

**The Role of Dramaturgy between Production Teams,
Critics and Audiences in the Transitional Society of China**

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Statement

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Ting Zhang

April 3, 2024

Abstract

Dramaturgy research has received considerable attention in Western countries over the last two decades, and a number of scholars have observed and analysed the development of dramaturgy in Germany, the UK, the US and Australia in various ways. Compared to Western countries, however, research into dramaturgy in China is still an emerging field with few published outcomes.

This thesis examines the role of dramaturgy in the context of contemporary Chinese theatre. Drawing on the development of dramaturgy in different social, political and cultural contexts, the thesis will first reassess the role of dramaturgy in other theatre cultures by concentrating on German and Anglo-Saxon dramaturgical theories and practices. Then, given the tremendous societal transition in China over the last century, the thesis charts a history of spoken drama (*Huaju*) from its origins in 1907 to the current stage by chronological comparison to establish a trajectory from the hybrid foreign influence on the origin of *Huaju* to the way of self-exploration with Chinese characteristics. This thesis will also offer three dramaturgical case studies: the reception of Henrik Ibsen's work in Chinese theatre through different periods; the 1983 production of Miller's *Death of a Salesman* in Beijing; and the writing, staging, revival and restaging of the play *Teahouse*. This will be followed by an analysis of the role of dramaturgy in the current performance context in China, extending from re-evaluating the different translations of the word dramaturgy into Chinese, to comparing dramaturgical practices in contemporary spoken drama and dance theatre. This chapter is based on fieldwork and interviews with both theatre educators and practitioners in Beijing and Shanghai to examine the difficulties they have been confronting and the breakthroughs they have achieved.

Dedication

This thesis is a tribute to my grandparents (外公外婆), who raised me as their treasure and also respected me as an independent individual rather than just their child. They created a unique planet full of love and inspired my passion for literature and theatre. I cannot imagine how I began and continued this thesis without thinking of them. Although they passed away many years ago, every time I read the books they used to read and discover their handwritten notes or small pieces of paper tucked between the pages, I am transported back to that planet with tears and even more smiles.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis investigates the development of dramaturgy in the context of contemporary Chinese theatre. Dramaturgy research has increased considerably in Western countries over the last two decades, and several scholars have observed and analysed the development of dramaturgy in Germany (Lehmann & Primavesi, 2006; Stegemann, 2015), the UK (Luckhurst, 2005; Turner & Behrndt, 2007), the US (Gallagher-Ross & Blacker, 2015; Jackson-Schebetta, 2020) and Australia (Eckersall, 2006; Kelly, 2013) in various ways.

Compared to Western countries, the concept of dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg was not widely known in China until 2009. The research on the dramaturgical practice has thus just emerged with limited outcomes (for example, Li, 2018; Sun, 2015; Tian, 2010; Tian, 2018). People often misunderstand about the role of the dramaturg and other positions in the theatre, confusing these in particular with the role of translator, playwright or director. In this sense, the development of dramaturgy in China and the differences and similarities of such development between China and Western countries merits further investigation. Moreover, given the tremendous societal transition in China, it is also meaningful to explore the

specific characteristics of dramaturgy as a foreign concept operating in Chinese theatre.

It is worth highlighting at the outset that in Chinese translation there does not exist a single term to convey all the different tasks and roles that might be discussed under the rubric of dramaturgy or dramaturg in English-language theatre scholarship, not to mention the added layers of meaning that have made their way into English from German and other languages. There are losses, but also possible gains, in such translation challenges. On the one hand, the flexibility of the English-language term seems to encourage free-ranging discussions that might draw links between play script development, translation and adaptation, the development of production concepts, group-devising practices, interdisciplinary artform practices, research, negotiating with art policy and administration among others. On the other hand, the very fact that the Chinese language favours the use of specific terms for different sorts of theatrical labour is a reminder that developments in dramaturgical thinking are necessarily bound to questions of genre, culture, history and social context.

Indeed, adapting the famous formulation of Raymond Williams in relation to ‘culture’, the term ‘dramaturgy’ can be described as a ‘keyword’ of theatrical culture, and similarly described: “the problems of its meanings [seem] inextricably bound up with the problems it [is] being used to discuss” (Williams, 1988: 15). For Chinese theatre practitioners, working in a context of rapid social and cultural change, the definitional challenge is particularly acute. Its definition demands such a broad and diverse understanding of dramaturgy from both theoretical and practical perspectives, as well

as a comprehensive awareness of Chinese theatre under an ambiguous social situation, that one hardly knows where to start.

However, begin I must. While I am bound to offer an inevitably limited perspective, it is important to break new ground to provide an introduction to the diversity of thought and practice surrounding dramaturgy in China. It is meaningless to state that these questions are unanswerable. A provisional or partial answer, acknowledged as such, may be the beginning of a new exploration.

1.2 Personal experience

My personal experience enabled me to develop the foundation for conducting this research topic. Firstly, my training in the Department of Dramatic Literature, at the Beijing Central Academy of Drama from 2004 to 2008; secondly, my work as a playwright and then arts journalist between 2012 and 2017. Lastly, I will describe the first time I encountered the word ‘dramaturgy’ in 2016. I hope that these reflections will also delivery some insights into the contemporary state of Chinese theatre.

My training during the four-year Bachelor Programme centred on creative writing. Other courses included art theory, theatre history as well as intensive reading and analysing of both worldwide literature classics and selected texts of traditional Chinese theatre and spoken drama (*Huaju*). Although I completed a certain number of short stories, one-act plays, TV films and TV series as my tasks throughout the writing course, which lasted three years, I was not exposed to any great extent to actual professional practice in theatre and television industries.

Our teachers told us that they designed the writing course carefully in order to break all the rigid writing patterns that we had gradually established since primary school. It is worth noting that the specific goal of those patterns (which left little space for questioning, imagination and creativity) was to fit the syllabus, and then to achieve a higher score during the competitive College Entrance Examination, failing which we would not have the opportunity to enter our dream university.

I did develop an entirely new writing style, however, most of my writing lacked experience and observation of social reality and was marked by complacency as an ‘art student’. Fortunately, the complacency did not last long. I soon realised the vast gap between ‘Ivory Tower’ and the real world upon my graduation. There were few options for me, even though I held a bachelor qualification in theatre literature. One option was to continue studying for a master’s degree to meet the requirements of public institutions and apply for a related job such as editor, journalist or a personal assistant in an office. Another option was to work in precarious employment for theatre, film and TV productions. I finally undertook a Masters’ degree by research and at the same time engaging freelance writing, thanks to personal connections with my supervisors and other senior colleagues who already had reputations in the field of television.

During my four-year undergraduate training, there was little discussion of concepts or practices that might correspond with the way the term ‘dramaturgy’ tends to be used in English-speaking theatre cultures. Indeed, across all the courses related to dramatic literature, theatre history and criticism that we studied as students at university, there

was no lecture on ‘dramaturgy’, and certainly the silence on the question of what dramaturgy might mean in a Chinese context was almost absolute.

After four years of writing for TV productions and obtaining a Masters of Arts in Television, I moved into arts journalism, and worked as a journalist and editor for the publication *China Arts News* (*Zhongguo yishubao* 中国艺术报) in Beijing from 2012 to 2017. This publication addressed intercultural artform practices, especially in performing arts. My job required me to watch theatre works from foreign and Chinese companies, interview theatre-makers from diverse backgrounds, as well as commission and edit theatre reviews.

During this period, hundreds of works from different parts of the world were performed on stage in China, thanks to invitations from various festivals, thus making my experience as an audience member interesting. However, from a theatre professional perspective, I was aware that several genres such as physical theatre, dance theatre and documentary theatre came to China one after another and were usually named using compound phrases that sounded novel but unfamiliar. Worse still, both production teams and theatre critics rarely provided comprehensive introductions and intercultural context about these genres. As a result, Chinese audiences generally did not take these genres seriously but considered them to be merely marketing labels.

In terms of locally produced Chinese works, the situation was more complicated.

State-owned theatres had a certain number of tasks to complete every year for both classic revival and original plays to coincide with specific anniversaries or other

government commissions. These works, even new ones, rarely offered fresh perspectives related to both reality and theatre development. Influenced by the significant shadow of Soviet theatre, these works were still being produced in the name of realism, although, they barely reflected the essential reality of Chinese society, due to continuing pervasive censorship. On the other hand, compared to state-owned theatres, the environment of private and individual theatre studios was a vast testing ground. Some of these theatres focused on box office success as their priority, while others tried to follow in the footsteps of the new genres I mentioned earlier, or imitate Chinese Little Theatre stars such as Meng Jinghui, to build a personal style for the company. Although experiments varied, touching on social problems was always an area where extra care was needed.

It was clear to me that there was tension between the desire of young artists for aesthetic innovation and provocative practice, the huge appetite of audiences for high-quality original theatre works and the limitations of the established state-owned theatres and their repertoire. However, many authors, including me, chose to ignore this tension in the articles we wrote. I was used to writing theatre reviews (theatre propaganda sometimes), rather than critiques. I could describe performances and introduce theatre artists meticulously but seldom stated my point of view. This approach may appear deceptive and irresponsible, but many journalists in my field would agree with me that it was a safe and practical strategy.

What is the reason for the circumstances I describe above? Both artists and critics are aware of censorship issues and try hard to avoid the associated risks. However, are we

to understand that as the only reason? Could censorship then become an excuse for lazy thinking? Is it impossible to find a balance between restraint and exploration? Is it indeed necessary for theatre to address the problems of contemporary society? What if theatre does not relate to reality at all? What would be presented on stage if there were no censorship in China? I was curious but also struggling with these questions.

It was during this period as an arts journalist that I began to encounter in programmes and on posters, the use of terms that are roughly analogous to the term ‘dramaturg’ in English usage, referring to a very unique and specific position in the theatre. For instance, Hu Kaiqi participated in John Logan’s *Red* (2014) and Arthur Miller’s *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan* (2015) under the title of ‘literary consultant’. Zou Lulu worked on Jon Fosse’s series of plays as ‘literary advisor’. Given the association of such terms with all the refreshing but ambiguous compound words that I saw in festival contexts and in the work of individual studio productions, I began to wonder whether a more explicit engagement with what dramaturgy could mean or might be, could be a source of renewal for Chinese theatre.

Of course, I was not alone in asking such questions. For the purposes of this thesis, one of the most intriguing and comprehensive attempts to introduce concepts of dramaturgical practice into Chinese theatre would have to be the work of Li Yinan. In 2016, I had an opportunity to see the documentary theatre *家/home* performed by students from the Department of Dramatic Literature, the Central Academy of Drama, at a shopping centre in Beijing.

The work explored the theme of the itinerant urban population and discussed the loss of hometown belonging experienced by rural migrant workers during the urbanisation process in China. Xiaojie, the protagonist, was the owner of a small barbershop in Beijing. 'Haircut', 'love' and 'vagrant' were the three tags designating his fate. The hardships of his livelihood, his broken family and the powerlessness of love caused him both desire and pain, as experienced by hundreds of thousands of people who came to Beijing from rural areas.

While the performance struck me as somewhat rough and unpolished, and perhaps too abstract in some parts, it also surprised me because, in other ways, it was so closely bound to social reality. As a former student in this department, I was very curious about how this story had been scripted and how the rehearsal process had been developed. After the performance, I had a conversation with Li Yinan, who had guided students during the creative process. It was then I began to consider an extended definition or understanding of the role of dramaturgy based on her comments, which not only included translating and adapting the Western text to the Chinese stage but also allowing theatre works regain their engagement in and responsibility to society.

In fact, Li Yinan started to introduce and advocate for the concept of dramaturgy in China from 2009 after she came back from Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich and Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany. Her first step was curating the International Symposium of Dramaturgy in Beijing (together with the Goethe-Institute China). She then established the Dramaturgy course at the Central

Academy of Drama, and then gradually developed it into a bachelor programme, named Dramaturgy and Applied Theatre, in 2015. During the 2015/2016 academic year, she created 家/*home* with forty students. They undertook intensive readings of sociology theory, long-term fieldwork, and several workshops together.

Working with a teacher in such a collective way interested me and made me envious since my training at the university had never been like this, focusing instead on reading art theory, theatre history and classic literature. Writing practice followed the recurring teaching mode of task assigning-collecting-scoring and giving feedback. This way of training may build up students' theatrical knowledge and writing skills but does not allow for interaction with the world outside the classroom. Hence, I wonder what Li brought to her students in her dramaturgy course and whether she reached her goal.

Li emphasised the creation of documentary theatre throughout her dramaturgy practice and teaching. In an interview with her in 2018, she explained the reason in detail; for her, the most important task was encouraging her students to take social responsibility and reflect on social issues during their studies. She pointed out that after the Cultural Revolution, Chinese spoken drama showed a strong tendency of avoiding political issues. Firstly, she thought the reason was that people misunderstood the word 'politics', seeing it as the equivalent to political propaganda from the top. Secondly, with the deepening of market-oriented reform since the 1990s, the combination of depoliticisation and business trends had gradually led to melodrama dominating theatre, which not only met the public's needs for

entertainment but also eliminated political risks. In response to this situation, she introduced dramaturgy to her students, not only as a foreign concept, but also as a method of reflection to help younger generations re-evaluate the political nature of Chinese spoken drama since its origin in 1907.

With regard to the discussion on the creative process of *家/home*, Li said that the predicament she and her students faced was beyond their expectations. Based on the fieldwork they were undertaking, her 'post-90s' students recognised the problem of their own identity, which gradually triggered their intense emotion and even resistance to the rehearsal process.

The 'post-90s' generation in China is unique; most are single children and were born in a period of rapid economic development in the 1990s. Under the care of their parents and elders, they experienced great material enrichment during their childhood. However, after graduating from college and entering society, they were exposed to fierce competition in the urban living environment. Many in this generation lost confidence and felt hopelessness with regard to their future career development.

During their fieldwork, Li's students saw the harsh living environment of the 'Beijing Drifters' (*Beipiao* 北漂) who included migrant workers and white-collar workers; they realised that they would lose the protection of their parents and become 'Beijing Drifters' too. In addition, when students interviewed each other as part of project, some students found it even harder to admit the massive gap in their family background. Facing the imminent future distinction between privileged and ordinary working families, students engaged in intense quarrels during these discussions. At

the final stage of production of the project, a few students could not bear the pressure and refused to rehearse, ultimately harming the quality of the final performance.

Although challenging, Li thought that the experience described above was valuable. She told me that one or two years later, some students came to thank her, believing that the pain and struggle at the time were worthwhile. The students said they might never have had the courage to face reality if she had not insisted on leading them to tear open the sweet outer coat of their lives and expose the uncomfortable reality.

Another question came to both Li and me. The students' work was indeed revealing the reality of Chinese society, however, what was the next step? At the end of the interview, Li said that when she started the dramaturgy course her intention had been to ambitiously 'do useful theatre'. However, she had become conscious of the limitations of her teaching in later years. In terms of my observations, I recognised the gap between Li's teaching, her brave practices and those of her students, and the quality of the final production. By observing the development and challenges through my personal engagement, I realised that comprehensive research on the development of Dramaturgy in contemporary China is a significant task to take on as my PhD study.

1.3 Key research questions, method, and the structure of the thesis

As discussed above, the dilemma faced by Li Yinan and others goes to the very heart of this thesis. In response to the possibilities and constraints of dramaturgy in the Chinese context, there are four research questions to be addressed in this thesis:

1. Why have educators and theatre-makers adopted the concept of dramaturgy in China?
2. How have educators and theatre-makers adopted the concept of dramaturgy in China?
3. What are the similarities and differences, in terms of adopting dramaturgy and dramaturgical practices, between China and other Western countries?
4. What are the similarities and differences of dramaturgical practice in different performing arts, such as spoken drama and dance theatre?

In order to tackle these questions, this research adopts a qualitative method through fieldwork in Beijing and Shanghai, including conducting in-depth and semi-structured qualitative interviews with educators and practitioners in the field of theatre-making; participation and observation of teaching and learning of dramaturgy at education institutions; observation at major theatre companies in Beijing and Shanghai, as well as archival research at local libraries, secondary information collection through local newspapers and magazines.

Table 1.1 demonstrates the detailed sources of data collection and Table 1.2 presents interviewees' profile.

Table 1.1: The sources of data collection and fieldwork in China

Sources	Target	Description
Primary data collection through interviews	No. of educators: 3 No. of theatre managers: 1 No. of dramaturgs: 4 No. of directors: 1	The role includes: Dramaturgy education; Experimenting new production; Translating foreign plays; Organising training workshop; Mentoring new playwrights.
Participation/ observation at education institutions	Central Academy of Drama, Beijing; Beijing Dance Academy, Beijing; Shanghai Theatre Academy, Shanghai.	Educational institution for training new generation of director, actors, dancers, choreographers, dramaturgs and critics.
Observation at theatre companies	Mengjingshui Theatre Studio, Beijing; Beijing People's Art Theatre, Beijing; Penghao Theatre, Beijing; Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre, Shanghai; Vertebra Theatre, Shanghai; Edinburgh Fringe Showcase, Shanghai.	Drama production; Theatre management and development; Platform for dramaturgs to function; Training workshop for public; Development of new works and playwrights.
Archival research at local libraries/museum	The Museum of Beijing People's Art Theatre, Beijing. The Library of Central Academy of Drama, Beijing; The Library of Shanghai Theatre Academy, Shanghai.	Archival collection of historical documents related to the development of <i>Huaju</i> in China.
Secondary information collection through newspapers and magazines	Beijing Evening News; Xinmin Evening News; China Arts News; Asian Theatre Journal; Ibsen Studies.	Collection of drama report, analysis and critics, particularly on the contemporary development of drama and dramaturgy.

Table 1.2: The Profile of Interviewees

ID	Position	Work Unit	Type of Theatre	Year of Experience
11. Li Yinan	Teacher/Dramaturg	Dramaturgy Faculty at Central Academy of Drama	Theatre(Documentary Theatre)	14
12. Yu Rongjun	Artistic Director	Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center	Theatre(text-based theatre)	25
13. Zou Lulu	Teacher/Translator/Dramaturg	Shanghai Theatre Academy	Theatre(text-based theatre)	10
14. Kai Tuchmann	Theatre-Maker/Teacher/Dramaturg	Dramaturgy Faculty at Central Academy of Drama	Theatre(Documentary Theatre)	14
15. Wang Anni	Dramaturg	Meng Jinghui Theatre Studio	Theatre(Text-based Theatre)	6
16. Wang Hao	Dramaturg	Meng Jinghui Theatre Studio	Theatre(Text-based Theatre)	7
17. Gu Lei	Director/Playwright	Freelance	Theatre(Text-based Theatre)	15
18. Fabrizio Massini	Artistic Director/Producer/Dramaturg	Ibsen International	Theatre(Text-based Theatre)/Dance	11
19. Chen Ran	Director/Playwright/Dramaturg	Independent Art Group "Stage No More"	Theatre(Children Theatre)/Dance	10

A thematic approach was adopted to analyse the data (King, 2004). Interview data analysis was supported by secondary data analysis of the relevant documents, and observations of education and theatre-making processes, structures, and relationships. This data triangulation enabled a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena studied. Specifically, the interview transcripts were read in several iterations by the author with the categorisation of key themes in the light of the research questions. Codes were developed to represent the key themes. Then the full sets of data were analysed by identifying text relevant to the research questions, associating them with the corresponding codes, and organising the relationships according to the themes. Table 1.3 presents a sample summary of the codes and illustrative key responses based on the interviews.

Table 1.3 Interviewees' key responses and themes

Interviewee	Key responses	Relevant themes
I1. Li Yinan (李亦男)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dramaturgy is not only a concept but also a method of thinking. 2. The purpose of advocating dramaturgy in China is to address the transparency of the creative process and to disrupt personal dictatorship and pyramid hierarchy in theatre. 3. Rebuild the relationship between theatre and social related issues. 4. Changing the way of studying theatre in China, developing critical thinking and analysis of students. 5. The dramaturg should engage in the whole process rather than staying in the position of an outsider. 6. Working with students through theory reading, fieldwork, workshop and rehearsal. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The role of dramaturgy in China. 2. The purpose of adopting dramaturgy in China. 3. Using dramaturgy for building bridge among stakeholders. 4. Challenging traditional thinking. 5. Engaging the entire process as an insider. 6. Learning from practising.
I2. Yu Rongjun (喻荣军)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The purpose of advocating dramaturgy in China is to bridge the gap between theory and practice in <i>Huaju</i>. 2. Fulfil the role of dramaturg by the art department in state theatres. 3. Communicating with different people, from the production team to critics and audiences. 4. Arranging long-term workshops for new works' development. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The purpose of adopting dramaturgy in China. 2. The role of dramaturg in China. 3. Using dramaturgy for building bridge among stakeholders. 4. The role of dramaturg in China.
I3. Zou Lulu (邹鲁路)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is not easy to hire full-time dramaturgs in China because of the financial pressure and theatre hierarchy. 2. Dramaturgs should not be limited in the text preparation but fully and actively participate in the 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Opportunities and challenges of adopting dramaturgy in China. 2. Engaging the entire process as an insider.

	entire creative process as sensitive observers.	
I4. Kai Tuchmann	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introducing dramaturgy as an implement for teaching different methods of theatre-making. 2. The short history of practising dramaturgy in China means there is still the freedom to try different things. 3. The challenge of adopting dramaturgy in China is commercialisation, which vanishing not only spaces in theatre but also spaces in minds. 4. The capability of communicating with different people and collecting different opinions is necessary for dramaturgs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The purpose of adopting dramaturgy in China. 2. Opportunities and challenges of adopting dramaturgy in China. 3. Opportunities and challenges of adopting dramaturgy in China. 4. Using dramaturgy for building bridge among stakeholders.
I5. Wang Anni (王安妮)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The dramaturg in the team is someone who is making trouble and challenging others. 2. Dramaturgs in China still have the mission of self-identity. 3. Many commercial theatre production teams do not value dramaturgs' work because they seem unable to help increase the box office in a short time. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The role of dramaturg in China. 2. The role of dramaturg in China. 3. Opportunities and challenges of adopting dramaturgy in China.
I6. Wang Hao (王好)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. My role included text adapting during the pre-production period and asking questions to directors and actors to open up more possibilities for them during the rehearsal process. 2. The situation of dramaturgs in China is ambiguous because many directors and actors still believe they are capable enough and suspect the role of dramaturgs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The role of dramaturg in China. 2. Opportunities and challenges of adopting dramaturgy in China.
I7. Gu Lei (顾雷)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The cooperation with dramaturgs in the workshop pushed me reflect on the creative process. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The role of dramaturg in China.

	<p>2. Dramaturgy is a mode of constant reflection and feedback.</p> <p>3. It is not easy to adopt dramaturgy in China because it requires not only financial support but also professional dramaturgs who can solve problems efficiently.</p>	<p>2. The role of dramaturgy in China.</p> <p>3. Opportunities and challenges of adopting dramaturgy in China.</p>
I8. Fabrizio Massini	<p>1. Dramaturgy is not only a foreign concept but also a practical tool for reflecting and developing the creation process, which is helpful for Chinese theatre.</p> <p>2. The dramaturg, acting as an "outside eye", assists the choreographers in building up a dance work by observing, questioning and contextualising.</p> <p>3. Dramaturgy is not a magic stick which could cope with all problems in one second but a way of exploring.</p> <p>4. Although it has become a fashion trend, the situation of dramaturgy in China is still vague because it is difficult to distinguish qualified dramaturgs.</p>	<p>1. The role of dramaturgy in China.</p> <p>2. The role of dramaturg in China.</p> <p>3. The role of dramaturgy in China.</p> <p>4. Opportunities and challenges of adopting dramaturgy in China.</p>
I9. Chen Ran (陈然)	<p>1. Finding a suitable group of audiences should not be just the job of the marketing department but should be considered by the dramaturgs during the creation process.</p> <p>2. The operation of dramaturgy in China is "case by case", which depends on the specific production or the personal relationship between directors and dramaturgs.</p> <p>3. Many directors, playwrights and producers are playing the role of dramaturgs in Chinese theatre without the title.</p>	<p>1. The role of dramaturg in China.</p> <p>2. Opportunities and challenges of adopting dramaturgy in China.</p> <p>3. Other stakeholders playing the role of dramaturgs in China.</p>

As for the structure of the thesis, following this introductory chapter, the thesis includes the following sections:

Chapter 2 begins by identifying existing literature that focuses on dramaturgical theories and practices in Germany, Anglo-American countries, and the Asia-Pacific region, outlining how the concept of dramaturgy developed in different social and political contexts, and the role of the dramaturg in different theatre cultures. Then, in applying these findings to the situation in Chinese theatre, historically and now, this chapter explores the lessons we could draw in the Chinese case if we traced back the journey of dramaturgy to its origins.

Chapter 3 provides a contextual background of Chinese spoken drama (*Huaju*) and the evolution of *Huaju* through its development. This chapter divides into five sections, including *Huaju*'s birth (1907 to the late 1920s); the development of *Huaju* during the wars period (the 1930s to 1940s); the development of *Huaju* in the new China (1949 to 1976); the development of *Huaju* under the reform (1977 to 1989); and the recent development of *Huaju* (1990 to the present). In the early development stage (from 1907 to the late 1920s), in order to awaken the masses and advocate social reform in China, *Huaju*'s pioneers made efforts to introduce this Western-style art form with its realistic portrayal of society and use of spoken dialogue as their vehicle of creation. During the war period from the 1930s to the 1940s, the focus of *Huaju* was to explore its path and to serve as a weapon to encourage the masses to fight against the Japanese invasion. During the development of *Huaju* in new China (from 1949 to 1976), *Huaju* experienced new developments. Especially during the period of

the ‘Hundred Flowers Campaign’ in the 1950s, there was a tremendously blossoming in theatre fields. *Huaju* practitioners participated in the exploration of the ‘*Huaju* sinicization’ (*Huaju minzuhua* 话剧民族化) by creating several new plays. During the development of *Huaju* from the end of the Cultural Revolution (1976) to the late 1980s, *Huaju* was characterised by its diverse and free exploration by following the new policy of ‘opening up’ the society. The period between 1990s to the present is marked as a diversified development with a split between mainstream theatre productions by state-sponsored theatres and avant-garde productions by auteur-style independent dramatists. The way of making theatre in this period also shows a diversified tendency, including maintaining old traditions, developing experimental theatre productions, deconstructing established plays, and increasingly adopting dramaturgy in the making process.

