigated the earliest new drama adaptation of *Peacock*—the 1922 amateur version—in its production, circulation, and reception, and in so doing, revealed connections between this amateur play and the professional civilized drama that flourished in the 1910s.

In contrast to the dearth of studies of the 1922 amateur *Peacock*, Yuan Changying's three-act adaptation, *Southeast Flies the Peacock*, has received much critical attention and is esteemed as one of the best examples of a modern drama adaptation of a

traditional story. Scholars such as Su Xuelin, Tian Qin, Elizabeth Eide, Haiyan Lee, and Haiping Yan have all highlighted the originality and pioneering spirit of Yuan's *Peacock*, declaring Yuan to be "the first Chinese female dramatist"<sup>1</sup> and *Peacock* an "early feminist awakening."<sup>2</sup> However, in this thesis I have taken a rather different approach in reading Yuan's *Peacock*: I position Yuan's adaptation within the context of the overall "Peacock fad" and thereby examine the connections between Yuan's *Peacock* and the 1922 amateur version. Through this approach, it becomes apparent that Yuan was not unique in her use of a traditional story (*Peacock*) as host for a Western cultural theory (Freudian psychoanalysis). Furthermore, by mapping out Yuan's social relationship with Su Xuelin, Ling Shuhua, Chen Ying, and Xu Zhimo, this thesis presents Yuan as a supporter and follower of the National Drama Movement initiated by the New Drama Society and the Crescent Moon Society in the second half of the 1920s. In other words, the case study of Yuan's *Peacock* is also a window through which to investigate the larger trend of the new professional drama. The pursuit of a natural hybridization between the Chinese theatrical tradition and Western dramatic form was a goal commonly shared by all of these new professional dramatists, who believed that to inspire more new professional dramatists to write "national drama" was the only way to override the "social problem" dramas composed by drama "laymen"/ "amateurs." However, despite these claimed goals, a close reading of Yuan's *Peacock* reveals much continuity between the new professional work and the 1922 amateur *Peacock*, continuity

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<sup>1</sup> Tian Qin, *Zhongguo xiju yundong (Xin zhongguo xiju jianping)* [Chinese Drama Movement (The Brief Review of Chinese New Dramas)] (Chongqing: Commercial Press, 1944), 63.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Eide, "The Ballad 'Kongque dongnan fei' as Freudian Feminist Drama during the May Fourth Period," *Republican China* 15. 1 (Nov. 1989), 65.

not much different than that of the 1922 amateur *Peacock* with the previous commercial civilized drama.

By contextualizing the internal connection between the female playwright Yuan and the female amateur student troupe, this thesis further illustrates how commercial civilized drama, amateur drama, and new professional drama were interconnected in the new drama field. Unfortunately, this issue is not yet sufficiently addressed in various constructions of new drama, perhaps because most constructions rely heavily on the narratives of drama “insiders,” such as, Ouyang Yuqian, Xu Banmei, Tian Han, and Hong Shen. These “insiders” were sometimes allied with certain drama societies/troupes and positioned themselves in opposition to others, which influenced the ways they understood the field of new drama and later represented it. In other words, they both participated in and narrated the development of new drama. Furthermore, they often painted a homogenous picture of new drama in order to make it fit an evolutionary narrative of the development of modern literature. In the process, they simplified their own complicated roles in the drama field. Influenced by their narratives, later researchers see only isolated phases of new drama development: from “old” to “new,” from “for money’s sake” to “for art’s sake,” and from “amateur” to “professional,” suggesting a linear and evolutionary trajectory.

Of course, the development of new drama is a much messier affair than this narrative allows, and the “phases” not so distinct or easily delineated. Hong Shen, Ouyang Yuqian, etc., identify the debut of Chinese new drama as the 1907 performance of *The Black Slave’s Cry to Heaven* (*Heinu yutian lu*), staged by the Spring Willow Society, a male amateur troupe, in Tokyo. Soon after returning to China to carry out their

new drama agenda, these dramatists were faced with the reality of harsh competition for audiences from the established traditional opera and reformed opera; their pursuit of “cultural/political capital” had to give way to the necessities of “economic capital.” Reaching an audience was the most significant requirement for civilized drama troupes to earn any form of capital, whether economic, cultural or political. After all, civilized drama troupes had to first sell tickets and attract an audience; only then could they carry out an agenda.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the amateur male students had to either transform themselves into commercial professionals or shun completely the field of new drama. In this way, Chinese new drama completed its first transformation from “amateur” to “professional.”

