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THE REVOLUTION IN THE THEATRE
IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the political transformation of the theatre in the People's Republic of China. Some background to this transformation is provided in a brief survey of the development of the traditional Chinese theatre and of changes that occurred during the twentieth century. The developments in the Red areas before 1949 are given particular attention. The great increase in theatrical activity in the 1950's is described and attention is given to its political aspects. Political problems in the theatre became important in the early 1960's and these are examined in Chapter 4, with particular attention to the case of Wu Han's Peking opera, Hai Jui Dismissed From Office. The denunciation of the "black line" in the theatre during the Cultural Revolution is discussed in the same chapter. The positive response to these political problems is discussed in the following two chapters. Chapter 5 examines the revolution in Peking opera and gives particular attention to the model revolutionary Peking operas on contemporary themes. Chapter 6 discusses the recent developments in creating new forms of theatre suitable for taking theatrical activities to all the Chinese people and, in particular, in ensuring that they reach the most remote settlements in the country. In the conclusion, the developments in the theatre are briefly put into the context of overall developments in Chinese society.

Research was limited to reading translations of plays and of Chinese articles, in addition of what other material is available in English.

What is shown in this thesis is that the Chinese theatre has undergone a fundamental political transformation-- a revolution. In content and in form, a new type of theatre is emerging in China that is designed to serve the people of China and especially the workers, peasants, and soldiers. Problems remain in the theatre, especially in the artistic area, but experimentation and development are continuing on the new political basis established in the Cultural Revolution.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the world today all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes or art that is detached from or independent of politics. (Mao, 1967b: 25)

Chinese revolutionaries have been unusual in their explicit recognition of the political importance of literature and art, and in their overt political use of a wide variety of literary and artistic forms. In response to this, commentators in the West have written about an incompatibility they see between art and politics (for example, Goldman, 1966; Hsia, 1968; Yang, 1969). The Chinese position on this issue, which is the same as the one taken in this thesis, is that there is no such incompatibility. While it is possible to discuss the political or artistic aspects of any work of art, the two cannot be rigidly separated or placed in opposition: both politics and art arise from specific historical situations and reflect those situations. They are, therefore, inextricably tied together.

Western criticism of the political content of contemporary Chinese art and literature is based on a lack of awareness of the political aspects of non-revolutionary and non-socialist art and literature. It is not so much that art and literature in China have a particularly heavy political content, as it is that they have a political content of a

different nature. The development of Chinese art and literature in the twentieth century represents the process of creation of a new socialist form of art and literature. In this thesis, I will examine this process in one area of art and literature, the theatre. There, not only the political content, but also the artistic form is new. So also are the method of writing plays and the organisation of theatrical performance.

The revolution in literature and art, of which the revolution of the theatre is part, has been given great importance by the Chinese. As early as the time of the Kiangsi Soviet, it was a subject of much attention on the part of Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Communist Party. In 1942, when Mao presented his Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art (Mao, 1967b: 1-43), there were already many years of experience in revolutionary literary and artistic work. In the Talks, Mao summed up that early experience and laid out the principles for further work in literature and art. This document remains the most important work on the subject of contemporary Chinese literature and art.

In it, Mao stated that literature and art inevitably play a role in class struggle. They cannot avoid reflecting and supporting one class position or another. Mao saw the class character of literature and art as its most important and fundamental aspect. Therefore, the major distinction he made in the Talks was that between art and literature serving

semi-feudal,¹ capitalist, and imperialist interests and that serving the masses--the workers, peasants, soldiers, and urban petty bourgeoisie (Mao, 1967b: 11-12). His policy has been to promote the latter and to destroy the former. The goal is socialist art and literature, created by peasants, workers, and soldiers (or by intellectuals who are united with them), and intended for their use (Mao, 1967b: 22). In the first place, this art and literature will serve the political interests of the masses in their struggle against semi-feudal, capitalist, and imperialist forces. In the second place, they will provide a rich cultural life based upon and close to the life experiences of the masses, and therefore more meaningful to them than any other form of literature and art (Mao, 1967b: 19-20).

The period of development of the new art and literature can be divided into two main parts: before 1949 and after 1949. Before Liberation in 1949, the main focus in art and literature was on contributing to victory in the wars against the Japanese and against the Kuomintang. Art and literature were seen as essential tools in these struggles (Mao, 1967b: 26). Since Liberation, and especially since 1953 the chief task has been to bring the ideological superstructure into line with the economic base. The enemies at this time are much the same as before--lingering feudal and capitalist tendencies, and imperialism. The difference is that since Liberation and the transformation of the economic and political systems, the main area of struggle has moved

to the ideological level. The Chinese are not complacent about their successes up to this point and are clearly quite worried that if they fail to transform the superstructure, their victories on other levels will be undermined. What happens on the ideological level will either facilitate success at the present stage of socialist construction and permit further advance, or cause failure in socialist construction and degeneration into revisionism. As revealed in the Cultural Revolution especially, the ideological struggle has been very acute. In Mao's words: "The overthrown bourgeoisie is trying, by all methods, to use the position of literature and art as a hotbed for corrupting the masses and preparing for the restoration of capitalism" (quoted in Lin et al., 1968: 36). The example of the Soviet Union's slide into revisionism or, as the Chinese call it, "the restoration of capitalism" in the Soviet Union, heightens this concern. The Soviet Union at present is as much a stratified class society as any Western capitalist one. The Chinese fear that China also could degenerate in this direction.

The vital importance of literature and art and the presence of bourgeois and revisionist elements in those areas has meant that a wide range of measures aimed at reform and control have been necessary. The major source of difficulty has been the bourgeois background of the majority of writers and artists. For this reason, it has been repeatedly

necessary to require writers and artists to take political study courses and to gain some experience of life among the workers, peasants, and soldiers. As will be shown later, success in these re-education programs has been limited. This has meant, on the one hand, that censorship and a variety of other after-the-fact control measures have been necessary. On the other hand, it has resulted in great efforts to create a new generation of writers and artists who either are themselves from worker, peasant, or soldier backgrounds or at least have some experience of such a nature. However, at present and for some time to come, the older writers and artists, predominantly from bourgeois backgrounds, will continue to dominate their fields. This makes it imperative that they be reformed. Otherwise, the areas of literature and art will be under bourgeois or revisionist control and, perhaps more seriously, the new generation of writers and artists, learning from the older generation, may follow in their path. At different times different measures have been taken to reform and control literature and art. The development of these measures and their degree of success will be examined in the following chapters.

Within the area of literature and art, theatre has a particularly important place in China, especially in relation to political issues. This is so for three main reasons. First, theatre in China has long been a widespread and very popular art form. Not limited just to urban centres

and educated persons, it existed in hundreds of local variations throughout China, having great popularity among the many millions of peasants (Scott, 1963: 35). The theatre was unique among Chinese art forms in this wide popular audience. Quite early, the Communist Party realised the potential of theatre for communicating with and educating the masses of illiterate peasants by way of their favourite art form.

A second characteristic of theatre, which proved its political value most markedly in the Cultural Revolution, is its high degree of visibility. This enabled it to provide effective public examples of what was meant by socialist art when the struggle against revisionism in literature and art became most acute. Of the eight model revolutionary works² set up as examples in the Cultural Revolution, five are Peking operas. The others, two ballets and a symphony, also represent highly visible art forms.

A third significant quality is theatre's group nature. As a joint activity of a large number of people working together, theatre is particularly suitable for reforms in work-style, for mass involvement, and for struggles about political content within the creative process itself. Where success has been achieved in these areas, the results have been highly visible and have been presented publicly as examples of what can be produced when problems in these areas are solved. In particular, the model Peking operas

have been presented as examples of victories over revisionists in Peking opera companies. As such, they constituted models for struggle and revolution in all areas in which the revisionists were being attacked in the Cultural Revolution.

In this thesis, I will outline the development of a revolutionary and socialist theatre in China and indicate the particularly important role played by the theatre in the class struggle on the ideological level. Before doing that, however, a brief sketch of the previous history of the theatre in China and its condition as the modern period began is necessary.

The Traditional Theatre

The theatre, in a variety of forms, has very deep roots in China. Its origins are so long ago that they cannot be dated with any precision. It is certain that there were entertainments that can be viewed as precursors of the later theatre as early as the Chou dynasty (1122-221 B. C.) (Scott, 1956: 28; Arlington, 1930: xxv). At this time, and up until the T'ang dynasty, what appears to have existed was a mixture of music, dance, and athletic displays of variable nature. These were largely associated with festivals and religious events and seem to have constituted a form of folk art (Scott, 1956: 28; Arlington, 1930: xxv,8).

Beginning in the T'ang dynasty (A. D. 618-906), a high tradition in the theatre emerged under the influence of

Imperial interest and patronage. The emperor Ming Huang founded the Pear Garden for the training of theatre artists, and this period seems to be the time that a theatrical profession first emerged (Arlington, 1930: 12-13). As well as patronising the theatre, many members of Imperial families took an active part as amateur performers. While this Imperial interest and attention greatly promoted the development of theatre, it appears to have done nothing to help the prestige of professionals in the theatre. Perhaps because of the popular nature of the Chinese theatre, they were until very recent years regarded as outcasts (Scott, 1956: 28).

The Sung dynasty (960-1279) saw a continuation and further development of theatre. There was a variety of professional performers, some serving the masses and some the court. Performers whose chief audiences were the rural and urban masses, were also often called upon to entertain officials. The theatre of the masses and of the rulers were therefore closely connected. By this time, at least, there were professional playwrights who were members of Book Guilds; some actors may have provided scripts as well. It was during the Sung dynasty that dramas, in a form similar to that of the closing years of the traditional period, first appeared (Liu Wu-chi, 1966: 161-6).

Upon the basis laid during the T'ang and Sung dynasties, the Yuan dynasty (1234-1368) became the period of richest development of the traditional theatre (Liu Wu-chi, 1966: 169; L. W. Snow, 1972a: 4). Partly this was a natural

product of artistic development and continued Imperial patronage, however, it also represented a response to very different political conditions than had hitherto existed. While the court continued its interest in and support of the theatre (Liu Wu-chi, 1969: 92), the locus of the most important developments lay outside the court and in opposition to it. The Yuan dynasty was a period of foreign (Mongol) rule, and a period of considerable misfortune for classical scholars. Mongol distrust of these scholars caused the abolition of the literary examination system during the first half of the Yuan dynasty, to be restored only in 1314. This destroyed the ambitions of four generations of scholars for official positions. Unable to build a career upon their classical scholarship, many of them turned to more popular scholarship and wrote plays professionally. Previously, playwriting had been done by actors and low-status Book Guild members, but in the Yuan dynasty some of the ablest and best educated scholars turned toward the theatre (Liu Wu-chi, 1966: 169). This occurrence at a time when the theatre was already rapidly developing and maturing, resulted in the production of a large number of plays of particularly high theatrical and literary value (Liu Wu-chi, 1969: 92).

These plays are also notable for their political content. They are chiefly the product of disenchanted gentry writing for a popular audience during a period of oppressive foreign rule. It is therefore not surprising to find themes of official corruption and abuse of power and of

opposition to this on the part of a few honest officials or, more frequently, bandits. The bandits were not outlaws terrorising the masses, but were predominantly social bandits, robbing the wealthy and aiding the poor. Much of Yuan drama clearly represented a protest against unjust and foreign rule which was oppressing the common people. This protest was voiced by the highly educated stratum which, at least at this time, saw its interests and those of the masses as the same (Liu Wu-chi, 1966: 181-3).⁴

Not all Yuan drama was of this nature--some was purely entertainment and some was intended for the court. In writing about the Sung and Yuan theatres, Liu Wu-chi (1969: 93) has pointed out that, although the courts sponsored their own private dramatic troupes and patronised theatrical activities, the court plays lacked literary quality and have failed to survive. The rich drama of the Yuan period seems to have been based upon an urban commoner public which was supporting a large professional theatre establishment (Liu Wu-chi, 1969: 93).

The fusion of popular theatre and the high literary tradition that produced the classics of the Yuan period broke down during the Ming dynasty. While the popular theatre continued in numerous regional variations, a new form of drama emerged in the upper class. K'un-ch'u, initially formed from a number of other theatre styles, became distinctive for the high quality of its poetry. Lin Wu-chi (1966: 247) notes that this excellence was achieved at the expense

of dramatic quality, for it was mostly a vehicle for the presentation of poetry in upper-class literary circles. Apart from the poetry, they were little else than revisions of Yuan dramas. The authors were prominent literary and official figures rather than theatre professionals. Eventually k'un-ch'u became so removed from theatrical realities and so sophisticated in a literary sense, that it was beyond the appreciation of most theatre-goers (Scott, 1959: 3-4; Liu Wu-chi, 1966: 247-53). Its literary quality was so high, however, that by 1600 it was the dominant theatrical style (Liu Wu-chi, 1966: 252). Its lack of theatrical quality and its distance from the popular theatre, among other causes, contributed to its decline in later years. The destruction of Soochow, the main centre of k'un-ch'u, in 1853 during the T'ai P'ing Rebellion, marked the end of the dominance of k'un-ch'u (Scott, 1959: 3; Liu Wu-chi, 1966: 260).

In the late eighteenth century, a new theatrical style emerged which by the mid-nineteenth century was the dominant style--ching hsi, or Peking opera. It was a fusion of k'un-ch'u and a variety of local operas which had existed alongside it. It was developed in Peking in the 1790's by several theatrical troupes from Anhwei and therefore owes much to the Anhwei local opera style. These troupes were also skilled in some other local opera styles (especially those of the northwest) and in k'un-ch'u. There were no outstanding new plays in Peking opera--only revisions of older plays and comparatively poor dramatisations of popular

tales, histories, and events of current interest. The Peking opera represented a return of the high tradition in theatre to popular styles and a popular audience, while still receiving Imperial favour and support. The qualities of Peking opera which made it so successful were theatrical rather than literary. It brought theatrical skills to an unprecedented level of development due to the contributions of some outstanding actors and singers--as important to Peking opera as great playwrights had been to earlier theatrical styles (Liu Wu-chi, 1966: 260-1; Scott, 1956: 36-7; Ma, 1956: 4-8).

On the eve of the modern period, the theatre in China was composed of Peking opera and over 200 different local genres of opera. All of these were popular forms of theatre and theatre was therefore a widely available and much appreciated form of entertainment.⁵

From this sketchy overview, at least two points should be clear. The first is that China has a theatrical tradition of unusual richness and historical depth. The second is that the Chinese theatre has consistently been a popular art form as well as a cultivated literary medium.

Although Western spoken drama has been introduced in China (to be discussed in the next chapter), the Chinese forms of theatre are by far the most important. This is partly because of their deep roots, but it is also because of the form of Chinese theatre. On a framework of a plot and dialogue, they include music, singing, dancing, mime,

and acrobatics. In a political context--and politics is a major element of modern Chinese theatre--these elements are very important. They allow for a much more powerful and lasting impression to be made on an audience than can be achieved by spoken dialogue alone. The spoken words can be reiterated in song and dramatised in mime and dance, making it much more likely that a propaganda message will have an impact and be remembered.⁶ The songs can also be performed apart from the rest of the opera, spreading the message further and refreshing the memories of those who have seen the operas of which they are part. For these various reasons, the focus of development in the theatre in China has been on indigenous forms, with spoken dramas having much less importance.

