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Xing Fan

Jingju—Beijing/Peking Opera

History, Practice, and Aesthetics

Jingju—Beijing/ Peking Opera

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SERIES PREFACE

The scope of this series is scripted aesthetic activity that works by means of personation.

Scripting is done in a wide variety of ways. It may, most obviously, be the more or less detailed written text familiar in the stage play of the western tradition, which not only provides lines to be spoken but directions for speaking them. Or it may be a set of instructions, a structure or scenario, on the basis of which performers improvise, drawing, as they do so, on an already learnt repertoire of routines and responses. Or there may be nothing written, just sets of rules, arrangements and even speeches orally handed down over time. The effectiveness of such unwritten scripting can be seen in the behaviour of audiences, who, without reading a script, have learnt how to conduct themselves appropriately at the different activities they attend. For one of the key things that unwritten script specifies and assumes is the relationship between the various groups of participants, including the separation, or not, between doers and watchers.

What is scripted is specifically an aesthetic activity. That specification distinguishes drama from non-aesthetic activity using personation. Following the work of Erving Goffman in the mid-1950s, especially his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, the social sciences have made us richly aware of the various ways in which human interactions are performed. Going shopping, for example, is a performance in that we present a version of ourselves in each encounter we make. We may indeed have changed our clothes before setting out. This, though, is a social performance.

The distinction between social performance and aesthetic activity is not clear-cut. The two sorts of practice overlap

and mingle with one another. An activity may be more or less aesthetic, but the crucial distinguishing feature is the status of the aesthetic element. Going shopping may contain an aesthetic element—decisions about clothes and shoes to wear—but its purpose is not deliberately to make an aesthetic activity or to mark itself as different from everyday social life. The aesthetic element is not regarded as a general requirement. By contrast a court-room trial may be seen as a social performance, in that it has an important social function, but it is at the same time extensively scripted, with prepared speeches, costumes and choreography. This scripted aesthetic element assists the social function in that it conveys a sense of more than everyday importance and authority to proceedings which can have life-changing impact. Unlike the activity of going shopping the aesthetic element here is not optional. Derived from tradition it is a required component that gives the specific identity to the activity.

It is defined as an activity in that, in a way different from a painting of Rembrandt's mother or a statue of Ramesses II, something is made to happen over time. And, unlike a symphony concert or firework display, that activity works by means of personation. Such personation may be done by imitating and interpreting—'inhabiting'—other human beings, fictional or historical, and it may use the bodies of human performers or puppets. But it may also be done by a performer who produces a version of their own self, such as a stand-up comedian or court official on duty, or by a performer who, through doing the event, acquires a self with special status as with the *hijras* securing their sacredness by doing the ritual practice of *badhai*.

Some people prefer to call many of these sorts of scripted aesthetic events not drama but cultural performance. But there are problems with this. First, such labelling tends to keep in place an old-fashioned idea of western scholarship that drama, with its origins in ancient Greece, is a specifically European 'high' art. Everything outside it is then potentially, and damagingly, consigned to a domain which may be neither

'art' nor 'high'. Instead the European stage play and its like can best be regarded as a subset of the general category, distinct from the rest in that two groups of people come together in order specifically to present and watch a story being acted out by imitating other persons and settings. Thus the performance of a stage play in this tradition consists of two levels of activity using personation: the interaction of audience and performers and the interaction between characters in a fictional story.

The second problem with the category of cultural performance is that it downplays the significance and persistence of script, in all its varieties. With its roots in the traditional behaviours and beliefs of a society script gives specific instructions for the form—the materials, the structure and sequence—of the aesthetic activity, the drama. So too, as we have noted, script defines the relationships between those who are present in different capacities at the event.

