The New Drama Before the New Drama: Drama Journals and Drama Reform in Shanghai Before the May Fourth Movement

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Introduction

In this paper, I would like to introduce three Shanghai drama journals from the pre-May-Fourth period (1895-1919) and make suggestions as to how these journals could be used to gain a more sophisticated understanding of early twentieth-century Chinese theater history. These three journals are Grand Stage of the Twentieth Century (Ershi shiji da wutu, October 1904), Crescent Moon of the Stage (Gechang xinyue, November and December 1913), and New Drama Journal (Xinju zazhi, May and July 1914). I will show that these journals preserve invaluable material for the reconstruction of this history and provide us with a lot of textual and contextual information previously unavailable to us. I will argue that the analysis of these journals and of other related material will force us to rewrite the history of early twentieth-century Chinese drama and see pre-May-Fourth drama in a much more favorable light than we have done so far. In particular, we will see that the pre-May-Fourth period was a phase of intense experimentation with indigenous and foreign theatrical forms aimed at the modernization of Chinese drama and in many ways anticipated developments that were fully realized only later in the century. In this sense, the first two decades of the twentieth century are of crucial importance for the history of Chinese drama and its history needs to be recovered from latter-day misrepresentations.

Our image of pre-May Fourth drama is heavily filtered through the lens of May Fourth intellectuals. These intellectuals claimed to have established modern drama in China and rejected, with a few exceptions, whatever came before them. The leaders of this movement advocated a total break with tradition and proposed wholesale Westernization as a means to induce a renaissance of Chinese literature and culture. May Fourth anthologies of creative and critical writings, literary histories, and journals replaced those of their predecessors in the 1900s and 1910s and forced the earlier material to fall out of sight. Among May Fourth intellectuals, Hu Shi (1891-1962) is credited with having revolutionized both the theory and practice of Chinese drama. His essay on "Ibsenism" from 1918 and his play The Greatest Event in Life (Zhongshen dashi) from 1919 have been seen as milestones in the development of modern Chinese drama. Other modern playwrights of the first generations were Ouyang Yuqian (1889-1962), Guo Moruo (1892-1978), Tian Han (1896-1968), and Hong Shen (1894-1955), to name only a few. Among these playwrights, Hong Shen, more than anyone else, shaped the way we have come to see early modern Chinese drama. The single most important text for the theater historiography of this period is his "Introduction" to the Drama volume in the Compendium of Modern Chinese Literature (Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi, 1935). In this introduction, Hong paints a disparaging picture of Chinese drama before 1917. This period was characterized for him by the lack of involvement on the part of "men of letters" (wenren) and consisted merely of unsuccessful reform efforts by "old and new actors" (jiuda yu xinde xizimen, 12). He contested these actors' claim that they were practicing New Drama (xinxi or xinju); "Real New Drama" (zhen xinju) began for him only when May Fourth intellectuals entered the debate about drama reform and pushed for wholesale Westernization (16ff.).

May Fourth intellectuals' suppression of the material produced by their immediate predecessors and their concomitant rewriting of early twentieth century theater history had a profound and long-lasting impact on Chinese as well as Western theater historiography of this period. First of all, because the previous material became largely unavailable, May Fourth intellectuals' version of early twentieth century theater history was very difficult to challenge. This was all the more so because pre-May-Fourth drama was systematically excluded from anthologies and compendia on twentieth century Chinese drama and practically dropped from public awareness. Second, May Fourth intellectuals narrowed the definition of modern drama to spoken drama and, within spoken drama, to realist drama. Their narrow theater aesthetics precluded them from...
appreciating alternative forms of theater and performance arts and bequeathed later generations with a legacy that was difficult to get rid of. Third, by rejecting indigenous dramatic forms and favoring Western dramatic forms they created two separate spheres of critical discourse. Although this split was later mitigated, it is still largely operative in Chinese and Western scholarship of Chinese drama and has hampered the development of an inclusive theater historiography.

Fourth, because May Fourth intellectuals emphasized the absolute novelty of spoken drama, Chinese and Western scholars have not paid enough attention to internal developments that prepared the reception of foreign dramatic forms and provided an impetus for the reform of indigenous dramatic forms.

Due to these and other, more political reasons, pre-May-Fourth period drama was largely neglected throughout the century. It is only in recent years that large-scale projects carried out in mainland China have recovered crucial material and that libraries have begun to grant access to them. Foremost among these libraries is Shanghai Library (Shanghai tushuguan), which has one of the largest and most complete holdings of pre-May-Fourth journals and related material. It is there, in the Modern Documents Department (Jindai wenxian bu), that I found the three journals I discuss in this article. It is not coincidence that Shanghai Library owns these holdings, since, during the pre-May-Fourth period, Shanghai was both a major publishing and drama center. All early drama journals were published in Shanghai and most new developments in early twentieth-century drama took place in Shanghai and gained national prominence through its periodical publications that were distributed and read all over the country. Drama journals and drama reform are therefore intricately interrelated and need to be studied in conjunction with each other.