In line with the usual terminology in English, the Chinese plays will here be referred to as "operas". This name has been given to them because of the large role singing plays in them. They are, needless to say, very different from European "operas".

Notes

¹I am using this term in the sense in which it is used by the Chinese, that is, to refer to traditional, non-capitalist elements in China following intrusion by Western powers and the advent of capitalism in China.

²These are: the Peking operas, Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy, Shachiapang, The Red Lantern, Raid on the White Tiger Regiment, and On the Docks; the ballets, The White-haired Girl and The Red Detachment of Women; and the symphony, Shachiapang (see Wen, 1967).

³One of the most famous Yuan plays (Liu Wu-chi, 1966: 178), The Wrongs of Maid Tou by Kuan Han-ch'ing, falls into this category. In revised form, under the title Snow in Midsummer (text in Meserve and Meserve, 1970), this play was an example of traditional plays considered acceptable after Liberation. It is also interesting to note that one of the most prominent Communist playwrights wrote a play about the writing and performance of The Wrongs of Maid Tou in the face of brutal official repression (T'ien, 1961). The political acceptability of the later play is now, however, in doubt in light of the denunciation of its author, T'ien Han, in the Cultural Revolution.

⁴Liu Wu-chi (1969) demonstrates that this must have been the audience these plays were chiefly aimed at. The degree to which they may have extended into rural areas is not clear to me.

⁵Scholarly studies of the Chinese theatre have been chiefly concerned with the literary forms and forms appearing in the Imperial court. Despite the lack of detailed information on popular theatre in traditional China, there are indications that it was widespread and important. It repeatedly shows up as an important influence on the dominant forms of theatre. The existence of so many different varieties throughout China indicate that it must have had considerable popularity and vitality.

⁶I am indebted to Carole Farber for drawing my intention to this aspect of Chinese opera.

Chapter 2

The Chinese Theatre, 1900-1949

The traditional forms of Chinese theatre persisted well into the twentieth century in much the same form as they had had in the late nineteenth century¹ throughout most of China. However, in a few centres, and especially in Shanghai, some new trends were emerging that in the following decades were to penetrate into the most remote regions.

One important development was the artistic enrichment of the traditional theatre. This was largely due to research into the classical theatre by Ch'i Ju-shan and its application by his colleague, the actor Mei Lan-fang. Their efforts, and those of other outstanding artists, caused considerable improvement in Chinese opera. At least during the period 1912-19, its vitality overshadowed the feeble beginnings of a Western style of theatre in China (Scott, 1963: 38). Without such a dynamic theatrical basis upon which to build, it is difficult to imagine how the later transformation of the traditional theatre could have been so successful.

Parallel with the revitalisation of classic Chinese opera, there was a movement to introduce spoken drama in China. This was not an outgrowth of Chinese theatre, but was rather an importation of Western drama. The first plays to be performed were translations of Western plays. Particularly serious study of Western drama began after 1919,

but by this time Chinese writers were beginning to produce spoken dramas of their own (Scott, 1963: 36-9).

While this Western-influenced trend enriched and broadened the theatre for a limited audience in such centres as Shanghai, it did not at this time reach a large public. Spoken drama was limited to the cities and performed there almost exclusively by amateur groups of students for limited audiences.² The intellectuals responsible for this influence were, in their enamouration with things foreign, estranged from their own people (Levenson, 1971: 29-41). It was not until the new drama became linked to the nationalist movement, and later to the revolutionary movement, that it penetrated to the masses. Even now it is not a serious contender for popularity with the Chinese operas.

The new modern dramas were oriented towards politics more than were the Peking operas of the time. Their authors were in many cases acutely aware of the social problems of their time and concerned with commenting on them. They would surely have welcomed a popular audience. The play that contributed most to the establishment of spoken drama in China is a good example of this problem. Thunderstorm, by Ts'ao Yu (1958), uses the framework of a domestic tragedy to reveal the corruptness of the Chinese bourgeoisie, the hard lot of Chinese workers, and the courage of some young union men in fighting for their rights. Written and first performed in the mid-1930's, it received high

praise from critics, but this, and Ts'ao's other plays, have never been popular among the peasants and workers (Liu Wu-chi, 1966: 276-7). This can be partly attributed to the very heavy Western influence on Ts'ao's work, making it strange and unpopular in the eyes of those Chinese who had been less exposed to Western influence than the Shanghai intelligentsia.

Linking the theatre to popular demands in the twentieth century was to require an explicitly political approach and decades of experimentation. Dating from the May Fourth Movement of 1919, there were attempts to use the theatre as a medium for social protest (L. W. Snow, 1972a: 8; Meserve and Meserve, 1970: 1).

Around 1930, the Shanghai Art Drama Association was formed under the auspices of the League of Left-wing Writers. This association, located in the chief centre of dramatic innovation at the time, Shanghai, made an effort to present a new form of play that would reach urban workers. Short and simple plays were performed at low cost on a regular schedule by members of a mobile drama troupe which travelled to the workers. The plays were topical and propagandistic in content (Ting, 1959: 209). Such efforts were rare in those years, especially as the government was opposed to them, and arrest was a constant danger for those involved (Scott, 1963: 40).

Truly widespread use of the theatre for propaganda and mobilisation began only after the Japanese invasion. A united front of writers, artists, and dramatists joined to-

gether in the nationalist cause. The Nationalist Government sponsored some travelling theatrical troupes for these purposes.³ Private troupes in the Nationalist areas were also very active, especially in tours to perform for workers, peasants, and soldiers (Scott, 1963: 45-6). However, these activities also faced opposition from the Nationalist Government. When it launched its first campaign against the Red bases during this period, it moved to restrict drama troupes and anti-Japanese propaganda teams from activities in the armed forces, the factories, and the countryside (Ting, 1959: 66). Repression was intensified as the war dragged on and corruption and political problems continued in the Nationalist areas, leading to criticism by writers and artists. By the sixth year of the war, more than fifty plays had been banned for being politically unacceptable (Scott, 1963: 7-8).

By such repression, the Nationalist Government forfeited any chance of fostering the development of the new trends in theatre that were then emerging. This was in sharp contrast to what was happening in the Red areas. Mao Tse-tung very early recognised the potential of theatre as a means of mass mobilisation and gave the development of theatre very high priority. As early as 1929, under Mao's leadership, it was official policy in the Red areas to promote the theatre and to do so, especially, within the framework of the Red Army propaganda teams. From 1929 on, artistic and literary (including theatrical) activities were

an essential part of the Red Army's political work. Although the Red Army was the centre of such work, efforts were made to extend it to the rural masses. (In part this too could be done through the Army.) At least in Kiangsi and Fukien provinces, there were extensive artistic and literary activities in the rural areas. Worker-peasant dramatic societies appeared in large numbers in the Red areas, and leaders of them were called together for a special six-month training course by the Ministry of Education in order to create a trained core for the worker-peasant drama movement (Ting, 1959: 44-7). There was even a school, the Gorky Drama School, for the training of professionals in the theatre. It graduated over 1,000 students who were, in the early thirties, organised into over sixty touring theatrical troupes performing for peasants in the rural areas and for soldiers on the frontlines (Ting, 1959: 47; E. Snow, 1968: 122). Their repertoire was primarily of a propagandistic nature and, in particular, consisted of material intended to gain the support of the masses in areas newly added to the Red bases and material intended to spread news about the latest political and military developments. Such a repertoire was one that constantly required new writing and revision, and this was mostly done by the troupes' members themselves (Ting, 1959: 245). There were such travelling troupes, not just in Kiangsi, although it was the major centre, but also in Honan, Hunan, and Shensi (L. W. Snow, 1972a: 102; E. Snow, 1968: 123).

Although much of the work of this theatre movement was to be wiped out by the destruction of the Red bases in the south, it left a legacy that was to contribute greatly to the foundations of China's new theatre as developed in the Yen'an period. First, it represented the beginnings of a theatre which was close to the masses. In Ting Yi's words: "The theory that literature and art should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers was never clearly put forward; nevertheless, this was what was actually being done" (Ting, 1959: 48). It was a period of experimentation, also, in how to establish and organise such a form of theatre. Second, many of the professionals trained in Kiangsi went on the Long March⁴ and on arrival in Soviet Shensi were of great importance in developing theatre there during the period of the anti-Japanese war (E. Snow, 1968: 122-3).

After the arrival of Mao Tse-tung and the Red forces from the south at the Shensi border region, there was a continuation and an intensification of the earlier theatrical work. The Lu Hsun Academy of Arts trained theatrical workers from among local people.⁵ Those trained people who had made the Long March were used as instructors (L. W. Snow; 1972a: 107-8; E. Snow, 1968: 123). As in the south in earlier years, large numbers of touring theatrical troupes, many of them attached to the Army, were engaged in propaganda work throughout the Red areas (E. Snow, 1968: 123; Ting, 1959: 69).

There were some problems in the whole area of literature and art, relating largely to the work of the large numbers of bourgeois intellectuals who had gone to the Red areas. They were nationalists and partners in the united front against the Japanese, and many were also Party members or at least sympathetic to the Party. However, they were apparently not contributing satisfactorily to the nationalist war effort. Their reform was part of the rectification movement that began in 1942 (Hsia, 1968: 240-2). As part of this, writers and artists were called together for a series of meetings at the Yen-an Forum and were there addressed by Mao Tse-tung. At the beginning of his Talks, Mao indicated the great importance he attached to literary and artistic (cultural) work:

In our struggle for the liberation of the Chinese people there are various fronts, among which there are the fronts of the pen and of the gun, the cultural and the military fronts. To defeat the enemy we must rely primarily on the army with guns. But this army alone is not enough; we must also have a cultural army, which is absolutely indispensable for uniting our own ranks and defeating the enemy. (Mao, 1967b: 1)

The style of warfare, people's war, used by the Chinese Communist Party and its armies was heavily dependent on mass support. The purpose of cultural work was to serve as one of the major tools for producing this support. This work was not being done well enough because too many of the people doing it were urban intellectuals who did not understand the masses of the people and the conditions under

which they were living. They were therefore unable to write in a way that was effective in communicating with the masses. Mao therefore insisted on the necessity of remoulding these intellectuals and proposed two means of achieving this. The first was ideological study:

It is right for writers and artists to study literary and artistic creation, but the science of Marxism-Leninism must be studied by all revolutionaries, writers and artists not excepted. Writers and artists should study society, that is to say, should study the various classes in society, their mutual relations and respective conditions, their physiognomy and their psychology. Only when we grasp all this clearly can we have a literature and art that is rich in content and correct in orientation. (Mao, 1967b: 8)

This was to be combined with actual experience of life among the masses:

China's revolutionary writers and artists, writers and artists of promise, must go among the masses; they must for a long period of time unreservedly and wholeheartedly go among the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers, go into the heat of the struggle, go to the only source, the broadest and richest source, in order to observe, experience, study and analyse all the different kinds of people, all the classes, all the masses, all the vivid patterns of life and struggle, all the raw materials of literature and art. Only then can they proceed to creative work. Otherwise, you will have nothing to work with and you will be nothing but a phoney writer or artist. . . (Mao, 1967b: 19).

The writers and artists were also directed to pay attention to the literary and artistic work going on at the grassroots level. In the case of theatrical workers, they were to look at the theatrical troupes in the army and in the villages (Mao, 1967b: 22-3).

When the Talks were given, the rectification movement was already under way in literary and artistic circles in Yenan. It was to continue for the next two years (Hsia, 1968: 244-5). Its success was limited, as was to be demonstrated in the Cultural Revolution many years later. Some progress was made, however, as exemplified by the opera, The White-haired Girl,⁶ which was written in the mid-forties by a group of writers at the Lu Hsun Academy. Based on a story current in the liberated areas at the time, it told of a young peasant girl whose father had been forced to sell her to his landlord. In the landlord's house, she was cruelly treated and raped. Eventually driven from his house, she lived a solitary life in the hills, where she gave birth to the landlord's child and suffered such great hardships that her hair turned white. At the end of the play, she is brought down from the hills by Party cadres after the area has been liberated. With their support, she denounces the landlord and he is punished. The political content of the opera was lauded, as it dramatised the sufferings of the masses in the old society and showed the way to a solution to their problems. It was also exemplary in its artistic excellence and popularity. It was based on a popular tale reflecting peasant life; it used the language of the peasants; its music strongly resembled folk music; and it incorporated many features of the traditional operas familiar to the peasants (Ting, 1959: 271-2).

At the same time, the old operas were being reviewed. Those that were considered politically unacceptable were restricted. Others were reformed (Ting, 1959: 280).

While important beginnings were being made in revising the old operas and writing new operas, even more significant developments had been taking place in the countryside. On the pattern first set in the Red areas in the south in the early thirties, small amateur troupes in villages, touring theatrical troupes, and army theatrical troupes were all greatly increased. Throughout the liberated areas of the north, innumerable small drama groups sprang up in the villages, which used the traditional theatrical forms to present plays with a radically new political content. Dramatisations of current conditions were the main fare, and of special importance were the plays which appeared to assist each new political development by informing the masses about it and showing them the planned course of action (Ting, 1959: 247-8, 279).

To promote this mass theatrical movement, great efforts were made to train large numbers of drama workers, and this was one of the main activities of the professionals in the liberated areas (Ting, 1959: 249).

Villages which did not have their own drama groups were reached by touring troupes of actors, who might be professionals (Ting, 1959: 249) or might be semi-professionals who worked their land part of the year and spent the off-season on tour, subsidised by the government (Hinton, 1966:

313). Such troupes provided the only cultural events many villages would have and were therefore assured a large audience.⁷

The Red armies maintained large numbers of theatrical workers, both to perform for soldiers and to secure the support of the masses when moving into new areas. The plays and skits they performed were primarily vehicles of propaganda: the topics were such things as the necessity of fighting the Japanese and the Kuomintang, correcting one's ideology and becoming a good soldier, army-peasant solidarity and cooperation, and celebrations of military victories (Hsiao, 1965: 106-9).

By the summer of 1949, there were an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 literary and artistic (including theatrical) workers attached to the various Red armies, and more than 20,000 other such workers throughout the liberated areas (Chou En-lai, 1950: 27). The importance of these workers, however, exceeds even that suggested by these numbers, for they were to become models for the new socialist theatre that emerged in the 1960's.

These workers were the channel through which literature, art, and theatre were taken to the masses in accordance with Mao's directive that "all our literature and art are for the masses of the people, and in the first place for the workers, peasants and soldiers; they are created for the workers, peasants and soldiers and are for their use" (Mao, 1967b: 22). The numerous troupes were, on the one

hand, linked with specialists at such places as the Lu Hsun Academy of Arts and, on the other hand, they were close to the amateur groups in the villages whom they were involved in training. The abilities and expertise of many of China's best writers and artists were brought to the masses through their participation in these troupes, through the use of their writings by these troupes, and by training large numbers of new writers and artists. Influence did not flow in just one direction--demands from below and experience in mass work led the experts to produce works of a more popular nature than they had previously been writing (for example, The White-haired Girl). The result was a combination of popularising the best of Chinese art and literature so that it could be appreciated by the masses and, at the same time, raising the standards of popular art and literature.