In the beginning of the 1920s, commercial civilized drama went bankrupt when it lost most of its audience in Shanghai and its performing locations were used for other purposes. In 1922, the Beijing Women’s Normal Higher School’s amateur troupe staged *Peacock*. Chen Dabei exclaimed that the female amateur *Peacock* opened a new alternative path to commercial civilized drama and rekindled the spark of Chinese new drama by “rescuing” the genre from slipping into the abyss of “economical capital” by readdressing the importance of “cultural/political capitals.” However, my close reading of the 1922 amateur *Peacock* has revealed that commercial concerns were not eliminated in the amateur production, only expressed in alternative ways.<sup>4</sup>

This new wave of amateur drama lasted less than two years. In the middle of the 1920s, a group of male overseas students who majored in drama, including Yu

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<sup>3</sup> This is rather different than the field of modern fiction. True, fiction also requires readership. However, the unpopularity of one work will not deadly threaten or terminate the career of an elite writer. Particularly, elite writers, aligned with various literary societies, are always assured to have their works published in the official journals of their organizations. Such assurance will not work out in new drama since no literary society can repeatedly “organize” a mass audience.

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, female amateur drama has not yet been recognized for its role as “Mothers” of Chinese new drama, though it plays a similar role to the Spring Willow Society.

Shangyuan, Zhang Zhutao, Wen Yiduo, Xiong Foxi, etc., returned to China to work out their “National Drama” agenda. This group soon opened its doors to women who shared similar academic backgrounds and were inspired by the same goals from Chinese new drama: to create new professional drama. However, my thesis has shown that this goal of “creating new drama” reflected an exaggerated sense of self-promotion. The new professional drama continued to embody the aesthetic values of amateur drama. Yuan’s *Peacock* was not only inspired by but also heavily relied on previous amateur productions. Rather than a neat linear path, the development of Chinese new drama was rather more spiral: from (male) amateur activities open exclusively to students, to commercial civilized performances in entertainment centers, to (female) amateur performances open to the public, and finally to the elite professional dramatists’ script publication.

Here surfaces confusion regarding the terms “professional” and “professionalization,” terms this thesis has attempted to clarify. As I suggest in Chapter 1, the commercial civilized drama of the 1910s was also known as professional civilized drama because its troupes and individual members relied entirely on the box office and patrons for their financial earnings. Early civilized drama activists, such as Ren Tianzhi, Lu Jingruo, Ouyang Yuqian, and Zheng Zhengqiu all openly acknowledged that they sometimes needed to compromise their performances for the sake of money. Zhu Shuangyun particularly mentions that Ren Tianzhi recruited actors by publishing advertisements in the newspaper. As a result, Ren Tianzhi’s troupe attracted people who only viewed civilized drama as a way to earn a living. It is predominantly because of their dependence on the market that civilized drama activists were “professional.” However, the phenomenon where commercial civilized drama depended solely on the

market had changed by the time the new professional dramatists were active in the field of new drama. Most of them, including Yuan Changying, maintained stable and relatively well-paid jobs at universities, with literary journals and other cultural institutions. Therefore, making money was not their most pressing need. But this does not mean that these new professionals were only pursuing drama for art's sake, as they claimed. It could be argued that new professional dramatists, benefiting from the general institutionalization of modern Chinese culture, no longer needed to produce dramas predominantly for money's sake. Instead, for Yuan and her elite peers, drama regained its nature as a leisure activity. In this regard, the new professional dramas were also "amateur."

The two waves of professionalization in the 1910s and the late 1920s certainly deserve more attention, especially when we take into account the issue of gender. Namely, how were female drama productions, either the *mao'er xi* or the new professional, incorporated into the process of professionalization? How did the female amateur students and the new professional female dramatists present such incorporations? Furthermore, if the scope of this research were to expand to include a study of the 1926 film adaptation of *Peacock*, female involvement in professionalization would become even more intriguing because we would find the complex intertwining of commercial concerns, gender issues, and competition between genres. It is precisely this series of questions that I hope to pursue in my future study.