Synopsis of Developments in late Qing and Early Republican Drama

Before I proceed to introduce the three drama journals, I would like to give here a synopsis of general developments of the extremely diverse late Qing and early Republican theater within which the drama journals and drama reforms must be situated. On the broadest level, the rural popular theater had deep roots in seasonal festivals and religious ceremonies and was performed all over China, either by itinerant professionals or local amateurs. The theater troupes were organized around one or a few lead actors. They played either on fixed temple stages or on make-shift stages erected for a specific performance. The repertoire of these troupes was determined mainly by the occasions for which they were hired and therefore varied considerably. This rural popular theater continued to thrive into the first half of this century and brought forth new forms of local operas. At the other end of the spectrum was the so-called Kunshan-style opera (kunju). This operatic form took shape in the mid-16th century, was the dominant theatrical form of the 17th century, and retained a certain popularity through the mid-19th century. During its formative period it absorbed elements from various earlier theatrical forms like the Yuan dynasty variety play (zaju). It was regarded as a distinctly southern operatic form, and the writing of its libretti was almost exclusively practiced by literati. After the 17th century the repertoire of the Kunshan-style opera was basically set, and new plays were merely written as "table-top plays" (antou zhi qu) and remained unperformed. Literati also continued to write plays in imitation of the Yuan dynasty variety play, but again as a written and not as a performance genre. The literati's output of both genres was steady throughout the late imperial period and seems to have even increased during the late Qing period (1840-1911). Both genres continued to be written during the Republican period, albeit on a much smaller scale. During the pre-May-Fourth period, they were often published in novel journals (xiaoshuo zazhi) and addressed contemporary topics. Kunshan-style opera as performance genre became a marginal phenomenon beginning with the end of the 19th century.

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The main performance genre of the period was the so-called Peking Opera (jingju). Contrary to what the name suggests, Peking Opera was not the local operatic form of Beijing. Rather, the capital served as a breeding ground for a new operatic form made up of elements from Kunshan-style opera, Jingjiang (an operatic form popular among the Manchu nobility of the capital), clapper opera from Shaanxi/Shanxi and Sichuan, as well as operatic forms from Anhui and Hubei province. The cross-fertilization of various theatrical forms began in the late 18th century and continued, with various degrees of intensity, through the early 20th century. Peking Opera spread to Shanghai in the second half of the 19th century and attained there a distinct Southern identity (so-called haipai). After the failure of the constitutional reforms of 1898, intellectuals pressed for spiritual renewal and called for, among other things, the reform of the current theater in order to achieve that end. Shanghai theater people led this reform movement and in 1908 opened a modern theater on the Western model which had a circular, revolving stage instead of the traditional square stage, modern lighting equipment, and scenery in their performances. They also reformed old plays, wrote new ones, and aligned the theater closer to the demands of the time.

Shanghai had been home to Western forms of drama since the 1850s, when a foreign community big enough to sustain regular theatrical performances emerged (J.H. Haan, 27ff.). Although these performances
might not have been open to Chinese at first, around 1911 Chinese intellectuals like Bao Tianzuo (1876-1973) attended performances of Western drama at the Lyceum Theater as well as performances of Japanese drama at the various theaters in the Japanese concession (Bao, Chuangying lou 483-4). Beginning in 1899, various Shanghai schools performed Western or Western-style drama as part of their curricular or extra-curricular activities. However, Western drama caught on in China only after it was introduced by Chinese overseas students who studied in Japan. These students were drawn to Western and Japanese theater only upon their arrival in Japan. Their organization, the Spring Willow Society (Chunliu she), founded in 1906/1907, was originally an association dedicated to the study of the arts in its broadest sense (including poetry, prose, painting, and music, Huang Ainua 77). It was only after a series of successful performances in Tokyo that they saw themselves as a theater society rather than a literary association. Their success in Japan inspired similar developments in China, principally in Shanghai, and reinvigorated the New Drama (xinxu) movement in China.

Both reformed Peking Opera and the various forms of spoken drama could be called New Drama in the pre-May-Fourth period. The term was also applied to translations of foreign plays (Fan Chuan 691). Hong Shen, as mentioned above, questioned the appropriateness of this term for pre-May-Fourth drama. May Fourth intellectuals appropriated the term New Drama for their own plays only after they replaced it with the term huaju (literally "spoken drama") in the early 1920s. Early twentieth-century plays before the May-Fourth movement are now customarily referred to as "civilized plays" (wemini xi), a practice which seems to go back to Hong Shen's "introduction." Before 1917, spoken plays were hardly ever referred to in this way; this term was applied to them to ridicule and demean them and therefore should not be used any longer to refer to pre-May-Fourth drama.

Grand Stage of the Twentieth Century: The Political Phase of Drama Reform

Grand Stage of the Twentieth Century (Ershi shiji da wuta) appeared in two issues, one in the first half of the tenth month of 1904 and the other in the second half of the same month, until it was banned from publication by the Qing authorities. The main editors of the journal were Chen Qubing (1874-1933), a poet and social activist, and Wang Xiaonong (1888-1918), a Peking Opera actor. Unlike the other theater journals which I will discuss in this article, Grand Stage carries a strong and clear political message which pervades each section of the journal in both issues. It is in fact this message that defines the journal's extraordinary coherence. First of all, there is a strong anti-Manchu sentiment. This anti-Manchu sentiment comes out strongly not only in Liu Yazi's (1861-1938) inaugural statement (fakanci) and Chen Qubing's essay "Drama is useful" ("Xiju zhi you yi") but also in Sun Huangjing's traditional literary dramas Anle wo (Lair of Peace and Happiness, which ridicules the emperor's dowager, Cixi [1835-1908]) and Guolin han (Cold Shadows of Light, which attacks the rapacious nature of the Manchu nobility and the Qing army), and many other texts in both issues. The Qing empire is said to be on the verge of collapse and Han national sentiments are conjured up by plays representing the Han defeat by Manchus during the mid-seventeenth century. Wang Xiaonong's Peking opera libretto Changliao (The Traitor, in which a Ming loyalist criticizes a Qing collaborator who used to be his friend) and Lü jin xiang (The Golden Chest, in which a wife commits suicide in order to show her husband how he should preserve his integrity) both deal with this period and show how exemplary individuals preserved their integrity in face of the Manchu invasion. Second, there is a strong anti-imperialist message conveyed in many of the journal's texts. For example, Ouyang Gan's (1883-1907) traditional literary drama Xin Shanghai (New Shanghai) shows how Chinese are discriminated against in Shanghai, and his Peking opera libretto Jingu xiang (the title refers to the name of a restaurant serving foreign food) tells the story of a failed assassination attempt on a Chinese who collaborated with the Russians. Both of these plays are set in the present and reflect the unease with which many Chinese viewed the foreign presence in China. Finally, there is also a sense of a growing "Asiatic consciousness" in this journal. This element is very strong in the biographical sketch of Miyazaki Tolen (1870-1922) in the second issue of the journal. Miyazaki was a close ally of Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) and was convinced that Asia could regain its former power only with a China under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen and his party (cf. Eto and Jansen in Miyazaki xii-xxv). The second issue of the journal also contained a picture of the famous kabuki actor and reformer Ichikawa Danjuro (1839-1903) and carried some other news items related to Japan which showed Japan as a model for China.