It is only by attending to what is scripted, to the form of the drama, that we can best analyse its functions and pleasures. At its most simple analysis of form enables us to distinguish between different sorts of aesthetic activity. The masks used in *kathakali* look different from those used in *commedia dell'arte*. They are made of different materials, designs and colours. The roots of those differences lie in their separate cultural traditions and systems of living. For similar reasons the puppets of *karagoz* and *wayang* differ. But perhaps more importantly the attention to form provides a basis for exploring the operation and effects of a particular work. Those who regularly participate in and watch drama, of whatever sort, learn to recognise and remember the forms of what they see and hear. When one drama has family resemblances to another, in its organisation and use of materials, structure and sequences, those who attend it develop expectations as to how it will—or indeed should—operate. It then becomes possible to specify how a particular work subverts, challenges or enhances these expectations.

Expectation doesn't only govern response to individual works, however. It can shape, indeed has shaped, assumptions

about which dramas are worth studying. It is well established that Asia has ancient and rich dramatic traditions, from the Indian sub-continent to Japan, as does Europe, and these are studied with enthusiasm. But there is much less widespread activity, at least in western universities, in relation to the traditions of, say, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. Secondly, even within the recognised traditions, there are assumptions that some dramas are more 'artistic', or indeed more 'serious', 'higher' even, than others. Thus it may be assumed that *noh* or classical tragedy will require the sort of close attention to craft which is not necessary for mumming or *badhai*.

Both sets of assumptions here keep in place a system which allocates value. This series aims to counteract a discriminatory value system by ranging as widely as possible across world practices and by giving the same sort of attention to all the forms it features. Thus book-length studies of forms such as *al-halqa*, *hana keaka* and *ta'zieh* will appear in English for perhaps the first time. Those studies, just like those of *kathakali*, tragicomedy and the rest, will adopt the same basic approach. That approach consists of an historical overview of the development of a form combined with, indeed anchored in, detailed analysis of examples and case studies. One of the benefits of properly detailed analysis is that it can reveal the construction which gives a work the appearance of being serious, artistic, and indeed 'high'.

What does that work of construction is script. This series is grounded in the idea that all forms of drama have script of some kind and that an understanding of drama, of any sort, has to include analysis of that script. In taking this approach books in this series again challenge an assumption which has in recent times governed the study of drama. Deriving from the supposed, but artificial, distinction between cultural performance and drama, many accounts of cultural performance ignore its scriptedness and assume that the proper way of studying it is simply to describe how its practitioners behave and what they make. This is useful enough, but to

leave it at that is to produce something that looks like a form of lesser anthropology. The description of behaviours is only the first step in that it establishes what the script is. The next step is to analyse how the script and form work and how they create effect.

But it goes further than this. The close-up analyses of materials, structures and sequences—of scripted forms—show how they emerge from and connect deeply back into the modes of life and belief to which they are necessary. They tell us in short why, in any culture, the drama needs to be done. Thus by adopting the extended model of drama, and by approaching all dramas in the same way, the books in this series aim to tell us why, in all societies, the activities of scripted aesthetic personation—dramas—keep happening, and need to keep happening.

I am grateful, as always, to Mick Wallis for helping me to think through these issues. Any clumsiness or stupidity is entirely my own.

Simon Shepherd

REIGN PERIODS OF THE QING DYNASTY (1644–1911)

Shunzhi	1644–61
Kangxi	1662–1722
Yongzheng	1723–35
Qianlong	1736–95
Jiaqing	1796–1820
Daoguang	1821–50
Xianfeng	1851–61
Tongzhi	1862–74
Guangxu	1875–1908
Xuantong	1909–11

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During this study, I often found myself struggling with a paradoxical challenge: *jingju* studies is one of the most prolific fields in both Anglophone and Sinophone scholarship on Chinese traditional theater, yet inconsistency, vagueness, and contradictions appear in discussions about virtually each artistic component and about its development in nearly every historical period. Throughout this research, I found many more questions than answers. But this circumstance is also the very reason I am tremendously grateful for this project. As a researcher on this humbling journey, I am filled with awe for *jingju* practitioners' creativity and wisdom; as a writer, I learned the need for introductory-level scholarship that reaches beyond surface information; and as an educator,

I am convinced by this book series that we can and should understand performing arts originating from cultures not our own. For me, this project is a learning process; all errors of fact and interpretation lie with me.