Before leaving my analysis of *Peacock*, it might prove interesting to return to Hong Shen's 1935 contextualization of Chinese new drama, which sets the basic tone of later historical narratives of modern Chinese drama. Hong Shen's "Introduction to

Drama” was written for *Compendium of Chinese New Literature* (*Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi*) and depicts both the amateur drama and the National Drama Movement of the 1920s. In this essay, Hong places several key figures of these two drama movements—Chen Dabei, Pu Boying, Yu Shangyuan, and Xiong Foxi, etc.—in very important positions within the drama field by not only describing their contributions to new drama’s development, but also by including full scripts of their plays in the Drama volume of *Compendium of Chinese New Literature*. Interestingly, neither the 1922 amateur *Peacock* nor Yuan Changying’s three-act *Peacock* is mentioned even once in Hong’s construction of the amateur drama and National Drama Movement.

Who and what dramas *does* Hong Shen include in the first *Compendium of Chinese New Literature*? Although Hong traces the beginning of Chinese new drama back to the Beijing Opera performers’ self-reformation in late 1900, his selections of new drama “masterpieces” begins with Hu Shi’s *The Greatest Event in Life* (*Zhongshen dashi*) written in 1917, and excludes all dramas from the civilized drama repertoire. Similar to Hu Shi, Lu Xun, Mao Dun, Zheng Zhenduo, Zhu Ziqing, Zhou Zuoren, and A Ying, who compiled volumes for other literary genres in the *Compendium*, Hong conceives his selection—a review of Chinese new drama’s development in the first decade (1917-1927) after the New Culture movement<sup>5</sup>—as a canonization of the May Fourth generation’s new cultural products. Hong further hopes that his selection for the *Compendium* could serve as a model for future canonization, and therefore hold a position in the new culture field by means of its “cultural capital” and “political capital.” Hong thus determines his selections based on “cultural/political capital,” not “economic capital.” Around 1917 and

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<sup>5</sup> Hong Shen, “Xiju daoyan” [Drama Introduction], in *Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi* [Compendium of Chinese New Literature], 10 vols., (Hong Kong: Xianggang wenxue yanjiu she, 1935), 9:3851.

1918, commercialized civilized drama productions, according to Chen Dabei's depiction, having already narrowed their pursuit to an absolute desire for "economical capital," turned "art for civilization's sake" into "art for money's sake." In other words, the growth of civilized drama's "economic capital" from 1917 to 1918 cancelled out the "cultural/political capital" that the Spring Willow Society had earned for civilized drama during the previous decade. It is for this reason that Hong Shen excludes the masterpieces of civilized drama.

Given the *Compendium's* stated focus on "new literature," Hong Shen mainly reserves pride of place to new drama activists, with a couple of exceptions. First, Hong recognizes Wang Zhongxian's efforts to reform old operas and compose new dramas, and thus depicts Wang as one of the traditional operatic players (*jiu xizi*) who practiced the ideal of "new drama" in old operatic form at the end of the 1800s. Also, Hong reveals, in great detail, Wang Zhongxian's involvement in The Demotic Opera Troupe and his interaction with Shen Yanbing, Chen Dabei, and Hong himself. Hong includes Wang's one-act new drama, *Good Son (Hao erzi)*, first published in *Drama* (vol.1, no.1, 1921), in *Compendium's* Drama volume. Second, Hong draws attention to Ouyang Yuqian, another new dramatist who had a complex relationship with the traditional operatic tradition and commercial civilized drama. Unsurprisingly, Hong Shen includes Ouyang Yuqian's *After Going Home (Huijia yihou)* in the *Compendium* and relies heavily on Ouyang to construct his narrative of civilized drama in the 1910s. But it seems that Hong is not quite sympathetic with the "period of decline" (1918-1924) that Ouyang Yuqian frames for civilized drama, and instead represents it as a failure.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Hong Shen, 9:3765.