Chapter 4 delves further into three specific case studies from a dramaturgical perspective: the reproduction of Henrik Ibsen’s work in China from 1907 to 2018; the 1983 production of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* in Beijing; and the writing, staging, reviving and new versions of Lao She’s *Teahouse* from 1958 to 2018. By analysing these three examples, this chapter reveals the visible and invisible roles of dramaturgy and the different roles of dramaturgs in contemporary Chinese theatres.

Chapter 5 examines dramaturgy’s role in the current context of performance. Since 2009, when Li Yinan first formally introduced dramaturgy, the localisation of dramaturgical practices has been debated in the application of diverse practices. This chapter progresses this discussion by studying the different translations of the word

dramaturgy in China and compares dramaturgical practices in both spoken drama and dance theatre, based on my field work and interviews, in order to tease out what confusions and difficulties theatre-makers are facing, as well as potential breakthroughs they could have by developing a more conscious dramaturgical practice.

Chapter 6 summarises the findings and provides detailed responses to the key research questions. This chapter also presents a holistic conceptual framework as key contribution, presenting a number of contributions to literature development. In addition, the implications for policy, practice and future development are also discussed.

1.4 Summary

In sum, this thesis aims to investigate dramaturgy in the context of contemporary Chinese theatre. The journey of such development has been influenced by the initiatives of key Chinese dramatists as well as the thinking, research, and practices of dramaturgy in Western countries, particularly the development of dramaturgy in Germany. In order to facilitate a better understanding of the concept of dramaturgy, the next section provides a review of the relevant theoretical foundations and underpinning theories, as well as a historical development trajectory of the concept and practices of dramaturgy internationally.

Chapter 2

Historical Review of Dramaturgy in Different Theatre Cultures

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the importance of the historical evolution of dramaturgy in different theatre cultures was highlighted. In this chapter, a review of the existing literature in relation to the term ‘dramaturgy’, and the historical development of dramaturgical theories and practices in Germany, the UK, the US and the Asia-Pacific region, will be explored. Key questions tackled in this chapter include: How did the concept of dramaturgy develop in different social and cultural contexts? How did the concept of dramaturgy travel from Germany to other countries? What is the role of the dramaturg in different theatre cultures? Based on these, I conclude that a number of useful lessons for the Chinese theatre context may be drawn from these different examples.

2.2 Defining dramaturgy

In its earliest definition, dramaturgy meant a comprehensive concept of play-making. The original Greek word *dramatourgos* meant a play-maker, play composer, one who is able to organise various dramatic actions into a meaningful and comprehensive order. A dramaturg, then, could be seen as the equivalent of a playwright (Romanska, 2015: 1). Indeed, in many modern languages, including French, Spanish and Polish,

the word *dramaturg* (or *dramaturge*) can also mean playwright. Can we therefore regard dramaturg as simply another name for a playwright? On the contrary, the skill set one needs to be able to write a play is not the same as the one needed to function as a dramaturg who is capable of engaging and developing the entire play making activity with multiple functions (Romanska, 2015: 1). *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance* (2003) defines the dramaturg more expansively as “a person with knowledge of the history, theory, and practice of theatre, which helps a director, designer, playwright, or actor realise their intentions in production”.

From a historical point of view, although dramaturgy often traces its origins to eighteenth century Germany, it has antecedents throughout theatre history. For example, in ancient Greece, in the earliest surviving work of dramatic theory *Poetics* (335 BC), Aristotle valued the plot as the most vital essence of the drama, maintaining that the plot was not a story or a narrative, but a dramaturgical scaffolding that arranges the dramatic structure (Romanska, 2015: 1). That is, Aristotle considered that the initial dramaturgical work/effort was arranging various dramatic actions in a meaningful and comprehensive order.

The concept of dramaturgy itself has undergone constant evolution. In modern theatre, the function has expanded to cover both the aesthetic architecture and practical philosophy of theatrical work (Romanska, 2015: 2). The work of the dramaturg thus refers to the accumulated techniques of analysis, research and practical application (Chemers, 2010: 3). In Chemers’ definition, analysis means determining the architecture of each play; research means discovering everything needed to transform

an inert script into a living piece of theatre; practical application means applying the knowledge to a living audience at a particular time in a particular place.

Dramaturgical functions can be fulfilled in myriad ways, and potentially by a variety of people. The role of dramaturg has been also continually shifting due to local social, political, economic and cultural factors, as well as theatrical tradition. Just as there is no one way to create theatre, there is no single model of dramaturgy. The following sections illustrate the historical evolution of the development of dramaturgy in different societal sittings, namely Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States and the Asia-Pacific region.

2.3 The development of dramaturgy in Germany

2.3.1 The initial development of dramaturgy in Germany

Unlike France or Britain, 'Germany' in the eighteenth century was not a single nation but was comprised of a loose confederation of over three hundred principalities.

Consequently, Germany lacked its own national literary figures, a definable tradition and, to some extent, a standard literary language (Luckhurst, 2006: 25). Hence, the establishment of a national theatre in 1767, namely the Hamburg National Theatre, described as an 'academy' for training actors and playwrights as well as enlightening audiences, came from the ambition of developing a distinct cultural identity, through staging plays in the local language, and thus building an indigenous literary tradition. From this perspective, Lessing became Germans' hope with his wide range of talents

in writing and translating. His appointment as ‘in-house-critic’ – dramaturg – at the Hamburg National Theatre became an essential part of this national theatre project.

With the rise of the bourgeoisie and the transformation of the public sphere in the eighteenth century, Germany’s emerging middle class tried to gain more political power and make its voice heard. The consequence of this endeavour was a new model of theatre, referred to as ‘public theatre’, to which everybody nominally had access, regardless of their social status. Furthermore, it was felt that these theatres should validate bourgeois/democratic worldviews and embody these values (Trencsényi, 2015: 3). As such, German theatre turned away from its polarised position between popular travelling companies doing low-brow comedy, and court theatres steeped in French and Italian tradition (Luckhurst, 2006:25). Instead, Germany wanted to establish its own theatre tradition. Thus, Lessing had been placed in his prominent position by the theatre founders’ high expectations of advancing a plan for theatrical reform in this period of Enlightenment.

As Daniel Brewer has noted, the Enlightenment was a “moment of intellectual and social reform” (1993:13), aimed at influencing education, critical questioning and empirical objectivity to challenge the thoughts and behaviours based on religion, social norms and tradition. Enlightenment pioneers of the eighteenth century attempted to explain the world, not in religious and metaphysical terms, but in objective, empirical and scientific terms (Turner & Behrndt, 2008: 20). Influenced by the Enlightenment movement, the Hamburg National Theatre aimed not only to offer lectures covering the entire span of theatre history and encourage original German

plays, but it was also intent on improving the tastes and moral sensibilities of German audiences (Luckhurst, 2006:26).

Having accepted the theatre's invitation to be the 'in-house-critic', Lessing proceeded to inspire, identify and champion serious and significant theatrical art at the theatre (Turner & Behrndt, 2008:20). He published critical articles bi-weekly, which he named *Hamburg Dramaturgy* (*Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, 1767-1769). With these articles, he attempted to develop a more rigorous, objective and analytical theatre discourse and practice, identifying several principles for theatrical renewal (Turner & Behrndt, 2008:20).

Lessing's career as dramaturg lasted only from 1767 to 1769. Although he was imbued with a passion for creating a high-level national theatre, he realised soon after his appointment that he was facing the dilemma of having an extremely multifaceted role but with limited power. This dilemma was not unique to Lessing and was to be experienced by many dramaturgs in later generations and many other theatre cultures, including that of China, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

The theatre-managers required Lessing to fulfil a number of tasks under the title 'in-house-critic'. Firstly, Lessing was expected to provide a substantial supply of new plays. Secondly, Lessing was to prepare productions from a literary viewpoint, including background information on the playwrights themselves, the source of the plays and the structural and linguistic features of the plays. Thirdly, Lessing was required to analyse productions from a practical viewpoint, especially with regard to

the actors' portrayals of the characters, delivery and technique. At the same time, however, Lessing was excluded from the major institutional process and decision-making, because the theatre-managers feared that Lessing's controversial tastes would put the theatre at financial risk. Hence, economic security rather than cultural reform quickly became the top priority of the theatre's management after the theatre opened.

In terms of Lessing's role as dramaturg, there was significant divergence between his view and that of the theatre. Lessing regarded himself as an educator, and he insisted that new plays should challenge and lead audiences' tastes. However, the financial backers needed Lessing to perform as the theatre's propagandist and to publish articles which would attract larger audiences. Confused about "who is the cook and who is the waiter" (Luckhurst, 2006:31), Lessing found he had no power to influence the theatre's repertoire. Subsequently, Lessing turned his passion to writing the essays that would become the *Hamburg Dramaturgy*.

Lessing began to compose his first essay on the *Hamburg Dramaturgy* in 1767 and the last one in 1769. The 104 essays written during these two years were the most intuitive representation of Lessing's thoughts on German national theatre. Two important elements can be mentioned in summarising his contribution.

First, he was noticeably ahead of his time in pointing out the importance of the dramaturg in maintaining a different perspective between the written text of a play

and a play being performed on stage, in order to distinguish the different roles and intentions of the playwright and the theatre production team.

Second, Lessing's dramaturgical suggestions in relation to nurturing German plays emphasised both source materials and characters. As an experienced playwright, Lessing played a mediating role between the stage and the auditorium. He emphasised that the effective approach to eliciting audiences' sympathies is "not to describe passion but to let it develop before the eyes of the audience" (Lessing & Zimmern, 1962: 38). Additionally, he argued that characters are the driving force behind a compelling story; they must follow their own inner logic and remain true to that, or else audiences' sympathy and attention would be lost (Lessing & Zimmern, 1962:52).

For this purpose, Lessing proposed breaking away from the conventions of French neo-classical plays. He advocated the creation of a new genre of bourgeois tragedy that depicted ordinary people, marking a departure from the tradition of focusing solely on the upper classes. Additionally, Lessing emphasised the importance of translating works, especially those of Shakespeare, as they featured the lives of ordinary people.

Lessing's suggestions on repertoire were not accepted by the theatre-managers. They preferred well-established plays by French authors above German newcomers or Shakespeare because they believed French plays could decrease the financial risk of the theatre (Luckhurst, 2006:30). The number of performances staged proved this tendency: the theatre presented 308 performances of French plays, compared with 176

performances of German plays. Ironically, among the German plays, only Lessing's works escaped being excluded (Luckhurst, 2006:35).

The essays which would make up the *Hamburg Dramaturgy* stopped being published in 1769 due to the financial crisis experienced by the theatre; box-office receipts were unsatisfactory and company tours were also insufficient to make a profit. The theatre finally went bankrupt in March 1769.

While Lessing did not realise his vision for the progressive reform of German theatre, his legacy can be examined from various perspectives. His suggestion of producing drama based on ordinary people's lives by learning from Shakespeare, for example, had a profound impact on the development of German theatre during his generation and later generations. As the second most acclaimed dramaturg following Lessing, German poet and critic Ludwig Tieck, together with August Wilhelm Schlegel, translated Shakespeare's collective works into German from 1797 to 1833. This project widened the scope of the dramaturg's function, including translation and adaptation. Through the efforts of Lessing and Tieck, the dramaturg was established as a crucial function in the German theatrical landscape. In addition, later generations of playwrights and theatre-makers, including Goethe and Schiller, followed Lessing's suggestions and created plays based on Shakespeare's works.

Further, as negligible as Lessing's influence in the Hamburg National Theatre may have been at the time, his contribution to the role of the critic and dramaturg was long-lasting and profound. In conjoining theory and practice, as Anthony Meech

noted, Lessing was unique in combining a critical sense of the highest order and an ability and willingness to read foreign texts in the original with the talent of a dramatist and an acute awareness of the practicalities of stage performance (Meech, 2008: 71).

2.3.2 The evolution of dramaturgy in Germany

After the initial development of dramaturgy in German, dramaturgs in the nineteenth century continually sought a balance between theatre's values of entertainment and political awareness through national identity. As a result of Lessing's influence, theatre functioned as an enlightenment platform to cultivate audiences, and foster people's new identity and collective values (Luckhurst, 2006: 35).

From that historical point, dramaturgy not only adopted the 'architecture of action' as seen in ancient Greece, but also combined philosophical and political dimensions within the German theatre system. Based on Lessing's earlier dramaturgical advocacy that was closely bound to the rise of the bourgeois class, the new movement emphasised the importance of self-reflection in the drama of bourgeois tragedy to reveal individuals' inner lives on stage, leading to a new dramaturgy of psychological actions. For example, characters were to typically know about and fight against the constraints of social conventions imposed on them as part of the bourgeois enlightenment and revolution (Stegemann, 2015: 46).

The new approach to dramaturgy created an invisible wall between the stage and the audience as a 'fourth wall', and this arrangement enabled the audience to be observers

of the life represented on stage, rather than participants. Actors could thus demonstrate their inner life on stage with a distance between themselves and the audience (Stegemann, 2015: 46). As observers, ordinary audiences could be enlightened by the inner bourgeois life represented on stage (Stegemann, 2015: 46). In order to accomplish this new objective, dramaturgs needed to discuss their intentions with directors as the first critics of the performance, and to organise the production accordingly in order for audiences to concentrate on and sympathise with the life seen on stage (Trencsényi, 2015:118).

In order to implement the new ideas generated by later dramaturgs in the nineteenth century, financial backing for theatre development was crucial. Most cities at the time tried to build new theatres in their centres with financial support from city governments as a way of developing citizens' awareness of theatre. The performances offered a wide range of formats with different levels of quality and genre, including operas, operettas, ballets, plays, musical comedies and melodramas (Stegemann, 2015: 47). The thriving market for plays resulted in a huge range of texts, so the repertoire of the city theatre could even-handedly satisfy the demand for entertainment and representation of bourgeois inner life. A greater number of untried plays were also produced given theatre managements were financially supported by their city governments and were not too concerned with financial income from the box-office (Schechter, 1995: 27).

Under such circumstances, dramaturgs had gained more influence in the selection of new playwrights and their works. For example, Ludwig Tieck's dramaturgical advice influenced the production team to bring plays by Goethe, Shakespeare, Calderon and Kleist to the stage. In addition, Otto Brahm's dramaturgy led to premieres of Ibsen, Strindberg, Zola and Gerhart Hauptmann in Berlin toward to end of the nineteenth century (Schechter, 1995:38).

Although these dramaturgs exerted more influence than Lessing over play selection, they still faced much resistance from other people, including actors and management teams, regarding satisfying audience tastes, rather than leading and enlightening audiences through developing new national identities. For example, Ludwig Tieck experienced difficulties in dealing with management teams when he challenged the prevalence of low standards of taste to please audiences (Schechter, 1995:39).

According to Stegemann (2015), following the early development of capitalism, there was a tendency towards turning everything into a commodity with a price on the market, including labour. This trend created alienation of people's lives given most working people were treated as a commodity in society. With the bourgeois class being the winner of this alienation, theatre lost its critical role of enlightening the masses, and instead became a form of entertainment for making money. In order to fight against this tendency, a new generation of dramaturgs, such as Brecht and his colleagues, brought political awareness back to the theatre in the twentieth century as the continuation of the enlightenment of the masses in the class struggle. These later theatre-makers believed that there was no other choice for theatre than to become

political since “for art to be unpolitical means only to ally itself with the ruling group of bourgeois” (Brecht & Willett, 1978:196).

2.3.2 Brecht’s contribution

Taking theatre as an important force of societal transformation, Brecht believed that drama should reflect the tension of social life in reality rather than the tension between characters in the plot of a play. Therefore, the goal was no longer to arouse audiences’ sympathies but to awaken in them the recognition of the forces that had shaped current society (Trencsényi, 2015:116). With regard to the ‘fourth wall’, developed through the nineteenth century, Brecht believed it no longer existed because the stage had become a part of the social reality, and there should not be a wall or distance between the stage and the audience (Trencsényi, 2015:118). In this regard, dramaturgs played a crucial role in bringing drama and the audience closely together to achieve the wider horizon of social relevance (Stegemann, 2015: 47).

These different approaches have traced the trajectory of the dramaturg’s role, evolving from the notion of enlightenment during Lessing’s era to the concept of intermediation as articulated by Brecht. As with Lessing, Brecht’s dramaturgical statements on both theory and practice brought reforms to German-speaking theatre. While both Lessing and Brecht combined the roles of critic and playwright, Brecht took his practical experimentation further, eventually establishing his own theatre, the Berliner Ensemble, in East Germany in the 1950s.

As a globally well-known dramatist, Brecht's dramaturgical contribution has perhaps received less attention from the academic field. His work *Der Messingkauf*, similar to Lessing's *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, comprehensively expressed Brecht's dramaturgical thinking. Written from 1939 to 1955, *Der Messingkauf* runs to 174 pages and includes dialogues, poems, notes, essays and actors' exercises (Luckhurst, 2006:110). Brecht wrote this work not only as theoretical material, but also as a performance text with five dramatic personae, namely, Philosopher, Actor, Actress, Dramaturg and Technician. The main body of *Der Messingkauf* comprises a four-night discussion between these five characters, each of whom represents their respective profession and a particular perspective of theatre. By putting various aesthetic, political and individual roles against one another, the work synthesised Brecht's way of making theatre (Luckhurst, 2006:112). The discussion embodied a dialectical design and explored what could become of theatre within a politically charged paradigm and whether it was still possible to establish or maintain theatre's aesthetics, and remain playful and complex (Luckhurst, 2006:110).

The Philosopher and the Dramaturg roles are the most eloquent voices in articulating Brecht's intention. As a Marxist, the Philosopher firmly states that theatre should serve Marxist ideology and encourage audiences to recognise the forces shaping current society. The Dramaturg takes a number of positions on the production process, including the role of 'adaptor' by re-contextualising classic and modern repertoire in new radical reading, thus performing a full-scale transformation of all materials into a workable starting point for rehearsal. The Dramaturg then assumes the role of

‘mediator’ by identifying, analysing and articulating all aspects of the processes of rehearsal, and constructing a framework for the debate, connecting with the Philosopher and other dramatic personae through discussion.

In *Der Messingkauf*, Brecht emphasised the importance of developing dramaturgy beyond Lessing’s approach. On the one hand, Brecht followed Lessing’s legacy that saw dramaturgs as intellectuals whose role should combine with that of the playwright, and as translators who thoroughly understood play texts and the dramaturgical structure, as well as theatre historians with encyclopaedic knowledge of theatre history from scholarly research in libraries and dedicated spectatorship. Lastly, dramaturgs were to be incisive, receptive and articulate communicators. On the other hand, Brecht reversed the tradition that excluded dramaturgs from being involved in the rehearsal process and other performance practices, placing the dramaturg in the rehearsal process to become the dynamic facilitator of the work.

In addition, Brecht contributed two fundamental approaches to drama production: first, the creative process must be collective and a collaboration in literary, musical and artistic talents; second, it is necessary to keep a record of any idea, conversation, event, book or story, because notetaking and documentation are the seedbeds for creating. Based on these two approaches, the ideal role of the Dramaturg as described in *Der Messingkauf* could only be accomplished by a team rather than a single person (Luckhurst, 2006:129). Carl Weber, who trained under Brecht as directing assistant, actor and dramaturg recalled: “He asked everyone he trusted to come to rehearsal and constantly asked their opinion; he controlled his work through their reactions. In the

fifties, his productions were always teamwork, and he constantly used all the people connected with a production - assistant, designer, musician” (Turner & Behrndt, 2016:66). In this sense, what Brecht valued was dramaturgical thinking throughout the collective creative process rather than a special person who worked as a dramaturg. Hence, it is important to bear in mind that the role of the Dramaturg in *Der Messingkauf* in the Berliner Ensemble was fulfilled by each member, from Brecht to his actors, designers, directors and of course, dramaturgs.

2.3.4 Implications from Brecht

Brecht was regarded as one of the most powerful cultural figures in East Germany until his death in 1956. Compared with Lessing and other dramaturgs, Brecht exerted far more influence on artistic approach and decision-making at his theatre. In addition, the Socialist Unity Party had allocated financial support to the Berliner Ensemble and confirmed its official status as an “institution of the German Department of Education” (Luckhurst, 2006:127), thus providing legitimacy for Brecht to run the theatre with political and financial support.

Theoretically, it was an ideal situation for Brecht to develop his dramaturgical thinking fully with few limitations. However, in terms of being an “institution of the German Department of Education”, there were significant discrepancies between Brecht’s vision, and the official view of the East German government. Brecht expected the Berliner Ensemble to work as a national model for collective theatre-making, especially with regard to mechanisms for research, self-critique and

documentation. In contrast, the East German government required the theatre to establish the cultural identity of the socialist nation because of the theatre's nationally and historically important status. Therefore, Brecht's epic theatre had to submit to the 'official doctrine' of Socialist Realism. In the midst of such contradictions, Brecht had to struggle to uphold a dynamic relationship between his principles and party dogma.

Notably, however, Brecht realised the Dramaturg role in *Der Messingkauf* by employing three female dramaturgs before the WWII, namely Elisabeth Hauptmann, Margarete Steffin, and Ruth Berlau. Elisabeth Hauptmann worked in various roles, including editor, literary consultant, translator, researcher, notetaker and documenter of discussions, literary agent, secretary and intellectual debate partner (Luckhurst, 2006:122). Margarete Steffin undertook the role of translator and playwright, and also undertook administrative functions. She was valued by Brecht because of her voice as a representative member of Brecht's intended audience; through her, he could constantly clarify his goal for the spectator (Luckhurst, 2006:122). Ruth Berlau initially acted as Brecht's translator, secretary and literature agent. Brecht then trained her to be a dramaturg by teaching her methods of reading and critiquing plays. Berlau's mission was writing down everything, including her thoughts and experiences, and other people's stories, and then to work them into a condensed dramatic structure. Brecht thus gathered potential material for his further writing and theory development (Luckhurst, 2006:123).

In conclusion, Brecht's approach to dramaturgy can be summarised as follows. First, dramaturgs will always face challenging situations. Regardless of their identity or the

extent of their influence or power, they will invariably find themselves in dynamic relationships within societal, political, or economic environments, where they could play their role by negotiating with various stakeholders. Second, dramaturgical approaches rely on the collective way of making. In this way, different individuals can complement each other, spark inspiration, provide materials and approach theatre work from different perspectives of creation, criticism and management.

2.3.5 Recent developments in dramaturgy in Germany

The conventional role for the German dramaturg is within the management structure of a state-funded theatre existing in both West, and in the former East Germany. It is common in the German system to employ at least one dramaturg in a theatre. The number of dramaturgs being employed depends on the size of the company, its funding, and the scope of the production. In larger theatres, the head dramaturg reads new plays, assumes a prominent advisory role in selecting the repertoire, and acts as primary thinker in terms of the political and social objectives of the theatre (Luckhurst, 2006:9). In these theatres, the *Chefdramaturg* (Head Dramaturg) and the rest of the team also work on individual productions as researchers, advisors and textual consultants to the director. Together with the Artistic Director, the *Chefdramaturg*'s job in planning the repertoire includes studying new plays and selecting works for production.

By the second half of the twentieth century, first in East Germany and later in unified Germany after 1990, the concept of dramaturgy continued to evolve, serving as the

intermediary between theatre and the real world. Therefore, the play text was regarded as the raw material from which the performance was composed, which could be shaped or adapted according to the needs of the performance. Classics were also examined from the current socio-political perspective. An adapted classical production on the stage, therefore, played with the dynamic between the meaning and the narrative of the original play and the meaning and narrative of the production (Trencsényi, 2015: 118).

Hence, the director and the dramaturg became “two sides of the same coin” (Li & Zhang, 2021:31). The director was responsible for the stage presentation, while the dramaturg was responsible for managing the text, collecting background material, and establishing the concept for the rehearsal and creating the programme. Rehearsals became enriched through comprehensive research and constant discussion, and the audience was informed adequately by the background of the drama and the production process through programmes.

Since the 1980s, postmodern theory has also influenced the conventional way of making theatre in Germany. This development operated under the name of ‘post-dramatic’ with the characteristics of deconstructing classical drama by using certain narratives and characters to reflect the concurrent social reality as new product to reflect on the social relevance of the time (Stegemann, 2015: 47). For example, in the 2009 production of *Othello* in collaboration with the Munich Chamber Theatre, Marion Thiedtke, as the dramaturg, substituted parts of the original script focusing on Black characters with a new dialogue addressing discrimination against Turkish

immigrants in contemporary German society. In order to highlight the new theme, Marion Thiedtke invited a second-generation Turkish immigrant writer to re-translate Shakespeare's scripts from English. The new play text was full of street slang used by Turkish immigrants in German society (Li & Zhang, 2021: 31).

New media technologies and new habits of perception have also redefined the contemporary development of theatre and performance in Germany. Hybrids of theatre, dance, performance, installation, exhibition, film and media art gained in importance, often based on new production methods (Lehmann & Primavesi, 2015:169). The arrangement of performance is no longer achieved through the subordination of all elements under one (usually the text) but rather through the dynamic balance between different elements. In post-dramatic theatre, the traditional hierarchy of theatrical elements has almost vanished. As the text is no longer, within this genre, the central factor, all the other elements, such as space, light, sound, music, movement and gesture tend to have an equal weight in the performance process. Therefore, the role of dramaturg in this style of theatre is not supposed to function as an expert but to facilitate thinking and behaving with experimental approach (Lehmann & Primavesi, 2015:170). It is noteworthy that, although post-dramatic theatre has gained more significance, the vast majority of productions cannot necessarily be described as 'post-dramatic'.

Currently, according to Stegemann, the role of dramaturg in Germany has been further developed: to explore creative ideas in cooperation with authors and directors; to ensure the quality of theatrical works based on a fruitful communication process

within the production team; to invent helpful concepts for season schedules and for cultural institutions in general; to enhance unconventional modes of exchange and discourse; and to build up global networks and use them effectively (Stegemann, 2015: 47). For example, the 2017 Schaubühne Theatre's production, *Oedipus the King*, was staged in China with dramaturg Florian Borchmeyer as group leader, playing a significant role in dealing with internal management and coordination as well as external engagement with local assistant teams, bureaucracy and audiences. From this example, we can see that the dramaturg in current German theatre operation is still significant given the long history and continuous development in the changing political, social and cultural environments (Lehmann & Primavesi, 2015:172; Stegemann, 2015: 49).