This strong political character of the journal was part reflection of the times and part reflection of the concerns of its main editor, Chen Qubing. After the failure of the constitutional reforms in 1898 and the humiliations wrought onto China in the wake of the Boxer Uprising in 190011 Chen became evermore radicalized and joined the anti-Manchu movement. He spent some time in Japan and, upon coming back to Shanghai, was asked by Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) to act as editor of the revolutionary newspaper Jingzhong ribao (original English subtitle: The Alarming Bell Daily News, 1904.2.26-1905.3.25). The main emphasis of this newspaper was on the coverage of the imperialist activities of Russia in China's northeast. It was in this capacity as editor of this newspaper that Chen got to know the actor and social activist Wang Xiaonong and became interested in drama. His essay "Drama is useful" appeared first in Jingzhong ribao before Chen reprinted a slightly revised version of it in the premier issue of the Grand Stage. Before Chen and Wang Xiaonong collaborated on the publication of the Grand Stage, Chen published a
number of other articles and news items on drama in Jingzhong ribao.12 The most important of these include an article by the unknown author Jianhe entitled “Proposa I for Theater Reform” ("Gai liang xiu zhi jinhua," appeared between 1904.5.30 and 1914.6.1); the first book of Wang Xiaonong’s reform Peking opera libretto Guazhong lanyin (The Decline and Fall of Poland, appeared between 1904.8.20 and 1904.8.31); and a text entitled “Organizational Statutes of the Journal Grand Stage of the Twentieth Century” (“Ershi shijil da wutai cong biao zuzhi jianzhang,” appeared on 1904.10.3). In addition, Chen Qubing’s “Address to the Actresses” (“Gao nüyou”) published in the precursor publication of Jingzhong ribao, Eshi jingwen (Alarming News from Russia).13

Chen found in Wang Xiaonong an ideal collaborator for his journal. Wang was not only a successful actor and playwright, he was also educated and knew how to use drama for political purposes. Wang passed the provincial civil service examination and served as county magistrate before he turned into an amateur into a professional Peking opera actor. Around 1898, he moved from his native Beijing to Shanghai and firmly established himself there by 1903-4, when he came out with a series of new plays. These new plays included historical plays like Dangren bei (The Stele of Faction Members) and Taohua shan (Peach Blossoms Fan), both adaptations from famous traditional literary dramas, as well as new plays on recent events (shishi xinxi) like Guazhong lanyin (this is the first Peking opera libretto dealing with a foreign subject matter). It was because of this combination of talents and capabilities that Chen sought Wang Xiaonong’s collaboration.

In order to facilitate the revolutionary movement, Chen and his collaborators proposed to make use of drama and advocated a series of drama reforms to adjust the contemporary drama to their political goals. These reforms included the following measures: First, Chen urged the actors and actresses to respect themselves and to realize that the stage was a schoolroom and that they were teachers, especially to the illiterate masses. They had the power to awaken the intoxicated and dreaming and to usher in a new era. Chen made this argument most forcefully in his “Address to the Actresses,” but the message resounds throughout the journal. Second, Chen argued that Chinese actors were as skillful as their Japanese and Western counterparts but that they lacked the foreign actors’ level of education and patriotic spirit. Chinese actors had to emancipate themselves from their low position and collaborate with progressive intellectuals in order to raise their status and the value of their art. Grand Stage was exemplary in this respect. Intellectuals like Chen Qubing and Liu Yazi collaborated with actors like Wang Xiaonong and Shi Baohui (1881-1943) and treated them as their equals. Two of the Peking opera libretti, for example, were the product of collaboration between Chen and Wang.14 The poems in the belles-lettres section were not on the actors’ beauty or skills (as much poetry on actors was before and after) but on the way actors like Wang used their acting skills to convey a political message. Third, Chen and Liu asked for new kinds of plays. They very much liked Wang Xiaonong’s plays on the Ming/Qing transition and on recent domestic and foreign events and wanted more of them. Liu Yazi asked in particular for plays about the French Revolution, the American War of Independence, the revival of Italy and Greece, and the national defeats of India and Poland. Many of Wang’s plays were featured in various sections of the journal and provided the reader with examples of this kind of new plays. In addition, reviews of and poems on performances of these plays testified to their appeal and popularity. Unlike earlier reform efforts by Liang Qichao (1873-1929), for example, which were directed toward the traditional literary drama and stayed within the realm of intellectuals (Dolby 197-201), Chen’s reform efforts targeted the living theater (i.e., Peking opera) and called for an alliance of intellectuals and actors/actresses. Fourth, although Chen’s main target was the living theater, he also was interested in utilizing the emerging school theater movement for his purposes. In his essay “Drama is useful” (Grand Stage, No.1), he mentions the theater activities of a Chinese school in Yokohama. In the chronicle section, this example is taken up and discussed in detail. In addition, in the same section there is also a report on the theater activities of students of the Yucai xuetang in Shanghai. Chen saw these activities as a means to enlighten young people about the recent past and to engage them in the revolutionary movement.