In the area of theatre, the concrete results were performances of the type reported by William Hinton (1966: 312-6) and Edgar Snow (1968: 119-22). They consisted of a wide range of different entertainments: singing, dancing, skits, and full-length operas. The forms were those of the traditional entertainments popular among the masses, albeit with a few innovations. The contents, however, were political and propagandistic--inspiring loyalty to the Party and the Red government, giving news of the latest political and military developments, dramatising current

changes in the countryside, and so on. There were also parts of the programs that were purely, or almost purely, entertainment. Such performances as these two, which both included complete operas, were more elaborate than much of what was happening in the liberated areas. Some of the troupes, and especially those propaganda teams attached to the armies, concentrated more on presenting skits and one-act plays on items of topical interest--large-scale productions were beyond their means, as they were constantly on the move and performing many military duties as well (Hsiao, 1965).

Not just the productions themselves, but also the operations of the theatrical troupes were exemplary. Whether located in specific villages or on tour, the artists were a model of resourcefulness and self-reliance. If they were to keep up with the changing political situation and to adapt their work to specific localities, they could not rely on playwrights elsewhere to provide them with all their scripts. Much of their material, and in some cases all of it, was provided by members of each troupe. The troupe members were at once actors, playwrights, producers, directors, and stagehands. In addition to this they provided their own transportation, looked after as many of their other needs as possible, and even helped others in their work whenever possible. Some would support their families as peasants part of the year and perform during the winter. Those who were soldiers would help with support activities and even

go into battle with the units to which they were attached. The object was to take literature and art everywhere and do so with as little drain as possible on the meagre resources of the people who were their audiences (see E. Snow, 1968: 119-25; Hinton, 1966: 312-6; Hsiao, 1965).⁸ Their dedication and resourcefulness in taking literature and art to the masses is held up as a model for present-day literary and artistic workers.

Notes

¹In the late 1920's in Ting Hsien, Hopei, Sidney Gamble and his co-workers collected forty-eight plays being performed at that time (Chinese Village Plays, 1970). In this country of 454 towns and villages, there were thirty-six theatrical troupes providing entertainment for villagers, chiefly at various festival seasons (Chinese Village Plays, 1970: xvii-xx). Clearly there was a vigorous popular theatre in existence--and it was both amateur and professional (Chinese Village Plays, 1970: xvii, xxvi). The plays, even at that late date, do not appear to reflect any of the theatrical or political developments of the time. The only way in which Gamble indicates that they differed from those of preceding decades was in being somewhat coarser (Chinese Village Plays, 1970: xxii). Such plays as were found in this county were apparently typical of all of northern China, at least (Chinese Village Plays, 1970).

²I am grateful to Ma Sen for pointing out this limited nature of spoken drama.

³Interestingly, it was T'ien Han who was in charge of the touring Peking opera troupes in the northwest (Scott, 1963: 40).

⁴The vigour of these performers and the importance attached to their work is indicated by the fact that even amid the great hardships of the Long March, they gave performances for soldiers and civilians in the evenings after full days of marching (Ting, 1959: 243).

⁵Chiang Ch'ing, who was to become a figure of major importance in the Cultural Revolution, was at this time director of rehearsals for the theatrical troupe of the Lu Hsun Academy of Arts (L. W. Snow, 1972a: 18).

⁶A translation of this opera can be found in Meserve and Meserve (1970). A particularly successful opera, it was awarded the Stalin Prize, jointly with another work, in 1951 (Ting, 1959: 269). Adapted as a ballet, it is now one of the eight model works.

⁷Hinton (1966: 312-6) provides a report of a touring troupe's performance in one North China village that is particularly informative.

⁸The work-style of these troupes and their efforts to take as little as possible from the peasants in the villages they visited, constituted a powerful illustration of the character of the Red government. This probably persuaded the peasants of the value of the new order, as much as the performances they saw.

Chapter 3

Revival and Reform

Liberation presented a new set of problems to workers in the theatre. The very rapid expansion of the liberated areas in the preceding few years required formulation of a policy for dealing with the theatre which had existed in the Nationalist areas. Further, the political tasks of theatre were somewhat different after political control of all China was achieved. It was no longer necessary to encourage the masses to fight the Japanese and the Kuomintang, or to calm their fears in the wake of the expansion of the Red areas. What was necessary after Liberation was to create cultural supports for the new socialist society. A basis for this was laid during the 1950's, although a distinctively new and socialist theatre was to emerge only in the 1960's.

The first problem to be tackled was reviving a theatre that had deteriorated badly. The Japanese had tried to encourage the theatre in the areas they occupied, but it did not thrive under their rule, in part because of the refusal of many renowned artists, such as Mei Lan-fang, to perform while their country was under Japanese rule (Scott, 1956: 38). In the Nationalist areas, too, theatre fared badly. The social and economic disruption of the war years had affected the arts as well as other aspects of life. The government had done nothing to help the theatre during

this time, and its fear of theatre generating opposition to its rule even made it hostile to those theatrical activities that were able to continue. For financial and political reasons, many artists had to give up their professions and find other ways to make a living. Because of this, many theatrical forms were on the verge of extinction by 1949 (Folk Arts, 1954; Scott, 1956: 38; Scott, 1963: 49; Kuo, 1960: 129).

Initially, the theatre was in little better condition in the People's Republic. Although it was later to receive great assistance, the first few years were ones of disorganisation and lack of an overall policy regarding its future. The traditional theatre was clearly in disfavour during 1949-53. When Peking was liberated in 1949, fifty-five traditional operas were banned on grounds of being superstitious, licentious, or depictions of the degradation of Chinese at the hands of foreigners. In other areas of China, additional, or even all, traditional operas were banned (Scott, 1963: 47-8).

While policy was being formulated in these early years, the first developments were already apparent. There was a great increase in theatrical activity throughout the country, taking place with governmental encouragement and assistance. In the countryside, land reform was followed by the appearance of numerous amateur theatrical companies. By 1954, there were more than 100,000 of these (Houn, 1961: 183), and, while the distribution of these groups was

undoubtedly somewhat uneven, this figure surely represents a great resurgence of theatrical activity at the lowest level throughout much of the country. Also by 1954, there were about 10,000 amateur theatrical groups in factories in China (Ibid.). Given the comparatively small size of China's industrial sector at that time, this represented an accessibility to theatre probably comparable to that in the villages. In addition, there were 2,300 professional opera companies (Houn, 1961: 183).¹ The professional companies had been reviving with the assistance of government subsidies and government schools training theatrical personnel (Scott, 1963: 49).

Another early development was a series of measures, beginning in 1950, aimed at demonstrating to the performers that they were better off in the People's Republic and that they should therefore serve it actively and willingly. Whereas previously opera performers had had very low prestige in China, the new government made great efforts to raise their status. They were referred to as "artists" and "teachers of the people", and large national festivals were held in which they were given wide public recognition (Houn, 1961: 189-90). Top Party officials, including Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai, attended and even spoke personally with the performers (Houn, 1961: 190). Press coverage was extensive and some companies were sent to tour abroad. Some performers were recruited into the prestigious New Democratic Youth Corps and the

Communist Party. Similar measures were taken to raise the status of performers in spoken drama shortly later. Such measures were apparently quite successful in generating goodwill toward the Party and the government on the part of many performers (Houn, 1961: 191; Chen, 1959). Some opposition did persist, however, as revealed during the Hundred Flowers period. This criticism was not as serious an occurrence as the actual development of a revisionist theatre in the "black line" period (to be discussed in the next chapter). It is of interest, nevertheless, in that it revealed some of the problems that were arising during the process of theatrical reform. Some of these were: resentment of Party control activities, alleged favouring of pro-Party incompetents over apolitical experts, a bureaucratic work-style on the part of some Party cadres, limited royalties, and egalitarian pay in state-owned theatres (Houn, 1961: 191, 197-8).

Upon the basis thus established both in terms of an audience and of a body of theatre artists, the theatre developed in several different directions in the 1950's. There were operas about current political developments of a nature similar to those before Liberation. There were large-scale efforts to promote and preserve a wide range of different theatrical forms, with particular attention to some that seemed to be on the verge of disappearing. There was a major effort to overhaul the old opera repertoires to make them suitable for the new China. There were also efforts to write new operas and new spoken dramas.

Continuing with the strongly propagandistic purpose of much of pre-Liberation theatre, the early 1950's saw a number of operas and plays on the subject of the improvements brought by Liberation. By telling of these improvements, they served to gain support for the government and to spread certain reforms further. There was a special category of drama consisting of former participants in outlawed activities, such as prostitution, pickpocketing, and gangsterism, themselves performing dramatisations of the end of their old careers and of how their new lives were much better (L. W. Snow, 1972a: 10).

The theatre was also used to inform the masses about ways in which they could make use of some of the recent changes. For example, Little Son-in-Law, which was very widely performed in the early 1950's, showed how a woman was able to end an unhappy arranged marriage and re-marry according to her wishes, because of the new Marriage Law of 1950 (Folk Arts, 1954: 38-40).

There was also much activity with a less direct political purpose in the theatre in these early years. Some of this was connected with preserving old and local opera forms, especially those that were falling into disuse. By 1957, more than 51,000 traditional operas of numerous types had been discovered, over 14,000 of these transcribed, and more than 4,200 revised (Kuo, 1960: 130-1). There were also efforts made to keep many varieties of local opera, shadow theatre, and puppet theatre on the stage as living

art forms (Kuo, 1960: 132; Chen, 1959; R. Yang, 1969: 62; Scott, 1963: 49; Folk Arts, 1954). Even the old opera style of k'un-ch'u received government support (Scott, 1959: 5). This large-scale revival of disappearing theatrical forms had two main causes. One was a concern with guaranteeing the continuation of the local operas which constituted a form of folk art. This was considered valuable in itself (Scott, 1963: 49), and it was also valued as a means of taking political messages to the masses. The second was a determination to preserve the wide range and the historical depth of Chinese theatre so that there would be a firm foundation upon which to build a new form of theatre.

This foundation would have to be suited to the emergence of a socialist theatre. A considerable part of the traditional repertoire consisted of operas about court life, operas promoting traditional values, operas depicting the subjugation of women, operas promoting superstition, and licentious operas. Such elements were responsible for the disfavour shown to the traditional theatre immediately after Liberation. In 1953 (Scott, 1963: 48), a new policy was implemented giving qualified support to the traditional theatre--it was to be maintained but also to be reformed. Some operas were considered so objectionable that they were banned or massively revised. Others needed only minor revisions to improve their political content. Not all had to present positive political messages, but they could not

present negative ones (Kuo, 1960: 130,136; Kuo, 1962: 105; Hsieh, 1963).

It was appreciated that much of the traditional repertoire consisted of operas that portrayed the hardships of the masses and their struggles against landlords and officials. Such operas were given prominence, and the politically acceptable themes in them were emphasised when they were re-written (Hsieh, 1963; Kuo, 1962: 100-104; Kuo, 1960: 128,130). The objective was a transformation of traditional theatre in accordance with Mao's 1942 slogan: "weed through the old to let the new emerge" (Kuo, 1960: 127).

Reform was also undertaken in the artistic and technical areas. The value given the traditional theatre meant that improving its artistic quality was emphasised, both through re-writing and through improvement of the acting (Kuo, 1960: 131; Scott, 1963: 49). In 1956, The Fifteen Strings of Cash (Shih Wu Kuan, 1956) was presented as an example of what could be achieved in this area. It had been revised but mostly just shortened for artistic reasons (Scott, 1963: 49-50). Artistically, it is a particularly good opera and, politically, it is at least acceptable. It is the story of two young people who are accused and convicted of a crime they did not commit. A zealous junior magistrate makes a careful investigation that produces proof of their innocence, whereupon they are freed. Clearly, such an opera does not provide inspiration for socialist construction, but neither does it undermine socialism. It at least

portrays some of the injustices of the old society, such as official incompetence and indifference to the plight of the masses.

A wide range of technical reforms have been made: some were improvements in themselves, and some were changes necessary in order to achieve congruence between form and content. Examples of the former are the removal of the orchestra from the stage and the abolition of some acrobatics which endangered the actors performing them (R. Yang, 1962: 131). An example of the later is the appearance of actresses to play the female roles, which had previously all been played by men (Scott, 1963: 51).

The reform of traditional opera policy of the 1950's was the outcome of a controversy over the future of traditional opera. There was a left line stating that traditional operas could not be reformed so that they could become suitable for socialist China, and that they therefore should not be performed at all. There was a right line stating that the traditional theatre should be preserved without change. The actual policy was a middle line between those two (Kuo, 1960: 136-7).

The period of emphasis on the reform of traditional opera was brief. It was replaced in 1958 by a policy described as "walking on two legs": using both traditional and modern theatre but placing an increasing reliance upon the latter (R. Yang, 1969: 65). Modern theatre had been supported

in earlier years as well, but after 1958 it was promoted more strongly. It was not until the mid-1960's that the new theatre acquired strength and importance. The years preceding that can all be characterised as constituting a period of experimentation prior to a decision about what course of development should be taken.

There were considerable efforts to promote spoken drama. Some of this took the form of translations of Western, especially Russian, plays (Levenson, 1971: 6-19; L. W. Snow, 1972a: 10). The writing of new spoken dramas was encouraged, but the results were disappointing. There were numerous one-act plays but relatively few full-length plays, and the artistic quality was poor. They tended to be fairly unimaginative and unsophisticated portrayals of life in post-Liberation China. They conveyed a correct political message but did so too poorly to be of much value (see Houn, 1961: 193-5). Taming the Dragon and the Tiger (Tuan and Tu, 1961) is a good example of this problem. Its theme is the encouragement of dedication to the struggle to increase production. It tells the story of the efforts of peasants, cadres, and technicians in one county to build a bridge over Dragon River in order to reach the rich iron ore deposits of Tiger Mountain. While chiefly lauding the energy and resourcefulness of the people involved in this project, it also touches upon a number of other important issues: the relations between the older and the younger generations, the emancipation of women, correct cadre work-style, and so on. Unfortunately, the

plot and the characters seem artificial, and there is little dramatic tension.²

More important were the new operas being written. Most of these were historical operas, but a few had contemporary themes (Kuo, 1960: 133-4). Upon the beginnings established in the 1950's (and even earlier in the liberated areas), the creation of operas which used the traditional forms to convey contemporary themes was one of the most important developments of the 1960's. Although much of the other experimentation was later cast aside, the work done in this area paved the way for developments of far-reaching significance. Chapter 5 will take up this issue.