Female playwrights are accorded an even smaller role in Hong's narrative. In fact, the single female dramatist's production that Hong Shen mentions is Bai Wei's *Linli*, written in 1926. Hong briefly introduces Bai Wei, and depicts *Linli* as "a passionate work," that "carries a certain hysteria," and thus requires "extremely talented actors" to stage the script.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, *Linli* is not reprinted in the Drama volume because a separate edition of *Linli* was already published and released by the Commercial Press, the publishers of *Compendium*.<sup>8</sup>

Let us now look at how Hong Shen positions key figures of amateur drama, such as Chen Dabei and Pu Boying, in his new drama field. Hong Shen associates Chen Dabei and Pu Boying with The Demotic Opera Troupe that was founded in 1921 in Shanghai. In Hong's construction, the Demotic Opera Troupes made six major contributions to the field of new drama: to emphasize the entertainment nature of drama; to produce "dramas on stage" and not "dramas on paper"; to compose their own drama scripts; to improve theatre management; to raise the social status of new drama players; and to use amateur drama to reform commercial civilized drama.<sup>9</sup> Hong affiliates Pu Boying and Chen Dabei primarily with this last contribution.<sup>10</sup> When examining amateur drama practices, Hong Shen describes how Chen Dabei and Pu Boying founded a People's Art Drama

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<sup>7</sup> Hong Shen, 9:3828.

<sup>8</sup> Hong Shen did not include Yuan Changying's *Peacock* in the Drama volume, possibly because *Peacock* was published in 1930, later than the first ten years (1917-1927) post-New Culture Movement.

<sup>9</sup> Hong Shen, 9: 3781-2.

<sup>10</sup> Chen Dabei's case is a little bit different. As I mention in the Introduction, Hong Shen also reads Chen Dabei's detailed descriptions of the technical perspectives of new drama (stage), written in "Amateur Drama," as important aids to make "drama on stage" possible.

School (*Renyi xiju zhuanmen xuexiao*) to train actors who were academic professionals.<sup>11</sup> Within Hong's narrative, he does not mention the amateur *Peacock* at all.

In this thesis, I follow Elizabeth Eide, Dong Jian, and others to include the 1922 female students amateur production in the genealogy of new drama adaptations of *Peacock*. Eide reads Yuan Changying's *Peacock* as a mature work that represents a new phase in Chinese drama/literature professionalization, whereas she only mentions, without any analysis, the 1922 amateur *Peacock*. Other scholars, such as Dong Jian and Gi Yihong, adhere to Chen Dabei's view of the amateur *Peacock* as a (tentative) alternative to commercial civilized drama and read it only as a passing moment in the history of modern drama. Different from these scholars, I have paid much more attention to the amateur drama. In analyzing the promotions and reviews published in *Beijing Morning Supplement*, I have shown that the amateur *Peacock* provoked a great amount of social/critical responses and attracted more than 2,000 spectators to a one-night show. On the one hand, the production and reception of the amateur *Peacock* among both general and elite audiences repeated, to a degree, the model of the commercial civilized drama in stressing "economic capital" and entertaining the audience. Some elite reviewers, such as Xu Dishan, even recommended the dramatists to develop the new drama stage into something like an ethnographic "exhibitionary space," which led the amateur students and audiences to an "obsession" with material authenticity. This suggestion, to some extent, echoes the commercial civilized drama troupes' efforts to construct "dramatic reality." On the other, the amateur *Peacock* contributed a series of

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<sup>11</sup> The other important amateur drama practice is the 1921 production of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (Hualun furen de zhiye) at New Stage in Shanghai. Wang Zhongxian convinced Xia Yuerun and Xia Yueshan to join in the performance, which turned out to fail so disastrously that it invoked serious concern for the future of amateur drama. See Hong Shen, 9: 3783.

modern touches that is repeatedly revisited by Yuan Changying in her *Peacock*: to re-read history and tradition; to see the ballad *Peacock* as a “tragedy”; to modernize the *feeling* between Zhongqing and Lanzhi into “love”; to further challenge patriarchal authority; and to explore the “jealousy” between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

The different versions of *Peacock* should neither be ignored, as they are by Hong Shen, nor seen as irrelevant, as they are by standard scholarly narratives. Instead, as I have tried to do in this thesis, they should be seen as two integral parts of an overall trend. Hence, my thesis refuses to view these different versions of *Peacock*, as well as the spheres of commercial civilized drama, amateur drama, and new professional drama, as somehow distinct and independent from each other. Rather, I see them as pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and stress the fact that different agents in the new drama field were in fact connected to each other in complex ways. We need to listen more carefully to the intricate dialogues and negotiations between them, which are unfortunately muted by the homogenous imagination of Chinese modernity.