This revolutionary movement gained even more momentum through the 1900s and finally brought about the collapse of the Qing dynasty and the founding of the Republic in 1912. Drama played a significant role in molding public opinion during this period, and some actors even participated in the Revolution of 1911 (Mackerras 120-123). The use of drama for political purposes during this period set a precedent for later political movements to do the same. This close connection between drama and political movements meant, on the one hand, that drama gained in importance and stature, and it meant, on the other hand, that drama ran the danger of being dominated by politics and losing its independence. It was in part because of this danger that actors and playwrights at times asserted their creative freedom and revolted against the dominance of politics. An example of this revolt can be seen in the next journal I would like to discuss, Crescent Moon.

Crescent Moon: The Aesthetic Phase of Drama Reform

Crescent Moon of the Stage (Gechang xinyue)15 began publication in November of 1913 but was discontinued after the second issue was published in December of the same year. The journal’s editor, Wang Limin, later published another drama journal, Juchang.
yuebao (Theater Monthly, 1914-1915), which was conceived as a sequel to Crescent Moon.

Crescent Moon was a very different drama journal from Grand Stage. While the latter was highly politicized and advocated a clear ideological message for the nation as a whole, Crescent Moon was, at least on the surface, utterly apolitical and limited its reporting to Shanghai. This is all the more astonishing when one considers the historical background of late 1913. A constitutional crisis had led to an abortive “Second Revolution” led by southern provinces against Yuan Shikai (1859-1916), the Republic’s provisional president, who had begun to take steps toward the reinstitution of the monarchy. But these recent troubling developments did not seem to leave any trace on the Shanghai world of theater. Although Grand Stage was also a Shanghai publication, its reporting was not confined to Shanghai itself but also included other parts of China and Japan. Crescent Moon, however, focused almost exclusively on Shanghai. In its premier issue, it even carried a section on Shanghai called “Sights and Scenes of Shanghai.” Theater reviews reflected only performances in Shanghai’s theaters, especially those held in Dangui diyi ta (Dangui First Stage), Da wutai (Grand Stage; not related to the journal Grand Stage), and Zhong wutai (Central Stage).

Another reason why Crescent Moon is different from Grand Stage is because of the cult of opera stars that emerged in the early Republican period (cf. Duchesne). While Wang Xiaoxong was famous in his time and was respected and remained influential until his death in 1918, a new group of young actors quickly eclipsed the fame of Wang and other actors of his generation. These actors included Gong Zhen (1888-1941), Jia Biyun (1890-1941), and Mei Lanfang (1894-1961). Unlike the previous generation of famous Peking opera actors who excelled mainly in the liao sheng role type (older male role), Gong, Jia, and Mei were dan actors, i.e., female impersonators, and brought about a radical shift in the repertoire and aesthetics of Peking opera (Scott, 37-8). The publication of Crescent Moon coincided with Mei Lanfang’s first visit to Shanghai between November 4th and December 18th, 1913. Mei’s visit is given ample space in the two issues and spawned a series of articles in which critics would compare Mei and the other two female impersonators. In addition, Crescent Moon carried stage photos of all three actors as well as biographical sketches, reviews of their most recent performances, and poems dedicated to them by literati spectators. A couple of months before the publication of the premier issue of Crescent Moon (in August of 1913, to be precise), Liu Yazi had published a volume of reviews, appreciations, and poems celebrating the dramatic art of Gong Zhen. The texts of that collection entitled Chunhang ji were authored by Liu and his friends. By publishing this volume Liu lived up to his reputation as being the head of a “Feng party” (Feng dang). This title was given to him by people who slighted Liu for his arbitrary preference for this particular actor. Prominent newspaper people of the time like Di Chuqing (1873-1921), Bao Tianxiao, and Sun Yusheng took this quarrel up and formed a “Jia party” (Jia dang), excoriating Jia Biyun and criticizing Feng Zhihe. After publishing Chunhang ji, Liu published in 1914 a similar collection of texts on the emerging acting star Lu Zimei, whom Liu had befriended in 1913. This collection was entitled Zimei ji (Collection of Prose and Poetry on [Lu] Zimei). Both of these volumes were extremely popular and went through several printings within a short period of time. They inspired fans of other actors, mainly female impersonators, to publish similar collections.

The major shift from male to female roles and from male actors to female impersonators engendered not only a change in repertoire but also in the way drama was discussed. While Grand Stage talked about drama in almost purely political terms, in Crescent Moon an aestheticized discourse prevailed. We can glean this from the following review of a performance by Jia Biyun written by Wang Limin (1):

[...] The playlette Beating the Flower Drum is an acknowledged masterpiece of Jia Biyun. Tonight when he entered the stage, his bearing was even more gorgeous; as his dimples flashed, he exuded every charm, and with his white teeth and clear eyes he certainly qualified as a “State topper;” confusing the beholder’s eye, he makes it impossible to determine whether he is a woman or a man. Though only a brief song, every single syllable is rendered with crispness, every note is presented with charm, resembling the sounds of young orioles eagerly leaving the deep valley. All of this uplifted my spirit and carried me away. (Wang 1913).