Finally, thank you goes to Kurt Würmli for his presence in my life. Kurt was a dedicated chef when I did not have time to cook, a committed listener to my writing plans and ideas, and an unwavering supporter throughout this journey, including some dark moments of life.

Introduction

On UNESCO's 2010 Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, *jingju* is designated as Peking opera, with the concluding sentence of the nomination description, submitted by the government of the People's Republic of China (the PRC), as follows, "It is regarded as an expression of the aesthetic ideal of opera in traditional Chinese society and remains a widely recognized element of the country's cultural heritage."[1] This choice of name may reflect the PRC government's 2010 consideration that "Peking opera" was the most widely used English term for that performing art. There has been, however, increasing acknowledgment that this nomenclature is misleading: in *jingju* acting, physical performance—featuring dance-acting and combat—is considered as important as vocal performance featuring both song and speech; melodic-passages and the percussive music of *jingju*'s traditional repertoire are often created, revised, and finalized by master performers and instrumentalists rather than composers and librettists;[2] and not all *jingju* productions feature melodic-passages delivered through song.

This book offers an introduction to *jingju*, with a historical perspective and a focus on its performance text. Responding to the scope and theme of this book series, I present major artistic components of *jingju*, how they interact with each other in composing a three-dimensional script on stage, and how the compositions have been in a state of flux since the form's early days. Through the two main chapters of this book, I propose two perspectives in order to nurture a more in-depth understanding of *jingju*, often labeled as merely a stylized, traditional performing art. One approach is that *jingju*'s style is better seen through its form *as* its content. The other

is that *jingju*'s tradition is better seen through its history of experiments that constantly inspire further innovation.

As an aesthetic activity, *jingju* is best understood by appreciating its three-dimensional script. This onstage performance text is composed with meticulous choices in each artistic aspect and via a mounting process commonly employed by *jingju* practitioners. The "form" of *jingju*, therefore, seemingly based on technical details of onstage practice, *is* its "content." A text-based approach prioritizing the playscript works less effectively in approaching *jingju* because practitioners must reach beyond textual analysis to convey their understanding of a character when constructing a stage language—vocal, physical, visual, and audio—that is not only congruent with customary *jingju* practice but is also original and appealing to their audiences. Considerations during the *jingju* creative process are never indifferent to character analysis, but this analysis needs to be embedded in artistic choices made by practitioners—not only performers but also instrumentalists, wardrobe managers, makeup and headdress masters, and other stage functionaries.

Chapter 1 employs this perspective to introduce the major artistic components that constitute *jingju* performance in its traditional repertoire during most of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It presents *jingju* creation in the context of a production's internal labor divisions and establishes *jingju* as a multilayered performance text when observed by an audience. We will begin with the music, which is the foundation for the signature characteristics that delineate *jingju* as a discrete theatrical form. Advancing the discussion of *jingju* stage musicality, we will then turn to acting and explore characterization as the performer's domain. Based on an understanding of the intricate relationship between music and acting, we will incorporate into this discussion the onstage visual aspects, including makeup, costuming, scenery, and stage properties. Next, we will explore the playscript as yet another layer of *jingju*'s performance text. The last section introduces the general practice of mounting

a *jingju* production. Anglophone scholarship, book-length monographs by Elizabeth Wichmann, Alexandra B. Bonds, Li Ruru, and David L. Rolston, among others, and book chapters and journal articles whose authors are too numerous to identify have contributed to focused discussions of *jingju*'s major artistic aspects.[3] Benefiting from their research and presenting major artistic aspects as interwoven in *jingju*'s performance text, Chapter 1 offers an understanding of their interrelations as a critical feature of the performing art.