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## Glossary

- A Ying 阿英  
ai 爱  
*Aiguo zei* 爱国贼  
aimei de 爱美的  
aimei ju 爱美剧  
aimeide ren 爱美的人  
an 案  
baxi 把戏  
*Baishe zhuan* 白蛇传  
bangqiang 帮腔  
bangzi 椰子  
Bao Tianxiao 包天笑  
Beijing nügao 北京女高  
Beiping funü xiehui 北平妇女协会  
*Beijing chenbao* 北京晨报  
beixi 北戏  
bixi 蔽膝  
bieyou huaibao 别有怀抱  
bude 不得  
*bunmei* 文明  
bu wenming de 不文明的  
chayuan 茶园  
chaibai dang 拆白党  
Chen Baichen 陈白尘  
chengzhong zhongxue 澄衷中学  
chicu 吃醋  
*Chi qian hen* 赤钳恨  
chixing 迟性  
chuanqi 传奇  
chuangta 床榻  
Chunliu she 春柳社  
Chunliu juchang 春柳剧场  
chunliu pai 春柳派  
Chunxian 春仙  
Chunyang she 春阳社  
da litang 大礼堂  
daqian shijie 大千世界  
Dengtu zi 登徒子  
difang jingyan 地方经验  
diji quwei 低级趣味  
dianying 电影  
erhuang 二簧  
Feng Han 凤汉  
*Fengliu heshang* 风流和尚  
Feng shuanfei 凤双飞  
fu 赋  
Fujisawa Asajirö 藤泽浅二郎  
fuju 副剧  
fukan 副刊  
gailiang xi 改良戏  
geng zhenshi de 更真实地  
*Gonghe wansui!* 共和万岁  
*Gujin yuelu* 古今乐录  
gushi 古事  
Gu Yiqiao 顾一樵  
Guangxu-Xuantong 光绪宣统  
guiguai 鬼怪  
*Guiqu* 归去  
guiren 贵人  
*Guobao lu* 果报录  
guochang xi 过场戏  
Guoli Beijing zhengfa daxue 国立北京  
政法大学  
Guoli Wuhan daxue 国立武汉大学

Guo Moruo 郭沫若  
 Hao erzi 好儿子  
 Heiji yuanhun 黑籍冤魂  
 Heinu yutian lu 黑奴吁天录  
 Honglou meng 红楼梦  
 huli jing 狐狸精  
 Huaqi aiqing 滑稽爱情  
 huaju 话剧  
 Hualun furen de zhiye 华伦夫人的职业  
 huazhuang yanshuo 化妆演说  
 huibao yanchu 汇报演出  
 Huijia yihou 回家以后  
 Huo shiren 活诗人  
 jiti 集体  
 jia 假  
 jiating ju 家庭剧  
 Jiaotong daxue 交通大学  
 Jiayin xiaozhuan 迦茵小传  
 Jiayin zhongxing 甲寅中兴  
 Jian'an 建安  
 jian dongxi 贱东西  
 jianhuo 贱货  
 jianghu ban 江湖班  
 Jiaomu 焦母  
 jiaoxun ju 教训剧  
 “Jiao Zhongqing qi” 焦仲卿妻  
 Jiehun qian de yiwen 结婚前的一吻  
 Jie jiuti xie xinzuo 借旧体写新作  
 Jiujing shei shi saobaxing 究竟谁是扫把星  
 Jinhua tuan 进化团  
 Jing Runsan 经润三  
 Jingying san 经营三  
 jiude yu xinde xizimen 旧的与新的戏子们  
 jiuju 旧剧  
 jiupai 旧派  
 jiu xizi 旧戏子  
 ju 剧  
 ju'an qimei 举案齐眉  
 juben 剧本  
 Jukan 剧刊  
 “Jukan shi ye” 剧刊始业  
 jushe 剧社  
 jutuan 剧团  
 juehao de beiju cailiao 绝好的悲剧材料  
 juemiao haoshi 绝妙好诗  
 kechuan 客串  
 Kaiming she 开明社  
 kanju 看剧  
 kanke 看客  
 Konggu lan 空谷兰  
 Kongque dianying gongsi 孔雀电影公司  
 Ku zumiao 哭祖庙  
 kuaihuo kuaihuo 快活快活  
 Lanxin da xiyuan 兰心大戏院  
 laoban 老板  
 laogong 劳工  
 Laolao 姥姥  
 Laoshao yiqi 老少易妻  
 Lili suo jutun 丽丽所剧谈  
 Li Qi 李祈  
 lishi ju 历史剧  
 lixiang ju 理想剧  
 Ling Lianying 凌怜影  
 lian'ai 恋爱  
 liangqing xiangyue 两情相悦  
 Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai 梁山伯与祝英台  
 Liang Shiqiu 梁实秋  
 liangxin 良心  
 Liangzhu tongshi 梁祝痛史  
 Liaozhai zhiyi 聊斋志异  
 Linli 琳丽  
 Lin Pulin 林卜琳  
 linshi yanshuo 临时演说  
 linshi yanyuan 临时演员