2.4 The development of dramaturgy in the UK

2.4.1 The initial development of dramaturgy in the UK

Compared to the development in Germany, dramaturgy in the UK has not only a relatively short history but also unstable development, due to economic pressure and people's misperceptions regarding dramaturgy. According to Mary Luckhurst, England has belatedly followed in the wake of European continental practice, and its dramaturgical cultures have undergone an extraordinary transformation since the 1960s (Luckhurst, 2006: I).

As with Germany in the eighteenth century, British theatre practitioners' dramaturgical explorations were closely connected to their intention of establishing a

national theatre at the turn of the twentieth century. The term ‘literary manager’, which would incorporate the function of the European dramaturg was first advocated as a new job in William Archer and Harley Granville-Barker’s dedicated plan, *A National Theatre, Scheme & Estimates* (1904 and 1907). This outline argued that national theatre should be the nation’s property, significantly impacting the whole community and offering sustained artistic effort on a grand scale (Trencsenyi, 2015: 14). In addition, the literary manager would be one of the five officials running the theatre, also including the director, the business manager, the solicitor and the reading committeeman. Three of these officials would also participate in the reading committee in charge of play selection. According to the plan, the literary manager would be given more power than the dramaturg in Lessing’s Hamburg National Theatre, including a voting right in drama production decision-making (Trencsenyi, 2015: 15). Compared to the context in which Lessing worked, the plan obviously constituted a significant development. However, the National Theatre in the UK was not actually formed until 1963.

2.4.2 The evolution of dramaturgy in the UK

Following its early development, further international influences continuously affected the later development of dramaturgy in the UK. For example, Brecht’s influence was crucial for the development of the newly established National Theatre in London with Kenneth Tynan being appointed as literary manager to play the dramaturg role as suggested by Brecht during Tynan’s visit to the Berliner Ensemble in the 1950s (Luckhurst, 2006:158). Brecht’s dramaturgical theory and practice

subsequently spread to the UK in the 1960s and 1970s mainly through directors and dramaturgs either working or formerly employed at Brecht's theatre, and through John Willett's 1965 translation of *Der Messingkauf* (Luckhurst, 2006:109). Since then, many British theatre companies and directors have started to employ extra people to undertake dramaturgical tasks following Brecht's approach (Luckhurst, 2006:189).

Tynan became the first official literary manager in the UK at the newly opened National Theatre in October 1963 and remained in that position for a decade. Similar to the German and British theatre pioneers, Tynan's statement regarding the new role of dramaturg was closely linked to the image with which the national theatre defined itself and the message that the national theatre intended to deliver to the public.

As many scholars have pointed out, Tynan's appointment provided a model of the literary manager that continues to be appropriated and refashioned by theatre companies throughout the UK (Luckhurst, 2006: 152; Trencsenyi, 2015: 20). At the same time, Tynan intended to challenge the traditional British theatre management system based on the managerial role of actor-managers by replacing it with the new role of literary manager (Luckhurst, 2006: 152).

The National Theatre made significant contributions to theatre development in the UK. According to the theatre critic, Michael Billington, as the first government-subsidised theatre in the UK, the National Theatre shaped British theatre over several decades, making a decisive shift in the balance of power away from the commercial sector (Trencsenyi, 2015:21). With regard to the success of the theatre in its early years,

Billington stated that Laurence Olivier, as Artistic Director, inspired many theatre-makers of the younger generation, including literary manager Tynan, filling the Theatre with greater energy.

One of the most important contributions of Tynan's dramaturgical exploration was on repertoire-making. Similar to Lessing, Tynan was convinced of the importance of subsidised national theatres for ensuring a broad international repertoire and creating space for innovation and experimentation. In an interview, Tynan commented on the collaboration between himself and Laurence Olivier, recalling that sometimes they would sit and argue all night, and draw up charts, making plans and sending little memos to each other which would be useful as guidance for later drama production (Cardullo, 1995: 200). Tynan had a list of all the plays in world drama from the second half of the twentieth century that could be worth reviving in Britain, called *Some Plays*. Tynan and Olivier used this as a reference book when they were planning repertoires. During the discussions, Olivier typically held a holistic view on theatre-making, while Tynan tended to focus on plays and playwrights. Subsequently, they each compensated for their respective shortcomings and developed better plans.

While the significance of Tynan's artistic and administrative function at the National Theatre is without doubt, his dramaturgical contribution as Britain's first literary manager has been underestimated by the public, for two reasons: First, much of Tynan's work took place in a small office and out of the public eye. Unlike the contributions of writers, actors, designers and directors, the literary manager at that time in England was unfamiliar and incomprehensible (Luckhurst, 2006: 189). Second,

in the rehearsal room, Tynan kept a distance from the production team and was seen as an independent critic, rather than being involved in the process of drama production, thus creating an uneasy relationship between him and the rest of production team (Trencsenyi, 2015: 27).

Though the position of literary manager became official only in 1963 with the arrival of Tynan at the National Theatre, the process of the dramaturg becoming an important role in the theatre was slow until the 1990s when an increasing number of literary managers were appointed in theatres nationwide.

2.4.2 Recent developments in dramaturgy in the UK

The boom in theatre companies in the UK and the diversity of production genres with creative experimental approaches since the late 1960s and early 1970s have required more financial support, given the changing attitudes towards securing subsidies from governments and the European Union. Economic factors have become vital to the professionalisation of dramaturgs and literary managers as most theatres were struggling financially from the 1960s onwards (Luckhurst, 2006:203). In fact, government subsidies have been integral to the establishment of literary management departments. In the 1980s in particular, innovative theatre and new writing remained substantially underfunded and the growth in literary managers and dramaturgs was financed piecemeal, based on production projects. It was hard to secure long-term contracts for literary managers/dramaturgs; only some of the theatre-makers could acquire targeted short-term contracts with certain dramaturgical functions. In the

1990s, the situation gradually improved with more funding becoming available and theatre companies could make longer-term investments in literary development. Most subsidies were given to large theatre companies with a national reputation, and many small and fringe theatres could only rely on freelance readers or literary advisers since they could not afford paid positions.

Another important change in relation to the national development of theatre was the significance of the new regional playwriting organisations established in the 1980s and 1990s. These organisations played a vital role in the development of writers in the early stages of their career with some financial support from different sources.

Increasingly, the new writing organisations have been taking on a substantial volume of unsolicited script-reading. This trend has also highlighted the importance of developing new plays in literary management in the UK.

Today, literary managers/dramaturgs in the UK have become key figures in many theatres and their roles differ from those of dramaturgs in the German theatre system (Luckhurst, 2006: 1). They tend to focus more on text-based tasks, such as selecting and revising plays and preparing production plans. However, they do not assume the production role as initially defined by Brecht. Instead, the dramaturg, as defined by Brecht, is responsible for the crucial function of actively engaging in the theatre production process,

In terms of the development of dramaturgy in recent times in the UK, Mary Luckhurst's book titled *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre* (2006), describes the

situation of dramaturgy as a silent partner because not only was academic research behind the changes that occurred in theatre, but there was also a lack of substantial professional documentation and analysis of the diverse practices of literary management and dramaturgy (Luckhurst, 2006:215).

In addition, unlike their counterparts in the German system, literary managers in the UK have to fight for their position in relation to the two better-understood roles at the top of an implicit hierarchy of creators, namely the writer and the director. In the German system, both writers and directors treat dramaturgs as equal partners, whereas in the UK system, writers and directors enjoy greater power than literary managers, given the historical traditions that still influence the organisational hierarchy in UK theatres. Katalin Trencsényi pointed out that beyond the power battles, the novelty of the concept of dramaturgy led some theatre-makers to the misapprehension that those who use the services of a dramaturg might lack some ability and that people feel ashamed to admit that they needed a dramaturg (Trencsenyi, 2015: 23).

Other scholars have also noted the difficulties facing the development of dramaturgy in the UK. For instance, Duška Radosavljević, dramaturg at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, pointed out the high level of anti-intellectualism in English-speaking theatre, giving the typical example of Terry McCabe, who attacked dramaturgy as bringing creatively bankrupt and destructive forces into theatre-making (Radosavljević, 2015:41). Based on Radosavljević's observation, dramaturgy was unsettling traditional forms of theatre and hierarchical structures in the rehearsals system in the UK at the beginning of the 21st century. While dramaturgs could excel

in thinking structurally with sensitivity to how things are shaped and how the structure impacts interpretation, they often found themselves treated as a cultural minority without full control over the theater production process in the UK system (Radosavljević, 2015:41).

These illustrations and observations demonstrate that the form of dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg in the UK system have been marginalised for multiple reasons, including anti-intellectual attitudes, traditional organisational hierarchy and constraints within the theatre-making process. Therefore, we can see a very different development trajectory of dramaturgy in the UK compared to its development in the German system. We now turn our focus to the development of dramaturgy in the North America, mostly focusing on the United States of America.

2.5 The development of dramaturgy in the US

2.5.1 The initial development of dramaturgy in the US

As with England, the history of dramaturgy in the United States is significantly shorter than in Germany. Dramaturgy nominally only developed in America from the 1960s. However, the adoption and adaptation of dramaturgy in American theatre have distinct characteristics. For instance, American theatre-makers realised that they had to develop their own model rather than simply copying the German one. Additionally, they created a critical space where academic and practitioners could meet and exchange ideas. Today dramaturgy and literary management are embedded in subsidised theatres and recognised as academic curricula at over forty universities.

America's dramaturgical practice nevertheless did share some similar ground with their German predecessors. In the eighteenth century when the new theatre was established, Lessing wanted to direct his audiences' tastes toward bourgeois drama, an approach which found consensus in 1960s America. With the development of the regional theatre movement, theatre pioneers like Arthur Ballet believed that the public deserved a refreshed repertoire of theatrical classics and new original plays. During the 1960s, from his base in the Office of Advanced Drama Research (OADR) at the University of Minnesota, Arthur Ballet read and recommended numerous new American plays to his theatre colleagues working around the country to establish regional theatres (Cattaneo, 1997:4). From today's perspective, we can value him as a national dramaturg of America.

In 1964, the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center was founded in Waterford, Connecticut, and created an atmosphere where playwrights could develop new work. With the advent of a multiplicity of regional theatres came the call for new works and hybrid minds that could combine theory and practice. However, the majority of American theatres had no clear concept regarding nurturing playwrights and new plays. By the mid-1970s, with several new playwrights emerging and heralding a new age of American playwriting, dramaturgs were added to the teams of these theatres to arrange incoming original plays and organise the developmental arms of these growing regional institutions (Cattaneo, 1997:5).

Although Americans realised the importance of dramaturgy, they refused to embrace this German concept completely. For instance, the profession of dramaturg came

under a variety of official titles: literary manager, literary adviser, artistic associate, playwright-in-residence, director, and often artistic director. In this sense, dramaturgy was not seen as a comprehensive concept but a set of tasks which could be carried out by any team member who was qualified and interested in taking responsibility.

What was the reason for this trend? As Peter Hay (1983) and Robert Brustein (1997) stated, one of the reasons lay in America's historical anti-intellectualism. A

considerable gap existed between professionals and academics in the theatre field.

The term 'dramaturgy' was closely associated with drama structure, and most structural analyses were performed on the text for classroom learning rather than real theatre production. However, theatre also employed its share of anti-intellectuals who labelled anything too difficult to understand as 'academic'.

Another reason for hesitancy in recognising the dramaturg, even resistance to the concept, was a misunderstanding of dramaturgy's strong political tradition in Germany, especially with regard to Brecht. Given the lack of understanding of Brecht's actual practice and theory, and the absence of the tradition of regional theatres and institutional dramaturgs, many western practitioners exaggerated the political aspects of dramaturgy, even referring to it as the 'theatrical thought police'.

For example, American director Terry McCabe, mentioned above, railed against the evils of dramaturgs, gratuitously invoking the names of Stalin and Trotsky (Luckhurst, 2006:120).

2.5.2 The evolution of dramaturgy in the US

Although dramaturgy in America shared a similar trigger with dramaturgy in Germany in that new theatres called for new works and demanded refreshed repertoires, the reason behind the trigger was very different in America. If we go back in history a little further prior to the regional theatre movement, America's innovative dramaturgical ideas were arguably pioneered by commercial theatre producers such as David Belasco and organisations such as the Theatre Guild and Hedgerow Theatre by commissioning new plays and presenting classical revivals in the 1920s (Cattaneo, 1997:3). The objective was to guarantee box-office takings rather than seek any political reform. Funded primarily through private donations, regional theatres also served different agendas to those of state-funded German theatres.

In summary, the history of dramaturgy in the US is relatively short but continues to provoke debate. Dramaturgs today are still arguing about their title, territory and mission. The regional theatre movement has constantly experienced growing pains since its inception. Politicians have also brought into question the very notions of public support for the arts and freedom of expression. In addition, while other new media becomes increasingly accessible and popular, the cost of theatre attendance becomes increasingly prohibitive. That is to say, the practice and profession of dramaturgy in America is full of ambiguity and need to be further clarified and developed. We may, however, say that American dramaturgy gradually developed its own model rather than copying the German one. The reasons for this trend include, first, German dramaturgs fulfilled their mission within a well-established (highly

subsidised and highly hierarchical) theatre structure; second, German dramaturgs work within a circle among key elements from play productive process to performance as well as theatre criticism. In contrast, American dramaturgs not only have to undertake the basic job of finding and nurturing scripts but also have to work hard to create a better platform for real theatre production.

2.5.3 The recent development of dramaturgy in the US

Compared to their counterparts in Germany, American dramaturgs find themselves in a more ambiguous situation. As a result, they have the flexibility to approach dramaturgy from various perspectives rather than being confined to specific traditions. Consequently, these diverse circumstances contribute to the enrichment of the concept of dramaturgy itself.

The contributions of contemporary American dramaturgs are particularly reflected in three major areas. First, a wealth of publications, including seminar books and handbooks, interpreted the concept of dramaturgy and the role of dramaturgs from a practical perspective.

Second, the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA), founded in 1985 as a service organisation, covering both the United States and Canada, has now brought together and provided support to dramaturgs and literary managers, particularly those engaged in part-time, freelance, or low-paid and unpaid work, both in North America and internationally. In addition, the organisation has established a space in which to promote the exchange of information about the function, practice

and value of dramaturgy, encourage cooperation among practitioners and academics, and expand boundaries of other disciplines such as dance and opera.

Third, the essential contribution to the development of dramaturgy in education, seen in the specific example of the Yale School of Drama's theatre criticism programme launched in 1966, and the first MFA in dramaturgy conferred eleven years later, in 1977. The MFA event is considered to be the turning point for dramaturgy in that it established dramaturgy as an official field of study, a theatrical function, and a profession in the US.

One of the Yale School of Drama's original programme founders, Robert Brustein, stated that its primary purpose was to develop well-informed intelligent critics (Brustein, 1997: 34). Yet, surprisingly, when students-in-training were initially given the opportunity to write critiques of recent productions, some of them used sharp and vicious words, resulting in these students being isolated and treated with "suspicion, mistrust, and even hatred" by other students (Brustein, 1997: 35). As an antidote, Robert Brustein invented a variety of methods to redirect the students to use acceptable approach in order to achieve more effective outcome. The methods included: developing programme materials, reading new scripts, translating foreign plays, undertaking research for directors and actors, and presenting seminar based on their review of play texts. Many of these students also began to act, direct and write; after graduating, many became dramaturgs in resident theatres.

As a result, the criticism programme was replaced by a new programme in dramaturgy. Robert Brustein presented his lectures from the perspective of both educator and practitioner (Brustein, 1997: 35). He insisted that the first lesson for dramaturgs as well as any drama students was to gain acceptance in theatres with constructive criticism. Brustein pointed out that if the opportunity arose, dramaturgs could always function as critics. In addition, the more deeply engaged dramaturgs were in practice, the more ways they would find to communicate their views about productions and theatre construction without arousing the defensiveness of the artistic director or hurting the feelings of other participants.

In addition to the above three major contributions, there are two important lessons with implications for this thesis. First, the mutual antagonism between theatre critics and practitioners is sometimes inevitable because it is perceived that the analytical mind constantly constructs threats to the creative process. Thus, dramaturgs could and should play a transformational role between these two elements. When transforming between theory and practice, dramaturgs should keep to their critical evaluation of the work-in-process but at the same time, maintain their empathy for artists. Second, as a consequence of the first, by looking back to Lessing's statement, dramaturgs should combine creative skill and critical sense. If we value dramaturgs' contributions with regard to 'what to do', then Americans' practices actually provided the answer on 'why and how to do'. As well as Robert Brustein, Oscar G. Brockett also raised the importance of negotiation between dramaturgs and others working in the theatre, pointing out that mutual trust and respect were prerequisites, although this was hard to

teach and learn in the classroom. According to Brockett, these prerequisites must be achieved through real life experiences (Brockett, 1997: 47).

As with England, the history of dramaturgy in the United States is significantly shorter than in Germany. However, the way of adapting the concept of dramaturgy in American theatre is an important reference point for studies of theatre in China. Now, we turn our focus to the development of dramaturgy in the Asia-Pacific Region.

2.6 The development of dramaturgy in the Asia-Pacific region

Dramaturgy in the Asia-Pacific Region provides a more participatory perspective which I will outline before discussing dramaturgy in Chinese theatre specifically. This section thus examines the diversified practices of dramaturgy in the Asia-Pacific Region, including countries such as Australia and Japan as well as the establishment of the Asian Dramaturgs' Network (ADN) in Singapore.

2.6.1 The development of dramaturgy in Australia

The starting point of dramaturgy in Australia was closely related to the agenda of putting more recognisably Australian characters on stage (rather than an imitation of 'Britishness') around the late 1960s. Since then, the rise of Australian drama through a generation of self-conscious theatre-makers has been most influential on the development of the Australian stage (Eckersall, 2006: 286). Dramaturgy, on one hand, has built an osmotic relationship with script development institutions. In the 1970s, dramaturgy was first formally acknowledged by the Australian National Playwrights Centre (Kelly, 2013: 80). The Centre embedded dramaturgs into the Australian

National Playwrights Conference for developing text-based plays, nurturing playwrights, and assisting the rise of script development organisations (Kelly, 2013: 80). On the other hand, similar to other English-speaking countries, dramaturgy in Australian theatre experienced ambivalent situations during the 1970s and the 1980s. Many people who worked in theatres refused to accept this ‘foreign’ and ‘parasitic’ profession of dramaturg, which they believed yielded no visible creative contribution in the final production, nor any accountability for quality or impact (Kelly, 2013: 80). Later, in the 1990s, the application of dramaturgy grew markedly in Australia to cope with increasing demand for low-risk and effective development process, given the predominance of text-based work in mainstream theatres, and dramaturgical practices could provide new scripts with an artistically low-risk support (Kelly, 2013: 80). The dramaturgical function thus became concentrate on addressing problems within the play-texts (Eckersall, 2006: 287). In this situation, however, dramaturgy faced the risk of being reduced to a commodity, where success was measured primarily in revenue output rather than considering its artistic and societal impact.

Alongside the mainstream theatres, there was a broader space for dramaturgy with the rise of contemporary performance in small-to-medium theatres in Australia and internationally in the 1990s. In the Australian context, contemporary performance is used to describe a wide range of live performance artforms, from physical theatre, cabaret, circus and dance theatre to newer post-dramatic artforms (Kelly, 2013: 79). The application of dramaturgy adopted by small-to-medium theatres became a

complex and theoretically rich set of creative practices deployed across this range of non-textual and post-dramatic performance artforms (Eckersall, 2006: 287).

In recent decades, theatre-makers have continually faced the practical reality of scarcity of funding and income. On one hand, managing scarcity has become one of the imperative skills for many artists. Creative development and rehearsal processes are eroded inevitably by other part-time jobs and funding applications (Kelly, 2013: 84). On the other hand, this situation has highlighted the advantages of dramaturgs for their flexibility. As invisible contributors to theatre production, they could keep an inherent distance from generative processes and supported productions with tailored research, feedback, analysis and development (Kelly, 2013: 84).

In this environment, the application of dramaturgy has broken down the boundaries between mainstream theatres and small-to-medium theatres. Take a mainstream theatre, the Malthouse Theatre, as an example. It introduced the professional title of dramaturg on staff for developing both text-based productions and contemporary performance works (Kelly, 2013: 86). What is more, as Australian scholar Peter Eckersall has pointed, for those companies or creative teams engaged with theoretical or political intervention, dramaturgs were an invaluable intellectual resource. Thus, people need to have an expanded and extended understanding of dramaturgy (Eckersall, 2006: 284). We can see that dramaturgy has been adopted and developed with different functional role between large mainstream theatres vs. small-to-medium theatres with different impacts and implications.

2.6.2 The development of dramaturgy in Japan

In Japan, the concept of dramaturgy and dramaturgical strategies was introduced to reflect the on-trend phenomenon of integrating other theatre cultures and art genres into Japanese theatre in the 1990s. Belonging to ‘Hybrid Performance’ in the sense proposed by Richard Schechner (2006: 304), there were many attempts to incorporate elements from different cultures. For instance, Western-oriented theatre groups staged Ancient Greek tragedies in the form of Nō, and Japanese directors produced Shakespearean plays in a kabuki or Kyōgen style. However, as Japanese scholar Eiichiro Hirata observed, these attempts often showed a tendency to assimilate the elements of other theatre cultures without careful consideration of the other incompatible elements with their own artistic concepts (Hirata, 2015: 87). Thus, there was a rich space for dramaturgy to function as ‘in-between’ (Turner & Behrndt, 2008:150), to explore the theatrical elements’ relationship arising from various combinations of cultures and genres.

With ‘in-between dramaturgy’, Japanese theatre practitioners critically invested and questioned the relationships of diverse theatrical elements in every process of their hybrid productions rather than simply assimilating them (Hirata, 2015: 88). For instance, when Japanese dance dramaturg Nanako Nakajima worked with contemporary Swedish dance troupe *koosil-ja* on the *mech[a]OUTPUT* in 2007, she faced a conflict when deciding whether to faithfully represent the traditional Japanese dance she had trained in for many years or to collaborate by making some compromises to a certain extent. After that, Nanako Nakajima recognised her role as a

dramaturg was a negotiator. She further explained that the negotiator should critically examine cultural production when the knowledge of a culture is separated from its origins and demonstrations (Nakajima, 2015: 167). Based on these phenomena, we can see there are different roles of dramaturgs in different theatre cultures and the overall development of dramaturgy has covered a wide range of function in the process of theatre production and cross-cultural integration.

2.6.3 The establishment of the Asian Dramaturgs' Network (ADN)

Another significant example of the development of dramaturgy is the establishment of the Asian Dramaturgs' Network (ADN) in Singapore in 2016. Lim How Ngean, Robin Loon and Charlene Rajendran worked as the foundation network's co-directors to promote the concept of dramaturgy and the role of dramaturgs in theatrical arts ranging from traditional to contemporary postmodern forms in Asia-Pacific. The establishment of ADN was not to be definitive but to allow for discussion and questions and to examine what kinds of dramaturgical thinking were being developed all over the region and why they mattered (*ADN Re/View* Vol. 3, 2021: 9). Thus, ADN organised conferences from 2016 to 2022 in Singapore, Yokohama, Adelaide, Yogyakarta and online meetings aimed to provide a focused platform for making connections, enhancing exchange, developing engagement and generating criticality about the work of dramaturgs and dramaturgical thinking (*ADN Re/View* Vol. 1).

One of the critical topics of the ADN was how to translate the terms ‘dramaturgy’ and ‘dramaturg’ into different languages. For instance, in China, dramaturg has been translated into both 戏剧构作 (the dramaturg as someone who is core-part of the creation process of the theatre production) and 戏剧顾问 (the dramaturg as an advisor for theatre production) (*ADN Re/View* Vol. 1, 2021: 21). Similarly, in Malaysia, the dramaturg is sometimes referred to as ‘pendamping’ (an accomplice or companion), and sometimes as ‘pengganggu’ (a provocateur or questioner) (*ADN Re/View* Vol. 1, 2021: 21).

Peter Eckersall pointed out at the first ADN conference that the process of navigating language was also redefining the concept of dramaturgy in the Asia-Pacific region. He noted: “Dramaturgy is not an English word. It is not a word that is necessarily clearly defined within English, German, or any other language that adopts the term. It’s a term that comes from a conjunction of two terms from Classical Greek aesthetics, and according to classical scholars, the term itself is inherently unstable” (*ADN Re/View* Vol. 1, 2021: 91). Based on this “unstable” situation, the application of dramaturgy in Asia-Pacific theatres provoked lots of questions and debates. Meanwhile, many theatre practitioners in this area then had chosen to dive into the term’s inherent ambiguity and use that productively to think about the creative process. For example, Australian theatre-maker David Pledger explained at the conference that he took dramaturgy as an operating system rather than specific definitions. In addition, he noted, the dramaturg was someone who had to create the system, as well as work within it (*ADN Re/View* Vol. 1, 2021: 100).

Helly Minarti, whose role is as a dance dramaturg from Indonesia, indicated that it was essential to distinguish the dramaturg's role from the monitor or educator. She explained that there was a solid hierarchy in the dance field, especially in Southeast Asia. When young choreographers expected guidance from experienced dramaturgs, she argued that it was necessary for dramaturgs to let the young choreographers realise that it was their own production. The role of dramaturgs was provoking, not teaching (*ADN Re/View* Vol. 2, 2021: 23). Based on these reflections, we can see that the terminology of both dramaturgy and dramaturg is blurred without clear boundary in different cultures and people interpret them based on their needs in their particular situation. In addition, the translation of foreign words into their own language could also create different understanding and that adds more difficulties to define these two terms precisely and use them homogeneously. Therefore, the diversity of adopting and applying the concept of dramaturgy and the role of dramaturg globally is the reality and needs to be considered carefully in this research focusing on China.