Guaranteeing that the theatre would fulfill its political responsibilities was a difficult task which continues to pose problems even now. In the early post-Liberation period a variety of control measures were undertaken. These measures fell into two main categories: supervision of companies and theatres, and education and re-education of actors and playwrights. The first category, consisting of such things as the licensing of theatres and the nationalisation of opera companies, constituted an effort to prevent whatever opposition that might exist from being voiced. The second category, largely political education, consisted of efforts to persuade the professionals to support the People's Republic willingly and actively (see Houn, 1961: 183-4; R. Yang, 1962: 137). The appearance

of the "black line" in the theatre in the early 1960's indicated that these measures had not been successful and that a socialist theatre did not yet exist in China.

Notes

¹Unfortunately, I do not have comparable data for other years and therefore cannot indicate rates of growth. I also lack information on distribution of both amateur and professional companies. There are some additional figures, however (Houn, 1961: 182-3).

²There have been a few more successful plays, however; for example, Dragon-Beard Ditch (in Meserve and Meserve, 1970).

Chapter 4The Black Line and the Cultural Revolution

It will take a fairly long time to decide the issue in the ideological struggle between socialism and capitalism in our country. The reason is that the influence of the bourgeoisie and of the intellectuals who come from the old society will remain in our country for a long time to come, and so will their class ideology. If this is not sufficiently understood, or is not understood at all, the gravest mistakes will be made and the necessity of waging the struggle in the ideological sphere will be ignored. (Mao, quoted in On the Docks, 1969: 4)

At least as early as the Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art, Mao indicated the importance he gave to the problem of the reform of bourgeois intellectuals and, at the same time, indicated his realisation that such reform would require a long time--eight to ten years (Mao, 1967b: 14). Unfortunately, the problem has proved to be as serious as Mao foresaw and to require an even longer time for its solution. The "black line" in the theatre and in the rest of literature and art is part of the larger problem of the place of bourgeois intellectuals in China's emerging socialist society.

Now and for some time to come, the new socialist China will be dependent upon intellectuals raised and educated in the old China. Most of these people came from landlord or bourgeois backgrounds and had had a correspondingly non-revolutionary life-experience and education. Large numbers of them had supported and been active in the nationalist

struggle and even in various progressive or revolutionary activities. Many were members of the Communist Party. But despite this commitment, their backgrounds and world views were so different from those of the masses of the people that it was difficult for them to fully represent and serve the interests of the masses. In the process of revolutionary struggle, some managed to transform themselves, but in many the change was only partial.

This problem was greatly aggravated by the absorption into the People's Republic of very large numbers of intellectuals who had not participated in these struggles but who chose to remain after Liberation. Their commitment to socialism was slight or even nonexistent. All these intellectuals were badly needed by China to provide expert knowledge in the process of socialist construction and to educate the next generation of intellectuals. Somehow it was necessary to harness their expertise without allowing their non-socialist tendencies to interfere with the building of socialism. This problem was particularly severe with respect to the education of the next generation and of the masses in general. There were still large numbers of people among the masses who retained pre-revolutionary and pre-socialist attitudes and who could be led towards revisionism by such intellectuals (Hinton, 1972b: 24-5).

The great popularity of theatre, especially of Chinese operas, made it an important medium for the education of the masses for socialism or for revisionism. In the

Cultural Revolution, it was an area of particularly acute conflict between the two lines--the black line of the revisionists and the proletarian line of Mao Tse-tung and his supporters (Hinton, 1972b: 49). As will be shown later, the leaders of both lines were consciously trying to control the theatre and use it for their political purposes. Not all the political problems in the theatre were the result of such direct conflict, however. Much of the difficulty was due to a failure on the part of many people in the theatre to recognise the political aspects of theatrical work. By not vigilantly working to ensure that the theatre served socialism, they made it possible for the revisionists to take control of much of China's theatrical world. The political problems in the theatre can therefore be divided into two main aspects: (1) the failure to continue to make the theatre serve socialism, and (2) the intentional use of the theatre to undermine socialism. These two are not strictly separate, but it is important to keep the distinction between them in mind, for not everyone criticised in the theatre during the Cultural Revolution was guilty of intending to destroy socialism. Most, in fact, were guilty only of a blindness that allowed the revisionists to use them for anti-socialist activities.

The first problem, at least, was present as early as Liberation. Despite political instruction and supervision, there had been backsliding among theatrical workers from as early as 1949. Some who had been dedicated political workers

during the war years were overcome by the temptations of a return to the cities and a more regular professional life. They came to put their professional careers first and gave little attention to politics. Professionalism was even more pronounced among those who had not participated in the war-time revolutionary theatre but had been absorbed by the new China at the time of Liberation. Many workers in the theatre after Liberation were thus less concerned with politics than with art:

now, after the victory of the socialist revolution there are people who regard the theatre, art and literature not as weapons for carrying on the Chinese revolution and world revolution but as things to amuse and entertain. Obviously this view is not Marxist-Leninist and runs counter to the orientation of a revolutionary theatre, art and literature. In a socialist society, if the theatre, art and literature are not made to serve the proletariat, then they cease to be the superstructure of socialism, and will instead degenerate, take the road of revisionism and become part of the superstructure rendering service to the restoration of capitalism (Ko, 1965: 30).

The degeneration of theatre showed itself in two areas--in the work-style of theatre artists and in the dramas they wrote and performed.

It appears that after Liberation, careerism among theatre professionals was encouraged and that they became removed from the masses of the people. The efforts to develop the theatre in the post-Liberation years were oriented toward individual rather than collective efforts. The "three-famous" policy promoted famous writers, directors, and actors, and

the "three-high" policy provided for high salaries, royalties, and awards (Swift, 1969: 118-9). At least by the early 1960's, leading artists were receiving extremely large salaries that were supplemented by the large share they received of the net profits of their companies, these being divided among the actors on the basis of talent (Gigon, 1962: 44, 47-8). Individual success could be best achieved in opera companies in the big cities and, although actual information on their location is lacking, this appears to be where they were. In contrast to the preceding period of revolutionary struggle and to the succeeding Cultural Revolution period, the years from 1949 to the mid-1960's are notable for the lack of mention of professional work among the masses. Although the Chinese publications available to me¹ make prominent mention of such work in earlier and later years, there is a curious lack of such material regarding the period in question. Further, the available material on such activities during the Cultural Revolution period (to be discussed in Chapter 6), indicate that much of the activity taking place then was very recent in origin. It therefore appears that professionals in the theatre were becoming removed from the masses. The extent to which the theatre had moved from its revolutionary tradition of serving the masses is indicated by the following passage regarding one opera company in 1961:

Last July, the government asked every Chinese to join the fight against famine. Actors, as state employees, were not exempt. The best Peking opera company was given land on the edge of the city, with orders to cultivate it. The company, however, hired peasants to work the land. At harvest time, the company requested several cars from the government, and all the actors went off to the fields to gather in the fruits of the earth. Chairs were brought for the leading actresses. Behind them, youthful pages from the T'ang or Ming dramas opened parasols to shield them from the sun, and stirred a breeze with swanfeather fans. (Gigon, 1962: 46)

While probably not typical, it shows how far at least some artists were allowed to backslide. The same author reported that there had been a marked decrease in the amount of political discussion carried on in opera companies (Gigon, 1962: 46).

It is against this background that the types of plays being performed must be seen. The prominence given the revival of traditional operas no doubt suited the actors who were predominantly trained for this type of theatre. Apparently many actors strongly resisted plays on contemporary themes, even going so far as to sabotage those that were staged by bad casting and poor performances (Kaplan, 1964: 635). Despite the supposed increasing reliance upon new plays in the "two legs" policy, in 1960-62 traditional operas dominated repertoires throughout China (Kaplan, 1964: 634).²

The emphasis in the 1950's upon promoting traditional operas and translations of foreign works was criticised in the Cultural Revolution. It was then asserted that making feudal, bourgeois, and revisionist literature and art (and

theatre) more readily available to the masses did not truly constitute serving the masses. Rather, it represented handing over the areas of literature and art to counter-revolutionary forces (Shanghai Writing Group for Revolutionary Mass Criticism, 1971).

In addition to criticism of the import of foreign works, foreign methods in the theatre were criticised. In the 1950's, Stanislavsky's methods were heavily relied upon in training actors for spoken drama (Scott, 1963: 51). This approach was denounced as being egoistic and unconcerned with class struggle or any other political issue. It was declared an importation of Soviet revisionism which would lead to similar revisionism in China (Shanghai Revolutionary Mass Criticism Writing Group, 1969). Actors using the Stanislavsky method were probably not doing so with any anti-socialist political intention, but by letting it divert them from the class struggle, they were making a serious political error.

Writers, including playwrights, were similarly moving away from political and toward personal topics. They showed an unwillingness to restrict themselves to subject-matter of a political nature and, when writing on political topics, a tendency to criticise the new socialist society. These were clearly dangerous trends and were criticised as such in the Cultural Revolution (Lin et al., 1968: 23-5).

From the above, it is apparent that, even without attributing intentional anti-socialist attitudes or activities to theatre workers, the theatre in China had moved far from its revolutionary tradition and was not adequately serving socialism. It is therefore not surprising that, as will be shown below, the theatre did harbour some people who were using it for anti-socialist purposes. Their numbers were probably few, but at least some of them were in powerful positions, and they were supported by many theatre workers who were not aware of their own backsliding or of the political significance of their work.

An exhaustive treatment of the use of the theatre by those following the black line is not possible here, but the fact that it was being so used can be established by examining two of the cases that were given particular prominence in the Cultural Revolution--those of Wu Han and T'ien Han.

Wu Han's Peking opera, Hai Jui Dismissed From Office (Wu, 1961), was the most important play of the period leading up to the Cultural Revolution, for it was criticism of this play that launched the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Hai Jui Dismissed From Office is the story of a Ming official, Hai Jui, who was an honest and just official, albeit a loyal servant of the emperor and the established order. Peasants appealed to Hai Jui for justice because they were being deprived of their land and terrorised in various ways by the family of a very powerful local landlord and former official

and by a local official under his influence. Hai Jui took measures to return their land and punish the local tyrants. For this he was worshipped as a saviour by the people, but dismissed from office due to the influence of the powerful family he had injured. Taken out of context, this might be seen as merely a tale of the sufferings of the masses under feudal rule. It could be criticised for showing relief coming from a member of the ruling class, rather than from the efforts of the masses themselves, and therefore of ignoring class struggle. While this is a serious failing, it does not constitute subversion, nor does it indicate why this play was criticised so severely during the Cultural Revolution. An explanation of this play's significance is to be found in Wu Han's personal history and in the social and political context in which it appeared.

Hai Jui Dismissed From Office was both published and presented on the stage in Peking in 1961. Disruption arising from difficulties during the Great Leap Forward still existed. Successive years of natural disasters resulting in bad harvests had created unrest. Out of these problems, there had arisen considerable controversy, reaching to the highest government and Party levels, about what was the correct policy to follow. It was in this context that Hai Jui Dismissed From Office appeared, with its messages of "return the land to the peasants" and "oppose bad persons in power". At this time, the opera could readily be seen as a criticism of the commune movement and as encouragement of the opposition

to it that was then apparent (Pusey, 1969: 31). Confirmation of the fact that it was so interpreted is found in its removal from the stage after only a few performances, apparently as a result of political censorship (Pusey, 1969: 36). The play was not criticised then; it was merely proscribed.

That it was more than fortuitous that an opera with such double meanings should have appeared then can be shown by examining the circumstances surrounding its creation, in particular the position and history of its author. Wu Han was a non-Communist university professor and public official (Ansley, 1968: vi-vii). As a historian and social scientist, he had been a member of China's intellectual community in the Kuomintang areas before Liberation and had been active in criticising the Kuomintang. His method was that of "attacking the present through the past", that is, writing of some historical event in such a way as to criticise something in the present. He was apparently very skillful with this technique (Pusey, 1969). After Liberation, he remained in China and continued his professional career, a career that included a post at the prestigious Tsinghua University. He never became a member of the Communist Party, but instead rose to high position in the China Democratic League, a minor political party (Ansley, 1968: vi-vii). He held a number of public positions, including the honorary post of vice-mayor of Peking. This position was probably given to him as a representative of the non-Communist

academic community (Ansley, 1968: vi-vii; Pusey, 1969: 57).

Wu was almost totally silent for the ten years following Liberation, but in 1959 he suddenly began producing an incredible number of articles. Between 1959 and 1961, he published 100-200 articles, one Peking opera, and four collections of previous articles. A fifth volume appeared in 1962 or 1963 (Pusey, 1969: 44). There is a clear continuity between the content and style of Wu's writing at this time and before Liberation. At both times, he was being critical of the existing government and using the tactic of "attacking the present through the past" (Pusey, 1969: 68).

On 19 June 1959, Wu Han published an article entitled "Hai Jui Upbraids the Emperor" in Jen Min Jih Pao under a pseudonym. This was a discussion of Hai Jui bravely criticising an unjust emperor. On 14 July, Minister of Defense P'eng Teh-huai wrote a letter to Mao, criticising the Great Leap Forward and some of Mao's other policies. Whether or not Wu Han knew of this coming event, it is certain that this article was referring to the considerable discontent caused by the Great Leap Forward and was intended to encourage opposition to it. The connection is made more apparent by Wu's beginning to work on Hai Jui Dismissed From Office almost immediately after the Lushan Conference in August 1959, at which P'eng and his supporters were defeated by Mao and his supporters and P'eng was dismissed from office (Ansley, 1968: 119-21). There are also indications

that Hai Jui was being used by others as well as a symbol for the opposition to the Great Leap Forward (Pusey, 1969: 17-20; Ansley, 1968: 153).³

After Hai Jui Dismissed From Office was withdrawn from the stage, Wu continued to publish articles with double meanings (Pusey, 1969: 37-48). Some of his work at this time was done with Teng T'o and Liao Mo-sha, the three jointly producing a column published in Frontline entitled "Notes From Three-Family Village". Together with "Evening Chats at Yenshan", another column appearing in Frontline and in Jen Min Jih Pao and written separately by Teng T'o, these articles constituted a concerted attack on the current policy of Mao and the Party (Pusey, 1969: 44; Ansley, 1968: 122).⁴ When the political climate changed in 1962 to make the publication of such articles dangerous, the series "Evening Chats at Yenshan" concluded with an article entitled "Of the Thirty-six Strategems, to Depart is Best". Wu's writings came to an abrupt stop at the same time (Pusey, 1969: 45).