*Liu jun nu* 六军怒  
*Liu Lanfang* 刘兰芳  
*Liuli chang* 琉璃厂  
*Lu Bingxin* 陆冰心  
*Lu Jingruo* 陆镜若  
*Lu Xiaowu* 陆笑吾  
*Lu Yi*  
*Lu Zimei* 陆子美  
*luozi* 落子  
*Lü Yi* 绿漪  
*Ma Jiangshi* 马绛士  
*maiban shangren* 买办商人  
*maile* 买乐  
*mai yi* 卖艺  
*mao'er xi* 髦儿戏  
*Meng huitou* 猛回头  
*Minguo daxue* 民国大学  
*Minming she* 民鸣社  
*Minxing she* 民兴社  
*Mingzhong* 民众  
*minzhong xiju* 民众戏剧  
*Minzhong xiju she* 民众戏剧社  
*Mingmo yihen* 明末遗恨  
“*Mulan ci*” 木兰辞  
*Muqin* 母亲  
*muwai xi* 幕外戏  
*Nanfu nanqi* 难夫难妻  
*nannü shejiao gongkai* 男女社交公开  
*Nanshe* 南社  
*nanyang* 南洋  
*Nie Ying* 聂嫫  
*nongtang* 弄堂  
*nuanchang* 暖场  
*nü xuesheng* 女学生  
*Pan Jinlian* 潘金莲  
*paotou loumian* 抛头露面  
*pengchang* 捧场  
*piaoyou* 票友  
*Qihao de julebu* 七号的俱乐部  
*Qi jue la* 契块腊  
*Qimin she* 启民社  
*Qianfang zhanshi* 前方战士  
*qing* 情  
*Qinghua tongzi jun* 清华童子军  
*Qinghua wenyi* 清华文艺  
*Qinghua xinju she* 清华新剧社  
*qingke* 清客  
*Qiong hua fu ye* 穷花富叶  
*qu* 曲  
*Qu Yuan* 屈原  
*quanren* 全人  
*quju* 趣剧  
*Renli chefu* 人力车夫  
*Ren Tianzhi* 任天知  
*Renyi xiju zhuanmen xuexiao* 人艺戏剧  
 专门学校  
*Ren zhi dao* 人之道  
*Shen Bingxue* 沈冰血  
*Shen Chunhua* 沈春华  
*shenxian* 神仙  
*Shen Yanbing (Mao Dun)* 沈雁冰 (茅盾)  
*Shilin ji ta* 仕林祭塔  
*shi lingren yahui* 拾伶人牙慧  
*shizhuang ju* 时装剧  
*shinpa* 新派  
*shiyanshi de juchang* 实验室的剧场  
*shizhuang ju* 时装剧  
*Shuhu zhuan* 水浒传  
*suren* 素人  
*Su Shichi* 苏石痴  
*tanci* 弹词  
*Taohua shan* 桃花扇  
*Teng Ruoqu* 滕若渠  
*ti* 体  
*Tian benxiang* 田本相  
*Tian Han* 田汉  
*Tianyi dianying gongsi* 天一电影公  
 司  
*Tianyu hua* 天雨花  
*tingke* 听客