2.7 Summary

Firstly, with regard to political, cultural and economic conditions, the German model has had strong political roots throughout its development from Lessing's era, to Brecht and on to today. Dramaturgs in Germany continually seek to balance theatre's entertainment value and political awareness objectives. Since Lessing's time, the theatre in Germany has been an Enlightenment mission to cultivate audiences as well as part of the national agenda to foster a people's identity and their collective values. As a result, theatre came to play a fundamental role in the country's cultural life, and

Lessing was the beginning of a line of pioneers which can be traced through to Brecht in the twentieth century and to many dramaturgs today. By comparison, commercial considerations have driven the Anglo-Saxon models in the UK and the US. America's regional theatres and British repertory theatres lacked government financial support and struggled with financial problems. While financial viability was crucial for theatre development, dramaturgs could increase the cost of theatre-making, which was then seen to be less important in comparison with the German model which had considerable government funding to support it.

Secondly, since the nineteenth century, Germany has gradually accumulated dramaturgy traditions. German state-funded theatres officially employing dramaturgs have a history of more than two hundred years. After the contributions of Lessing, Brecht and many other dramaturgs, the dramaturgical role has been an integral part of the theatre-making process. The role of the dramaturg in Germany thus has become stable and solid. In comparison, the history of dramaturgy in the English-speaking world is significantly shorter, and the dramaturg's role is also unstable and full of uncertainty. However, exploration of dramaturgy practices in the UK and the US provides an important reference point for studies of the related issues in China.

Anglo-American theatre-makers realised they had to discover their own model rather than copy the German one. In addition, a space was needed where academic and professional practitioners could meet and exchange ideas.

Thirdly, the German model was marked by power battles and hierarchy in terms of the relationship between dramaturgs and other theatre positions. In the case of theatre

in Lessing's time, theatre owners demanded a multifaceted role which was not clearly defined and covered the playwright, the resident critic and the public communicator. However, the dramaturg was denied the power to influence the repertoire. The later development of dramaturgy allowed for a more significant role of the dramaturg in the theatre-making process with multiple functions ranging from the beginning of drama selection to the end of communication with the public. By comparison, the situation in the UK and the US looked different due to different collaborations. For instance, the collaboration of Laurence Olivier and Kenneth Tynan was supportive and complementary. However, the organisational hierarchy still influenced many theatre operations, and writers and directors enjoyed more power than dramaturgs in the decision-making process, given many dramaturgs could only obtain short-term contracts attached to production projects. These factors determined the less powerful position of dramaturgs in Anglo-American theatres compared to those in the German theatres. These different characteristics, highlighted by a comparison of these three countries, have profound implications for investigating the development of dramaturgy in China. Finally, the brief review of the development of dramaturgy in the Asia-Pacific Region provides us with a better understanding of the adoption and application of dramaturgy in other parts of the world in contemporary performance practices.

As we have seen, dramaturgy as a practice has been adopted and developed with differing functional roles and impacts depending on the kinds of theatre in which it is being practised (for example large mainstream, compared with small-to-medium or

independent companies). Further the role of the dramaturg differs widely across different theatre cultures, and may involve a wide range of functions, not only in the process of theatre production but also in cross-cultural integration. The diversity of adopting and applying the concept of dramaturgy and the role of dramaturg globally adds complexity to future research. The next chapter will provide an overview of theatre-making development in China as background.

Chapter 3

Background of Chinese Spoken Drama

3.1 Introduction

All art forms are responsive to the milieu in which they are practised, shape-shifting as they co-evolve with the wider society, both mirroring and offering new perspectives on these changes. In China, performing arts in general, and spoken drama (*Huaju* 话剧) in particular, have been significantly integrated into the social, political, economic, and historical environments. If we use the metaphor of a ‘moving train’ to describe *Huaju*, it has been continuously adding and subtracting multiple elements along its journey at different stops or time influenced by those social, political, economic and historical factors. Therefore, it is essential to review this journey and examine the elements that have been added and subtracted.

In reviewing this process of co-evolution *Huaju* and the wider society, it is important that we keep in mind how rapid and tumultuous these historical changes have been. In the space of fewer than 50 years, between 1900 and 1949, China transformed from the last feudal dynasty to a failed Republic, to the reign of warlords and finally to a communist regime. From 1937 to 1945, large parts of China were occupied by the Japanese, leaving a wound that has never quite healed. Hardly had victory against Japan restored peace in 1945 when China faced another war, the Civil War between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Kuomintang (KMT). Lasting from 1945

to 1949, this conflict resulted in a victory for the CCP, which established the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949.

On mainland China, *Huaju* has undergone 116 years of development (1907-2023) and has witnessed several stages. In this chapter, the following questions will be addressed: Why and how was *Huaju* born as a departure from traditional Chinese theatre, such as Peking Opera? What is the historical background of *Huaju*? How many stages has *Huaju* gone through, and what are the characteristics of these periods? Who are the significant figures throughout the development of *Huaju*, and which plays should be explicitly evaluated? As we will see, while the terms 'dramaturgy' and 'dramaturg' were never invoked in the early development, and finest flourishing, of *Huaju*, there were always implicit dramaturgical practices, happening in and around the writing and staging of *Huaju* plays, that were an essential feature of the work. This chapter has the following sections: *Huaju*'s birth (1907 to late 1920s); the development of *Huaju* during the war period (1930s to 1940s); the development of *Huaju* during the 'New China' period (1949 to 1976); the development of *Huaju* under the reform period (1977 to 1989); and the recent development of *Huaju* (1990 to the present).

3.2 *Huaju*'s birth (1907 to the late 1920s)

As in many other Asian countries, traditional theatrical forms, which combine singing, dancing, acting and acrobatic combat, have a long and well-received history in China (Liu, 2014: 75). In contrast, the modern form, known as *Huaju* (spoken drama 话剧), adopted a radically different conceptualisation of performance through language and

did not appear on stage until the early twentieth century. Imitating Western-style theatre, *Hua* means ‘spoken language’, and *Ju* means ‘drama’. *Huaju* features the use of ordinary spoken language to convey meaning, as opposed to the traditional ‘song-dance’ theatre (Li, 2016: 1). It is noteworthy that in the Chinese context, modern theatre, which was based on the Western model, was referred to as *Xinju* (New drama 新剧), as opposed to *Jiuju* (Old drama 旧剧). The term *Huaju* was adopted in the 1920s to emphasise the spoken words in reaction to *Xinju*’s lesser focus on the spoken element.

3.2.1 The background of *Huaju*’s birth

Modern Chinese theatre started at the turn of the twentieth century as an explicit response to the urgency of social and political reform as advocated by Chinese intellectuals (Chen, 2010: 2). If one steps a little back in history, in the years before the First Opium War (1839-1842), China was one of the world’s largest economies, accounting for nearly a third of the world’s total production, according to Chinese economist Lin Yifu (Mackerras, 2013: 6). However, China began an inexorable downward slide over the next century. After the defeat in the First Sino-Japanese war (1895), the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901) and the Eight-power Invasion (1901), the old empire fell into poverty and was on the brink of collapse.

At the same time, China was forced to open up to the world and reluctantly encounter elements of the West. Soon afterwards, tens of thousands of Chinese intellectuals went abroad to study. Surprised by the wide social gap between China and other

countries, these intellectuals began to reflect on the root cause of Chinese society's backwardness. Under the long-term influence of Confucianism, which was "secular, hierarchical, authoritarian and family-centred" (Mackerras, 2013:10), the emphasis in Chinese political philosophy was the ruler's role. People believed that if the ruler could properly fulfil his duty and maintain social order, society would remain peaceful and stable. However, little attention was paid to the obligations and rights of individual citizens, especially underprivileged peasants and women. After seeing the development of Western democracy, many Chinese intellectuals became convinced that democracy powered the rise of Western countries, as well as its Asian model in Japan.

As one of the most significant intellectuals and politicians at this time, Liang Qichao constantly wrestled with the problem of how to reform China. Along with Kang Youwei, Liang persuaded the Guangxu Emperor of the urgency for change. During the so-called Hundred Days' Reform (11 June to 21 September 1898), the Guangxu Emperor implemented changes in political, social and economic systems, including improving the existing education system to reflect modern realities, abandoning the outdated format of essay writing (Mackerras, 2013:17). However, this reform lasted only a hundred days.

With the failure of these reforms, Liang fled to Japan where he remained for 14 years. Reflecting on the reason for failing, he realised that, rather than constraining the upper level of society, it was necessary to inspire the masses and awaken their awareness. In order to achieve this, Liang promoted reforms in literature and theatre from their

ancient rules so that they could exert prolonged influence on the public's thinking and behaviour (Mackerras, 2013:148). Liang then advocated reforming the classical style of language, which could only be mastered by a small group of scholars, into the vernacular. With the progression of the twentieth century, Liang's advocacy became widespread and even considered mainstream in China. These trends also had a direct impact on the formation of modern Chinese theatre. As Theatre Studies scholar Chen Xiaomei has described, Liang's proposition resulted in two features that shaped the development of modern Chinese theatre. First, Liang transformed the traditional thought of 'classical literature that delivers social and political messages as a vehicle' (*wen yi zai dao* 文以载道) into a modern concept of Enlightenment by combining theatrical forms with a modern political ideal of democracy. Second, Liang's advocacy for promoting equality between elites and ordinary theatre artists shaped modern Chinese theatre development by encouraging intellectual elites to work together with theatre artists who were used to being treated as grassroots people (Chen, 2010: 2).

It is worth clarifying that, firstly, traditional theatrical forms in China were never considered serious literature throughout their long history. While serious literature included the classics and standard histories, essays and high-class poetry, which was characterised by "compressed syntax and an elaborate, allusive vocabulary" (McDougall & Louie, 1998: 3), traditional Chinese theatre lured audiences with its vernacular language, often with no formal scripts but centuries-old stories featuring mainly emperors, kings, generals, and statesmen (*di wang jiang xiang* 帝王将相),

and talented scholars and classic beauties (*caizi jiaren* 才子佳人) (Chen, 2010: 2). Thus, traditional Chinese theatre was centred on actors' performance, rather than authors' texts. In addition, this theatre was the main source of daily entertainment for ordinary people, with performances being held only in restaurants and tea houses as well as some simple performing platforms at street corners and small theatres.

Secondly, traditional Chinese society was characterised by a vast disparity of social status between intellectuals and theatre artists (*xizi* 戏子). As the small group of people who mastered the classical language (this usually took a quarter of a lifetime), most intellectuals aimed at passing the imperial examination and acquiring a decent career in the upper class. In comparison, a large number of theatre artists were illiterate, and the term *xizi* had a very negative meaning indicating they belonged to the lowest grassroots social level. Enjoying little respect, these artists were usually regarded only as artisans who had skill, but lacked culture. We can thus see that theatre reform at the turn of the twentieth century was advocated by intellectuals with new orientations of literariness as well as social and political aspirations.

3.2.2 The beginning of *Huaju* in Tokyo

With the widespread advocacy for theatre reform, the newly reformed operas (*gailiang xinju* 改良新剧) became an innovative means of transmitting an ideology directed at bringing about revolutionary changes. The operas also benefited from new performance spaces, such as the New Stage (*xinwutai* 新舞台), which opened in Shanghai in 1908. These spaces replaced the old teahouses and introduced a modern

theatre and proscenium stage (Chen, 2010: 2). Many famous intellectuals, including Liang Qichao, tried to write new plays reflecting social and political content. However, most of these plays were written texts that could only be read rather than performed as operatic pieces on stage because these intellectuals were not familiar with theatre presentations. Moreover, many new social and political topics were incompatible with Chinese opera's highly systematic performance. Such limitations prompted intellectuals and reformers to turn to Western-style theatre performances.

Parallel to this trend, foreign theatre productions flourished in China's port cities, Shanghai in particular, as these ports were forced to open up to international settlement after the Opium War. In 1866, China's first Western-style theatre, the Lyceum Theatre (*Lanxin da xiyuan* 兰心大戏院), opened with two amateur theatre troupes established by British expatriates in Shanghai. Although the theatre's annual public performances were performed and seen by Western expatriates, a small group of Chinese intellectuals were also exposed for the first time to these Western-style theatre performances.

Based on these events, it is unsurprising that several traditional Chinese opera reformers, such as Ouyang Yuqian, later became one of the important pioneers of modern Chinese theatre. He not only had rich knowledge of traditional operas but were also inspired by the new theatre of Japan, *Shinpa*, which borrowed from modern

Western theatre as well as against traditional Japanese theatre as a form of entertainment (Chen, 2010: 3).

Regarding the starting point of *Huaju*, it is commonly considered that it can be traced from the first two days of June 1907 (Guo, 2003: 24). This date marks the performance by the Spring Willow Society (*Chunliu she* 春柳社), organised by a group of overseas Chinese students in Tokyo, of the play *The Black Slave's Cry to Heaven* (*Heinu yutianlu* 黑奴吁天录), a fully-fledged dramatic adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Chen, 2013: 3). This was the first modern play performed in Chinese, following the model of Japanese *Shinpa*, and performed outside China. However, Ouyang Yuqian, a core member of the Spring Willow Society, still considered it to be the first real Chinese *Huaju* production because of "its predominant reliance on speech in Chinese with modern style, rather than traditional Chinese operas mixed with singing and dancing". Ouyang continued, "In addition, before that, our country had never had such a well-ordered spoken drama script with several acts we had created ourselves." (Ouyang, 1990:152).

Leading with the principles of the Spring Willow Society of "opening minds and awakening spirits", *The Black Slave's Cry to Heaven* presented the socially engaged aspect of modern Chinese theatre. It also initiated the tradition of modern Chinese theatre that stood against oppression with a new national identity. It is worth noting the dramaturgical interventions in this production. Zeng Xiaogu, one of the founders of the Spring Willow Society, wrote the script based on Lin Shu's translation of

Stowe's novel. In order to "alert our people", he adapted the thematic subject matter from anti-slavery to anti-discrimination of Chinese immigrants, as well as weakening the Christian content, which was vital in the original text, but unfamiliar to the Chinese masses (Liu, 2014: 63).

The performance of *The Black Slave's Cry to Heaven* was a great success in Tokyo and even attracted the attention of several Japanese dramatists. Ihara Seiseian, a leading Japanese theatre critic, wrote a ten-page review in the journal *Waseda Bungaku* (*Waseda Literature*). Seiseian praised the acting skill of several members and pointed out that the Spring Willow Society represented the hope for a brighter future for Chinese youth (Liu, 2006: 344). In addition, the performance sparked strong nationalist sentiments among overseas students in Japan. Afterwards, many of them tried to produce new theatre works in Japan, following the example set by the Spring Willow Society. However, this trend caused dissatisfaction and panic within the Qing embassy because of the strong sociopolitical messages in these plays. The Qing embassy then forbade overseas students from staging any performances, with the threat of their official scholarships being cancelled. In order to continue their effort of using the new drama for sparking nationalist movement, most members of the Spring Willow Society decided to return to China for further development.

In contrast to the great success experienced in Japan, these young overseas returnees faced considerable challenges at home, particularly in finding a balance between developing the new drama, which was at the forefront of social, political and artistic

controversy, and earning sufficient income to survive. Inspired by the Spring Willow Society, Wang Zhongsheng organised the Spring Sun Society (*Chunyang she* 春阳社) in Shanghai's Lyceum Theatre and staged *The Black Slave's Cry to Heaven* in October 1907 (Liu, 2006: 346). The theatre piece attracted great attention mostly because of its innovative lighting and proscenium stage rather than the performance itself. The contribution of this production was the introduction of Western stage technology, which led to a boom of proscenium-stage theatres in Shanghai.

Besides the above initiative, other new drama groups were also being established. For example, in 1910, Ren Tianzhi established the Evolution Troupe (*Jinhua tuan* 进化团) in Shanghai. The most significant feature of this troupe was the use of 'plot summary' (*mubiao zhi* 幕表制), which provided only "outlines of the main plot and dialogues for each act" rather than completed script (Chen, 2010:4). In terms of the contents, Ren Tianzhi followed the *Shinpa* style by selecting stories related to current political events and combined them into improvised dialogues, as well as impromptu speeches. By doing so, Ren Tianzhi's objective of delivering revolutionary messages to a broader range of audiences was successfully achieved. However, in the long-term, *Mubiao zhi* and a large percentage of improvised performances left certain negative influences on new drama in the next couple of years, namely a lack of attention to well-developed scripts.

By the late 1910s, the new drama was heading towards a rapid decline due to the lack of high-quality scripts, artistic direction, and mismanagement of theatre operations.

According to scholar Ge Yihong (Ge, 1997:28), there were several reasons. First, in order to generate quick box office revenue, the new drama theatres neglected the effort required to craft high-quality scripts and produce well-developed works. Consequently, the new drama stage became inundated with an abundance of works featuring similar plots and inferior productions. Second, in order to cater to audiences, some of the new drama actors deviated from the scripts. They only used a few elements of the plots, often adding significant explicit and violent content. Such situations resulted in performances becoming exceedingly disorderly. Third, in order to promote the new drama productions, some theatres employed critics to write reviews. These reviews typically contained overwhelming positive comments and lacked critical or constructive feedback.

All of these actions went entirely against the Spring Willow Society's original intention of "opening minds and awakening spirits". As a result, the audience lost interest in the new drama over time. The decline of the new drama provided painful lessons for future theatre development. Meanwhile, it inspired the growth of new generations of theatre professionals after the May Fourth Movement in 1919, especially in playwriting and theatre-making.

3.2.3 The influence of the May Fourth Movement

Disappointed by the result of the Paris Peace Conference on 30 April 1919, where the major powers transferred all previous German possessions in Shandong Province to Japan, thousands of university students (3,000 from Peking University and dozens of

other educational institutions in Beijing) marched at Tiananmen to express their anti-imperialist sentiments on 4 May 1919 (Mackerras, 2013: 39). Named after the date on which it took place, the May Fourth Movement occupies a very important place in modern Chinese history, not simply because of the demonstration, but also due to the concatenation of progressive events and processes that made up the so-called the New Culture Movement (*Xin wenhua yundong* 新文化运动) with which it was associated.

As the movement progressed, a substantial amount of foreign literature and theatre works were translated and introduced into China. According to the dramatist Tian Han, statistics indicate that between 1919 and 1924, 28 Chinese periodicals published 81 translated scripts, encompassing works by 46 different playwrights (Huang, 2009:35). Notably, among these periodicals, the magazine *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian* 新青年) wielded a significant influence in inspiring the creation of Chinese spoken drama.

The publication of Hu Shi's one-act play *The Main Event in Life* (*Zhongshen dashi* 终身大事) in *New Youth* in 1919 is considered a landmark in the history of modern Chinese theatre, although one can see the play was, to a large extent, an imitation of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (Chen, 2010: 4). One year earlier, *New Youth* had released an Ibsen Issue, which included Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, *An Enemy of the People* and *Little Eyolf*, as well as two introductory essays written by Hu Shi: "Ibsenism" and "A Biography of Ibsen" (Liu, 2014: 65). Educated at Cornell

University and majoring in Western philosophy, Hu Shi saw the modernisation of the West and its democratic system as promising models for China. Some of Hu Shi's supporters argued that modern drama in the Western style would "indeed become the most effective tool for transforming traditional Chinese society" (Mackerras, 2013: 106). Thus, in his essays, Hu Shi embraced Ibsen not merely as a famous dramatist but as someone who could be set as a model for upending traditional Confucian values in the New Cultural Movement. Ibsen was potentially seen as the most influential example of Western drama during this period by *Huaju* practitioners because of the close relationship between his plays and social problems. Under the influence of Ibsen, numerous Chinese playwrights began to craft their works to address social issues in China.

In addition to the extensive translation and introduction of foreign scripts, the performance of spoken drama also entered a new stage during this period. While traditional theatre still had a strong presence, occupying a significant share of the stage and audience, Western-style theatre, due to the decline of the new drama, did not have enough opportunity to perform for the masses. This led to the emergence of *Aimeiju* 爱美剧 (*Aimei* being a transliteration of the English word 'amateur'). The performance of *Aimeiju* emphasised a not-for-profit approach, focusing on enhancing artistic quality and increasing its societal impact on the masses. Inspired by the European Little Theatre Movement in the late nineteenth century, Chinese theatre pioneer Chen Dabei coined this term against the new drama, which saw box office revenue as the primary goal (Ge, 1997: 48).

With the development of *Aimeiju*, two significant changes occurred. The first was the gradual establishment of theatre literature in China. Influenced by foreign scripts, a number of Chinese playwrights, such as Tian Han, Ouyang Yuqian, Guo Moruo, and Ding Xilin, constantly created their own works. As the quality of these scripts improved, theatre literature began to be recognised as a distinctive part of contemporary Chinese theatre. Well-developed scripts not only be read as literary works but also had the potential for successful theatrical performances.

The second one was applying the director system in theatre-making. Hong Shen, who returned from studying in the United States, led the *Shanghai Stage Society* (*Shanghai xiju xieshe* 上海戏剧协社) and introduced the director system to China. He practised the role of director in many performances and, more importantly, established a complete set of regulations and rules in theatre-making (Tian & Song, 2013:138).

When Hong Shen conducted rehearsals, he meticulously dictated actors' positions and movements, as well as the intonation and pace of their lines. Sometimes, a single action or line had to be rehearsed dozens of times, and the actors' gestures and movements had to follow a predetermined procedure strictly. At that time, a journalist observed Hong Shen's direction and initially felt it was too rigid, as the actors seemed to merely mimic the director's instructions. However, after a few days, upon revisiting the rehearsal, the journalist noticed that the actors had shed their stiffness, displaying exceptional skill and a natural sense of beauty in their movements and expressions. They effortlessly conveyed the plot without any overacting or extraneous improvising (Huang, 2009: 48). Subsequently, theatre practitioners realised that all

these regulations and rules were essential. In 1928, Hong Shen proposed the term *Huaju* (spoken drama 话剧) for the first time in order to distinguish it from the new drama, receiving support from Tian Han and Ouyang Yuqian (Huang, 2009: 90).

Having discussed above the background of *Huaju*'s birth, its beginnings in Tokyo in 1907 and the important influence of the May Fourth Movement since 1919, the next section will focus on the development of *Huaju* during the war period.

3.3 The development of *Huaju* during the war period (1930s to 1940s)

This section focuses on *Huaju*'s development before and during the wars. The impact of the May Fourth Movement on the development of *Huaju* in China continued through the first half of the twentieth century, in particular during the wars of the 1930s and 1940s. The 1930s in China witnessed the increasing threat of Japanese invasion from occupation of the Northeast of China in September 1931 up to the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (*Lugouqiao shibian* 卢沟桥事变) on 7 July 1937, which signalled full-scale war (Liu, 2014: 70).

The focus of *Huaju* during these periods turned from the pursuit of individual freedom against the oppressive feudal society to depicting social realities. What is more, the national crisis and international leftist theatre movement pushed many theatre practitioners to serve the masses and venture into agitprop theatre (Liu, 2014: 70). For instance, Tian Han, one of the *Huaju* pioneers, publicly “turned left”, in part forced by his radical students, and dismissed his own works of the 1920s as expressing “a common sentiment, a tone of the ‘torment between the body and soul’

that was far from social realities” (Tian, 2000: 163). In 1931, the Chinese League of Left-Wing Dramatists (*Zuoyi xijujia lianmeng* 左翼戏剧家联盟) was established in Shanghai with Tian Han as its nominal head.

Another important feature of this era was theatrical professionalism. From the perspective of playwriting, multi-act plays had replaced one-acts, and several remarkable plays raised *Huaju* to a new height, especially in Cao Yu’s four works in the period from 1934 to 1941 (Liu, 2014: 70). Cao Yu gained his theatre education in Nankai Middle School in Tianjin where his teacher Zhang Pengchun guided him to engage with a series of classical and modern Western dramas. Zhang Pengchun, who had graduated from Columbia University, also gave Cao Yu the *Complete Works* of Henrik Ibsen in English. In 1934, Cao Yu published his debut play *Thunderstorm* (*Leiyu* 雷雨), while he was still a senior student at Tsinghua University in Beijing. These works were succeeded quickly by *Sunrise* (*Richu* 日出, 1936), *The Savage Land* (*Yuanye* 原野, 1937) and *Peking Man* (*Beijing ren* 北京人, 1941).

Thunderstorm heralded the arrival of Chinese spoken drama’s mature period in the 1930s; here Cao Yu imitated Western play structures but melded them with compelling Chinese realities and characters (Chen, 2010: 11). The work tells the story of eight characters from two families in a three-act play that takes place on a suffocating summer day. In order to explore questions of fate and retribution, Cao Yu appropriated European dramatic techniques not only from Greek tragedy but also from Ibsen’s *Ghosts* and John Galsworthy’s *Strife* (Liu, 2014: 71). Moreover, Cao Yu

expanded *Huaju*'s range of themes, featuring individuals versus feudal families with complicated characters and tight plot construction.

In 1936, Cao Yu published *Sunrise*, a story about the traps facing “‘Chinese Nora’ after leaving home for independence” (Liu, 2014: 71). Set primarily in a hotel room in a northern city in China, *Sunrise* portrays a kaleidoscope of characters around Chen Bailu, an educated young woman who once lived with her lover in the countryside, then left him and pursued a life in the city supported by bank manager Pan Yueting and surrounded by other high-society figures. Compared to *Thunderstorm*'s conventional structure, *Sunrise*'s concentric feature allows characters to develop in their own circles in parallel subplots (Liu, 2014: 72) and captures the social realities at that time.

In addition to Cao Yu's work, another important play that also depicts the 1930s is *Under Shanghai Eaves* (*Shanghai wuyan xia* 上海屋檐下) by Xia Yan, written in 1937 immediately before the war. Set in an alley, it portrays five tenant families in a two-story building. With a set design that displayed a cross-section of the building capable of showing each room, the play revealed a remarkable mixture of tragic and comic elements and ended with the alley's children singing: “We're all brave little children, all uniting to save our country!” Fueled by the encouraging ending, audiences responded strongly to the anti-Japanese sentiment (Liu, 2014: 75).