What was particularly serious about this group of writings was the political position of the people responsible. Teng T'o and Liao Mo-sha were members of the Peking Party Committee and Teng T'o was its secretary. Teng T'o was also at different times editor-in-chief of both Frontline and Jen Min Jih Pao, both of which were organs of the Peking Party Committee (Ansley, 1968: 133, 161; Pusey, 1969: 44-5; Yao, 1966: 29). Standing behind these people was P'eng Chen, the first secretary of the Peking Party Committee, the mayor of

Peking, member of the CCP Central Committee, and the eighth-ranking person in the Party (Ansley, 1968: 129; Hinton, 1972a: 35; Pusey, 1969: 43). He was one of the most prominent persons to fall in the Cultural Revolution. Most of those who were dismissed during the Cultural Revolution were Party and government officials in Peking (Ansley, 1968: 125), and it appears that there had been a concerted attack upon Mao's leadership and policies on the part of the Peking Party Committee, one of the most powerful ones in the country. The object appears to have been a return of P'eng Teh-huai and the adoption of the revisionist policies advocated by him (Hinton, 1972b: 35). Wu Han was not himself an important political figure, but his connections with powerful persons (connections which were probably made by way of his vice-mayorship) gave his writings a political significance that they would not otherwise have had. It was probably through such contacts that Wu knew when it was safe to write his articles and when he should stop; it was certainly such people who made it possible for his articles to appear in such widely circulated papers as Jen Min Jih Pao; and, as will be shown below, when he came under attack in the Cultural Revolution, they made some efforts to protect him.

One point remains to be made about Hai Jui Dismissed From Office. This concerns the question of how it was that Wu Han, an academic who had never before written drama, came to write a Peking opera on this particular topic. In the preface to the opera, Wu Han stated that this had not been

his idea, but rather had been suggested to him by some dramatist friends. He said that they knew that he had written some articles on Hai Jui and thought that he should write an opera about Hai Jui as well. They advised and helped him through seven revisions during the year in which the opera was written (Wu, 1961: 1-2).⁵ This indicates that there were persons in the theatre concerned with using the theatre intentionally to promote the black line.

Hai Jui Dismissed From Office was not an isolated case. There were a number of such works, and that they had support in official circles is indicated by the fact that they received good reviews in the official press, were published in leading magazines, and were performed by publicly financed drama troupes (Hinton, 1972b: 36). One of these were Hsieh Yao-huan by T'ien Han. It is the story of a court lady of the T'ang dynasty who, along with the empress she served, stood up for the interests of the people in opposition to powerful families. She advocated the return of land to the peasantry and died as a martyr for the masses (Goldman, 1966: 140; "Criticism", 1966: 49-50).⁶ This play was guilty of essentially the same sort of double meanings as was Hai Jui Dismissed From Office (Goldman, 1966: 141).

T'ien Han was a more prominent person than Wu Han. He was noted as an early progressive in the theatre in pre-Liberation days. He contributed a great deal to the early development of the modern Chinese theatre, through experimentation with new acting and production methods. He has

written numerous plays, but they have been a less important contribution. He did not go to the Red areas before Liberation, but remained in the Kuomintang areas during the war against the Japanese and held a high position in the Cultural and Propaganda Department of the Kuomintang government. After the Japanese defeat he went to Hong Kong and returned to China only in 1948 (Scott, 1963: 40-1). He, as well as Wu Han, was one of the many intellectuals absorbed by the People's Republic after Liberation, who were not Party or pro-Party people before then. T'ien, however, did subsequently become a Party member and at the time of the Cultural Revolution was secretary of the Party group of the Union of Chinese Stage Artists (Goldman, 1966: 140), although he may have been only a figure-head (Scott, 1963: 40).

It appears that T'ien, a lifetime professional in the theatre, had consistently from at least 1950, pursued a policy of favouring expertise over political commitment. He had alleged that theatre workers were not well treated despite the great improvement for them since Liberation and had opposed political training for young actors. T'ien was opposing the Party and promoting individual careerism (Shih Yen-sheng, 1966). T'ien, as well as Wu, had powerful connections--he was a close associate of Chou Yang (Goldman, 1966: 140), another figure to fall in the Cultural Revolution.⁷

The increasing power of revisionism, in the theatre as well as elsewhere, had not escaped the notice of Mao and of some other people. As soon as the economic situation

improved in the early 1960's, a movement to combat revisionism began. The first action appears to have taken place at the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth CCP Central Committee in 1962. The communique it issued emphasised the importance of continuing the class struggle and warned against "various opportunist ideological tendencies in the Party" (exerpt in The Great Cultural, 1968: 9).

Literature and art were identified as areas where there were particular problems. In December 1963, Mao issued a strongly worded statement on problems in literature and art, with special mention of the theatre:

Problems abound in all forms of art such as the drama, ballads, music, the fine arts, the dance, the cinema, poetry and literature, and the people involved are numerous; in many departments very little has been achieved so far in socialist transformation. The "dead" still dominate in many departments. What has been achieved in the cinema, new poetry, folk songs, the fine arts and the novel should not be underestimated, but there too, quite a few problems exist. As for such departments as the drama, the problems are even more serious. The social and economic base has changed, but the arts as part of the superstructure, which serve the base, still remain a serious problem. Hence we should proceed with investigation and study and attend to this matter in earnest.

Isn't it absurd that many Communists are enthusiastic about promoting feudal and capitalist art, but not socialist art? (Mao, 1967a: 10-11)

This was followed in June 1964 by a strong statement criticising the leadership of the national mass organisations in literature and art, accusing them of sliding "right down to the brink of revisionism" (Mao, 1967a: 11). These clear

calls for reform went unheeded except for a rectification of the Federation of Literature and Art Circles in late 1964.

When stronger action was taken, it was directed, not at backsliders in general, but at persons who had clearly been using literature and art as political tools for the opposition. The first public event of the Cultural Revolution, beginning in late 1965, was criticism of Hai Jui Dismissed From Office. This should not be interpreted as indicating a great and particular importance for this one play, considered in isolation. Rather, Hai Jui Dismissed From Office was being presented as a symbol of revisionism in art and literature and of the powerful persons involved. The criticisms applied to it were very quickly extended both to other work in literature and art and to the people standing behind such work. Even in the very first public criticism (Yao, 1965), these broader implications were indicated.

In November 1965, the criticism of Hai Jui Dismissed From Office was launched in Shanghai. Mao was undoubtedly involved, and he may even have been in Shanghai at that time. He had disappeared from public view shortly after calling for a new wave of criticism of counter-revolutionary ideology⁸ at a meeting of the central leadership of the Party, in September and October. There has been speculation that he may have planned the opening stage of the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai during the silent months from November 1965 to May 1966 (Ansley, 1968: 125). In any case, it was on 10 November

1965 that Wen-yi Pao, a Shanghai paper, printed an article by Yao Wen-yuan and Chiang Ch'ing⁹ which denounced Hai Jui Dismissed From Office as a big poisonous weed undermining socialism. The article ended with a statement that its criticisms of Hai Jui Dismissed From Office had broader applicability and that public debate should take place concerning this opera because it represented widespread failings in literature and art:

We consider that The Dismissal of Hai Jui¹⁰ is not a fragrant flower, but a poisonous weed. Although it was published and staged several years ago, there was a whole series of articles in praise of it, and similar works and articles were disseminated in large quantities. The effect has been serious and the poison has flowed over a wide area. If it is not eliminated, it will gravely undermine the people's cause. This play should therefore be discussed. In such discussions, if only we base ourselves on the viewpoint of class analysis, we surely can learn a profound lesson from the realistic and historical class struggle. (Yao, 1965: 40-1)

Attempts were made to prevent this article from being reprinted in Peking. However, it did appear there in the Liberation Army Daily (Hinton, 1972b: 55), and later in Jen Min Jih Pao. It appeared in the latter paper only on 29 November. This lengthy delay was one of the actions of this paper which was later to be criticised. When Jen Min Jih Pao finally published Yao's article, it did so with an invitation for readers to participate in a public debate in the pages of that paper concerning the issues raised by the article. It printed 118 of the responses to this invitation. At the beginning, it printed several articles either defending Wu

or putting the whole matter in an academic context. The later accusations that Jen Min Jih Pao tried to stifle and to divert criticism of Hai Jui Dismissed From Office appears to have been quite accurate (Ansley, 1968: 128; Pusey, 1969: 49-53).

A particularly interesting document appearing in the pages of Jen Min Jih Pao was Wu Han's self-criticism (Wu, 1965), printed at the end of December 1965. A very large part of this lengthy document is taken up with an academic, historical discussion of Hai Jui and of the historical accuracy of Hai Jui Dismissed From Office. This can easily be interpreted as an attempt to put the opera in an academic, rather than a political, context. This interpretation is confirmed by the efforts Wu made throughout his self-criticism to present himself as a wayward academic whose ideological confusion had led him unintentionally to write a politically harmful opera. He asserted that he had written the historical opera purely for literary reasons and with no idea that it might have any contemporary significance. This was in direct contradiction to what he had written in the preface to the opera (Wu, 1961: 1-19). On the surface, the self-criticism was an admission of serious error, but the faults Wu admitted to (academic) were not the same as the ones of which he was accused (political). The self-criticism therefore appears to have been an escape manoeuvre rather than a sincere admission of wrong-doing. But even as an escape manoeuvre, it lacked sincerity, for some of the passages were

so unbelievable as to be ludicrous. For example, in one passage he claimed never to have tried to find out why his opera was removed from the stage, a statement which is very difficult to believe. He produces a feeble excuse and ends the paragraph with the following words:

....my attitude has been highly irresponsible to contemporary politics, as well as to the party and the cause of the people. I should never, and can never, use any pretext to absolve myself of this responsibility and mistake. (Wu, 1965: 102)

It is difficult to believe that Wu could have intended his self-criticism to be taken at face value at all. That he should have thus made a mockery of his self-criticism indicates that he must have felt protected by powerful persons.

This was, indeed, the case. Aside from the support indicated by the actions of such major papers as Jen Min Jih Pao, this was shown most conclusively by the "Outline Report".¹¹ This was written by P'eng Chen and a number of other senior Party leaders and approved by the CCP Central Committee in February 1966. Although claiming adherence to the Cultural Revolution ("waving the red flag to oppose the red flag"), this report actually constituted an effort to obscure the political issues involved and to restrict criticism of Hai Jui Dismissed From Office to the academic sphere. It also tried to restrain the criticism from spreading to other persons.

The articles in Jen Min Jih Pao tapered off after the initial onslaught, but there was a resurgence in April and May of 1966 (Pusey, 1969: 52-5).¹² In May, two events

occurred that moved public criticism directly from Wu Han to the powerful persons behind him.

The first of these was Yao Wen-yuan's article, "On 'Three-Family Village': The Reactionary Nature of Evening Chats at Yenshan and Notes From Three-Family Village" (Yao, 1966), which was first printed in two Shanghai papers on 10 May 1966. Referring to the three authors as Three-Family Village, Yao made the following accusation:

Evening Chats at Yenshan and Notes From Three-Family Village came on the stage close on the heels of Hai Jui Dismissed From Office. They formed a deliberate, planned and organised major attack on the Party and socialism, master-minded in detail by Three-Family Village. (Yao, 1966: 33)

Although not made public until a year later, on 16 May 1966, Party leaders received a circular from the CCP Central Committee (translated in The Great Power, 1969: 429-36) which repudiated the "Outline Report" and denounced P'eng Chen as being responsible for it.

The second public event took place on 25 May 1966, when several people at Peking University put up a big-character poster criticising Lu P'ing, President of Peking University and secretary of its Party committee, for trying to restrict discussion of Hai Jui Dismissed From Office to the academic sphere. This poster directly attacked a powerful Party person (Lu) and accused him of being a revisionist. On 2 June, the contents of the poster were published in Jen Min Jih Pao and broadcast nationally on Peking Radio, leading

to a great upheaval on campuses and elsewhere (Hinton, 1972a: 18-19; Hinton, 1972b: 56).

As the Cultural Revolution continued in one direction to become a struggle for power at the highest Party levels, it also continued in another direction as criticism and weeding out of revisionism in the theatre and in other areas of the superstructure. There was much to be criticised and weeded out: from Liberation up until the eve of the Cultural Revolution, the theatre had been mainly under the direction of those who were denounced in the Cultural Revolution (L. W. Snow, 1972a: 6).

One of the people to be so denounced was T'ien Han, in December of 1966 (Swift, 1969: 119). His play Hsieh Yao-huan was, together with Hai Jui Dismissed From Office and Li Hui-niang,¹³ one of the three most criticised plays of the Cultural Revolution period. All were historical plays sharing several important faults: eulogising class-transcendental virtues (in violation of the method of class analysis), drawing parallels between the life of the masses under feudal rule and their life in the People's Republic, eulogising heroes who were not from the masses but who supposedly represented them, and advocating the return of land to the people ('Criticism', 1966: 50). These works and others were heavily criticised in major papers, and the masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers were encouraged to join in the criticism. This was seen as an important means of destroying their bad influence (Yao, 1966: 66-8).

However, aside from the criticism of Hai Jui Dis-
missed From Office, the most important developments regarding
the theatre in the Cultural Revolution were in the creation
of politically acceptable work rather than in the denunciation
of unacceptable work. This, too, was not just a spontaneous
development. There was conscious direction of the desired
trend and intentional creation of a political base in the
theatre. This activity was centred upon the development of
Peking operas on contemporary themes.

Notes

¹These are: Chinese Literature, China Reconstructs, Peking Review, and translations in Extracts from China Mainland Magazines and Selections from China Mainland Magazines (from such magazines as Hung-ch'i and Wen-yi Pao).

²This source does not indicate whether these were revised traditional operas, in total or in part. Given the great activity in the 1950's in revising traditional operas, I expect that a large proportion of these were revised.

³There was another play about Hai Jui which appeared before Wu Han's play: Hai Jui's Memorial to the Throne. This was a collective creation of the Shanghai Peking Opera Institute. It and its creators were also criticised during the Cultural Revolution ("Criticism", 1966: 49; Swift, 1969: 118).

⁴"Evening Chats at Yenshan" began in March 1961 and ended at the time of the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth CCP Central Committee in 1962. "Notes From Three-Family Village" began in October 1961 and ended in 1964 (Ansley, 1968: 122-3).

⁵The troupe that performed Hai Jui Dismissed From Office was the Peking Opera Company at Peking. I am not certain, but I think that this is one of the most prominent troupes in the country. It is interesting to note that it is this same troupe that is credited with the final revision of Shachiapang in 1970.

⁶I am here relying upon brief descriptions in the sources cited. As far as I know, the only "big poisonous weed" in the theatre in English translation is Hai Jui Dismissed From Office. Also, it is only with respect to Hai Jui Dismissed From Office, that a sizeable body of the criticism that appeared in the Chinese press has been translated into English.

I do not know the dates of writing, performance, or publication of this play.

⁷Goldman (1966), however, suggests that Chou Yang may not have been a revisionist, that he was unjustly used as a scapegoat.

⁸This included specific mention of Wu Han ("16 May 1966 Circular" in The Great Power, 1969: 429).

⁹Chiang Ch'ing's name did not appear on the article at the time, but she has since been credited with helping to write it (Hinton, 1972b: 55). Chiang Ch'ing had earlier (July 1962) criticised this play in a letter sent to Hsia Yen, an important official in literary and artistic circles. Her letter was ignored (L. W. Snow, 1972a: 19).

¹⁰This is an alternative translation of the title of Wu Han's opera.

¹¹The full title of this document is "Outline Report Concerning the Current Academic Discussion of the Group-of-Five in Charge of the Cultural Revolution" (translated in The Great Power, 1969: 436-440).