Jia Biyun was famous for this kind of so-called “brief plays for flowery dan” (xiao huadan xi). The story of this playlette is very simple: A young gentleman takes a walk and meets a husband-wife team of flower drum performers. He asks them to perform and flirts with the young wife. In his review of Jia Biyun’s performance, Wang focuses on three elements: looks (se), voice (sheng), and craft (yi). Excellence is defined by these three elements. The content of the play or its ideological import is not considered. What matters more than content or ideology is the actor’s ability to transfer the spectator into a world of sensuality and aesthetic pleasure. This holds true even in the few cases in which Wang praises a play for its ability to stir patriotic feelings or to engender compassion with a suffering human being. It is therefore also no accident that it was around this time that plays on scenes from the 18th-century masterpiece Dream of the Red Chamber (Honglou meng) became very popular. Several of these plays are actually discussed in Crescent Moon, including the question whether this most philosophical of Chinese novels could be adapted to the various forms of New Drama that
had developed recently.16 By New Drama (xijiu) critics could refer to several things: 1. plays acted in the manner of reformed Peking Opera; 2. new plays written for either traditional or reformed Peking Opera; and 3. spoken drama. In Crescent Moon, it is often very difficult to determine in what sense a critic uses this term. This polyvalence of the term New Drama is not a sign of terminological confusion but reflects a complex reality of various forms of dramas coexisting and cross-fertilizing each other. This coexistence of various dramatic forms is also mirrored in the theater journals' publication of various forms of drama. While in Grand Stage that meant that texts of traditional literary dramas (chuangq) and performance texts for Peking Opera (banben) were printed side by side, in Crescent Moon that meant that a spoken drama was published next to an early 17th-century traditional literary drama. Other journals printed traditional literary dramas, Peking Opera performance texts, texts of local operas, and New (Spoken) Drama either simultaneously or in a mix thereof.

Although students at select schools in Shanghai had staged spoken plays since 1888, spoken drama did not emerge in the public realm until 1907, when Chinese students in Japan returned to China and propagated the new theatrical form. The New Drama text printed in Crescent Moon was a prime example for this. Its author/translator, Lu Jingru (1885-1915), had taken up drama studies while studying in Japan. He, together with other Chinese overseas students, founded a literary society, the Spring Willow Society (Chunliu she), and began to perform dramas in the Western style. They learned their acting skills from Japanese actors who had taken up New Drama. New Drama in the Japanese context meant either shimpageki, the Japanese equivalent of reformed traditional theatrical forms, or shingeki, Western-style spoken drama without any traditional Japanese elements. The Chinese students learned both styles, often indiscriminately, and appropriated many of the Japanese New Drama texts. Lu Jingru's Shehi zhong (Society Bell), published in the premier issue of the journal was just such a play. Despite Bao Tianxiao's praise for the play in this issue, many contributors of the journal still had reservations regarding this new form. According to them, New Drama lacked the traditional dramatic skills like singing and dancing and therefore went against Chinese habits; the content and problems of the plays were foreign to Chinese and they therefore could not relate to it; the plays were too matter of fact and left nothing to imagination; and, finally, the actors' skill did not match the intricacy of the dramatic texts. While these reservations prevailed in the premier issue of the journal, there is a noticeably more positive evaluation of New Drama in the second issue (and judging from the preview of the contents of the third issue, this positive evaluation would have continued). The second issue contained many more items on New Drama than the premier issue and devoted an entire section of the journal to it, namely Drama Talk from the Tianshui Studio (Tianshui xuan jutan). This section contained mainly practical criticism, that is, reviews of particular performances or plays; theoretical questions were not addressed.

The only time a theoretical issue was raised in Crescent Moon was in the premier issue of the journal. In its "Appendix" section, the critic Ayan (6-8) relates a conversation with a Japanese friend in which the latter expounded his theory of the four stages of the development of drama. These four stages are: the age of illusion (moni shidai), when drama is still bound up with ritual and each member of the group can be an actor; the age of technique (jiu shidai), when acting becomes a profession and technical virtuosity is the main goal and highest ideal; the age of realism (xiashi shidai), when drama represents all aspects of social life and serves to educate people; and the age of symbolism (biaoxiang shidai), when actors put their skill into the service of the expression of a certain spirit that is inherent in a play. According to this Japanese friend, Japanese theater people were already experimenting with expressionism, and people like Ichikawa Danjuro were reworking traditional kabuki, infusing it with the new thinking of the present. The Japanese friend pleaded ignorance about the Chinese situation but expressed admiration for the technical excellence of Chinese actors and the refine-

While Grand Stage was the expression of an era of revolutionary activism and unbound optimism, Crescent Moon reflected an era in which people were quickly disillusioned with the outcome of the revolution.....
art could serve as a refuge from the vicissitudes of life and function as a form of protest against current conditions. Although this protest articulated itself in an apolitical manner, it was in and of itself highly political. For to claim an autonomous realm and project ideals which were at odds with current ideology were acts of defiance intended to question established authorities. Skeptical of politics, drama entered a new, albeit often uneasy alliance with business. Business provided the people involved in drama with some of the freedoms they sought and opened up new venues for development. In addition, new media like journals, newspapers, movies, newscasts, and sound recordings transformed the way the world of drama was structured and turned it into an industry. These processes created new chances as well as challenges for New Drama. How drama people dealt with these new chances and challenges will become clear from my discussion of the "New Drama Journal."