When war broke out in July 1937, *Huaju* practitioners collectively created a three-act play, *Defend the Marco Polo Bridge* (*Baowei Lugouqiao* 保卫卢沟桥) in Shanghai

to express patriotic solidarity and emotions (Huang, 2009: 147). In the winter of 1937, as the Japanese invading army captured Shanghai, it became an isolated island. Most well-known *Huaju* practitioners moved to the interior with the wartime government. They established the Chinese National Theatre Anti-Enemy Association (*Zhonghua quanguo xijujie xiehui* 中华全国戏剧界抗敌协会) on January 1, 1938, with the aim of fighting against the Japanese invasion (Huang, 2009: 151). The association organised over a dozen performance troupes to carry out anti-Japanese propaganda by creating and performing *Huaju* works. The most distinctive feature of these troupes was mobile performances. They travelled to the front and in the country's interior, performing agitprop theatre such as the living-newspaper piece *Put Down Your Whip* (*Fangxia nide bianzi* 放下你的鞭子) (Liu, 2014: 76). Although they had little time to prepare scripts and rehearsals, audiences warmly welcomed their performance because of the same mood of fighting against the invasion. Meanwhile, many new theatre artists, such as Xia Chun, Diao Guangtan and Zhu Lin, emerged from these troupes.

During the eight years of war (1937-1945), in addition to Shanghai, another *Huaju* centre emerged around the temporary capital of Chongqing. In 1938, the first theatre festival was held in Chongqing. Twenty-five performing troupes presented their plays over 22 days, which included Lao She's *Supreme Nation* (*Guojia zhishang* 国家至上), Wu Zuguang's *Ode to Integrity* (*Zhengqige* 正气歌) and Ding Xilin's *Three Dollars in National Currency* (*Sankuaiqian guobi* 三块钱国币). These performances were not confined to theatres within the city but also extended to the suburbs, leading

to an unprecedented success. The festival catalysed greater progress in subsequent scripts and productions, steering towards a more professional approach (Ge, 1997: 212).

Despite the war, these years are often recognised as a significant period of *Huaju*'s development in scripts, theatre production and criticism. In terms of scripts and theatre production, the war opened up opportunities for the development of *Huaju* in certain directions, particularly in the realm of historical plays. For instance, Guo Moruo's *Qu Yuan* (屈原) celebrated the historical figure Qu Yuan (339-278 B.C.), who made patriotic choices during a similarly dark period, serving as an enlightenment for audiences of wartime. Directed by Chen Liting, the inaugural production of this play in 1942 blended the Western theatre style with elements from traditional Chinese opera. The renowned actor Jin Shan portrayed Qu Yuan, skilfully capturing the character and merging *Huaju* techniques with those of Peking Opera, resulting in a tremendously successful performance (Ge, 1997:221). Subsequently, the creation of historical works experienced significant growth.

Furthermore, theatre criticism experienced significant development due to the substantial growth of historical plays. Led by Tian Han, discussions took place in various theatre journals and newspapers, with experts from diverse backgrounds invited to delve into the issues related to historical plays. Notably, these discussions approached the subject from dramaturgical perspectives, encompassing aspects such as thematic scope, language usage in historical plays, and the practice of using

historical narratives to comment on contemporary events. Afterwards, these discussions, in turn, contributed to the further enhancement of historical plays.

The development of *Huaju* during this period indicates a significant progress of modern drama development in China by not only learning from the West and Japan to produce *Huaju* with a Chinese narrative, but also using modern drama as an enlightening tool, calling the masses to stand up against the Japanese invasion and in the civil wars in the late 1940s. In the next section, the focus will be on the continuing development of *Huaju* in the new China since 1949.

3.4 The development of *Huaju* during the New China period (1949 to 1976)

From 1 October 1949, the new China, namely the People's Republic of China (PRC), was established under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Over the following decades, *Huaju*, like other art forms, was highly influenced by the shifting political and social environment. This section focuses on the period between 1949 and 1976, during which *Huaju* experienced further development under the new political, social and economic conditions.

After the establishment of the new China founded on socialist politics, the First Five Year Plan ranged from 1953 to 1957 and marked a period of consolidation in PRC history (Mackerras, 1981: 13). During this period, China cooperated with the Soviet Union through strong political and economic ties, emphasising central planning with heavy industry development as priority and promoting the system of communes in the countryside.

Towards the end of the First Five Year Plan period, the Hundred Flowers Movement began. The initial idea was to ‘let a hundred flowers bloom’ as the metaphor for inviting people to express their minds fully and freely in terms of criticising the leadership of the CCP first in 1956 and again in April 1957 (Mackerras, 1981:14). Many intellectuals responded to the invitation, issuing serious criticism concerning individual leaders in the CCP or the way the CCP managed the political and economic systems. Some of these intellectuals, however, attacked the socialist system itself, presenting harsh criticisms which could not be tolerated by the Party leaders (Mackerras, 1981: 14). This short period of liberalism turned into the Anti-Rightist Campaign, aimed clearly against those who criticised the CCP and the government during the Hundred Flowers Movement. Large numbers of intellectual and cultural figures were sent to the countryside to undertake ‘re-education’. These changes in the political landscape silenced many intellectuals, including theatre-makers and artists. Furthermore, from 1966 to 1976, other political campaigns were carried out under the name of the ‘Cultural Revolution’. During this period, many schools and institutions, including theatre organisations, were closed, traditional culture was replaced with socialist propaganda, and millions of youths were relocated to the countryside to be ‘re-educated’ by peasants.

In terms of *Huaju*, 1949 had been regarded as a fresh beginning of an era characterised by optimism, collectivism, and hope on the part of theatre practitioners and playwrights (Chen, 2010: 20). Productions boomed in the 1950s as part of the state-sponsored theatre system being established. Most major cities established their

own theatre, and important figures of the pre-1949 leftist *Huaju* movement such as Tian Han were entrusted with overseeing both modern and traditional theatre. Tian Han was Chairman of the Union of Chinese Drama Workers and Vice-Chairman of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles (Liu, 2014: 80). As the political and cultural centre, Beijing saw the establishment of three *Huaju* theatre organisations: Beijing People's Art Theatre (BPAT), the Central Experimental Theatre and the China Youth Art Theatre (Liu, 2014: 80).

With the establishment of all these theatres, there was a great demand for new plays. *Huaju* practitioners actively engaged in the exploration of 'Huaju Sinicization' (*Huaju minzuhua* 话剧民族化), conducting numerous experiments. The most significant contributions in this field were made by Jiao Juyin, the general director of BPAT. His Sinicised style of stage productions, including *Tea House* (*Chaguan* 茶馆) and *Cai Wenji* (*Cai Wenji* 蔡文姬), became BPAT's classics (Li, 2016: 13). However, as the Hundred Flowers Movement did not last long, other more restrictive policies gradually came to dominate theatre productions and the range of drama productions was limited substantially from the onset of the Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957 (Mackerras, 1981: 16).

Shaped by these political movements, several successful theatre practitioners, especially playwrights, struggled between creative freedom and conforming to the official ideology. Many practitioners suffered significantly during the Anti-Rightist Campaign. The decline in quality of the works of those who wrote before and after the

new China became inevitable. Cao Yu, for instance, now Artistic Director of BPAT, ultimately failed to write new notable plays comparable to his early innovative works.

Another noteworthy example, Tian Han delved into the imperial past after having failed to write any artistically satisfactory play on the new society after 1949. He chose a subject he was most familiar with and produced a new play named *Guan Hanqing* (关汉卿) in 1958, a drama about a historical playwright in Yuan dynasty during the thirteenth century. The play is a unique autobiographical account underscoring the idealism and lifelong passion of Tian Han himself, who, like Guan Hanqing, never gave up playwriting (Chen, 2010: 22). This self-portrait is ingeniously presented as a play within a play. The inner play consists of the central plot of Guan Hanqing's most famous opera, *The Injustice of Dou'e* (*Dou'e yuan* 窦娥冤), in which, Dou'e, a poor woman without influential supporters, is caught up in an instance of social injustice and is wrongly accused of murder. The outer play dramatises the persecution of Guan Hanqing, who writes and stages *The Injustice of Dou'e* with the help of a famous actress Zhu Lianxiu to protest against corrupt officials. The play moves between Guan Hanqing's own life and the wrenching stories that inspired the play. Tian Han projected onto his ancient peer his own writing career, in the course of which he also dramatised the lives of several theatre artists, writers and other intellectuals (Chen, 2010: 22). Critics and audiences warmly welcomed this play as one of the best combinations of realism and romanticism, a style promoted during the 'socialist construction period' of the new China.

In spite of its revolutionary spirit and its initial popular reception by audiences and critics alike, *Guan Hanqing* was nonetheless condemned during the Cultural Revolution as a “disguised attack” on socialist China, which was by then marked by injustices and persecution against artists (Chen, 2010: 23). Tian Han’s tragic death while in custody in 1968, at the peak of the Cultural Revolution, ironically evoked the prison scene in *Guan Hanqing*. The period following the Cultural Revolution witnessed a revival of interest in Tian Han’s legendary life and his invaluable contributions to the development of *Huaju*, so much so that a biographical play about Tian Han, *Torrent* (*Kuangbiao* 狂飙), later premiered in 2000 in Beijing.

During the Cultural Revolution, most of the theatre organisations were closed nationally; only eight theatrical pieces in total were promoted as revolutionary model works, most of the other theatrical works could not be performed in China at that time. Many artists were also treated badly during this time and many of them were forced to remain silent.

In summary, we can see clearly that the constant feature which influenced *Huaju* the most between 1949 and 1976 is policy changes with strong ideological intervention. The degree of control varied to some extent, but it never sank below a level that would in any case be regarded as extremely high in most Western countries (Mackerras, 1981: 8). Chinese playwrights and their works endured endless political movements, with no exceptions. In addition, during this period, the role of critics had been diminished gradually due to the strong political intervention of the Party-State. Many critics were silent after Anti-Rightist Campaign and many of them were

punished during the Cultural Revolution (Ge, 1997: 447; Gu, 2009: 24). However, after the Cultural Revolution, the development of Chinese *Huaju* entered a new era of hope for revitalizing both theatre productions and critics' evaluations during the late 1970s and 1980s reforms. The following section will illustrate this trend in more detail.

3.5 The development of *Huaju* under the reform period (1977 to 1989)

The Cultural Revolution, often referred to as the 'decade of chaos', ended in October 1976 after the death of Mao Zedong and the arrest of his wife Jiang Qing and her clique known as the Gang of Four. Reforms followed, such as the Four Modernisations (1978-1982), aimed at strengthening agriculture, industry, defence and science/technology. Accompanying these tremendous political, economic and historical changes, *Huaju* went through a period of recovery. This section focuses on this period of change and discusses key features, important theatre works and criticism. Soon after the end of the Cultural Revolution, the dominant theme of *Huaju* was the depiction of the last days of the Cultural Revolution by staging the national revulsion towards the Gang of Four and emphasised an ecstatic mood of liberation (Liu, 2014: 88). The most famous of these plays included *In the Land of Silence* (*Yu wu sheng chu* 于无声处, 1978, by Zong Fuxian) that centred on the days after 5 April 1976 (Chinese Memorial Day) with the mass protest in Beijing in memory of the former Premier Zhou Enlai, who had died earlier that year. This mass protest was brutally suppressed.

Then, with ‘setting wrong things right’ (*boluan fanzheng* 拨乱反正), a policy adopted at the 1979 Third Plenum of the Eleventh CCP Congress that turned the party’s focus from class struggle to economic development, theatre practitioners shifted their attention onto the daunting social issues of economic and ideological reconstruction. It is noticeable that throughout the first half of the 1980s, dramatic depictions of social problems remained a politically sensitive balancing act for the government and also for artists (Liu, 2014: 88). On the one hand, the authorities studiously avoided the strong political intervention of the 1950s and 1960s. On the other hand, the government censored, altered or delayed the production of a number of plays because, as some of critics claimed, these were projecting an overly gloomy view of reality.

One of the first plays to receive such censorship was *If I were Real* (*Jiaru wo shi zhende* 假如我是真的) by the Shanghai playwright Sha Yexin in 1979. Based on a real criminal trial witnessed by Sha Yexin, the play focuses on Li Xiaozhang, a young man who wanted to return to Shanghai from the countryside (where millions of ‘re-educated youths’ were sent during the Cultural Revolution, as mentioned earlier) by pretending to be the son of a high-ranking official in Beijing in order to regain his city status. The play’s sympathetic treatment of Li Xiaozhang and exposure of official corruption attracted more new plays with similar themes in other theatre works, but the government showed less support and more disapproval of this style of theatre. The controversy around the play eventually triggered a national symposium on playwriting in Beijing in February 1980, which ended with a long speech by Hu Yaobang, Head

of the CCP Propaganda Department, who would soon become the Party Secretary-General. Hu Yaobang praised Sha Yexin's talent and showed deep reverence for artistic creativity (Liu, 2014: 88). Ultimately, however, he was unwilling to allow the play to be staged without revision. Sha Yexin refused to revise further and the play was never staged. Nevertheless, another play by Sha Yexin, *Mayor Chen Yi* (*Chen Yi shizhang* 陈毅市长), about Chen Yi and his years as Shanghai's mayor in the early 1950s, was staged at about the same time and received great praise from the government. Consequently, in 1985, Sha Yexin was promoted to Artistic Director of Shanghai People's Art Theatre.

The censorship of *If I Were Real* set a precedent for dealing with other contemporary plays, including *Small Well Lane* (*Xiaojing hutong* 小井胡同) by Li Longyun, which was published in 1981, but was not allowed to be staged until 1985 by BPAT in Beijing. The five-act play follows Lao She's tradition of Beijing-style plays by depicting a group of residents in a lane over three decades. It starts in January 1949, immediately before the founding of the PRC. The second act takes place in 1958, at the height of the Anti-Rightists Campaign, which is a sensitive historical moment. In its third act, the play moves to even more sensitive times, namely September 1966, at the onset of the Cultural Revolution when many people in the community suffered under political persecution. Given the political sensitivity, the play did not pass censorship and was labelled 'controversial' and was only given three 'internal performances' (*neibu yanchu* 内部演出) (Liu, 2014: 89).

One of the most innovative and controversial playwrights of this period was Gao Xingjian, who wrote *Absolute Signal* (*Juedui xinhao* 绝对信号, 1982), *Bus Stop* (*Chezhan* 车站, 1983), *Wild Man* (*Yeren* 野人, 1985) and *The Other Shore* (*Bi'an*, 彼岸, 1986) before emigrating to France. Gao Xingjian studied French literature in college in the early 1960s and was a translator before becoming a resident playwright at BPAT. His background in French literature, extremely rare for his generation of playwrights, gave him special insight into many foreign modernist theatre works, which inspired him profoundly in his own playwriting (Chen, 2010: 22).

His *Absolute Signal* is generally regarded as the first 'Little Theatre' production in China and was staged in a banquet room in the Capital Theatre, BPAT's home theatre (Liu, 2014: 90). The term 'Little Theatre' refers to a small theatre, usually non-commercial and amateur, that produces experimental drama, often presented to a limited audience. For most of Gao's Little Theatre works, Lin Zhaohua was the director at BPAT, including for the production of *Absolute Signal*. In this play, the director used simple platforms with railings, chairs and few lights. The play tells the story of the thwarted robbery of a night freight train. The immediacy and unpretentiousness of presentation supported a non-linear structure with multiple flashbacks and out of sequence monologues and dialogues that were from time to time lit up only with flashlights. The play ran for 159 performances and was widely imitated by other playwrights and directors throughout the nation. Gao Xingjian's next play *Bus Stop* is reminiscent of *Waiting for Godot* and was banned after a few performances because it conveyed a sense of bewilderment in response to the rapidly

changing society (Liu, 2014: 91). It was written before *Absolute Signal* but had been delayed by the theatre's leadership because of censorship fears.

In addition to the dynamic tension between dramatic themes and government censorship during this period, *Huaju* was also renowned for its discovery, especially of forms. With the widespread popularity of television drama, *Huaju* suddenly faced a crisis of losing its audience base. The development of television drama had a profound impact on aesthetic habits, leading to tremendous changes in the cultural and artistic landscape. Additionally, in the rapidly changing societal context, Chinese audiences grew less interested and patient with repetitive expressions on the stage.

In order to address such a crisis, there were extensive discussions from both theatre critics and practitioners. In November 1980, the journal *People's Drama* (*Renmin xiju* 人民戏剧) initiated a series of seminars titled 'What to Do with *Huaju*' (*Huaju zenmeban* 话剧怎么办) to address various challenges facing *Huaju*. Numerous theatre critics took part in these discussions. One of these critics, Zhao Xun, proposed that artistic and cultural policies should remain stable for an extended period and allow for more significant creative freedom (Xu & Chou, 2022: 15). Another theatre critic, Fang Hongyou, recommended segregating theatres into those specialising in classic works and those focusing on experimental works. Authorities, he said, should grant the latter more autonomy and financial support (Xu & Chou, 2022: 15).

In April 1982, the Beijing-Shanghai Directors' Conference (*Jing Hu daoyan huiyi* 京沪导演会议) was convened in Beijing to discuss the current status and direction of

Huaju in the new era. Among the participants, Lin Zhaohua from Beijing expressed his dissatisfaction with the status quo, stating, “We’re already in the 1980s, but the Chinese theatre has only one genre: Stanislavski, and the BPAT only has one doctrine: realism. This is absurd.” Meanwhile, Hu Weimin from Shanghai implied the need to break free from constraints and broaden horizons to explore the diverse possibilities of *Huaju* (Xu & Chou, 2022: 17).

After the conference, Lin Zhaohua initiated the production of *Absolute Signal* in Beijing, as previously discussed. Following the performance, theatre critic Tong Daoming wrote an article praising Lin’s daring exploration and stated, “Thanks to *Absolute Signal*, China has finally joined the global wave of the Little Theatre movement” (Xu & Chou, 2022: 18). Meanwhile, Hu Weimin directed *Mother’s Song* (*Muqin de ge* 母亲的歌) at the Shanghai Youth Repertory Theatre, a production in which Hu introduced a theatre-in-the-round arrangement of actors and audience for the first time in Chinese theatre. By significantly reducing the distance between actors and the audience, Hu intended to present the incomparable, vivid artistry of live performances that cannot be matched by film and television (Gu, 2009: 66). These performances also achieved success and sparked numerous discussions. The success of both these Little Theatre productions alleviated the crisis faced by *Huaju*, and subsequently, more exploratory and innovative new works emerged in the late 1980s. In addition, from the perspective of theatre criticism, this period can be regarded as another open and diversified stage after the 1940s.

At the start of the 1990s, intensive explorations into *Huaju* were abruptly truncated the year after the Tiananmen Incident (Liu, 2014: 92). Government control for the sake of ideological and political stability rose. For *Huaju*, such measures resulted in a split between mainstream plays by state-owned theatres and avant-garde productions, which were usually performed in rehearsal rooms at art academies like the Central Academy of Drama and Beijing Film Academy. State-owned theatres produced theatre works targeting government priorities in order to win government awards that were vital for the theatres' political and financial survival. In contrast, avant-garde productions by auteur-style directors focused on producing dynamic and grassroots-oriented theatre works reflecting the more challenging social issues of the time. This will be addressed in the next section.

3.6 The recent development of *Huaju* (1990 to the present)

In 1992, Deng Xiaoping's southern trip to the special economic zones in Guangdong, triggered an era of 'socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics' that has influenced developments in China to the present. China's rapid economic rise has brought challenges such as pollution, corruption and social and economic inequality. Under these circumstances, Chinese theatre practitioners witnessed severe conflict between old norms and new values of society. Since the 1990s, a split between mainstream state-owned theatres and avant-garde productions became even wider. This section sheds light on the diversity of *Huaju* development by emphasising important directors and their plays in both areas of practice.

From the perspective of mainstream productions, two outstanding melodramatic plays directed by two of the most active contemporary female directors came to the stage in Shanghai and Beijing respectively. *Shang Yang* (商鞅 by Yao Yuan, 1996), directed by Chen Xinyi at Shanghai People's Art Theatre, dramatised the life and death of a reformer, Shang Yang (390-338 B.C.), during the Warring States era (450-221 B.C.).

Another play, *The Field of Life and Death* (*Shengsichang* 生死场, 1999), based on the 1934 novel written by Xiao Hong, was adapted and directed by Tian Qinxin for the Central Experimental Theatre. The play presented a group of peasants in a remote Manchurian village under Japanese invasion. Both plays were powerful and received a warm reception from audiences. In terms of criticism, the reviews of these two plays were balanced and constructive. For example, some critics believe that while *Shang Yang* exhibited distinctive stage presentation, the character development was not profound, and the overall dramatic tension was lacking as well (Tian & Song, 2013: 660). Some stated that *The Field of Life and Death* offered strong visual impact on stage but the ending was abrupt (Tian & Song, 2013: 661).

However, it should be noted that excellent mainstream productions were not in the majority. Many state-owned theatres produced propaganda plays funded by the government to promote the government's political agenda. For example, various government departments commissioned 'targeted plays' to promote the achievements of advanced individuals and government agencies in different regions (Zhang, 2010: 12). Theatre criticism in this arena also primarily served the functions of promoting government achievements and acknowledging artistic accomplishments of plays.

Therefore, they could not play a sufficiently independent role for lifting the overall development of *Huaju* production.

Several other artists chose to investigate the combination of innovative genre and social reality reflection in the avant-garde productions. Directors who garnered the most attention in this field were Lin Zhaohua and Meng Jinghui; both directed many established and new plays with the intention of creating new stylistic possibilities and contemporary representation beyond the traditional boundaries (Liu, 2014: 94).

Both Lin Zhaohua and Meng Jinghui actually worked outside the state-owned theatre system for their provocative productions, even though they also still held positions within the state-owned system. This phenomenon reflects the attitudes and responses being adopted by contemporary artists in China dealing with the unique political and economic situation with a realistic approach. Lin Zhaohua, for example, created his own studio, which allowed him to stage bold experiments which were impossible within the context of BPAT where he served as Deputy Artistic Director. Meng Jinghui, who has held an official position of director at the National Theatre of China, has been engaged in avant-garde productions by using his own private production studio, including the production of the famous play *Rhinoceros in Love* (*Lian'ai zhong de xiniu* 恋爱中的犀牛), which has been on the stage domestically and internationally. Regarding the role of critics towards such avant-garde productions, two streams dominated the arena of criticism: one is based on those independent critics with more balanced approach with genuine criticism which could help further improvement of *Huaju* production (Zhang, 2011); another is commercially arranged

critics by the production team to promote the production, and this kind of criticism could hardly enhance further development of *Huaju* production.

In addition, those avant-garde productions and their directors have also influenced other younger generation directors, such as Wang Chong, Zhao Miao and Huang Ying with the intention of breaking the existing boundaries and creating new forms and dynamisms in their new theatre productions (Ferrari, 2016: 136). This diverse group of directors who have emerged publicly since the late 2000s, have produced different types of theatre works with wider diversities and have appeared on different stages, including the newly developed Beijing Fringe Festival (*Beijing qingnian xijujie* 北京青年戏剧节), for which Meng Jinghui has served as the artistic director since its inception in 2008 (Ferrari, 2016: 136).

3.7 Summary

During the 116 years of its journey, *Huaju* has experienced several stages. Its birth was a response to social and political turmoil at the beginning of the twentieth century. *Huaju* also experienced a well-developed period in creation and criticism after the May Fourth Movement and served as an enlightening tool to encourage the masses during wartime. Under the CCP's leadership since 1949, *Huaju*'s creations and criticism have been influenced significantly by censorship control under the influence of party policies from time to time. The most significant changes have occurred in more recent years since China adopted economic reform and 'open door' policies in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Since its beginnings, *Huaju* has been affected by

political, social and economic factors and it has reflected on and has engaged with the social reality of each historical period. This chapter has presented different features of the modern play (*Huaju*) in China, tracing its development from its infancy stage to its recovery and further development throughout its hundred-year history. It has also implicitly suggested how, in some of the most fertile phases of *Huaju*'s development, activities that we can, in hindsight, recognise as forms of dramaturgical practice (for example, new translations, constructive theatre criticism, innovative production design) were essential. In terms of more specific examples of the adoption of dramaturgy in theatre works in China, three examples will be presented and discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Three Case Studies

4.1 Introduction

The two previous chapters revisited different models of dramaturgy and re-evaluated the texts and contexts of *Huaju* in the last hundred years. This chapter will delve further into three specific examples: the reproduction of Henrik Ibsen's work in China from 1907 to 2018; the 1983 production of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* in Beijing; and the writing, staging, reviving and new versions of Lao She's *Teahouse* from 1958 to 2018. An analysis of these three case studies will reveal the role of dramaturgy (both visible and invisible), and the different possible roles of a dramaturg, in Chinese theatre-making as it has evolved over time.

4.2 The reproduction of Ibsen's work in China

As discussed so far, there is great potential for adopting a more conscious practice of dramaturgy in Chinese theatre. However, due to limited understanding of the concept and function of both dramaturgy and dramaturg, the introduction of these new concepts into Chinese theatre has been slow. The concepts have moved from a place of 'invisibility', where there was no defined position of dramaturg within the production process, with this function being carried out by other people, such as directors and playwrights as well as translators, to more a visible approach with the appointment of a dramaturg in the production process. This section will review the

history of the production of Ibsen's drama in China in order to identify some key implications for the function dramaturgy might have in theatre-making. Consideration will be given to the intense exchange of ideas and ways of producing Ibsen's work between foreign artists and Chinese colleagues that gradually brought the concept of dramaturgy into China and influenced the adoption of this new concept in theatre production systems. The production of Ibsen's drama in China serves as an example of the way dramaturgy emerged in Chinese theatre-making.

4.2.1 The early stage of reproduction between 1907 and 1949

In the period between 1907 and 1949, several Chinese intellectuals and theatre artists introduced Ibsen to China, subsequently exerting considerable influence on society.

The first mention of Ibsen in China was made by Lu Xun, a representative of these Chinese intellectuals, who quoted Ibsen in his 1907 essay, "A Discourse on the Power of Mara Poetry" (*Moluoshi li shuo* 摩罗诗力说). Lu Xun used the words of Dr Stockmann, the protagonist of *An Enemy of the People* – "the strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone" (Lu, 1981: 66) – to imply that warriors who insisted on the truth and had the courage to challenge the masses were necessary. Lu Xun's appreciation of Ibsen was closely allied to his idea of changing society, which for him meant overthrowing the old society and constructing a new one.

After the publication of a translation of *A Doll's House* (translated by Hu Shi, in 1918), Lu Xun commented that the phenomenon of 'Nora's leaving' was not yet possible in China, because if a Chinese woman ran away from her home like Nora,

she could not survive in society without financial independence (Lu, 1981: 148).