tongren 同仁  
 Ushino 猛回头  
 Wang Duqing 王独清  
 Wang Guowei 王国维  
 Wang Xiaonong (Wang Youyou,  
 Wang Zhongxian) 汪笑侗 (汪优游,  
 汪仲贤)  
 Wang Wuneng 王无能  
 Wang Zhongxian 汪仲贤  
 wenming 文明  
 wenming chengdu 文明程度  
 wenmingde 文明的  
 wenming fu 文明服  
 wenming hunli 文明婚礼  
 wenming jiao 文明脚  
 wenming lian'ai 文明恋爱  
 wenming xuesheng 文明学生  
 wenti ju 问题剧  
 wode airen 我的爱人  
 Wuliang 武梁  
 wusi 无私  
 wutai 舞台  
 wutaishang de xiju 舞台上的戏剧  
 wutong 梧桐  
 "Xiju zhidao shehui yu shehui  
 zhidao xiju" 戏剧指导社会与社  
 会指导戏剧  
 xiju de dongzuo 戏剧的动作  
 xitai 戏台  
 xiyuan 戏院  
 xizi 戏子  
 Xia Yan 夏衍  
 Xia Yuerun 夏月润  
 Xia Yueshan 夏月珊  
 xiandai ju 现代剧  
 Xiandai pinglun 现代评论  
 Xiandai wenyi congshu 现代文艺丛  
 书  
 xianfeng jia 先锋家  
 xiao shimin 小市民  
 Xiaotang 孝堂  
 Xiao wutai 笑舞台  
 Xiehe xiao litang 协和小礼堂  
 xieshide 写实的  
 xieyide 写意的  
 xiezi 楔子  
 Xin chahua 新茶花  
 xinju 新剧  
 xinju jie 新剧界  
 xinli de 心理的  
 xinmin she 新民社  
 Xinmin xinju yanjiushe 新民新剧研  
 究社  
 xin nüxing wenhua yundong 新女性文  
 化运动  
 Xin wutai 新舞台  
 Xinyue pai 新月派  
 Xinyue she 新月社  
 "Xuesheng mouhai faqi canwen"  
 学生谋害发妻惨闻  
 yamen 衙门  
 Yaxiya dianying gongsi 亚细亚电影  
 公司  
 Yanjing daxue 燕京大学  
 yang 鸯  
 Yang Dunliu 杨端六  
 Yang Guifei 杨贵妃  
 Yang Hui 杨晦  
 Yang Jinfu 杨金甫  
 yangpai jutuan 洋派剧团  
 yangwei 洋味  
 Ye Qirui 叶启瑞  
 Ye zhi hua 野之花  
 yishu de chunxing 艺术的纯形  
 yingxi 影戏  
 yong 用  
 youyi hui 游艺会  
 youyuan hui 游园会  
 yujiao yule 寓教于乐  
 yuan 鸳

yuanyang hudie xiaoshuo 鸳鸯蝴蝶  
小说  
yuefu shuangbi 乐府双璧  
zashua xichang 杂耍戏场  
Zeng Xiaogu 曾孝谷  
Zhang Jiazhu 张嘉铸  
Zhang Jinglu 张静庐  
zhanghui ti 章回体  
Zhang Shichuan 张石川  
Zhang Song xian ditu 张松献地图  
Zhang Yuguang 张聿光  
Zhaoshi gu'er 赵氏孤儿  
zhen 真  
zhende xiju 真的戏剧  
Zhenguang dianyingyuan 真光电影院  
zhengdang de yule 正当的娱乐  
zhengming 正名  
Zheng Zhengqiu (Zheng Yaofeng)  
郑正秋(郑药风)  
Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎  
zhimianshang de xiju 纸面上的戏剧  
zhishi jieji 智识阶级  
zhiye de xiju he zhiye de xiju de ren  
职业的戏剧和职业的戏剧的人  
zhongchan jijie 中产阶级  
Zhongguo gongxue 中国公学  
Zhongguo xiju gailiang she 中国戏  
剧改良社  
Zhongguo xiju she 中国戏剧社  
Zhongshen dashi 终身大事  
Zhou Zuoren 周作人  
Zhu Shuangyun 朱双云  
zhuxing 助兴  
Zhu Ziqing 朱自清  
Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君  
Ziye 子夜  
Zuihou de zhanzheng 最后的战争