¹²Pusey (1969: 52-5) analyses the differences in the articles printed at different times on this topic during the six months from November 1965 to May 1966 and makes some interesting comments on the changes in political climate that these shifts apparently reflected.

¹³Unfortunately, this play has been so over-shadowed by the other two, that I know almost nothing about it.

Chapter 5Peking Opera on Contemporary Themes

During the Cultural Revolution, a symphony, two ballets, and five Peking operas were presented as "the eight model revolutionary works." Together, these works constituted examples of what the Cultural-Revolution forces considered socialist art and literature to be (Wen, 1967: 100). The symphony and the ballet are imported, foreign art forms. The Peking opera before the Cultural Revolution was a highly stylised, elaborate art form which seems unsuited for contemporary themes. The choice of these areas for the model works was an intentional selection of the most difficult areas of art and literature. In showing that they could successfully embody contemporary revolutionary themes, the importance and the possibility of carrying out such a transformation in all areas of art and literature was dramatically demonstrated.

Furthermore, all three of these art forms were particularly suited for public presentation. An exemplary novel, poem, or song could not have made the same impact as any of the three chosen art forms. As large-scale productions presented for audiences of hundreds or thousands, they were vivid and powerful vehicles for the presentation of the new model for art and literature. Their group nature was also an advantage, for it made it possible for a struggle over the correct path in literature and art to take place during the actual processes of creation of the model works. When presented to the public, they could then also be

presented as examples of the reform of artists and artistic organisations, and they were prominently used as such examples.

Here, only the five model Peking operas will be discussed. They are probably the most important model works because they set the pattern for the theatre, a particularly important art form in China, and because they represent the reform of a Chinese, rather than of a foreign, art form.

There had been experiments in creating Peking operas on contemporary themes long before the Cultural Revolution, for as early as the 1910's Mei Lan-fang experimented with this (D. Yang, 1968: 228-9). However, such efforts were unusual before the Yenan period, when, with the support of the Red government, there were considerable efforts to create new operas on contemporary themes within the established Chinese opera styles. These efforts continued, and continued to receive some official support, in the early years of the People's Republic (D. Yang, 1968: 187). It is not clear whether any of these were Peking operas. However, it is certain that Peking operas on contemporary themes were being performed by 1958. As part of the new emphasis, beginning in that year, on creating new works rather than just revising old ones, there was a festival of operas on contemporary themes that included the presentation of several Peking operas (D. Yang, 1968: 187-8).

The most notable of these was The White-haired Girl, an adaptation of the award-winning opera of the Yenan years. It was quite similar to the earlier opera. When premiered in 1958, the leading roles were played by top actors, and the cast as a whole was particularly good. The opera was well received and considered a success (D. Yang, 1968: 188-90). The fact that an already very successful opera was chosen for adaptation and that top actors were chosen for it indicates that this opera was being treated as a test case and that its success was something of a breakthrough. The White-haired Girl has since been used to lead the way in another area as well--in ballet form, it is one of the eight model works.

Work on operas on contemporary themes continued after this, but little headway was made for some years. This can be attributed to the problems in the theatre described in the previous chapter. Beginning in 1963, a concerted effort was made to change this situation. The first action did not take place in the field of Peking opera, but rather in the field of spoken drama. It was, however, important in leading the way for the development of Peking opera on contemporary themes. This occurrence was the East China Drama Festival (L. W. Snow, 1972a: 20). At it were presented the best of a large number of new spoken dramas which had been written in the last year as part of an organised movement for dramas on contemporary themes (Tung, 1969: 124-5). Some of the ones performed were considered

quite successful. Also at this festival, there were speeches by several prominent persons--Chiang Ch'ing, Ko Ching-shih (mayor of Shanghai), and Chou En-lai--on the importance of this new development in the theatre (L. W. Snow, 1972a: 20).

In the same year, plans were made at a month-long meeting in Peking for a festival of Peking opera on contemporary themes for the next year. It was in 1963 that a large-scale effort was first mounted in this area. In retrospect, the activities in the theatre in 1963 can be seen as a prelude to the Cultural Revolution, and they have been identified as such quite prominently in the Chinese press (Tung, 1969: 124).

Part of the motivation for Peking opera on contemporary themes, voiced in 1963-4, was a declining attendance at Peking operas (Li Ch'i, 1964: 28). There was a fear that Peking opera was losing its relevance in socialist China and that if it was to survive it must transform itself. Peking opera had become somewhat out of step with the rest of the culture. It was so highly stylised that a considerable amount of special knowledge was required in order to be able to understand it--special pronunciation patterns, acting conventions, music patterns, and so on were all dependent on such audience knowledge. Very large numbers of young Chinese, grown accustomed to Western drama and cinema styles, lacked this knowledge (D. Yang, 1968: 185-6). The content of the operas--tales of emperors, court ladies, and scholars in traditional China--was also thought to be contributing to

the decreasing attendance. There were, therefore, non-political reasons, although the latter were more significant. It was the political aspect of the problem that determined the timing, the manner, and the particular form that the new operas were to take.

The 1964 Festival of Peking Opera on Contemporary Themes marked the greatest change in theatre in China since Liberation. It established the pattern for the subsequent far-reaching changes in all forms of Chinese opera. Shortly after this festival, similar festivals of various Chinese operas on contemporary themes were held in all regions of the country, and the operas produced at them rapidly spread from the major centres to the smaller cities and towns ("The Revolutionisation of the Chinese Theatre", 1966: 124).

As four of the five model operas were presented at the Festival of Peking Opera on Contemporary Themes, and the fifth, On the Docks, was presented only shortly later, this is a good place to discuss them individually.¹

The first successful one was Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy (Wen, 1967: 106). It was also one of the earliest; work on it began in the Peking Opera Theatre of Shanghai in 1958 (Kuang in Chiang, 1968: 16). As with many of the new operas, it was adapted from work that had previously been successful on other forms. This opera was based on an episode in a best-selling novel, Tracks in the Snowy Forest, which had also served as the story for a film of the same name (L. W. Snow, 1972a: 28-9). In Peking opera form it was

given a new title, Taking the Bandits' Stronghold, which it retained through several revisions until the late 1960's when a further revision was renamed Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy.

This opera presents the story of how a detachment of the People's Liberation Army freed an area of northeast China from the control of a brutal bandit leader working for the Kuomintang during the War of Liberation. Helped by the local people, who also join in the final attack, the PLA men devise a plan for capturing the mountain stronghold. Yang Tze-jung, an experienced PLA scout, disguises himself as a bandit, infiltrates the stronghold, gains the trust of the bandit leaders, and makes it possible for his comrades to enter and defeat the Tiger Mountain bandits.

Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy is a well-constructed tale of adventure and heroism. It has the necessary noble heroes, villainous enemies, and dramatic moments of confrontation. More than this, though, it is able to use this framework to present a vivid picture of the dedication of the revolutionaries of the War of Liberation and of the benefits they brought to the Chinese people.

Shachiapang is also one of the earliest of the model Peking operas. It had first been a Shanghai opera, Sparks Amid the Reeds, written in 1959 and first performed in 1960. It underwent three revisions and was a great success when re-staged in 1964 (D. Yang, 1968: 196). Chiang Ch'ing took this Shanghai opera to the Peking Opera Company of Peking with a request that they create a Peking opera on this basis

(L. W. Snow, 1972a: 122). With some considerable difficulties, for this was the same company that had staged Hai Jui Dismissed From Office and some other "poisonous weeds"

("Shachiapang" Revolutionary Fighting Regiment of the No. 1 Peking Opera Company of Peking, in Chiang, 1968: 45-6), a Peking opera version was performed successfully at the Festival of Peking Operas on Contemporary Themes. Shortly after that, on Mao's suggestion, the title was changed to Shachiapang (L. W. Snow, 1972a: 122-3).

This opera is set in the village of Shachiapang during the Anti-Japanese War. Eighteen wounded PLA men are recuperating there when it is captured by local bandits who are in league with both the Japanese and the Kuomintang. With help from the villagers, the soldiers take refuge in the nearby marshes. The enemy knows of their presence and searches for them. It is only due to the support of the villagers that they are protected and the village is finally liberated.

The army political instructor is a noble and impressive figure, and all the PLA men clearly have very good relations with the villagers--helping out despite their injuries and making the least possible demands upon the villagers. However, in this opera it is the civilians who stand out. Particularly impressive is Sister Ah-ching, an underground Party cadre, whose resourcefulness and courage are truly exemplary. She is the dominant character in the play.

The dramatic excitement of this play appears to be less than that of Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy, but here, too, there is an interesting story combined with a revolutionary political message. The dominant themes are the contribution of the masses to the war effort and the excellent relations between the PLA and the masses that make this possible. This opera is noted for its particularly good music, upon which the model revolutionary symphony Shachiapang is based.

The Red Lantern is possibly the most popular of the Peking operas on contemporary themes (D. Yang, 1968: 203; L. W. Snow, 1972a: 241). This play, too, was adapted from a Shanghai opera and was premiered at the Festival of Peking Operas on Contemporary Themes (D. Yang, 1968: 204).

The Red Lantern is another opera on the period of the Anti-Japanese War, but this time the focus is entirely upon civilians. The heroes are three generations of a worker's family. The foremost hero, Li Yu-ho, is a railway switchman and Party member working in the Japanese-occupied areas. The plot revolves around the delivery of a secret code to a nearby guerrilla unit. Under torture, one of Li's comrades identifies Li as the courier. Li himself defies the Japanese commander and dies rather than reveal the hiding place of the code. His mother bravely dies with him, also refusing to hand it over. His daughter carries on the family's revolutionary tradition by escaping surveillance

by the Japanese to retrieve the code from its hiding place and deliver it to the guerrillas.

The plot is developed well and maintains interest, but the great achievement of this opera is the three central characters. According to an American actress who has seen this opera, a convincing and effective blend of realism and idealism is achieved. These characters seem genuine and human, and at the same time successfully portray the highest revolutionary qualities. She attributes The Red Lantern's popularity to this success in characterisation (L. W. Snow, 1972a: 241, 244).

Raid on the White Tiger Regiment is another war story, but this time of the Korean War. It was first written in 1958, based upon a true story. It was also performed at the Festival of Peking Opera on Contemporary Themes after several revisions.

The story is about a detachment of the Chinese People's Volunteers in Korea during the Korean War. With the help of the Korean people and two Korean soldiers, this reconnaissance detachment carries out a daring operation behind enemy lines. Under excellent leadership, the soldiers manage to overcome numerous obstacles to carry out a surprise attack on the headquarters of a crack regiment--the White Tiger Regiment--of the enemy forces. Coordinated with a major advance of the Korean and Chinese forces, it makes an important contribution to this offensive.

Dramatically, this opera appears to be somewhat weaker than the three outlined above. The plot seems artificial in places, and the characters are less memorable than in the other three operas. The particular achievement of this opera is reported to be its successful adaptation of traditional Peking opera acrobatics to portray modern warfare (D. Yang, 1968: 211).

Raid on the White Tiger Regiment differs from the other operas chiefly in its central themes--the liberation struggles of other peoples and the role of the Chinese people in helping them.

The final model revolutionary Peking opera is On the Docks. It is the newest of the model operas and remains the weakest. In response to a call in 1963 for operas on socialist construction, Morning on the Docks was written as a northern Kiangsu opera. Chiang Ch'ing suggested that it be adapted for Peking opera, and On the Docks was the result (Hsieh, in Chiang, 1968: 28-9).

The setting is the Shanghai docks in 1963. Dockers are shown zealously doing their work for China and for the countries to which shipments are being sent. A crisis regarding the political conditions in one crew is precipitated by two occurrences. One is the dissatisfaction of one young docker and his request for transfer to a more glamorous job. The other is the discovery of some loose rice on the dock. Apparently a sack broke while being loaded on a waiting ship. This is considered serious because it means that a sack was

sent out underweight and this violates the high work standards of the crew; further, nobody will admit to responsibility. The matter becomes more serious when it is noticed that there is some loose fibreglass on the docks in the area--it might have become mixed with the rice in the broken sack. There then ensues a hurried search for that sack before the imminent sailing of the ship. The very capable Party secretary of the crew, a woman, leads the way in resolving these problems. In the end, the sack is found, the dissatisfied young docker admits to responsibility and vows to reform himself, and the troubles in the crew are traced to an old warehouse-keeper who is linked to the United States, Japan, and Taiwan.

Artistically, this is by far the poorest of the model operas. The attempts to create dramatic tension seem very strained and unsuccessful. The characters, even the leading ones, are wooden and uninspiring. Even in the latest revision (1972), there remain such lines as "Ma (full of gladness): Ever since the Party held its Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee last year, things in the countryside have been getting better and better." The other operas are more effective in conveying their political messages, and this one will undoubtedly undergo further revision.

Presumably, it was included among the model operas, not for its artistic quality, but in order to promote operas on the period of socialist construction. Clearly, such operas are more difficult to create, for the class struggle is more

subtle and the dramatic occurrences of wartime are not available to provide a stirring plot. Experimentation with such operas is still in the beginning stages, and greater success can be expected in the future.

The five model Peking operas, taken together, demonstrate a new political use of the theatre. Out of their variety of settings, plots, and characters, a common pattern can be discerned. All else is subordinate to the creation of highly idealised socialist heroes. In every case, the emphasis is upon one or a few such persons who, by their resourcefulness and courage, make contributions to the revolution or to socialism. However, these are not presented, as Western heroes so commonly are, as unusual people with individual abilities beyond those of most people. Nor are they prominent figures in decisive historical (past or present) events. Rather, they are heroes from among the masses--simply peasants or workers or soldiers or basic-level cadres. They are out of the ordinary chiefly through their dedication and experience--qualities that any members of the audience is capable of acquiring. So, while idealised in the exemplary quality of their actions, they are in another sense very close to the lives of the people watching them on the stage.

Similarly, their actions and successes are within the possible experience of the masses of the Chinese people. Rather than dealing with unusual or world-shaking events, the operas are dramatic stories drawn from common experience. In each opera something is achieved that contributes to the

success of revolution and socialism, but the achievements are small-scale ones. Furthermore, they are all cooperative achievements. The heroes do not achieve individual successes--they play leading roles in collective undertakings in which many people from among the masses make vital contributions. It was because of such innumerable small successes on the part of millions of Chinese people that the People's Republic could be established and continue to develop today. The model operas are a glorification of precisely these contributions. They represent the beginning of an art and literature in which the masses of the Chinese people take centre stage.

A supplementary and connected theme of particular importance that is shared by all the model operas is the emancipation of women. Women remain partly within the context of family relations as mothers, daughters, and so on, and are shown fulfilling these roles with great love and virtue. But at the same time, they are, in every model opera, shown moving outside the family to join in revolutionary and socialist struggles and make important contributions to them. In two of the model operas, Shachiapang and On the Docks, women are the primary heroes and individual men are secondary heroes. In The Red Lantern, a man is the central hero, but his mother and daughter come very close to him in importance. The other two model operas, probably because they are so military in setting, have less important roles for women, but even in them there are exemplary women. (In none of the model operas do women appear as villains.) Women in the model operas are

both shown as equals of men and given equal importance on the stage. The model operas have given women their rightful place in Chinese art and literature as surely as they have done so for the workers, peasants and soldiers.