Moreover, he suggested that despite the title, Nora was like a ‘puppet’ rather than a ‘doll’, whose entire life was controlled by other people. The issues of the play went deeper than just gender, for he stated that people could not live independently without spiritual and economic independence, whether they were women or men (Lu, 1981: 148).

Hu Shi, the translator of *A Doll's House*, also wrote a large number of articles which outlined his enthusiasm for Ibsen. Similarly to Lu Xun, Hu Shi also insisted that reform was necessary to change the old forms of society in China. However, Hu Shi stated that what Chinese society needed was a gradual reform rather than a radical revolution. Hu Shi believed that in order to fight against a repressive society, people should develop their free spirit and will as individuals; at the same time, they should take responsibility for the freedom of their families and themselves. These ideas are consistent with Ibsen’s text which emphasised individual liberty and freedom.

Together, Lu Xun and Hu Shi established the dominant interpretation of Ibsen’s work in China, which concentrated on the effect of reforming society and enlightening the masses. This approach has influenced subsequent generations of Chinese intellectuals and continues to do so even today. Although neither of them participated in any production of Ibsen’s plays, Lu Xun and Hu Shi fulfilled the critical dramaturgical function of analysing, advocating and introducing Ibsen’s works to Chinese writers, theatre-makers and audiences.

With the beginning of the New Cultural Movement in 1919, serious studies of Western drama were introduced in China, and Ibsen's plays were performed enthusiastically during the following three decades. In the late 1920s, Zhang Pengchun, a theatre educator at Nankai Middle School in Tianjin, vigorously introduced Ibsen by lecturing and staging his works with his students. In 1927, during the rehearsals of *An Enemy of the People*, Zhang wrote a chronology of Ibsen's works from his early play, *Brand*, onwards, and explained these in detail in order to help his students understand the play thoroughly. After days of rehearsals, the school received an order from the authorities to cancel the performance because it was suspected, from its title, that this play was an attack on the regime. In order to avoid more trouble, Zhang decided to alter the title to *The Headstrong Doctor* (*Gangbi de yisheng* 刚愎的医生) and held performances the following year, which were warmly received (Tian, 2009: 91).

Next, Zhang chose to stage *A Doll's House*. He supported his students by analysing the script and developing the inner tension of each character. In addition, Zhang encouraged his students to express their opinion during the rehearsal and he accommodated their suggestions, rather than forcing them to take his instruction (Tian, 2009:87). In October 1928, the performance of *A Doll's House* received good reviews, especially for Cao Yu's vivid portrayal of Nora. Zhang asked Cao Yu to play Nora because theatre groups were not allowed to perform in male-female collaborations at that time. Cao Yu would, in just a few years, pen his own important theatre works, such as *Thunderstorm* (*Leiyu* 雷雨) and *Sunrise* (*Richu* 日出), and he became one of

the important playwrights in China. When recalling his acting experience in Ibsen's plays, Cao Yu stated that for a playwright, taking on an acting role in theatre productions can help build a comprehensive understanding of each character, and the experience of playing Nora had benefited him greatly in his later playwriting career (Cao, 2005: 15). What Zhang had done can be considered dramaturgical strategies and his work with his students in analysing and producing these plays made a significant contribution to awareness and understanding of Ibsen.

In the 1930s, when socialism and Marxism were introduced and became influential in China, the Chinese embodiments of Nora became more radical and revolutionary. The 1935 production of *A Doll's House* is a notable example of this trend. To promote the spirit of the liberation of Nora, The Windmill Art Society (*Mofeng Yishe* 磨风艺社), organised by The League of Chinese Left-Wing Dramatists, performed this play in the Taotao Theatre (*Taotao daxiyuan* 陶陶大戏院) in the centre of Nanjing, receiving a warm response from audiences. However, the KMT Government ordered performances to stop after three days because the government believed these to be "harmful to society" for the subversive socio-political message embodied in Wang Ping, a young elementary school teacher playing the role of Nora on the stage (Qi, 2016: 343). In addition, as a result of her participation in this production, Wang Ping lost her job in school and was thrown out of her traditional family by her father. With the help of friends, Wang Ping nonetheless took a revolutionary path and began an independent productive career in acting and later in film directing (Qi, 2016:350). From this example, we can see that the real-world impacts of playing this fictional

character had a (perhaps surprising) correlation with the fictional character of Nora. Just as the play is proposing a moment of change (leading to Nora's departure/'emancipation') so too here is the time ripe in China for Wang Ping to follow a similar trajectory. In one way, her story of leaving her conservative family could even be read as a kind of postscript to *A Doll's House*.

A few months after the Nanjing performances, The League of Chinese Left-Wing Dramatists restaged *A Doll's House* in Shanghai, again directed by Zhang Min but performed by different actors, including Lan Ping, who played Nora, and Zhao Dan who played her husband, Mr Helmer. Both Lan Ping and Zhao Dan became very influential figures in later years. Lan Ping changed her name to Jiang Qing, joined the Communist-led revolutionary movement and married Chairman Mao, becoming the famous Madame Mao, while Zhao Dan became one of the most well-known movie actors in China before and after liberation. The production of *A Doll's House* in Shanghai won extensive praise for both directing and acting.

The success of the production was not mere chance. From the beginning of rehearsals, actors and director carefully crafted each character. Zhao Dan recalled in his memoir that from the start of the rehearsals, artists were aware of the importance of not only shouting a few slogans but also enhancing the quality of the performance with meaningful characters (Zhao, 1980: 89). Thus, Zhao Dan worked with director Zhang Min to closely analyse the script and characters. They took many literary and artistic materials showing foreign life as references, including a large number of American movies. For instance, Zhao Dan drew lessons from John Barrymore's performance in

films and designed the character of Helmer accordingly. By studying these additional works, the director and the actors were able to present each character with deep understanding and represent them on stage dynamically and coherently (Hu, 2006: 38). Such a performance outcome was in contrast to previous making processes in Chinese theatre which had lacked the detailed preparatory work. This example demonstrates that although a dramaturg was not employed in this production (and indeed the formal concept of dramaturgy had not yet been introduced to China), other people, including director and actors, took on dramaturgical functions within the process, including detailed analysis of the script and characters, understanding the social context and cultural differences, learning and moderating the performance by following Western-style movies.

As we have seen, Ibsen's works were often seen as politically sensitive by authorities who sought to control and maintain 'family and social order'. At the same time, many progressive intellectuals and theatre artists, particularly among left-wing intellectuals and artists, insisted on staging Ibsen's productions as a platform for enlightening the masses. These theatre productions were used to deliver political messages – again, this is a clear dramaturgical strategy which we would recognise today, even if it was not named and claimed as such at the time. The work of these 'proto-dramaturgs' successfully enhanced the quality of the overall artistic performances, while also allowing the theatre-makers to imbue their work with a political charge.

4.2.2 The reproduction of Ibsen's works between 1949 and the present

This section focuses on the engagement of Chinese artists and scholars in Ibsen's works from the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 to the present day. This period can be divided into three phases: (i) 1949-1965; (ii) 1966-1976; (iii) 1977-the present.

(i) 1949-1965: Socialist Construction Period

After 1949, the Communist Government insisted on a new interpretation of Ibsen.

With the influence of the new socialist ideology, Ibsen was no longer considered to be a pioneer of liberation but a representative playwright of the bourgeois class (Eide, 1987: 306). This shift was seen during a joint China-Norway production of *A Doll's House* in 1956. During this production process, different views and interpretations of Ibsen's work were clearly held by the two directors, from Norway and China respectively, Gerda Ring and Wu Xue.

In commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Ibsen's death, the then China Youth Art Theatre decided to revive *A Doll's House*. Before starting to direct the play, Wu Xue visited Norway to learn about Norwegian society and culture to ensure the performance was close to Ibsen's original play text. During his stay in Oslo, Wu collected photos, watched several of Ibsen performances and interviewed artists and other experts (Helland, 2015: 135). In addition, Wu Xue met Gerda Ring, who was the director of the Norwegian National Theatre and had directed *A Doll's House* in

Copenhagen the year before. Later Wu invited Gerda Ring as co-director to participate in the rehearsals in Beijing.

During the collaboration in Beijing, Ring, in keeping with Ibsen's original intentions (Ibsen, 1917:91), emphasised his interpretation of *A Doll's House* as a play about marriage and the spiritual conflict between Nora and her husband Helmer from a family perspective as the central theme of the play (Eide, 1987: 307). Wu, on the other hand, emphasised the social implications of the play and interpreted Ibsen's attitudes towards the major characters in the play from Ibsen's own petty-bourgeois perspectives (Eide, 1987: 307). Hence, Wu believed that after Nora left her family, other men she encountered in a capitalist society would be just as selfish and hypocritical as Helmer, as determined by the nature of capitalism. Chinese cultural leaders also supported Wu's stance at that time. Tian Han, who was in charge of the Chinese Dramatists Association, expressed a similar opinion, maintaining that Ibsen could not overcome his petty-bourgeois conventions as he focused on the conflict between Helmer and Nora as a family matter (Eide, 1987: 310).

Although their underlying intentions were different, the cooperation between Ring and Wu was successful. They worked hard to create the image of an 'authentic' Western life on stage (Helland, 2015: 135). All the characters looked distinctly 'Western' and they all carried strong visible signs of their class background. Female characters wore expensive-looking heavy dresses, and male characters appeared in long dinner jackets with starched white silk shirts and bow ties. The production team

not only paid attention to the details of clothing and make-up, but they also made the design of the stage authentically reflect Western bourgeois living quarters.

It is noteworthy that in this production, several stage devices were used to highlight the change in power relations between Nora and Helmer. For instance, the stage was designed in such a way that the stage floor was divided into two parts, with the upstage raised to a level higher than the downstage to indicate the differences in the power relationship (Tam, 2018: 225). Whoever stood on this part of the stage was visually on a higher ground, which gave a character a certain power over those on the lower level. During the tarantella dance scene, Nora was seen downstage, while Helmer watched and guided Nora from an upstage, higher position. Nora's fear and anxiety were hidden in her dance, which had spiralled out of her control. The power struggle was thus visually presented on the stage. The particular design of dress and staging reflected the intention of both directors to show an authentic Western bourgeois living environment with unequal power relationships, though Ring focused on family tension and Wu emphasised the nature of capitalist society.

From these different political interpretations and attitudes towards Ibsen and his work of *A Doll's House*, we can see the ideology behind the debate: from Ring's perspective, family tension was the central theme for the Western developed economies at that time given that post-war booming economies and emerging middle classes led to a shift from class struggle at societal level to family relationships at an individual level. In contrast, Wu represented the overwhelmingly dominant ideology in China at that time, which considered that all artistic works should reinforce

characteristics reflecting conflicts at the societal level, even if a theatre production was based on family relationships. In this sense, Western bourgeois male domination over women truly reflected such conflict and struggle. This dominant ideology directed theatre productions throughout the country up to the peak of political turmoil during the Cultural Revolution.

(ii) 1966-1976: The Cultural Revolution

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Cultural Revolution may be seen as a silent period for Chinese spoken drama. Only eight theatrical pieces in total were promoted as ‘revolutionary model works’, mainly in the form of six Peking Operas and two Ballets, but no spoken drama. Like all other Western writers, Ibsen’s works were not performed at all during this period. In fact, many artists, including playwrights, directors and actors were poorly treated as the bourgeois class and punished in labour campus or sent to the remote countryside. This period can be labelled as the ‘darkest era’ of Chinese civilisation.

(iii) 1977-Present: The Transitional Period

At the end of the Cultural Revolution, China gradually entered a transitional period marked by the ‘open door’ and economic reform policy and guided by the principle of ‘seek truth from facts’ under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping (Deng, 1978). The authorities consciously shifted policies from class struggle to economic development. At the same time, by introducing various foreign works into China, the authorities opened the door to different ideologies and value systems. During this period, other

Chinese artists have tried to interpret Ibsen's work from different angles. Foreign productions with the involvement of professional dramaturgs were also brought into China and influenced Chinese theatre-makers and audiences.

An important example of these developments was the 1983 production of *Peer Gynt*, which was initially translated by Xiao Qian and directed by Xu Xiaozhong, Professor of the Directing Department of the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing. In creating the performance text, Xiao Qian edited the play down to three hours of playing time. He stated that while the most famous scenes needed to be preserved, the parts that were too obscure should be taken out for Chinese audiences (Eide, 1987: 317). The Norwegian Embassy arranged for some Norwegian students to join the team and explain some contextual background to the Chinese production team.

Initially, the divide between the Chinese team and the Norwegian students as advisors was similar to that seen in the 1956 production of *A Doll's House*. The Chinese artists focused on the political implications, dividing the characters into positive and negative camps to reflect on the political environment in China at the historical moment the 'Gang of Four' was removed from power at the end of the Cultural Revolution. In contrast, the Norwegian students suggested the production should emphasise the dramatic tension in the play rather than the political implications. During the rehearsals the situation gradually shifted towards the Norwegian side. The Chinese actors found that each character indeed had both positive and negative perspectives, and all faced common fundamental questions, such as when Peer questions himself: "What is man's aim in life?"

After the first performance, Xiao Qian collected responses from the audiences and found that most were sympathetic to Peer and felt the ambiguity within his character. Audience members also saw a similarity in the relationship between Peer and his mother and an ordinary Chinese mother-son relationship, which made the audiences relate closely to the play (Eide, 1987: 317).

It is noticeable that after a long period of strict and ongoing ideological control in China, Chinese artists' ideas were initially limited by their own sense of self-censorship rather than the strictures imposed by the authorities. Breaking such self-imposed censorship and interpreting Ibsen's work with new lenses require a collective effort, including newly formed production teams with the support of visible dramaturgs, or people who can undertake dramaturgical functions during the production process. This observation is consistent with the call for the introduction of dramaturgical functions into Chinese theatre made by a number of leading artists in China in the 1980s and early 1990s as presented in Chapter 3.

Ibsen became popular again in China in the 1990s with many productions of his works being staged, including director Wu Xiaojiang's two productions in the late 1990s which received considerable attention. The first of these productions was *An Enemy of the People* in 1996, performed at the Beijing Central Experimental Theatre. In this production, Wu tried to respond to two questions: how could today's Chinese audience relate to the theme of Ibsen's work? And would the dramatic events in Ibsen's work still be accessible to today's China? (He, 2009:2)

In addressing these questions, Wu relocated the action from a coastal town in Norway to an unnamed city in China. In addition, Wu intended not only to reflect on environmental pollution in this work but also to address people's moral degradation during and after the Cultural Revolution. In order to represent these intentions, he chose several symbols that had special meaning for Chinese audiences. For instance, the journalist was dressed as a Red Guard from the Cultural Revolution and the background music was the famous revolutionary melody *The East Is Red* (*Dongfang hong* 东方红). Wu associated a dramatic event with a specific period, explaining: "I found that what Chinese intellectuals had suffered during that time was not very different from what Dr Stockmann had experienced in his native town" (He, 2009:2).

The second Ibsen work chosen by Wu Xiaojiang was *A Doll's House* (premiered in 1998). Wu changed the original theme to cross-cultural marriage conflict and directed the play by combining Western and Eastern cultural elements. Wu adapted the plot boldly and revised the story to be set in 1930s China. Nora, a Norwegian woman, marries an overseas Chinese student Han Ermao 韩尔茂 (Helmer in Ibsen's script). The couple then move back to China where, as her Chinese husband wishes, Nora tries her best to become a perfect traditional Chinese housewife. She learns the Chinese language, Chinese cooking and even embraces Peking Opera. Although she manages to keep the family happily surviving for four years, the family is confronted with a latent crisis because of the appearance of Ke Luotai 柯洛泰 (Krogstad in Ibsen's script). To save her husband, Nora had forged her father's signature to borrow money with the help of Ke Luotai years ago. Hence, she is now worried that Ke

Luotai is coming to inform her husband of the secret. This then leads to conflict between Ermao and Nora. Eventually, Nora can no longer tolerate Ermao's selfishness as well as the hypocrisy within traditional Chinese family relationships, and leaves China.

In order to attract both Chinese and foreign audiences, Wu changed the plot and made the performance a bilingual Chinese and English version. Wu invited Norwegian actress Agnete Haaland to play Nora. Instead of speaking her native Norwegian, she spoke English with some Chinese words on stage. Other actors talked in Chinese and 'Chinglish' (a blend of Chinese and English; in particular, a variety of English used by speakers of Chinese, incorporating some Chinese vocabulary or constructions).

The languages spoken in this cross-cultural setting, with accents used by the actors (the Chinese spoken by Nora and the English spoken by Chinese actors) caused unintended comic effects. Furthermore, Wu applied other traditional Chinese cultural elements, such as Peking Opera, traditional costumes and traditional musical instruments, in order to add Chinese flavour to a Western drama.

In order to avoid censorship, director Wu specifically designed this production to portray 1930s China to ensure the entire production would not be too confronting for the authorities, although much of the dialogue was also relevant to contemporary China at the time of production. An example of this strategy is the last conversation between Nora and her husband most of which was rewritten by Wu as follows:

Han Ermao: Foreign (western) women are like monsters. You have lots of shortcomings that foreigners have; you want to control what's happening in China... You are a foreigner, and your task is to perform as a lovely foreigner.

Nora: I am not your ugly uneducated Chinese wife. Does the philosophy of Confucius teach you Chinese to be such a mediocre human being? If that is true, I curse such morality and such a culture. (Entell, 2002: 110)

These confrontational dialogues reflect the mistrust and misunderstanding between cultures, even between people in an intimate relationship; such conflict can lead to irreparable consequences and human tragedy. The phenomenon presented in this new production of Ibsen's work also reminds audiences of the potential of geopolitical tensions and clashes of civilisation between nations due to mistrust and misunderstanding; citizens in different countries should draw a lesson from and act to prevent such tragedy.

Other creative interpretations of Ibsen's work have been presented in a similar vein in the twenty-first century. For example, in 2005, Lü Xiaoping, professor of theatre at Nanjing University, completed a new version of *An Enemy of the People* for a scriptwriting course, then directed it as a theatre production the same year (He, 2009: 124).

The most innovative part of Lü's production is its 'play-within-a-play' structure, namely using an established play by adding new stories with new characters into that play. The story added by Lü and his students was about university students living near a village along the Huai River who became fed up with the terrible pollution of the

river. In order to raise people's awareness of this situation and draw government attention to it, these students came up with the idea to produce Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*. However, they soon found themselves in the same predicament as Dr Stockman. The local villagers were only concerned about their jobs and income, so they joined hands with the factory owners who caused the pollution and saw these young students as 'troublemakers'. As both theatrical artist and educator, Lü intended to teach his students by identifying and stressing the relevance of the classic play and reality in Chinese society. Eventually, this play passed censorship and was first performed at Nanjing University in 2006; it was presented at the Beijing College Students Drama Festival later that year. Audiences responded well to the performance which brought a foreign drama close to their daily life.

Although there was no formal dramaturg appointed in the theatre productions presented above, the dramaturgical role played by translators, directors and theatre educators was significant. Key contributions include adding more meaningful interpretation into the new production, linking foreign cultural and societal contexts with Chinese realities, and bringing contemporary issues into classical works. The next example presented below represents a foreign production with involvement of a professional dramaturg and the impact of this approach in China.

A controversial interpretation of Ibsen in China was Thomas Ostermeier's production of *An Enemy of the People*, which toured internationally in 2018. Ostermeier, a German director based at Berlin's Schaubühne Theater, is well-known for his ambitious and socially engaged approaches toward classic works. Ostermeier

explained that to transform *An Enemy of the People* for twenty-first century audiences “a bourgeois 19th-century setting wasn’t going to work. This is such a politically engaged drama, and the 21st-century political discourse we used were ‘alternative facts’ and ‘fake news’” (Tinney, 2018). The dramaturg of this production, Florian Borchmeyer, adapted Ibsen’s historically distant play to resonate with contemporary perspectives. The biggest dramaturgical challenge was rewriting the climactic scene of Stockmann’s speech, breaking the fourth wall to invite the actual audience to add their views on current controversial public events.

As Borchmeyer wrote in his rehearsal note: “There is always and everywhere a current case that maps precisely onto the play’s scenario” (Borchmeyer, 2016: 83). During the production’s premiere at Avignon, audiences identified the play with a case of contaminated blood infusions. In Berlin, the production team received a letter from the local tennis association enquiring who had leaked all the details about their recent internal quarrels. When this production was performed in Montreal, drinking water had truly been poisoned all over the city by an industrial accident. From a dramaturgical perspective, Ibsen’s dramatic situation found itself appropriate and relevant for local conditions in many different places and contexts.

On the basis of Borchmeyer’s assertion that “a current case maps onto the play’s scenario”, it is even more worthwhile to evaluate the reaction to the production in Beijing in 2018. During the dialogue with Dr Stockmann, audiences were active in presenting their opinions on freedom of speech, economic scandals, corruption and media transparency (Tang, 2018: 39). Unsurprisingly, the audience’s reaction caught

the attention of the censors who were seriously concerned about the potential political implications during subsequent performances. The next stop of the tour in Nanjing was quickly cancelled due to “stage technical issues” (Tang, 2018: 39).

In terms of negotiating with censors in China, the Ostermeier team went too far in inviting direct and explicit responses from audiences. With a long historical struggle, Chinese theatre practitioners had gradually accumulated rich experience in using historically distant material to allude to the present and address local concerns by adapting Western classics, which censors could more easily pass. Moreover, production teams paid equal respect to spectators and shared mutual understandings with them: Chinese audiences became sensitive to any political metaphor embedded in theatre works and responded spontaneously. The differences in the ways of dealing with censorship adopted by Chinese and by foreign theatre teams provide a lesson for future cultural exchange activities. A more locally oriented approach towards censorship issues could avoid unnecessary disruption of a foreign performance in China. It is also noteworthy that dramaturgical strategies are context dependent. What was possible in a German (and more broadly foreign) context was not yet possible in China. Hence, dramaturgy cannot be taken as a ‘one size fits all’ tactic but requires a case-by-case analysis.

The reception of Ibsen’s work has not only been visible in theatre production but has also appeared among scholarly research activities in recent years. For instance, He Chengzhou analysed how time and location influenced Chinese interpretations of Ibsen in his paper “Inter-culturalism in the Theatre and Chinese Performances of

Ibsen” (He, 2009); Wang Ning reconstructed Ibsen from being a revolutionary thinker with ideological tendencies, to an artist with an aesthetic focus in “Reconstructing Ibsen as An Artist: A Theoretical Reflection on the Reception of Ibsen in China” (Wang, 2003). Two international conferences on Ibsen held in China also contributed to this intellectual engagement with Ibsen: ‘Ibsen and Modernity in regard to His Reception in China’ in Beijing in 1999, and ‘Ibsen and China: Toward an Aesthetic Construction’ in Shanghai in 2002. During these conferences, a group of young Chinese scholars who were able to write and present their papers directly in English made significant progress in developing Ibsen studies in China. Hence, further development in adopting, interpreting and analysing Ibsen’s work in China has flourished in more recent years, and that reflects on the enlightenment and progressive nature of Ibsen’s work with significant impact on transitional societies such as China. Given Ibsen’s works deeply reflect on capitalist society in transition in history, his works are particularly meaningful in China which is currently experiencing a similar transition towards a market economy with an emerging middle class and increasing awareness of individual rights.

4.2.3 Implications for the role of dramaturg

Although the terms ‘dramaturgy’ and ‘dramaturg’ are still new in China, if we take the reception of Ibsen’s work in China historically as an example, it is apparent that intellectuals and artists have performed dramaturgical functions before, during and even after the production process as ‘invisible dramaturgs’. These functions can be seen in the dramaturgical tasks undertaken by Xiao Qian and the Norwegian advisors

during the 1983 production of *Peer Gynt*, as well as with the work of theatre educator Lü Xiaoping. We can draw lessons from these earlier efforts with regard to the professional development of dramaturgs in China (and indeed elsewhere).

Firstly, intellectuals and artists are influenced by historical, social, and political factors, regardless of who they are or in which period they live. Therefore, it is essential that a dramaturg realises the importance of linking theatre works with audiences' life experience, playing a bridging role between playwright and audience.

Secondly, as a consequence of this first role, dramaturgs are also limited by their own constraints. People's interpretations of Ibsen, for example, are driven by their own different experiences and backgrounds. It is necessary for dramaturgs to be aware of their limitations and take up the role of dramaturg as a form of transmission between themselves and others, including other artists, critics, and audiences, in particular.

Therefore, dramaturgs may also play a coordinating role with collective effort in theatre production.

Thirdly, considering theatre's social, cultural and economic context, how might dramaturgs fulfil their role as a form of transmission? Here are some possible expectations we might have of dramaturgs:

Dramaturgs should be open-minded, good communicators and team-players by absorbing and providing information during and after the production process;

Dramaturgs should have extensive knowledge of, and sensitivity towards both historical circumstances and contemporary reality. More importantly, dramaturgs should be able to weave these aspects together;

Dramaturgs should have good capacity for self-evaluation and self-criticism;

The role of dramaturgs in the transitional society of China, in particular, should involve balancing the aesthetic, political and cultural aspects of productions through ongoing exploration in theatre-making.

So far, this chapter has used the example of the reception and development of Ibsen's work in China and to highlight the important role of dramaturgical practices in these productions historically. The focus will now turn to another significant example, namely the production of *Death of a Salesman* in Beijing in 1983, directed by Arthur Miller himself with the support of Ying Ruocheng, who was the first person in China to call for formal adoption of dramaturgy and the role of dramaturg in Chinese theatre.

4.3 Evaluation of *Death of a Salesman* from a dramaturgical perspective

As a turning point in Arthur Miller's career, *Death of a Salesman* introduced stream-of-consciousness writing to Western theatre in the late 1940s. In 1983, Arthur Miller was invited to direct this play at the Beijing People's Art Theatre (BPAT). This was not only an entirely new experience but also an absolute challenge for him as well as the Chinese team, most of whom had never heard of 'life insurance' or 'instalment payments'. During the production, the collaboration between Arthur

Miller and Ying Ruocheng stands out as a remarkable example of the challenges faced in directing a tragedy about American capitalism in a Communist country. Beyond the political perspective, the success of the production left a great legacy in Chinese spoken drama in the 1980s and after, particularly in relation to using key elements of dramaturgy in the production process.