New Drama Journal: The Pragmatic Phase of Drama Reform

New Drama Journal (Xinju zazhi) was published by the Xinju zazhi she (New Drama Journal Society) with Zhang Shichuan (1890-1954) as its executive publisher and Xia Qilue as chief editor. The journal lasted for two issues. The premier issue was put out on May 1, 1914, and the second one on July 1 of the same year. The journal was intended as a monthly but seems to have experienced some starting problems. The size of the journal was conspicuously bigger than that of the two previous journals and there were more pages. In addition, it included an extensive photo section with pictures of individual actors, entire scenes from famous New Dramas, and other drama-related subjects. This section must have been a major selling point for the journal because it included many more pictures than any drama journal before.

New Drama Journal differs from the two earlier journals in that it was the first journal devoted entirely to New Drama. Although the editors never quite define what they mean by this term, the content makes clear that this term referred to a form of spoken drama rather than restored Peking opera. In their "Call for Articles" (zhengwen) in the second issue of the journal, for example, the editors explicitly state that, except for the section containing novels, submissions had to be on, or related to, New Drama. That New Drama means spoken drama is most visible in the illustration section, where not a single photo of a Peking opera scene can be found. Even an actor like Lu Zimei who was versed in both genres is shown only in Western dress. Lu's photo is interesting because it shows him in his stage persona as female impersonator rather than as private person. Role types apparently were still applied to New Actors (xinxu jia) since some of them are identified as "famous New Drama clown" (xinxu mingchou) or "famous New Drama female impersonator" (xinxu mingdan). Another indication that New Drama referred to a form of spoken drama are the attacks on Old Drama in this journal. Although some of these attacks were directed only against specific "bad" aspects of Old Drama like its presupposed superstitious and licentious character, and the possibility of its reform was not excluded, there were also wholesale attacks on Old Drama. A good example for this is Xia Qilue's essay "The Force That Resists New Drama" (Xinju jie zhi duikang). In this essay, Xia argues that Old Drama is secretly and systematically undermining New Drama in order to preserve itself. Old Drama's efforts to undermine New Drama is all the more dangerous because it is "shapeless" and has so far eluded people's attention. Xia urges New Drama people to be alert and to fight Old Drama wherever they can. At the end of his essay he shows what is at stake in this fight by contrasting Old and New Drama (Xia 6) : "Old Drama has no [self-]consciousness whatever, it will never be able to progress, and society and state won't ever be able to receive any good from it. New Drama, however, contains the concept of this nation, world, and society as well as all new knowledge and new discoveries; it has everything to create flawless human characters and good customs." While Old Drama is portrayed as being stagnant and without any use to society, New Drama is shown to be embracing and propagating new ideas and ideas. Xia's attack on Old Drama was not unique; according to Wang Shouyue in his essay "On the Evolution of Drama" (Xinju jinhuaxue) such attacks were quite common. Wang calls these attacks "discourses on eradicating Old Drama and only advocating New Drama."

A second element that distinguishes this journal from the two others is that it existed because of a business failure of the main publishers. Zhang Shichuan and Jing Yingsan originally never intended to publish a drama journal. Until early 1914, Zhang and Jing, and the actor-director-playwright Zheng Zhengqiu (1889-1935) ran a film company, the Xinmin gongsi (New People Company), which produced films for the American-owned Asia Film Company. They shot the first fictional Chinese feature movie and went on to produce a number of short films to be shown as interludes in the productions of Zheng Zhengqiu's theater troupe, the Xinmin she (New People Society). Zheng founded that theater company in August of 1913 because the film business was slow in the wake of the "Second Revolution" and the actors needed a secure income. In November of the same year, an argument between Zheng, on the one hand, and Zhang and Jing, on the other hand, led to a split of the two parties and Zhang and Jing founded a new theater company, the Minming she (People's Cultray Society). After the outbreak of the First World War in Europe, film material could no longer be purchased from Germany (the sole supplier at that time) and the production of movies stopped altogether. When Zhang and Jing ventured into the journal business in May of 1915, they did this as directors of a theater company. However, they did not turn their journal into an advertising tool for their theater company. Although actors and performances of the Xinmin she are better covered than those of any
other company, this might in fact reflect Minming she's artistic and commercial domination of the Shanghai theater world in early 1914. In addition, the main emphasis of the journal was not on practical criticism but on establishing a forum for the reform of New Drama.

This focus on the reform of New Drama was another distinguishing feature of the New Drama Journal. The editors and contributors were acutely aware that New Drama was at a very precarious stage of its development. Although from the inside New Drama seemed to do just fine and New Drama's actors and their performances were very popular with their Shanghai audience, the contributors to the New Drama Journal felt uneasy with this sudden success which, by May of 1914, had already persisted for more than half a year. This uneasiness is expressed in almost every text included in the two issues of this journal, for example in Guan Yinhua's preface in the premier issue of the journal. He sees external and internal problems of the New Drama movement. External problems consist of the strong appeal of Old Drama for the Chinese mass audience and the Old Drama people's successful co-option of New Drama elements in their pursuit to retain their dominance. Internal problems include, among many other things, the low quality of New Drama actors and librettists. The New Drama Journal was supposed to redress this situation and to function as a forum to discuss the problems and solutions related to the reform of New Drama. Only through "discussion and research" ("taolun yanjiu," cf. Wang Shouyue "Fifth Preface") could New Drama be propagated, and firm foundations for its future be established (Guan 1).