The aforementioned focus of creative attention—that a successful artistic choice both conforms to general *jingju* practice and appears original to its audience—emphasizes that *jingju*'s tradition is carried through constant innovations that practitioners pass down to following generations, with a focus on "continuity" instead of "subversion" in their artistic experiments. From this perspective, Chapter 2 traces *jingju*'s trajectory with special attention to the historical development of its performance practice. This focus best illustrates the complexity—and therefore the messiness—of *jingju*'s history. People often prefer a clear and uncomplicated outline of historical development, but as Fu Jin points out,

> for *jingju*'s formation, we do not have much evidence to estimate its timeframe. As for "*jingju*" as the name of this performing art, although it appeared on *Shenbao* on March 2, 1876, during the following two decades and until the end of 1899, it only appeared as an independent term four times in the large amount of coverage [on this performing art] on *Shenbao*, and therefore it was far from a commonly used name for this performing art. By that time, however, *jingju*, as an independent theatrical form, had long been mature. . . . In *jingju* history, therefore, questions such as which period is critical for its birth, which period marks its maturity, which theatrical forms brought influences on it—and to what extent, and what influences it led to other theatrical forms, should be open to debate.[4]

Indeed, in its performance history, *jingju* has been referred to, at minimum, as *huangqiang* (*huang* melody), *erhuang* (named after a major melodic style), *jing erhuang* (capital *erhuang*), *luantan* (chaotic strumming), *pihuang* (neologism based on the contraction of *xipi* and *erhuang*, its two major melodic styles), *jiuju* (old theater), *guoju* (national drama), *jingxi* (capital drama), and *pingju* (Beiping drama). Each name may reveal some important attributes of this performing art at a certain point in its history, although, with different connotations, many of them overlapped and coexisted; thus, describing its practice and development in a clear and concise narrative is a daunting task. Anglophone scholarship, book-length monographs by Colin Mackerras, Joshua Goldstein, Andrea S. Goldman, Ye Xiaoqing, Paul Clark, Barbara Mittler, Rosemary A. Roberts, Li Ruru, and Siyuan Liu, among others, and book chapters and journal articles have addressed specific historic periods via different lenses.[5] Supported by these illuminating studies, Chapter 2's focus—the development of *jingju*'s performance practice in its history of performance—will assist in better contextualizing *jingju*'s three-dimensional onstage script within its own history.

Sinophone scholarship on *jingju* has been one of the most prolific areas in Chinese theater studies dating from the first half of the twentieth century. Throughout this book, I will also refer to some of the most pertinent Chinese-language sources. As we will soon see, in the *jingju* world, the practice is colorful and fluid, the history is complex and messy, and the aesthetics are both enchanting and robust. I invite you to join me as we embark on this journey.

1

Performance Practice

Music

Orchestra

The *jingju* orchestra contains two major sections: the percussive orchestra, also called "the martial section (*wuchang*)," and the melodic orchestra, also called "the civil section (*wenchang*)." Both sections include primary instruments that are commonly used for the majority of *jingju* repertories and supplementary instruments that may be selected for specific scenes or purposes. The five basic instruments of the percussive orchestra include the single-skin drum (*danpigu*), the clappers (*tanban*), the large gong (*daluo*), the cymbals (*naobo*), and the small gong (*xiaoluo*). The single-skin drum and the clappers are considered one set of instruments, and they are played by the drum player (*gushi*). The large gong, the cymbals, and the small gong are played by three separate instrumentalists. Under certain circumstances, the large *tang* drum (*datanggu*) and the small *tang* drum (*xiaotanggu*) may be used for combat scenes and to accompany specific *qupai* (tune pattern);[1] the water cymbals (*shuibo*) and the large cymbals (*danao*) may be selected for combat scenes in the water; and instruments such as the *qi* cymbals (*qibo*), the Southern *bangzi* (*nanbangzi*, also called Guangdong *ban*, Cantonese wooden-block), the wooden fish (*muyu*), the bump bells (*pengzhong*), the small *tang* gong