From choosing *Death of a Salesman* to staging it in a Chinese theatre, the role Ying played should be valued from a dramaturgical perspective. His role involved not only translating but also acting the character of Willy Loman, the protagonist of the play. Ying intentionally highlighted the connection between 1940s American society and 1980s Chinese society for the production team and audiences. More importantly, he had to prevent this play from becoming anti-American political propaganda.

As a visionary theatre dramatist, Ying wanted to bring new theatre forms and fresh directions to Chinese artists and audiences. By introducing *Salesman* to Chinese audiences, Ying opened a window on American capitalism during the earlier stage of transition in China, where the mechanism of market economies had been gradually introduced with less political reform. As Belinda Kong states in her analysis of the production: “Dramatic activities in China intersected significantly with extraordinary forces of reforming the economy,” and “the Beijing *Salesman* production was part of an attempt by certain Chinese artist-intellectuals to navigate the new political waters.” (Kong, 2007).

Arthur Miller's published seven-week journal (from 21 March to 7 May 1983) entitled *Death of a Salesman in Beijing*, provides us with a valuable reflection from his own perspective as a sensitive and thoughtful playwright. The following section draws on key elements from this journal, as well as Ying Ruocheng's memoirs, *Voice Carry*, and from the interviews with several members of the Chinese production team regarding the production process and the role of dramaturg in this process.

4.3.1 Background of the production

During the pre-production period, Ying's role included advocating to bring *Salesman* to the Chinese stage, as well as translating the play. Miller and Ying first met in 1978 when Miller made his first trip to China with his wife, Inge Morath. Miller was surprised that "since the greats of Chinese culture are nearly equally unknown outside China's borders, the isolation of this great people seems as incredible as the parochialism of both sides." (Miller, 2015: xxxvi).

Miller met several Chinese writers and artists in Beijing and Shanghai respectively, including Ying, Cao Yu, head of the BPAT at the time, as well as Huang Zuoling, director of the Shanghai People's Art Theatre (SPAT) in Shanghai. During their conversations, Miller felt their strong eagerness to reach out to the West after the Cultural Revolution. In terms of Miller's impression of Ying, he was amazed at the extent of Ying's reading of Western literature (Miller, 2015: xxxvii).

The artists Miller met asked him to recommend one of his plays for Chinese audiences and he picked *The Crucible*. From his perspective, what this play depicted

of the Salem witch hunt provided an ideal metaphor for the targeting of Chinese intellectuals who underwent numerous campaigns and suffering during the Cultural Revolution (Ying & Conceison, 2009: 160).

Chinese artists responded in different ways to this recommendation. For example, in 1981, Huang Zuolin followed Miller's recommendation and directed *The Crucible* with the new title of *Salem's Witch* (*Salemu de nvwu* 萨勒姆的女巫) at the SPAT. The production was successful and had 52 performances (Han, 2014: 74). As Arthur Miller had predicted, Chinese audiences, who had suffered bitterly from persecution during the Cultural Revolution, found extraordinary echoes in the play and could not believe it was written by an American playwright (Ou & Qian, 2013: 58).

In contrast, it was precisely these echoes of persecution which Ying was seeking to avoid. He recognised that during the period of 'scar literature' (*shanghen wenxue* 伤痕文学) since the end of the Cultural Revolution, there had been numerous works of literature and theatre exposing what people had undergone during the Cultural Revolution, most of these featuring depressing or horrific accounts of life, such as persecution, denunciation, beating and even the execution of family members and friends. In that respect, Ying claimed that "*The Crucible* would not have been something new" (Ying & Conceison, 2009: 160). In fact, Ying himself had been jailed for three years (1968-1971) and had endured years of re-education through labour during the Cultural Revolution; he felt the pain of continuously repeating the historical trauma on stage.

Hence, Ying sought to convince Miller to collaborate on *Death of a Salesman* because “It was entirely a breath of air, especially because of the way of staging...and audiences being shocked due to the kind of surrealistic style” (Ying & Conceison, 2009: 160-161). Miller was finally persuaded by Ying and decided to accept this challenge because he was convinced that his play “had no problem being understood in every culture, including China” (Miller, 2015: xxxviii). Miller also insisted that the protagonist, Willy Loman, should be played by Ying Ruocheng. What is more, Miller asked Ying to produce a new Chinese translation, even though there were two previous Chinese versions.

From 1979 to 1991, the BPAT produced 21 foreign plays (Yang, 2016: 13). Among the six Anglo-American plays produced over the period, five were translated by Ying. In terms of Ying’s translation principles, which he summarised in the preface to the collection of his translation of play-texts (Ying, 1999: 9), he stipulated that performability should be the first priority, not only for the actors but also for audiences. Ying’s translation of *Salesman* was fairly faithful to the original, even though this meant that the play ran longer than any play the BPAT had ever previously produced. Equally importantly, Ying insisted that the Chinese version should be close to the original in sentence length, rhythm and even structure. This technique provided Miller with an overall impression when he was directing, even though he did not understand Chinese.

Ying found the English language used by Miller to be very colloquial, so he made a great effort to avoid stiff translations. Completing the task in only six weeks before

Miller's arrival, Ying's 1983 version differed from the previous 1971 translation by Yao Ke and 1979 translation by Chen Liangting because he maintained Miller's linguistic style, then infused the dialogue with colloquial Beijing speech and local flavour, one of the hallmarks of the BPAT plays by local Beijing playwrights. What is more, as noted above, Ying considered performability to be an essential part of translation. For these reasons, he made certain changes in the Chinese text.

The following examples demonstrate Ying's approach:

1) Maintaining Miller's linguistic style;

Happy: Yeah, big cattle man, my brother. (Miller, 2009:193)

哈皮：对，畜牧业里的大人物，我哥哥。(Ying, 2001:337)

In order to keep the sentence structure, the same as Miller's, Ying inverted the Chinese order, which could only be used in oral expressions.

2) Infusing the dialogue with colloquial Beijing flavour;

Willy: That man was a prince, he was a masterful man. (Miller, 2009:133)

威利：那个人真是好样的，有肩膀。(Ying, 2001:256)

Ying paraphrased "a masterful man" to 有肩膀 (have shoulders) a Beijing slang, which means capable of taking responsibility.

Another example:

Willy: The woods are burning! (Miller, 2009:152)

威利：火烧眉毛了！（Ying, 2001:283）

Ying paraphrased this sentence to a Chinese idiom 火烧眉毛, “fire catches the eyebrows” to describe the urgency of the matter.

3) Making changes to keep the performability.

Willy: Or B. F. Goodrich. (Miller, 2009:152)

威利：还有那个橡胶大王，古德里奇。（Ying, 2001:260）

Ying added “the robber King” before Goodrich, in case Chinese audiences were not familiar with this person.

Not knowing any Chinese, Miller timed every scene of each rehearsal with a stop-watch and he was satisfied to discover that the play in Chinese was the “same” as the play in English to the minute (Miller, 2015: xv). What was more, he found that it was easy to follow the scene in his Penguin paperback; even the rhythms seemed the same, the flows to the peaks and the slopes toward the silences (Miller, 2015: 18). Nevertheless, Ying considered the translation as “the easiest part”; the real challenge was the rehearsal process (Ying & Conceison, 2009: 162).

4.3.2 Making process

How can we define Ying’s role in the making process as a dramaturg? As discussed in the last section, Ying acted as advocate and translator during the pre-production period. Then, from rehearsal to premiere, he strongly supported Miller’s directing work, not only by helping to select the cast, but also by playing Willy Loman, the

salesman, himself. What was even more challenging was communicating between Miller and the Chinese team, and with the press, audiences and theatre administrators. Thus, Ying played the role of dramaturg, not only translating the play with modification of tone and sentences which closely related to Beijing local dialect, but also acting as interpreter between Miller and the Chinese team, and communicator between different people inside and outside the theatre.

As an interpreter between Miller and the Chinese team, Ying had the advantage of understanding the difficulties of communication between the two sides. Ying was instrumental in assisting Miller to find common ground between this play and Chinese society. Ying also tried to encourage actors to find common ground between American and Chinese societies. In fact, the young actor who played Happy was quick to point out that there was one thing in the play that was ‘very Chinese’: “The way Willy tries to make his son successful. The Chinese father also wants his sons to be ‘dragons’ too” (Miller, 2015: 8). Other actors made similar observations from their own experiences.

In fact, Ying did not only interpret, but also transformed intentions from both sides. In Ying’s memoir, he admitted that “I was serving as his interpreter but at times I usurped his role and nobody really knew Arthur Miller’s ideas from my own ideas” (Ying & Conceison, 2009: 163). What was more, when Miller had days off, Ying led the cast during rehearsals and was able to answer questions from the Chinese cast who, according to Miller’s journal (Miller, 2015: 47), were afraid to ask Miller for fear of being seen as naive.

In Miller's seven-week journal, Ying's name appears nearly every day, with him becoming Miller's most reliable partner. The two also developed a complementary way of working. Ying found Miller's directing style as a playwright to be different from other professional directors with whom he had worked. On the one hand, he found Miller was not very versatile in the positioning of the actors, so he stepped in and did some supporting work. On the other hand, Miller paid great attention to the lines because he was directing a play written by himself. Another unique advantage of having Miller direct was that he could provide great information on the background of 1940s American society as well as rich detail on the characters during rehearsals, which helped the Chinese actors a great deal.

When Zhu Lin, the actress who played Linda, and Ying were struggling with the relationship between the characters of Linda and Willy, for example, Miller told them the history of the characters, explaining that Linda had to run away from home to marry Willy because of her parents' objections. She had accompanied Willy on some of his winter trips, sitting beside him in the little car to keep him company. With better understanding of the intense love and support which Linda had given Willy, Zhu Lin adjusted her interpretation effectively (Zhu, 2010: 195).

Ying also played an important role to bridge communications between the production team, the media and audiences. On 25 March, four days after rehearsals had started, a press conference was held. Ying stood with Miller facing journalists from many countries who asked questions such as: "Do Chinese actors work differently from Americans in creating their roles?" "Is it really possible for Chinese to relate to the

very American situation and to Willy Loman's character?" And more aggressively, "Why was *Salesman* chosen? Was it propaganda against the American way of life?"

Miller took a positive stance on all these questions. He told the press that he had learnt how to read the actors' signals and "while it is obvious that our cultural semaphores are vastly different, perhaps they are really referring to the same basic information deep within us" (Miller, 2015: 39). He also stated that people everywhere want to rise up in the world and the salesman motif was to a large extent metaphorical: "We must all sell ourselves, convince the world of a persona that perhaps we only wish we really possessed" (Miller, 2015:39). Responding to the most aggressive of the questions, Miller theorised on the universality of human emotions, saying that he hoped the production in Beijing of a very American play would simply assert the idea of a single humanity (Miller, 2005: 39).

Ying also addressed several questions about the production. In his journal, Miller praised Ying's response to the question of the drama being used as 'propaganda tool'. Ying said that "some people apparently think it is a different kind of propaganda than others. But actually my own interest in it is basically aesthetics. I think it can open new territory to our own playwrights, since it does break out of the conventions that have held us back." (Miller, 2005: 39).

Four days later, on 29 March, Miller once again wrote in his journal on the reason for having chosen *Salesman* based on his observations of Ying and other Chinese actors: "It becomes clearer that part of the urge to bring this play here, and to have me direct

it, was to show an ambiguous situation on the stage, one in which the audience would find itself understanding and even sympathising with a man who is not particularly 'good', or moral. In short, to let the real world into Chinese art. I think my being a foreigner is important as a signal that their isolation is, and should be, over with." (Miller, 2015: 56).

As well as dealing with the press, Ying also contributed with regard to how to interact with audiences and negotiate with theatre administrators. For instance, in the last scene, 'Requiem', Willy's funeral is attended by only five people: his wife Linda, his two sons Biff and Happy, his neighbour Charlie, and Charlie's son. The theatre administrators asked Ying to cut this final scene and claimed it would not work in China. Willy Loman's death meant that the story had ended, and his family and friends should simply say: "He was a nice chap." The theatre administrators claimed that no Chinese audience would have the patience to stay for the funeral scene. What was more, the theatre had to consider the issue of transportation whereby the buses would stop running at around 10pm. In those days, very few people in Beijing had private cars and all citizens depended on public buses. They anticipated that audiences would start rushing out of the theatre before or during the "Requiem" scene. Ying guaranteed the administrators that this would not happen and insisted that the play was so powerful that everyone would be experiencing its emotional impact and would have the patience to wait.

On the opening night, Ying told the actors not to hurry, but to make their way onto the stage to their designated places and act out the final scene. Miller also recalled this

moment in his journal: “Ying was waiting in the wings, while the other actors came off the stage one by one after paying tribute to Willy Loman. As the curtain came down, there was absolute silence from the audience for what seemed to us like a long time. One of our actresses started sniffing, thinking that the show was a total failure. And then, all of a sudden, I don’t know who started, but it came like an avalanche: the applause came forth and it didn’t end. Everyone was cheering. I was relieved and excited – all of that effort had not been in vain” (Miller, 2015:214). Of course, nobody in the audience was concerned about the last bus.

4.3.3 Implications for the role of dramaturg

From choosing *Death of a Salesman* to staging it in China, the roles Ying played included advocate, translator, interpreter, as well as communicator. These roles present certain implications from a dramaturgical perspective.

First, as an advocate for *Salesman*, Ying insisted on staging this play in order to bring various new theatre forms and fresh directions to Chinese artists and audiences. Thus, the role of dramaturg in this respect is to select plays for production which demonstrate a forward-looking vision, rather than merely following in the footsteps of others.

Second, as the translator of *Salesman*, Ying's work began with, but was not limited to, the literary aspects of the play. Ying considered the relationship between Miller's original text and the features of the BPAT’s performing style and made performability a key feature of the text. Hence, a dramaturg must be concerned not only with

realising a translation that sounds ‘natural’ rather than rigid, where its performability extends to actors and audiences, but is also perhaps ideally one that reflects the style of the theatre and actors performing it.

Third, as an interpreter, Ying supported Miller in building communication and trust with the Chinese team. This reflects the role of a dramaturg in not only relaying the different intentions among the members of the production team, but also addressing the commonality rather than differences in a cross-cultural production context. The production team thus gradually developed its complementary working method with a win-win outcome.

Last, as a communicator between the production team and the press, audiences and administrators, the dramaturg is required to work interactively with different people without losing sight of their own principles. Hence, in working with different areas of the theatre, a dramaturg should play the role of a bridge to link each of them.

This unique example of a joint production between Americans and Chinese presents a different perspective regarding the role and significance of dramaturgy in theatre-making. The next example focuses on theatre-making based on traditional Chinese themes and produced by a Chinese team, namely the production of the famous play *Teahouse*.

4.4 The writing, staging, reviving and new versions of *Teahouse*

In today’s world, all forms of art are related to the social and often political conditions of the culture and society which produces them. However, as noted by Constantine

Tung: “No country believes more deeply in the power of drama or uses drama more frequently in ideological feuds, political purges, and mass campaigns than the People Republic of China” (Tung & Mackerras, 1987: 1).

As was discussed in Chapter 3, one can see the close ties between the country’s political and social controversies and Chinese spoken drama ever since spoken drama’s infancy around the 1910s. Over the next few decades, spoken drama was subordinated to politics. Nevertheless, this form exerted a great influence on politics. In May 1942, in his *Yan ’an Talks on Literature and Art*, Mao Zedong put forward a strong view in favour of ‘mass art’. He proposed that literature and the arts should reflect the reality of society, particularly with representative images of the working class (that is, workers, peasants and soldiers) (Mao, 1965: III, 76-7)), and should function as propaganda for the revolution. After the People’s Republic of China was established in 1949, and under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, the propaganda value of spoken drama increased.

To respond to Mao’s call, many playwrights followed the slogan of ‘building a new socialist society’ as the national policy as well as adopting the concept of ‘social realism’ as their artistic approach. The creation of the play *Teahouse* was a typical example of such an effort by the so-called ‘liberated playwrights’, who had experienced and written about Chinese society under the old regime, and who wanted to develop a new genre through which to criticise the old regime and celebrate the new one. Lao She, the eminent Chinese writer and playwright, introduced the idea of using the life and changes at an old Beijing teahouse from the period of late Qing

dynasty to the end of KMT regime in mainland China to represent the miserable life experienced by ordinary people in the old society. Lao She's intention was to call for societal changes, anticipating that a new socialist society would be a good one for the majority of Chinese people.

4.4.1 Lao She's writing of *Teahouse*

In October 1949, Lao She returned from America, where, as a renowned novelist, he had been invited (together with Cao Yu) by the U.S. Department of State to take part in a lecture tour which began in 1946. During that period, he wrote *Four Generations under One Roof* (*Sishi tongtang* 四世同堂), a novel detailing the life of ordinary Beijing people during the Japanese Occupation. Then, accepting the personal invitation of Premier Zhou Enlai, Lao She came back to his hometown Beijing, and was thrilled by the changes he witnessed in the new socialist China. He recalled in one essay: "At the end of 1949 when I returned from abroad, I found a Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, and the first one I read was his *Yan'an Talks on Literature and Art*. After reading this great text, I could not help but be ecstatic. In all the theories I had seen before, none of them had told me so clearly who and how that literature and arts should serve" (Lao, 1982: 67).

With this feeling of ecstasy, Lao She was eager to "engage in political and social events" (Lao, 1982: 10), and make his own contribution to the new society. Shortly thereafter, he decided to turn his writing talent for novels which had gained him great fame before the founding of the PRC, to playwriting, as he felt spoken drama could

reach a wider audience. Inspired by the notion of ‘mass art’ in Mao’s talk, Lao She longed for broader audiences through a shorter form which took less time to write. In addition, he felt that the performing arts were more accessible to the common people than printed literature, which required literacy from readers (Ying & Conceison, 2009: 138).

From 1950 to 1966, Lao She wrote 21 play scripts in total, mostly as spoken drama, but also some in the style of traditional music-dramas; *Dragon Beard Ditch* (*Longxu gou* 龙须沟, 1951) and *Teahouse* (1957) were among the most notable of these. Both of these works were produced by the BPAT, and Lao She himself developed a close relationship with this theatre.

Dragon Beard Ditch was written for the BPAT, at the invitation of the Beijing Government. The play is named after the neighbourhood in Tianqiao district in Beijing, which used to be a destitute place but was under re-development by the new government; this development was presented as a model of socialist reconstruction at that time.

Born and raised in a poor Manchu family in Beijing, Lao She felt strong sympathy for underprivileged people. After visiting the reconstruction project himself, he said that he “was profoundly touched by the re-making of Dragon Beard Ditch by the Beijing government soon after the liberation” (Lao, 1982:123). In the script, which he had finished even before the end of the reconstruction project, Lao She dramatised the misery of life around Dragon Beard Ditch and the stinking slum streets that for

generations had trapped the poor in the old society. It was not until the advent of the new communist society that the people's government was able to clear the smelly ditch and build a wide road in its place.

In his first collaboration with the BPAT in producing this play, Lao She found Jiao Juyin to be the ideal stage director for his scripts. Although most of the actors in the brand-new theatre company (established in 1952) were in their twenties and inexperienced, guided by Lao She's writing and Jiao Juyin's directing, they became the best interpreters of Lao She's work (Ying & Conceison, 2009: 138). *Dragon Beard Ditch* was warmly received by audiences and critics and "played a significant role in consolidating the newly founded people's government and in illustrating the superiority of the new socialist system" (Chen, 2002: 12).

After *Dragon Beard Ditch*, Lao She decided to write a new work depicting the idea of constitutional democracy in China. He finished the first draft in 1956. The story depicts the fate of the three Qin brothers. Three people, three paths – this was a common writing style for playwrights in the early days of the New China. However, Lao She was hesitant as to whether to write another act about the story after the establishment of the New China. His intention in writing this play was to support the propaganda of the Constitution and it seemed inappropriate not to include post-1949 plot lines. Therefore, Lao She did not give the play a name and wanted to consult the opinions of the BPAT production team.

Continuing the specific way of collaborating with the BPAT since *Dragon Beard Ditch*, Lao She approached the BPAT and read this new untitled work personally to four leading figures, including Theatre President Cao Yu, Vice President Zhao Qiyang, Chief Director Jiao Juyin and Deputy Chief Director Ouyang Shanzun. The four were not very enthusiastic about the work because it did not have something innovative. Nevertheless, everyone felt that the second scene of the first act which was set in a Beijing teahouse at the end of the nineteenth century was outstanding and should definitely be expanded into an entire play (Xia, 1983: 216). Some days later, during a discussion with Lao She, Jiao Juyin proposed to develop the teahouse scene into a multi-act play, which should be titled *Teahouse*. Lao She was inspired by this proposition and promised to deliver the revised script in three months. On 2 December 1956, Lao She brought his newly written three-act play *Teahouse* to the BPAT and read the script to all the theatre actors and staff with great emotion. The BPAT announced on the spot its intention to put this play on the stage.

In addition to discussing revisions to the work with the production team during the pre-production period, Lao She also responded to the production team's suggestions and made changes to the script during rehearsals. For example, he added a Beijing Clapper Ballad performer as the storyteller following a suggestion from the director Jiao Juyin and associate director Xia Chun. As a character-centred play, *Teahouse* has over sixty characters and covers fifty years without a central plot. In order to link the three acts of the play, Jiao and Xia suggested that Lao She add a storyteller who comes on stage during intermissions to briefly introduce each act and provide

humorous and satirical comments on the events that are about to take place (Yu, 2013: 94). Lao She took on this suggestion and quickly wrote three parts of Clapper Ballad lyrics as the connection between the three acts.

Lao She also described his work as “democratic scripts” and encouraged the production team to feel free to make changes during the production process (Lao, 1991: 528). He freely admitted that he had not considered all the details about the arrangements and effects required on the stage. Hence, it was essential for him, as the playwright, to work with the director, actors, and other production team staff to realise the work together.

Based on this collaboration with the BPAT, we can consider Lao She’s role to be not only the playwright but also a kind of dramaturg. Both before and during the production process, his roles included discussing revisions to the work with the production team, transforming the script into the performed text, informing the production team regarding the historical background, participating in the rehearsal process, and working with the entire team thoroughly and collectively. Besides his active involvement in the production process, the Chief Director, Jiao Juyin, played a crucial role in producing *Teahouse* and making it successful.

4.4.2 The impact of Jiao Juyin’s directing

As one of the most influential directors of Chinese spoken drama, Jiao Juyin made great contributions in blending the Stanislavski system with Chinese theatrical aesthetics.

Jiao's interest in Western theatre developed while studying at Yenching University from 1924 to 1928, where he majored in political science. His publications included translating Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*; Goldoni's *Mistress of the Inn* and Molière's *Tartuffe*, as well as essays on Ibsen and Molière. In 1930, Jiao accepted educationalist Li Shizeng's invitation and established the Chinese Xiqu School (*Zhonghua xiqu xuexiao* 中华戏曲学校) in Beijing, the first modern training school for Peking opera actors and actresses in China. From 1930 to 1933, Jiao acquired rich hands-on knowledge of traditional Chinese opera and advocated several reforms in the training system during his tenure as the school President. This knowledge and experience provided him with a substantial foundation for his later studies at the University of Paris and his PhD thesis 'Chinese Drama Today' (*Le théâtre chinois d'aujourd'hui*), which involved comprehensive research of Chinese theatre's history, organisation, technique, training, and management. It is worth noting that Jiao also covered the introduction of spoken drama and several significant practitioners and their works in his thesis (Jiao, 2005). Returning to China during the Second Sino-Japanese War, Jiao went to Chongqing, where he attempted to develop his practice as a director and studied Russian theatre. The experience of translating Chekhov's plays and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko's memoir, *My Life in the Russian Theatre*, became his gateway to the Stanislavski system. Jiao not only wrote insightful analysis of these works but also practised the system in his theatre directing.

Due to the close relationship between China and the Soviet Union after the founding of the PRC, the Stanislavski system became the officially sanctioned method of

dramatic creation (Yu, 2013:102). When the BPAT was established in 1952, it was entirely modelled after Stanislavski's Moscow Art Theatre. Serving as the Chief Director, Jiao drew on the Stanislavski system, however he approached it with his own distinctive angles, which were: 1) a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between directors, playwrights and theatre-works, especially emphasising the synergistic co-operation of directors and playwrights; and 2) the adaptation of the Stanislavski system and practice of Western realistic drama to create a modern Chinese spoken drama with distinct native characteristics.

Jiao took Stanislavski's principle that performance should 'begin with life' as a point of departure. He used the concept of 'mental image' (*xin xiang* 心象) based on his interpretation of the term 'image' in Stanislavski system, which asked for the actors to form images of the characters in their mind before performing them on the stage. Jiao divided this process into three stages: experiencing life, developing mental images, and creating stage images.

Transforming his theory into practice, Jiao adopted numerous dramaturgical approaches during the preparation of the *Teahouse* production. The production team was formed in early 1957. However, rehearsals did not start immediately. Instead, Jiao invited several folklorists, such as Jin Shoushen, to explain old Beijing folk customs to the production team. Jiao also required all the actors to read Republican-era newspapers and magazines to find materials about the characters' lives. Actor Tong Di, for example, found an old photo showing someone "wearing a traditional Chinese long robe and dragging a long pigtail but wearing a Western top

hat” (Jiang, Su & Du, 1983: 200), subsequently receiving Jiao’s approval. In addition, Jiao required actors to carry out fieldwork and interviews. For instance, large tea houses no longer existed in Beijing, so actors went to small teahouses to chat with guests, fortune-tellers, and storytellers. Tong Chao, who played Eunuch Pang, went to interview an old eunuch at an old temple (Tong, 1983: 259).

After a period of experiencing life, the actors developed their mental images. Jiao then asked them to write down their experiences and thoughts daily in a journal, which was later reviewed and discussed with other production team members. The actors also needed to write a character biography and perform sketches of these characters’ daily lives to constantly search for reasonable justifications for their thoughts, personalities and physical movements. Jiao used this way to guide the actors in accurately grasping the combination of their character’s inner visualisation and external movements, gradually shaping distinct character images (Jiao, 2005: 226).

Jiao also emphasised combining Stanislavski’s principle with the essence of traditional Chinese opera. In *Teahouse*, Jiao used many of Peking Opera’s ‘formalised performance’ (*chengshi* 程式) conventions in movement and dialogue. One such technique was a heightened moment known as ‘striking a pose’ (*liangxiang* 亮相), which is especially used with a character’s initial entrance to strengthen the first impression. For *Teahouse*, this technique was important but also challenging with regard to showing a clear image of each character in this play with such a great number of characters.