There seems to have been a consensus among the contributors that the reform of New Drama depended on the establishment of a new field of study, namely "theater study" (juxue). This new field of study was to include everything from stage architecture, stage management, and stage design to playwriting and acting. New Drama reform called also for a new understanding of the role of the theater critic (jupingjia). There was no lack of various forms of theater appreciation but according to most contributors of the New Drama Journal, there was hardly any theater criticism that deserved that name. According to Junyao in his essay "On the Study of Drama" ("Juxue jingyuan lun"), the theater critic had to be knowledgeable about theater principles and had to perform two basic tasks: to point out shortcomings and to make suggestions as to how to reform those shortcomings. Theater productions and criticism were to grow with each other and create a truly New Drama. The criticism expressed by the contributors of the journal mostly pertained to the poor education and training of actors and the poor quality of librettists. Reform proposals included the establishment of specialized theater/drama schools; the copyright protection of librettists in order to encourage playwrights to write carefully crafted plays rather than just outlines (mubiao) as was the current practice (cf. Jun Yao "Discourse"); and the reform of stagecraft, including the use of the revolving stage, the deployment of modern lighting effects, and the use of music, song, and dance as complementary stage devices (cf. Xu Xiaotian). In the spring of 1914, theater critics and practitioners founded the New Drama Union (Xinju gonghui) in order to coordinate their reform efforts. They proposed to establish a New Drama School, New Drama Newsletter, New Drama Alliance, and New Drama Translation Center. These institutions were to provide a firm foundation for the future of New Drama. More than 200 people joined the New Drama Union and showed their support for these reform efforts. However, this union lasted only into April of 1914 and never made it beyond the planning stage. The reason for the failure of this union is unclear. Financial problems and internal rivalries might have played an important part. But what is more important in the context of the development of a new drama in China is the fact that critics and practitioners felt the need to build a sound foundation for their art and that they realized that they could do this only if they formed an alliance.

But what is more important in the context of the development of a new drama in China is the fact that critics and practitioners felt the need to build a sound foundation for their art and that they realized that they could do this only if they formed an alliance.

Drama Journal contributors are remarkable not only for their content but also for their form. Positions are argued for and not just presented as self-evident truths. Arguments are carefully constructed and Chinese as well as Western authorities are used to make those arguments convincing. When sources are quoted they are often marked as quotes (they are put in brackets). However, no exact bibliographic references are given. Western authors enjoy a high prestige but contributors do not hesitate to qualify a statement given in a Western source if they think the statement does not apply to the Chinese situation. Although Western examples are most often used to show how Chinese should do things, most contributors have a strong reservation about the translation and adaptation of foreign plays for the Chinese stage (cf. Junyao "Sources"). In his essay "On New Drama" ("Lun xinju"), Jiang Ziji demonstrates, for example, that it would be difficult to tell which foreign tradition Chinese should follow, given the fact that foreign the-
ater differs from nation to nation and from age to age. Because positions are argued for rather than postulated, the essays and notes in *New Drama Journal* are longer and more demanding to read than in the other journals. In addition, many of the contributors seem to have a fairly good knowledge or even first-hand experience of foreign drama and often make intelligent comparisons between Chinese and foreign theatrical traditions. This is very different from earlier second-hand reports on Western drama, especially through Japanese mediators.

A significant number of contributions in both issues of the journal favor a historical approach to the study of drama in general and *New Drama* in particular. Guan Yihua put this into the following programmatic statement in his preface to the journal: “Only if we explore the past and study the present, foster good practices and remove bad practices, can we create a pure and immaculate New Drama” (Guan 1). The New Drama movement began to write its own history like, for example, in Wang Shouyue’s essay “Investigation on the Origins and Developments of Chinese New Drama” (“Zhongguo xinju yuanliu kao”). The title of the essay itself is interesting because it shows that Wang is aware that Chinese New Drama belongs to a larger, international movement of theater reform. However, this larger context of the Chinese New Drama is never discussed in detail and in any of the contributions of the journal and it is not quite clear how much the individual contributors actually knew about contemporary trends in Western theater history. For a detailed treatment of recent Western theater history we have to wait until 1916 when Xu Jiaqiang in his *History of Western Drama* (Xiyang yanju shi) devoted a considerable section of his book to the discussion of realism (especially Ibsen), symbolism (Maeterlinck) and the theater reforms by Craig, Reinhardt, and Stanislavsky. Wang Shouyue also prepared a translation on the origins of Greek theater taken from a Western world history book for *New Drama Journal*. These and other articles show that New Drama critics were eager to learn about the past and present of Chinese and foreign theater and that they tried to bring these findings to bear on the contemporary reform movement.