There are a variety of secondary political themes regarding the importance of correct army-people relations, working hard to build socialism, helping liberation struggles in foreign countries, educating the younger generation for socialism, and so on. Importance is given to dramatising correct positions on major issues, but the actual issues themselves are less important than the portrayals of correct analysis and effective action based upon it. The message is a generalised one of people searching for the best solution to a problem and then putting it into practice. Whatever the specific issue, the guidance of the Party and the importance of good leadership on the part of basic-level cadres are given great emphasis.

In every model opera there is a clear comparison of "past bitterness" and "present happiness"--the message is unmistakable: the actions of these heroes must be emulated to maintain the socialist society they created or else there may be future bitterness as well.

A few of the more important aspects of the model operas are clearly indicated by the trends that appear when earlier and later texts of the same operas are compared.³ The chief difference is a decrease in emphasis on the "negative characters" (villains) and an increase in emphasis on

the "positive characters" (heroes and the masses in general). The issue of the comparative treatment of these two types of character has been an important one in the development of the model Peking operas. The policy that was adopted and increasingly put into effect was one of having the positive characters clearly dominant (see Chiang, 1968; Feng, 1964). Toward this end the negative characters have consistently been given fewer songs and have been in other ways pushed aside to make way for the positive characters. For example, Taking the Bandits' Stronghold was renamed Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy in order to give prominence to the heroes and their resourcefulness, rather than to the villains and their strength (L. W. Snow, 1972a: 36-7). At the same time as the negative characters are pushed aside, the positive characters are emphasised more strongly. In some cases this has been done by adding songs for the heroes which demonstrate their revolutionary and socialist virtues more strongly (Chiang, 1968).

Various political messages contained in the operas have been altered or developed more forcefully during the process of revision. For example, in Raid on the White Tiger Regiment, the 1972 version gives increased prominence to the Korean people and the theme of the importance of foreign wars of liberation is brought out more clearly. Another example can be found in On the Docks: in the earlier version there was considerable ambiguity about the problems arising on the

docks, but in the later version the two people responsible are shown more clearly and as quite different, allowing the opera to show the proper way of dealing with both contradictions among the people and contradictions between the people and the enemy.

Most of the revisions, however, appear to be for the purpose of artistic improvement. This, of course, has a political side as well, for operas with excellent political content will be useless unless they are also artistically good. One of the chief messages the model Peking operas are intended to convey is that good politics are compatible with good art. Therefore, in addition to considerable effort and repeated revisions before the model operas were first presented, they have been continually revised since. Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy, Shachiapang, and The Red Lantern had been standardised by 1972, but the other two, the artistically weakest ones, were still being revised then (L. W. Snow, 1972a: 23) and are probably still being improved today. Some of the changes have been fairly major. Shachiapang was considerably shortened--it had been particularly long. Numerous changes in On the Docks have been made in an effort to increase dramatic tension, albeit with only limited success. In all the operas, dialogue has been altered; although in many places the substance of what is said remains the same, the phrasing has been improved. Similar changes have been made in the lyrics of the songs.⁴ In many places, the sequence of events has been somewhat changed.

Even in the earliest versions of the model operas, and probably to a greater degree in the later versions, there have been important artistic innovations. The object is not just to change the political content of Peking operas in socialist China but also to create a new artistic form congruent with the socialist political content. To some extent, the traditional Peking opera technique has been retained, but in many cases it has had to be adapted to the different subject matter (for example, modern warfare), and in many instances the stylised technique has been replaced by realistic actions.

The increased realism represents a trend that has been growing in China since the early years of this century and which is probably connected with Western influence on China (D. Yang, 1968: 225-6). Set designs, costumes and make-up are all fairly realistic now in comparison with the traditional bare stages, elaborate costumes, and exaggerated make-up. There are still a few traces of the older patterns, for example, in the young hero's red cheeks and arched eyebrows of Yang Tze-jung in Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy. Also, while uniforms and other clothing may represent real and contemporary clothing styles, they are not quite realistic. For example, soldiers in the marshes in Shachiapang are not shown in mud-splattered uniforms (D. Yang, 1968: 183, 212-3).

The movement patterns and speech patterns have been made more realistic, although, in particularly dramatic moments, the traditional highly stylised actions and speech are used to highlight these moments (D. Yang, 1968: 214-6,

220). The objective is a blend of "revolutionary realism" and "revolutionary romanticism". At least with respect to The Red Lantern, there has been a knowledgeable report that this combination has been successfully achieved (L. W. Snow, 1972a: 244).

The music retains much of the traditional Peking opera style, although it, too, has undergone some major changes. One change has been the enlargement of the orchestra and the addition of Western instruments. The result has been an improvement in power and tonal quality. The music, both accompaniment and singing, has also become more expressive. Further, the traditional song patterns for specific types of role have been partly removed. In particular, the song patterns for women were found unsuitable for the heroic songs of the mother and daughter in The Red Lantern, and they used men's song patterns. Chiang Ch'ing has been named as the person responsible for the changes in the music of Peking opera (D. Yang, 1968: 221-5; L. W. Snow, 1972a: 124).

The creation of the model Peking operas was a long and difficult process. There were strong revisionist elements in all the Peking opera companies involved, and the model operas therefore took form in the midst of sharp ideological and political struggles within these companies.⁵ The revisionists initially tried to block work on Peking operas on contemporary themes. When that failed, some of them joined the effort, but in an objectionable way--they built up negative

characters and undermined the operas in other ways. Some continued to criticise the operas, largely on artistic grounds, describing them with such phrases as "without much flavour of Peking opera" and "just plain boiled water" (quoted by Kuang in Chiang, 1968: 17). While artistic criticism was certainly justified, especially at the beginning, the correct policy was to improve the artistic quality of the model operas, not to use that problem as an excuse for abandoning them. The model operas could not have been created unless the opposition to them was defeated: "As in the case of other revolutionary model operas, the victory won in the opera On the Docks is, first and foremost, a victory in the seizure of power" (Hsieh, in Chiang, 1968: 33).

Success in this struggle was not achieved in each opera company in isolation. Those who wanted to create the model operas had powerful assistance from outside their opera companies. Further, it is probable that without such help the model operas would not have been created and some might not even have been begun. While other people were undoubtedly involved, it is Chiang Ch'ing who emerges as the most prominent figure, and her role in the development of the model Peking operas appears to have been decisive.

Chiang Ch'ing had been a professional actress when younger and therefore had particular knowledge of the theatre that enabled her to offer technical guidance and to be listened to with respect by professionals in the theatre. She also had considerable prestige as the wife of Mao Tse-tung. However,

her activities and importance in the Cultural Revolution period were radically different from those of earlier years. Then she had been relatively inactive, at least as far as public issues were concerned, and when she had tried, in 1950 and 1962, to criticise reactionary art work, she had been ignored (L. W. Snow, 1972a: 19). In 1963, however, she became very active in promoting Peking opera on contemporary themes, and at this time she definitely had influence. Something had changed, and most likely this change was a recognition that she was acting as the representative of powerful political forces. Later, during the Cultural Revolution, she emerged into prominence as the First Deputy Head of the Cultural Revolution Group and was identified as the leader of the revolution in literature and art (Wen, 1967: 113; E. Snow, 1968: 459-61). She appeared publicly in other contexts as well (see Hinton, 1972a: 65, 98, 130, 133, 282), but primarily it was in the area of literature and art that she was important. In those areas, she led a movement that could later be seen as the prelude to the Cultural Revolution:

The revolutionary model plays were born after the proletarian literary and art fighters led by Comrade Chiang Ch'ing put up a bitter fight against the Liu Shao-ch'i counter-revolutionary revisionist clique. Their birth was a revolution. This revolution was first launched in the domains of Peking opera, ballet and symphony. It was the overture to the battle of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and it inspired us to attack and capture the tough citadels of Liu Shao-ch'i's counter-revolutionary revisionist line one after another. (Che, 1969: 25)

Chiang's activities regarding the creation of the model operas took many different forms. It was she who suggested that adaptations of the Shanghai operas which were to become On the Docks and Shachiapang. In the creation of these and of the other model Peking operas, she was active in initiating and assisting in both political and artistic changes. At the same time, she led in the political and ideological struggles going on in the opera companies. She both fought the revisionists and led others in study of the Talks at the Yen'an Forum on Literature and Art. In addition to undertaking ideological reform, in at least two cases (Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy and Shachiapang) the theatre workers went to live in conditions similar to those they would be portraying on the stage. Chiang Ch'ing was a leader in this as well (Chiang, 1968).

Chiang's prestige and power were strengthened by some appearances by her husband. In the summer of 1964,⁶ Mao attended performances of Taking the Bandits' Stronghold, Sparks Amid the Reeds, and Raid on the White Tiger Regiment. He spoke to the theatre workers, gave them encouragement, and even sent suggestions for improvement by way of Chiang Ch'ing (Chiang, 1968: 18, 49, 59).

When the Festival of Peking Opera on Contemporary Themes took place in 1964, Chiang Ch'ing made a major speech at it (Chiang, 1968: 1-7), and she was probably one of the chief organisers of the Festival.

The Festival itself took place in Peking in June and July, lasting almost the full two months. Twenty-nine Peking opera troupes from eighteen provinces, municipalities, and national autonomous regions performed thirty-five Peking operas on contemporary themes. Sixteen of these were on past revolutionary struggles and nineteen were on life since Liberation (D. Yang, 1968: 192-4). It was apparently a great success with both participants and audiences, for it was expanded to almost twice its planned size after it got under way (D. Yang, 1968: 196).

The Festival was given very wide publicity of a uniformly positive nature (D. Yang, 1968: 195). The Festival was hailed as a breakthrough in the arts in general:

The presentation of revolutionary Peking opera on contemporary themes has a far-reaching significance. It has given an impetus to the revolution in Chinese drama and set a good example for carrying out a thorough-going socialist revolution in China's literature and art (Jen Min Jih Pao editorial, 1964b: 109-110).

This Festival was followed by many others and by a correspondingly great increase in the creation and performance of operas on contemporary themes. In 1965, all the major regions of the country held festivals of dramas on contemporary themes. Some of these were for Peking opera alone, but some were for other types of opera or for a variety of forms, including both opera and spoken drama ("The Revolutionisation of the Chinese Theatre", 1966: 125). Opera troupes throughout the country were, by the summer of 1964, reported to be

widely experimenting with operas on contemporary themes ("A Revolutionary Creation", 1964: 1). The revolution of Peking opera is best seen as the vanguard of a movement that was soon sweeping the theatre throughout China.

An aspect of these new developments that is of particular importance was the reform of theatre workers that happened in the process of working on the new operas. As recommended in the Talks at the Yen'an Forum on Literature and Art, this took two forms: ideological study and going among the masses (P'eng, 1965: 15-18). The emphasis appears to have been upon the latter form (see Ko, 1965; Li Ch'i, 1964; Jen Min Jih Pao editorial, 1964b)--ideological study had to some degree been going on since Liberation, but in recent years the theatre (and other art and literature) workers had been becoming increasingly cut off from the masses. In the development of the model operas, there was a great effort made to change this situation. The object was to produce cultural workers who would truly be using their expertise to serve the masses. As will be seen in the next chapter, this was combined with a variety of other measures for making art and literature serve the workers, peasants, and soldiers.

The new operas on contemporary themes have a continuing importance in China. The model operas are particularly prominent--they exist in film versions, in regional opera adaptations, and excerpts from them are performed by amateur

dramatic groups and "cultural troupes". Songs from them are also widely performed and broadcast on radio (L. W. Snow, 1972a: 27; L. W. Snow, 1972b: 36). They have an impact upon a very large public both directly, in these many ways, and indirectly, through their influence on other developments in the theatre. Peking operas on contemporary themes are only one part, albeit an important part, of a larger movement in the Chinese theatre aimed at transforming it into an art form that would serve the workers, peasants, and soldiers in a way that it had not since Liberation.

Notes

¹The following discussion is based upon a reading of the texts of the plays and a few descriptions of performances. I have also seen part of a film of Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy. Since I have not seen the operas, I am limited in what I can say about their theatrical and artistic quality.

The Red Detachment of Women was also presented in Peking opera form at the Festival (D. Yang, 1968: 194).

²The three heroes are not actually related to each other, as is revealed in the play. They formed their family after the "mother's" husband and "daughter's" parents were killed in a strike. "Li Yu-ho", then Chang Yu-ho, a fellow worker of the two dead men, forged the new family and carried on revolutionary activities. One of the messages of this opera is that comradeship is as binding as kinship.

³The versions upon which the following comments are based are: Taking the Bandits' Stronghold (1967), Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy (1970), Sparks Amid the Reeds (1964), Shachiapang (1970), The Red Lantern (1965; 1970), Raid on the White Tiger Regiment (1967; 1972), and On the Docks (1969; 1972). Some information on changes in earlier revisions is contained in Lois Wheeler Snow's book (1972a) and in a series of appendices to a pamphlet by Chiang Ch'ing (1968).

⁴I expect that the music has also been changed but I have the music for only three operas and only for the latest versions of them, so I cannot make any comparisons.

⁵In the following discussion I shall be chiefly relying upon a series of five extremely useful appendices to a pamphlet by Chiang Ch'ing (1968). They were written by members of the five Peking opera companies that created the model operas. They are chiefly focused on the ideological and political struggles that took place in each case.

⁶Two of the appearances occurred during the Festival of Peking Opera on Contemporary Themes and one shortly after it (Chiang, 1968: 18, 49, 59).

Chapter 6A Theatre for the Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers

...all our literature and art are for the masses of the people, and in the first place for the workers, peasants and soldiers; they are created by the workers, peasants and soldiers and are for their use. (Mao, 1967b: 22)

For those in the theatre, it has not been enough, since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, to serve the masses merely by portraying them on the stage. Theatre workers have been called upon to go to the factories, to the countryside, and to army units, to experience the lives of the masses and take the new theatre to them. Otherwise, the theatre workers would obviously not be able to portray them convincingly upon the stage. And, what use are operas about workers, peasants, and soldiers if these very people never see them? The new creations in the theatre had to be taken out of the major cities and performed throughout the country.

Even in the early post-Liberation years, opera troupes took their performances on tour to smaller cities and towns and to factories and army units, but this happened on a small scale (Chou Kai, 1966: 9). As noted in the previous chapters, the theatre workers who produced the model Peking operas went among the masses, and this became an increasing trend as the Cultural Revolution progressed. It was reported in the Chinese press that theatre workers were inspired by the revolutionary operas they were working on to go among the masses. As early as the end of 1965, the movement of

theatre workers to the factories, countryside, and army units was declared unprecedented in magnitude ("The Revolutionisation of the Chinese Theatre" 1966: 133). Some of the artists concerned were joining in the daily work of the people in their work-places (Ibid.). Some were even doing both ("A Workers'", 1969: 15).

As theatre workers were going to the masses, the masses, at the same time, were moving into the theatre in an active capacity. They might do so in their local settings, as theatre workers brought their new plays to the countryside to receive criticism and suggestions from the peasants. This is now an essential procedure in the creation of new workers (Tsu, 1973: 20). Or the masses might literally go into the theatre to take a hand in the reform of theatre workers right in their working places ("A Workers'", 1969).

But, whatever radical transformations might be achieved in the opera companies, the fact remained that they were not suitable vehicles for taking theatre to the masses. The large number of people required to stage a full-scale opera, in addition to scenes, costumes, and properties, simply could not be transported throughout the rural areas to any great extent. The model operas reach millions of the Chinese people only in more portable form as films. Theatre for the masses must therefore take some other form. Primarily, such theatre must be suitable for high mobility or else it will not be able to reach the peasants in the thousands of villages:

The peasants account for over eightypercent of the total population. If we exclude the more than 500,000,000 peasants, the so-called universalisation of socialist culture will become an empty term. ("Hail the New Achievements" 1965: 14)

One of the important measures to cope with this problem has been the creation and promotion of revolutionary operettas on contemporary themes. In this development, as with the operas, the trail was blazed by a drama festival--the Central-South Regional Drama Festival in 1965 (see "The Revolutionisation of the Chinese Theatre", 1966; "Hail the New Achievements", 1965). While operas are performed in the rural areas to some extent, operettas can be more widely performed. Troupes of as few as ten members can present them with a relatively small amount of scenery, costumes, and properties. Innovations have been made to increase the portability of the equipment ("The Revolutionisation of the Chinese Theatre", 1966: 135-6). Such troupes are also much less expensive than full-scale opera troupes and can therefore be expected to have a minimal deficit, in some cases even to produce a surplus ("The Revolutionisation of the Chinese Theatre", 1966: 136). Clearly, this means that it will be possible to have many more such economical troupes than if they had to be heavily subsidised by the state, as do touring opera companies.

Of perhaps more importance, the operettas are particularly suited for amateur dramatic groups, who would have difficulty in producing operas. This is extremely

important because touring professional companies cannot possibly provide a large amount of theatrical activity in all of China's villages. If the theatre is to thrive in rural China, it must depend heavily upon amateur dramatic groups. The few characters, comparatively simple plots, and limited technical demands of operettas make them a very important part of amateur repertoires. Also, operettas are easier for beginning and spare-time playwrights to write, and encouragement of operettas is expected to result in more playwriting within amateur dramatic groups ("Hail the New Achievements", 1965: 16).

Fourteen operettas presented at the Central-South Regional Drama Festival have been given particular attention ("Hail the New Achievements", 1965). They have all been described as having a political content similar to that of the model operas--that is, they present stories of revolution or socialist construction and urge certain correct positions on the audience. Eleven of these fourteen are on the post-Liberation period, suggesting that the operettas may be more topical than the model operas. The description upon which I am drawing states that the operettas "have general and practical instructive significance" ("Hail the New Achievements", 1965: 16). It is quite probable that the new operettas are tied more closely to current developments and recommend specific actions more than do the new operas. The operettas are certainly suited for such use because they can be quickly written and written for specific local situations.

A more drastic change in professional theatre has been the formation of "cultural troupes" on a large scale. These are small groups of about twelve people who are specialists in a variety of different art forms--actors, musicians, acrobats, and others. They train each other in their own specialties, creating a very versatile team capable of bringing a wide variety of art forms to the villages. They have been particularly notable in serving the most out-of-the-way parts of China--Inner Mongolia (see Hsin, 1972), coastal islands (see Wang Chi-ning, 1966), Tibet (see "A Troupe", 1967), and the Gobi Desert (see Ai, 1972).

The cultural troupes are explicitly modeled upon the propaganda teams of the People's Liberation Army during the Anti-Japanese War and the War of Liberation (Chou Kai, 1966: 9; Wang Chi-ning, 1966: 27). Although such troupes seem to have appeared first in particularly sparsely populated and isolated areas, they have spread to more central parts of China (Chou Kai, 1966: 10). They resemble the earlier propaganda teams very strongly in their self-reliance, their spirit of serving the masses, and their political education activities.

These qualities can be illustrated by reference to the Ulan Muchirs of Inner Mongolia. The Ulan Muchirs ("red cultural teams" in Mongolian) serve every area of Inner Mongolia and have been presented as models for all of China's art troupes (Chou Kai, 1966: 10). The Ulan Muchirs are models

of self-reliance in the creation of their own material. Eighty percent of their repertoire is written by themselves, specifically to meet the needs of the Mongolian people who are their audiences. (Among the remaining twenty percent are the model operas, presumably somewhat altered and adapted.) The Ulan Muchirs also promote the self-reliance of the local people by helping train their amateur groups and by recruiting new members to their troupes from among the Mongolian people (Hsin, 1972: 145-9).

As with the other cultural troupes, the Ulan Muchirs are energetic in serving the people, both in their professional artistic role and in other respects. Their assignment is a demanding one to begin with--constant travelling, writing their own material, and performing in such a wide variety of art forms--but they make it even more demanding by being sure to reach even the most isolated people, no matter how few in number (Hsin, 1972: 145). This is characteristic of all the cultural troupes and is one of their activities that receives highest praise in the Chinese press (see Wang Chi-ning, 1966; "A Troupe", 1967; Ai, 1972). They also perform a wide variety of service functions that are particularly valuable to the isolated herdsmen, such as bringing goods from town and treating minor ailments (Hsin, 1972: 149). They even join in the everyday work of the masses (Chou Kai, 1966: 10).

In addition to all this, the Ulan Muchirs also carry on political education work by incorporating political messages in their performances. This political aspect has been

particularly important in the cultural troupes since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, and they have been active in carrying the struggle against revisionism into the remote villages they serve (Hsin, 1972; Wang Chi-ning, 1966; "A Troupe", 1967).

There have been some political difficulties within the Ulan Muchirs: some members led their troupes in a revisionist direction, but this was corrected by means of ideological study under the guidance of the Party (Hsin, 1972: 150). This is part of a larger problem that has been difficult to deal with and that may still remain. It is difficult to maintain political control over widely dispersed theatrical groups, both professional and amateur. Apparently some of these groups have been promoting revisionism and there has been a call for increased control to be exercised over theatrical groups at the local level (Che, 1969: 26-8).

The P.L.A. is particularly active in sending out rural troupes, in line with its tradition of cultural activity. Some of the cultural troupes cited above are P.L.A. cultural troupes primarily serving soldiers at distant outposts (see Ai, 1972: "A Troupe", 1967; Wang Chi-ning, 1966). The P.L.A. also has propaganda teams propagating Mao Tse-tung Thought all over the country (Hung, 1969: 150). These are probably more strictly political in purpose than are the cultural troupes.

As noted above, the amateur dramatic groups are crucial for the development of the theatre in the countryside, where most of the Chinese people live. There have been reports of an increase in such activity since the years just preceding the Cultural Revolution (L. W. Snow, 1972a: 307-11; Members of the Amateur Theatrical Troupe of Hopei Peasants, 1967; Lin et al. 1968: 10). What makes this activity particularly important is that, as shown above, professionals in the theatre are being moved out of their artistic enclaves in the major cities and are being used to train these amateurs.

The new theatre of China is thus an integrated structure operating at several levels but none of these levels is removed from the masses. Even the top opera troupes in the major cities periodically go to the countryside to do manual labour, to perform for the peasants, or to do both. Increasing emphasis is being placed on smaller professional troupes, especially the very small and versatile "cultural troupes", which are able to undertake more extensive travel and therefore better serve the rural masses. These groups are linked with amateur dramatic groups all over the country. The object is a transfer of professional expertise to the amateurs and a gain in popular quality for the professionals. This is the shape of the new theatre that is emerging in China today.

Chapter 7Conclusion

In this thesis, I have traced the development of the theatre in China in a political context since the beginning of the twentieth century, with particular attention to the period since Liberation. The extremely political nature of the theatre has been demonstrated, both in the sense of its responsiveness to various political situations, and in the sense of the active political role it has played. The emphasis throughout has been upon tracing the development of a fundamental political transformation in the theatre.

What has been accomplished in the theatre in China is nothing less than a revolution. The content of the plays has been drastically changed by the creation of a new body of works portraying the workers, peasants, soldiers, and women of China in their revolutionary and socialist activities. The organisation of theatrical activity has also been transformed. Even the elite that used to be isolated from the masses by being restricted to the major cities, has been led by the Party in going to the masses where they are and in serving them there. The new generation of workers in the theatre is being led to a different type of professional career--going out to serve the workers, peasants and soldiers wherever they are, and training them for amateur theatre groups.

The political development of the theatre is important in itself, but it gains further significance when seen within the context of other changes taking place in Chinese society at the same time.

In the years of war against the Japanese and the Kuomintang, the theatre had an important role in the strategy of people's war being used by the Chinese Communist Party under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung. The important quality of people's war that distinguishes it from other forms of modern warfare is its particularly heavily reliance upon active civilian participation. Political mobilisation therefore had high priority and the theatre had a prominent place in this aspect of people's war. This is made clear by Mao Tse-tung in "On Protracted War":

A national revolutionary war as great as ours cannot be won without extensive and thoroughgoing political mobilisation. . . . The mobilisation of the common people throughout the country will create a vast sea in which to drown the enemy, create the conditions that will make up for our inferiority in arms and other things, and create the prerequisites for overcoming every difficulty in the war.....

What does political mobilisation mean? First, it means telling the army and the people about the political aim of the war. It is necessary for every soldier and civilian to see why the war must be fought and how it concerns him.... Secondly, it is not enough merely to explain the aim to them; the steps and policies for its attainment must also be given, that is, there must be a political programme.... Thirdly, how should we mobilise them? By word of mouth, by leaflets and bulletins, by newspapers, books and pamphlets, through plays and films, through schools, through the mass organisations and through our cadres.... Fourthly, to mobilise

once is not enough; political mobilisation for the War of Resistance must be continuous. Our job is not to recite our political programme to the people, for nobody will listen to such recitations; we must link the political mobilisation for the war with developments in the war and with the life of the soldiers and the people, and make it a continuous movement. This is a matter of immense importance on which our victory in the war primarily depends. (Mao, 1967c: 228-9)

Among the methods Mao listed, reaching the people through plays was perhaps the most important. This was because personal contact could reach only a limited number of people, because there were relatively few films and schools, and because most of the people were illiterate. The limitations of the alternatives put a particularly heavy load upon the theatre.

The value of the theatre to the war effort meant that reform of the theatrical professionals was very important. This issue is part of the larger one of the place of intellectuals in revolution and in socialism. Intellectuals were recognised as being needed for the success of the revolution (see Mao, 1968). The problem, then, was not whether they had a place in the revolution but rather, what that place was and how they could fill it. They were predominantly members of the ruling classes of old China, and therefore not close to the masses of the people. However, the commitment and courage of the large numbers of them who went to the Red areas during the civil wars and the Anti-Japanese War indicated that they were not all supporters of the status quo. The quality of intellectuals that allows

them to move so far from their class background--their relative classlessness (see Mannheim, 1936: 153-64)--also makes it difficult to integrate them into another class (the proletariat or the peasantry, for example). The rectification movement of 1942-4 was, in part, an attempt to deal with this problem by having intellectuals, including those in the theatre, experience life among the masses and engage in ideological study (see Chapter 2). Only partial reform was achieved at this point.

The decade following Liberation saw relatively little advance in the theatre. It was a period, first of chaos, and then of revival of the Chinese theatre. The significance of this period in the theatre was in building a foundation upon which future, more important, developments could rise (see Chapter 3).

In the early 1960's, it became apparent that revisionist tendencies were growing in the theatre. This would not have been particularly important if it had been an isolated development, but that was not the case. It was linked both to widespread discontent arising from the Great Leap Forward, and to organised opposition to Mao's leadership and policies (see Chapter 4). What was happening in the theatre should therefore be viewed as representative of the problems that made the Cultural Revolution necessary.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was, as its name indicates, a revolution in the cultural realm. Mao Tse-tung and his supporters were not complacent about the

successes achieved in seizing political power and carrying out economic transformation. They saw that very serious problems continued to exist on the ideological level. A large part of this was the problem of the place of intellectuals in the new China. They retained many attitudes and habits from their landlord and bourgeois childhoods, and had not truly united with the masses. The seriousness of this problem is reflected in the support that the revisionist intellectuals received from powerful persons within the Party.

The situation in the theatre at this time shows the problem of the black line among intellectuals very clearly. In the theatre there were both politically unaware backsliders and people who were active in using the theatre for revisionist purposes. The cases of Wu Han and T'ien Han, as revealed in the Cultural Revolution, show clearly the connection between revisionists in the theatre and powerful persons in the Party. Also, because of the group nature of theatrical activity, the struggle between the two lines in the actual process of artistic creation was visible. For all these reasons, the theatre as a particularly good area upon which to focus in looking at the black line.

The theatre also reveals some of the more general developments of the Cultural Revolution period. In the renewed emphasis on ideological reform and going to the masses, as prescribed by Mao in the Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art, can be seen the return to the spirit of

the Yen-an period. This is also apparent in the presentation of the wartime P.L.A. propaganda teams as a model for theatrical workers.

Also, the emphasis on the collective creation of new operas, spoken dramas, and shorter theatrical works by amateurs (Members of the Amateur Theatrical Troupe of Hopei Peasants, 1967), and by members of professional theatrical troupes represents a movement away from specialisation in playwriting by a few intellectuals. More and more people are being drawn into this aspect of creativity and it is no longer the prerogative of a few.

A further important development in the theatre that is indicative of trends in other sectors of Chinese society is the increased orientation of theatre towards serving the peasants. As with medicine and the decentralisation of industrial development, this indicates the recognition of the central authorities that the masses of the people are primarily in the countryside and will remain concentrated there in the foreseeable future. Therefore, any policy of serving the people must accept this fact and adjust itself to it. The means the theatre has developed for serving the rural masses are village amateur groups, cultural troupes, and opera troupes going to the countryside (see Chapter 6).

In conclusion, lest it be thought that the Chinese theatre is totally political in nature, I would like to emphasise that there have been important artistic developments

as well, although these have not been of major concern here (but see Chapter 5). The Chinese give importance to the artistic side of theatre and its development. They see that at present the theatre is artistically weak and that improvement will require a long time (Ko, 1967: 66-7). The current revisions of even the model operas and the moderate artistic success of The Red Lantern are very promising developments. Further artistic improvement is to be expected in the future, but it will take place within the political framework that has been described in this thesis. What Mao wrote in 1942 still reflects the Chinese policy on art and literature:

Although man's social life is the only source of literature and art and is incomparably livelier and richer in content, the people are not satisfied with life alone and demand literature and art as well. Why? Because, while both are beautiful, life as reflected in works of literature and art can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life. Revolutionary literature and art should create a variety of characters out of real life and help the masses to propel history forward. (Mao, 1967b: 19)

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