The ultimate goal of the contributors of *New Drama Journal* was the establishment of an art theater. They never quite put it this way but the thrust of their arguments and proposed reform efforts points in that direction. The vision of New Drama that is projected in the pages of this journal is an institution that weds the useful with the beautiful and plays a major role in the transformation of Chinese society. New Drama was to educate and entertain the masses without alienating the intellectuals. It was not to be a commercial enterprise because commercialism was seen as a threat to the integrity of New Drama. And it was also not to be a political tool because it was to serve a purpose bigger than any narrowly defined political agenda.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, I have attempted to first show that the study of pre-May-Fourth drama journals is a viable means to challenge May-Fourth and later accounts of this period. Journals put texts into context and enable us, with the support of additional material, to reconstruct the dramatic discourse of the time. They sensitize us not only to the issues and challenges with which drama people were faced but also to the ways in which they expressed and tackled them. Second, I have shown that it is hazardous to apply aesthetic norms derived from Western realism to pre-May-Fourth drama. The drama of the time was shaped by a different set of evolving aesthetic norms. These norms derived from indigenous as well as foreign sources and were further molded by ideological and commercial influences. Drama critics and practitioners addressed these various influences in their discussions of New and Old Drama and presented a wide range of dissenting reactions to these influences. Because of this, the pre-May-Fourth period is characterized by a multitude of discourses on drama and anticipates most later discussions. Third, I have shown that during the pre-May-Fourth period, New and Old Drama cross-fertilized each other to such a degree that they have to be studied together. Having read these journals, it is simply impossible to talk about New Drama without a discussion of the continuing influence of Old Drama on this new form; and conversely, it is impossible to talk about Old Drama without acknowledging the impact New Drama had on its reform. While the May Fourth people at first rejected traditional drama, in the 1930s some of these same intellectuals came around to propagate a mutual cross-fertilization of spoken drama and local dramatic forms in order to reach a broader, predominantly non-urban audience. This process of cross-fertilization was carried over from the Republican period into the PRC and, to some degree, has been operative until the present. Fourth, I hope to have shown that pre-May-Fourth drama reform was the result of complex interactions between indigenous and foreign sources of change. While previous research tended to favor one at the expense of the other, my reading of these journals suggests that the relative importance of indigenous and foreign influences varied according to the period. I am convinced that future research will reveal more about these patterns and will show that they remained operative throughout this century. Finally, I hope to have shown that pre-May-Fourth drama merits our attention and that the circumstances are ripe for a re-assessment. In recent years, much previously unavailable research material has become public and will continue to change our understanding of pre-May-Fourth drama. I intend to draw on these materials for a larger project on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century drama. Drama was discussed not only in drama journals, but also in literary supplements of newspapers (fukan), novel journals (xiaoshuo zazhi), scholarly journals, and various kinds of so-called “mosquito newspapers” (xiaobao) that were in vogue during this period. In addition, the 1910s also wit-
nessed a proliferation of book publications on various aspects of drama. This larger body of texts is very important for our understanding of the theater history of this period and will allow us to draw a much more detailed and, I am convinced, much more favorable picture of the New Drama before the New Drama.

Notes

1. A previous version of this paper was presented at the conference Chinese Modernism: New Perspectives on Chinese Culture in the 1910s, held at Charles University, Prague, in late August of 1998. I would like to thank the organizer, Prof. Milena Dolezelová-Velingerová, and the participants of the conference for their criticism and encouragement. I would also like to thank the guest editor of this issue of Theatre inSight, Mr. Adam Frank, and his editorial team for their insightful comments and helpful suggestions for revision.

2. The first date refers to the Japanese defeat of China during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5. This defeat forced Chinese scholars and officials to acknowledge the weakness of their country and was the impetus for thorough-going reforms during the following years. The second date refers to the May Fourth Incident of 1919 and the intellectual movement spawned by it. On May 4, 1919, some thousand students in Beijing protested against the decision of the Paris Peace Conference to award Japan the former German concession of Shandong. This political incident galvanized an entire generation of young students and intellectuals into action and led to radical social and intellectual reforms. Most notable among these reforms were the revolution of tradition, the literary revolution, and the emancipation of women.

3. Space does not allow me to discuss this secondary literature in detail. Major Western contributions to the study of pre-May Fourth drama include Dobly, Eberstein, Gunn, and Mackerras.

4. For example, no play written before 1918 is included in Gunn, the only comprehensive collection of modern Chinese drama. Bernd Eberstein discusses New Drama in his introduction to A Selective Guide but provides summaries only for plays written after 1917.

5. For example, Scott, in his influential study An Introduction to the Chinese Theatre, reduces Chinese theater to Peking Opera and does not discuss the cross-fertilization of traditional and modern dramatic forms. On the other hand, Mackerras, Dobly and Eberstein in his Des chinesischen Theater, discuss both old and new forms, but due to the limited sources have little to say about modern Chinese drama before 1917.

6. In Chinese histories of modern drama, these indigenous elements are often mentioned but only rarely elaborated on. Exceptions to this are, for example, Zhang Gong and Zhao Mingyi. Dobly 197-205 provides a good outline of this process.

7. I am thinking here of two huge projects, namely Zongguo xiqu zhi and Zongguo jindai wenxue daixi 1940-1919. 11.

8. All in all there were 6 drama journals published in Shanghai between 1904 and 1915.

9. For this synopsis I relied on the following accounts: Mackerras; Dobly; and Chen and Yuan.

10. In that year, the Guangxu emperor followed the suggestion of several of his reform-minded advisors and planned to institute a comprehensive reform program for China. The implementation of these measures was blocked by the ruling elite and resulted in the death of six of the emperor’s advisors.

11. In 1900, northern peasants attacked Christians and foreigners and laid siege to the foreign legation area in Beijing. Their uprising was quelled by an eight-nation relief force, and China was subjected to enormous penalties as punishment for the Qing government’s initial support of the peasants.

12. These terms are listed and discussed in Zhang Zexiang 78-8 and Wang 159-235.

13. Cf. Wang Lingxun 163-166. In this article, Wang lists also other journals and newspapers which published libretti and articles on drama in the context of the anti-Russian movement.

14. In many ways, this is very similar to the collaboration between Mel Lantfang (1894-1961) and Qi Rushan (1877-1962), although in Mel and Qi’s case, the emphasis was more on the aesthetic than the political.

15. Beginning with the second issue of the journal, its title appeared not only in Chinese characters but also in romanized form as The Ko Chang Sin Rues.

16. The most famous Dream plays were by Ouyang Yuqian (1889-1962) and Mel Lantfang. The Dream plays discussed in Crescent Moon were all by Ouyang Yuqian.

17. The second half of 1914 saw a series of publications on New Drama: Fan Shiqiu; Zhu Shuangyuan; and Yu Muxia and Bi Tiansong. These books are part anthologies and part critical reflections on the past and present of New Drama.

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