It is worth noticing that Jiao combined Stanislavski's approach of portraying characters behind these formalised performances. In terms of portraying individual characters, Jiao reminded actors that they should not only focus on external manifestation but more importantly, they should grasp the inner essence and dynamics of each scene (Tong, 1983: 261).

Jiao's role in the production of *Teahouse* indicates that certain dramaturgical roles had been performed, such as informing the playwright and actors regarding the historical background of the setting of the play, encouraging actors to imagine their characters mentally and on the stage, and encouraging actors to participate in fieldwork to experience the 'real life' of the characters. Jiao also helped the playwright revise and finalise the script and enabled the production team to work cohesively from beginning to end.

4.4.3 The historical position of *Teahouse*

When the script for *Teahouse* was published in 1957, writers and critics immediately recognised its artistic excellence. At a symposium on this play in December 1957, hosted by leading playwrights and scholars, Lao She was praised for his masterful re-creation of the historical periods, especially the late Qing era in Act One, and his capacity to bring a character alive with a few vivid sketches. *Teahouse* was subsequently performed fifty times in 1958 (Ge, 1997: 380).

Teahouse experienced a second season from 1962 to 1963 for a further fifty performances. Nevertheless, during the Cultural Revolution, *Teahouse* was

universally attacked as a play “crooning a eulogy to old society” (Xia, 1983: 218). As was the case for other famous intellectuals and artists, Lao She was punished as an enemy of the people in 1966 and was publicly humiliated and beaten by the Red Guards. Eventually, Lao She could no longer take such humiliation and committed suicide in Taiping Lake, Beijing. The end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 brought new leadership with new politics. Many writers who died or were disgraced had their names cleared and their prestige restored – Lao She was one of them.

In 1979, the BPAT planned to restage *Teahouse* to commemorate Lao She’s eightieth birthday. The play was under the direction of Xia Chun, who had been the associate director in Jiao Juyin’s original production (Jiao Juyin was also treated badly during the Cultural Revolution and died of cancer in 1975). As Xia reflected in his essay “A Postscript on Directing *Teahouse*” (Chaguan daoyan houji 茶馆导演后记), the production team decided to play the 1958 version (Xia, 1983: 216). The original cast was also used, as well as the original stage design and Jiao’s directing plan.

This production received unprecedented enthusiasm. Ying Ruocheng stated that after Lao She’s tragic suicide during the Cultural Revolution, his masterpiece’s revival was considered a spiritual triumph (Ying & Conceison, 2009: 138). After its successful Beijing performances, *Teahouse* became the first Chinese spoken drama to appear on the international stage. The seven-week tour in 1980 to West Germany, France and Switzerland was well received. A German newspaper commented that the “play opens the door to a world which is culturally strange yet which in its humanness seems intimately familiar” (Krauter, 1981:118). After watching a performance in Paris, Peter

Brook told director Xia Chun that he understood what the Chinese meant by combining national form with modern drama (Jiang, Su & Du, 1983: 396).

This tour was an important chapter in East-West cultural exchange after decades of isolation and stimulated a second wave of introduction of Western literature and art to China (the first wave having begun during the May Fourth Movement in 1919). New generations of Chinese theatre-makers were, and continue to be, eager to broaden their practice beyond realism and the Stanislavski system. Among them, Lin Zhaohua and Meng Jinghui had made bold explorations respectively by using established drama as well as newly developed experimental theatre. Interestingly, both restaged *Teahouse* in later decades by using different approaches, as will be elaborated in more detail in the following section.

4.4.4 New *Teahouse* or not *Teahouse*?

The original production of *Teahouse* was given its last staging in 1992. On the occasion of Lao She's one-hundredth birthday in 1999, the BPAT restaged it under director Lin Zhaohua with a new cast.

During the preparation, Lin Zhaohua was very keen to strike out in a new direction and proudly stated: "I will not clone the old *Teahouse* in the new production" (Beijing Renyi, 2000: 5). The most noticeable difference was the stage design; the original teahouse was replaced by broken pillars and crooked beams with only a few lattice windows remaining from the old structure. The storyteller was also eliminated, leaving the different periods without a link. The changing times were signalled by the

stage design by a workman lighting the gas streetlight at the end of Act One and replacing the gas light with electric bulbs at the end of Act Two (Lin, 2014: 466). In addition, instead of the closed space of the old teahouse, the 1999 version allowed the audience to see the street scene of old Beijing beyond the teahouse. Lin explained that he felt in this play, Lao She intended to portray the lives and struggles of the ordinary people in Beijing. Hence, Lin used the stage design to highlight that no matter how great the political changes were, the most important concern of ordinary people was how to stay alive (Lin, 1999: 4).

In addition to the stage design, Lin's 1999 version represented a different interpretation of *Teahouse*. While Jiao reinforced its tragic impact, Lin restored the black humour of Lao She's work. For instance, Lin chose Liang Guanhua to play Wang Lifa, the teahouse proprietor. This version's Wang Lifa looked completely different from the original cast of Yu Shizhi's. Liang's fat body and many postures and gestures projected a comic image of the character. In Lin's view, although *Teahouse* is a tragedy, it uses the comic method to convey tragic feelings, and this tragic-comic combination is a unique feature of Lao She's works (Yu, 2013:112). Furthermore, Lin worked with actors to employ a more realistic style of acting. Whereas Jiao Juyin borrowed techniques from traditional Chinese operas, such as the 'striking a pose' to call attention to different characters, Lin wanted his actors to act more naturally (Lin, 2014: 68).

In an interview, Lin described his way of reproducing *Teahouse* as a "middle-of-road" approach, which preserved the tradition but also introduced some new elements (Yu,

2013: 111). Lin felt challenged because Jiao's 1958 version had left such a deep impression on many people, and he could not compete with this. He also stated that he would have been more daring if he had been producing this play for his own theatre studio rather than for the BPAT. The audience's feedback was divided in response to this middle-of-the-road approach; some felt the characters in the new version did not make as strong an impression as in the old version (Guo, 2004: 48), while others thought Lin was not bold enough to blaze a new trail (Pan, 2005: 100).

In reviewing the audience's criticism, Lin realised that the approach he chose in the 1999 production was not a good choice. In his later reproduction of *Teahouse* in 2005, on the occasion of Jiao Juyin's one-hundredth birthday, Lin adopted the original 1958 version of *Teahouse* directed by Jiao, without any changes. Lin realised that maintaining the tradition of classic theatrical works was important in order for the audience to visibly see the historical reality and embrace life at that time with deep understanding and empathy. Lin even encouraged actors to watch the video of the 1980s production of *Teahouse* to mimic the old generation of actors performing the play. This response illustrates the impact which feedback from critics and audiences can have on a dramaturg to re-develop theatre-making for the purpose of making on-going improvements for the final production. Hence, the interaction between critics and audiences on the one hand, and dramaturg on the other hand, is crucial for on-going improvement of theatre-making. A dramaturg should be sensitive to such an interaction and adopt changes accordingly.

The latest and boldest version of *Teahouse* was directed by director Meng Jinghui, first in October 2018 at the Wuzhen Theatre Festival, followed by the Avignon Festival in July 2019. The play then toured to many Chinese cities.

Meng stated that he emphasised two fundamental elements of the structure of *Teahouse*; firstly, the character-based structure: “*Teahouse* actually does not have a plot, Lao She himself said it is an authentication of history” (Meng, 2018:8). Thus, Meng rewrote the work to attain a structure which was a series of tableaux loosely linked to each other through recurrent themes such as suicide, love and revolution.

Secondly, this version underlined a concept of time that is not linear, but circular. The idea of circularity and repetition of history came from Lao She’s idea of passing on occupations from father to son. The circularity, in Meng’s production, took the shape of a gigantic installation that dominated the entire stage. The huge metallic structure had a massive wheel at its core that rotated at key moments of the play. As a number of reviews mentioned, this installation was so imposing that it became, in a sense, the protagonist of the play (Chen, 2018).

In the final scene, in Meng’s version, the wheel starts to rotate, smashing all the furniture of the teahouse installed in the central space and throwing all the pieces around. In comparison, Jiao Juyin’s version ended with three old men staging their own funerals: Master Qin the failed industrialist, Master Chang the Manchu who could not support himself by selling vegetables, and Wang Lifa the teahouse manager who could not sustain his business in spite of continuing efforts to reform.

Meng's new version created a big stir and resulted in divided reactions from the critics and audiences. Inevitably, his production touched on a very sensitive point in Chinese theatre culture. In the somewhat short tradition of *Huaju*, *Teahouse* is listed among Chinese drama masterpieces, crystallised in the BPAT's original production. When producing this play, Meng and other directors were not only faced with a classic script, but a double classic – 'classic text + classic production'.

Despite this reception, Meng strongly defended the possibility of "destroying the classics", because he believed that a classic is not a museum piece and should not be worshipped and reproduced always in the same way: "[n]ot repetition, but the dialogue is the target of relationship to classics" (Meng, 2018:8). Dialogue with the classics is the way Meng repeatedly explained his intention in this production.

It is worth noting that although Meng emphasised the importance of building a conversation with the classics, the channel he built with the double classic of *Teahouse* lacked adequate explanation in his production. We can see numerous extreme changes throughout Meng's interpretation compared with previous versions. For instance, in Act One, Meng preserved Lao She's lines in their entirety with few unimportant changes, but totally changed the order. Lao She put on stage a series of customers who came and went and engaged with other characters. Meng changed this by positioning all the actors sitting on chairs facing the audience and shouting their lines to the audience without interaction with other characters. Such an arrangement was common in Meng's previous works, such as *I Love XXX* and *Two Dogs' Opinions on Life*. However, this approach did not establish effective dialogue with the classic

Teahouse. Many critical articles suggested that Meng's production was "a terrible mix of incoherent and incomprehensible elements" (Hu, 2018: 4; Jin, 2019), whereby Lao She totally disappeared. The audiences felt insulted, some even indignantly leaving the theatre. Violent reactions both by the audience and the critics appeared on social media and in official newspapers: "that was not *Teahouse*" (Jin, 2019).

In fact, during the preparation of Meng's production of *Teahouse*, a formal dramaturg was employed, namely Sebastian Kaiser, a German dramaturg. According to Kaiser, Meng's initial idea of adopting a professional dramaturg was to have someone with no knowledge of *Teahouse* as a "blank paper", helping Meng and production team to deconstruct the new production without any of the "ink" of the previous production (Meng Jinghui Studio public Wechat account, 2018). In an interview during the Wuzhen Theatre Festival, Kaiser declared himself a supporter of building 'dialogue' with the classics as Meng demanded. Kaiser prepared a number of readings for Meng and the production team members to read together six months before rehearsals began. As Kaiser explained, this method was used to gradually develop a new direction for constructing the new production of *Teahouse*. These readings included *The Complete Manual of Suicide* by Wataru Tsurumi, *Art, Theatre and Life* by Nemirovich-Danchenko, Brecht's *Collected Poems*, *Love in the Time of Cholera* by Marquez, *Nana* by Zola, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, and *Kieslowski on Kieslowski* (Meng Jinghui Studio public Wechat account, 2018). Although these titles reflect 'classical' themes related to suicide, disaster, love, revolution, among others, there was still a considerable gap between these readings (all foreign) and

Meng's interpretation of *Teahouse*. Hence, the 'dialogue' with Lao She's *Teahouse* was not effectively established.

Kaiser recalled that the most challenging part of their collaboration was communication and integration between different cultures. He was facing the differences in Chinese and German people's understanding of, and interest in, Lao She and Western literature. These difficulties prevented him from relying on his previous experience as a dramaturg in German theatre and he had to find a new approach. For instance, his suggestion that adding Lao She's suicide to the plot as an echo for the tragedy of the characters in *Teahouse* was rejected because Lao She's suicide at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, which followed brutal session of criticism led by the Red Guards that combined verbal humiliation with physical violence, is still a sensitive topic in China (Zhi, 2019:16). Hence, Kaiser's role was less important during the production process and Meng was always at the centre stage for key decision making as director. Eventually, the function of dramaturg and effectiveness of this role in the entire production were limited. For example, Kaiser only provided some readings, but had no other crucial responsibility. Meng controlled the power to plan, manage and direct during the production. The dramaturg was passive and reactive to the call from Meng (Meng Jinghui Studio public Wechat account, 2018). A meaningful role for a dramaturg is not evident in such a context, even if a formal position is created in the theatre production. The lesson to be learned here is that if a director is not able to share power and allocate tasks with a dramaturg adequately, it is hard for that dramaturg to play a significant role in theatre-making.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has presented a number of examples of *Huaju* being developed from a dramaturgical perspective. The different examples include the challenge of introducing foreign theatre works into China, such as Ibsen's work and Miller's work, as well as Chinese indigenous work, such as *Teahouse*. From these examples, we can see that different people have undertaken various dramaturgical functions in relation to plays and productions, both visibly and invisibly. The overall character of dramaturgy in those productions can be categorised in different ways.

First, one dramaturgical feature can be translation-related work. For example, the early years of translation of Ibsen's work as well as the later years of translation of Miller's work, illustrate the important role of dramaturg as translator. Second, a significant dramaturgical feature can be work related to informing and educating. Introducing Ibsen's work and the related societal context to Chinese audiences, as undertaken by Zhang Pengchun and Lü Xiaoping, as well as training and educating actors to imagine characters mentally and on the stage, as undertaken by Jiao Juyin in the production of *Teahouse*, are examples of the dramaturg's role as an educator. A third dramaturgical feature can be work related to advising and analysing. This includes collaborative work between directors and production team members in analysing scripts and characters, and understanding the social context and cultural differences, as undertaken by the Norwegian advisor in producing Ibsen's work. A final dramaturgical feature in this context can be work related to cross-cultural and cross-functional communication. The dramaturg as communicator, communicating

and bridging between foreign playwright and the Chinese production team, was undertaken, for instance, by Ying Ruocheng in the production of *Death of Salesman*. Dramaturgy, then, may actually play a multi-functional role and may well be seen as central to theatrical production. It is also important to point out that both visible and invisible roles are equally significant. Without the production team's support, the impact of this role can be limited even if a dramaturg is formally employed, as was the case of Meng Jinghui's production of the new version of *Teahouse*. These findings are significant and further elaboration on the development of dramaturgy and utilising dramaturgs in China will be presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

Dramaturgy in China

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapters reviewed the historical background of spoken drama (*Huaju*) and evaluated three specific case studies from a dramaturgical perspective. In this chapter, the focus is on examining the development of dramaturgy in Chinese theatre from artistic, literary as well as political perspectives. According to Mao Zedong's *Yan'an Talks on Literature and Art* (1942), literature and art were required to serve the masses. Therefore, after the PRC was established in 1949 under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, the role of theatre as a propaganda tool increased sharply, particularly during the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976). After the Cultural Revolution, China adopted its opening-up policy. Spoken drama subsequently showed a less politicised trend, though censorship still existed. In the new political and economic environment, theatre-makers had to generate money to run their theatres as businesses since governments no longer provided sufficient financial support. With sharply increased ticket prices, not surprisingly theatre has become somewhat of a luxury entertainment in China in recent years and today's theatre-goers are inevitably not quite the same 'masses' as defined by Mao. From this perspective, the dilemma faced by theatre-makers in today's China is not only one of political restriction but also of market demand (Ren and Zhu, 2017).

As we discussed in earlier chapters, many Chinese dramatists have actually fulfilled the role of the dramaturg at various pivotal stages in the development of Chinese *Huaju*. However, the concept of dramaturgy was not formally introduced into China until 2009.

Since 2009, the adoption and adaption adaptation of dramaturgy in China has been characterized by curiosity, debate, and diverse practices. Hence, this chapter follows the sequence below and seeks to answer these questions:

1. How and why has China adopted and adapted dramaturgy for theatre development?
2. How do Chinese theatre-makers regard dramaturgy?
3. How can Chinese theatre (both spoken drama and dance theatre) develop to adopt the role of the dramaturg from a practical point of view?

5.2 Similar meaning with different names

Chapter 2 evaluated different systems of dramaturgy in Germany and the English-speaking world. Considering political, cultural and economic conditions, the German model has had strong political roots throughout its development. The fundamental function of dramaturgy has thus been to seek political awareness in theatre. In comparison, commercial considerations have driven the Anglo-American models. A text-centred approach has been one of the most significant features in UK and US theatres. The fundamental function of dramaturgy thus has been to meet the financial demands and cultivate high-quality texts.

In China, the situation is more complex. Facing both political restrictions and the demand in the markets, the evolution of dramaturgy in China appears not to have followed a single system. It is also worth highlighting again that the Chinese language has no single term to convey all the different tasks and roles that might be discussed under the rubric of dramaturgy in other languages. Considering the translation challenges, the term for dramaturgy used in China has been loosely interpreted and defined with varying levels of complexity. It is noteworthy that before the formal definition of dramaturgy was introduced in China, there were, however, two Chinese phrases being used to refer to dramaturgy in two stages of contemporary Chinese theatre development.

The first stage is *Wenxue Shi* 文学师 (literally translated as the ‘Literary Master’), which Ying Ruocheng introduced in 1983. Returning from *Teahouse*’s European tour and having had exposure to German theatre practices, Ying suggested adopting the ‘Literary Master’ system in the Beijing People’s Art Theatre (BPAT) (Ying, 1983:122).

The reason for Ying’s emphasis on this system was very much based on the specific circumstances of *Huaju* in the 1980s. With the end of the Cultural Revolution in October 1976, China experienced tremendous political, economic and cultural changes, all of which profoundly affected *Huaju*. In terms of government action, cultural authorities consciously loosened to a large extent their control of literature and arts. Encouraged by this move, many theatre-makers embraced the theme of “heroic struggle against the Gang of Four by political leaders, scientists, writers,

artists, workers, and others” (Chen, 2010: 27) through severe criticism of the Cultural Revolution. However, due to the considerable political influence on artistic creation over such a long time, many theatrical works during the period of transformation still had the tendency in varying degrees to over-emphasise political themes rather than literary content, to the point where the literary value of these works was limited.

Thanks to the reform and opening-up policy, Chinese people finally obtained opportunities to connect with the outside world after years of closure. In the field of theatre, many translations of contemporary Western plays were published in a short time. From symbolism to expressionism to the absurd theatre, these works inspired enthusiastic exploration of these new forms by a significant number of young artists. Innovation of form thus became *Huaju*'s defining feature in the 1980s.

As one of the theatre-makers from the older generation, who had not only a wide knowledge of Western theatre, but also rich experience of theatre practice in China, Ying Ruocheng asked an important question after witnessing various explorations: suddenly faced with all the theatrical forms from the Western world, what should Chinese artists absorb for the development of *Huaju*?

In his essays “What I Saw from Contemporary British and American Theatre” (Ying, 1980) and “Reflections on the European Tour of *Teahouse*” (Ying, 1983), Ying summarised his observation of British, American and German theatre, and maintained that every theatrical form originated and developed from its related social, political and cultural background. For example, in considering the Theatre of the Absurd, Ying

pointed out that theatre-makers needed to know that the profound reasoning behind these works was to reflect the post-war uncertainty and disillusionment of intellectuals. Hence, Chinese artists could not adopt these forms without comprehensive research, understanding and analysis. In addition, Ying maintained that, notwithstanding the enthusiastic exploration of theatrical forms, constant improvement of the literary quality of texts was still a task that should not be ignored. Further, Ying noticed that during the 1980s, one of the most significant technical innovations in British and American theatre was the use of the thrust stage, which shortened the distance between actors and audiences and encouraged mutual engagement. Surprisingly, when he discussed this technique with Anglo-American artists, he was told that it was exactly what Brecht had learned from Chinese opera, thus highlighting for Ying a historical irony: while Chinese theatre-makers threw away their own tradition and pursued Western styles, Westerners had picked up those very traditions and developed them.

Based on these observations, Ying advocated for Chinese theatres to adopt the Literary Master system, which he observed in the German theatre during the *Teahouse* European tour in 1980. He wrote:

Besides the artistic director and director, they have a literary team in each theatre, in which there is a chief literary master. This team's duty covers multilayers: from selecting and determining repertoire to explaining and analysing a play's background, theme as well as literary value to actors, to communicating with the audience, collecting their feedback, and also, to writing articles reviewing the

performance. In addition, the literary master would attend rehearsals regularly and provide suggestions on representation to the director (Ying, 1983: 122).

Ying's description indicates that what he meant by the *literary team* in German theatres is the dramaturgy department, and the *chief literary master* is the Head Dramaturg. As the first Chinese theatre artist who explicitly valued the role of the dramaturg, Ying's reasons for choosing to use the title 'literary master' are evident. First, in terms of the word 'literary', his intention was based on the situation of *Huaju* after the Cultural Revolution since he was concerned that people might overstress political motivations and form innovations, while overlooking the quality of text from a literary perspective. Ying insisted that literary value was the essence of theatre: "to continue developing our theatre in the future, we should take literature as the top priority. To unite more playwrights and nurture more original plays, we must have someone full-time responsible for this from the institutional structure" (Ying, 1983: 123).

Second, in terms of the word 'master', Ying emphasised that the role of the dramaturg should be played by experts in specific fields who master a comprehensive ability to support the production team and guarantee the quality of the work. His suggestion was to find experts from universities and research institutes who had strong academic backgrounds and were also interested in theatre (Ying, 1983: 124). We can thus see that in contrast to Anglo-American theatre-practitioners' anti-intellectual tradition,

Ying valued the combination of research and practice in adopting and modifying the German system of dramaturgy.

In addition to advocating for the literary master system, Ying emphasised another point which did not seem urgent at the beginning of the 1980s but gradually became significant in later years and represented a balanced approach to the key functions of theatre-making, namely the importance of daily administrative management, artistic development of repertoire and marketing/financial management. With regard to *Huaju*'s recovery and reform, Ying pointed out that Chinese theatres needed to learn how to develop repertoire, manage companies and contact foreign countries to organise collaborations and tours from practical and financial perspectives (Ying, 1980:). From Ying's point of view, the term 'box office' was not derogatory or associated with vulgarity. On the contrary, the pressure of the box office could promote competition and potentially enhance the quality of performances.

Unfortunately, his suggestion of adopting the literary master system was not implemented at BPAT or any other theatres in the 1980s. However, it appears evident that a great number of theatre practitioners have found the concept of dramaturgy to be useful in their later explorations.

With the period of change and unpredictability in the late 1980s, Chinese theatre-makers witnessed the conflict between old norms and new values of society. Refusing to use theatre as the mouthpiece of the official ideology, many chose to explore the combination of innovative theatre form with the reflection of social

realities. However, the delicate balance between exploration and relatively tolerant government censorship was affected following the Tiananmen Incident in 1989.

Afterwards, a split between the mainstream plays produced by state-owned theatres and avant-garde productions by auteur-style directors gradually emerged in the 1990s under tighter political and ideological control. In the case of the former, the purpose was to win government awards for financial survival, but creativity was inevitably limited. In the case of the latter, innovation under political and ideological pressure to some extent inspired more creative energy.

It was at this point, in 1990, that the second Chinese term referring to dramaturgy, appeared; namely, *Wenxue Guwen* 文学顾问 (literally translated as the ‘Literary Consultant’). This was coined by Lin Zhaohua who was, as noted earlier, one of the most important and controversial auteur-style directors. Deeply depressed by the consequences of the Tiananmen Incident, Lin directed his reflections to those tragic events and the realities they exposed about contemporary China, resulting in a subversive adaptation of *Hamlet* which he presented in Beijing in 1990. In this production, the protagonist was no longer a prince but an ordinary urban Beijing man, who was tortured by his sense of losing the meaning of life. Lin abandoned the orthodox ‘Western look’ make-up, wigs, prosthetic noses and ‘doublet and hose’ costumes which were common on the Chinese stage when Western classics were adapted. In terms of the performance text, Lin worked intensively with Li Jianming, who was the *Wenxue Guwen* (Literary Consultant) on this production. In order to express Lin Zhaohua’s underlying idea that Hamlet is one of the ordinary Beijing men

and every Beijing man is Hamlet, Li Jianming retranslated the script using the vernacular language of Beijing, and she also simplified certain parts of the minor characters (Li, 2004: 121).

In addition to *Hamlet*, Lin has collaborated with a range of other *Wenxue Guwen* (Literary Consultants) in a series of adaptations of Western classics, including Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (2004), Ibsen's *The Master Builder* (2006), and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (2007). When he became the Artistic Director of BPAT in 2002, Lin invited Mou Sen (another notable director of the avant-garde theatre) to work with him to reform the process of repertoire selection and development. The following year, at the 50th anniversary of the establishment of BPAT, Lin directed *The Orphan of Zhao* (*Zhaoshi gu'er* 赵氏孤儿). In contrast to *Zaju*, the traditional opera version of *The Orphan of Zhao*, which has been attributed to the thirteenth century dramatist, Ji Junxiang, Lin's version was based on Jin Haishu's contemporary novel. Lin appointed Mou Sen to revise the performance text.

Although the title used by Lin was 'literary consultant' rather than 'literary master', he shared a similar view of dramaturgy to that of Ying Ruocheng, which valued most highly the literary contribution. On the other hand, Lin considered this role to be as a consultant, providing services, whereas Ying's approach to this role attributed to it more power as a 'master'. From the different usage of the term, we can see a different interpretation of the role of dramaturgy; one has a more powerful position with significant influence as 'master', the other has a less powerful position, playing more of an assistant's role as 'consultant'. This difference can also be seen in other Western

countries in terms of whether the dramaturg is at the centre of theatre-making with some degree of control or is a facilitator to serve the production team.

Unfortunately, Lin's reform of the official position of *Wenxue Guwen* (Literary Consultant) at the BPAT did not last long. In an interview, Mou Sen mentioned that the unpredictable and complicated organisational structure in the BPAT, marked by bureaucracy and a party control system, led to his position at the BPAT lasting only one year.

In light of the above accounts, we can see that the ways in which theatre practitioners themselves adopted some of the practices of dramaturgy were similar to those in other Western countries, including similar job titles. However, there were curiosities and debates about how the word dramaturgy should be translated into Chinese and how the concept of dramaturgy could be embedded into the Chinese theatre context. The following section will address these issues in greater detail.

5.3 Debates regarding the meaning of dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg

This section will focus on debates arising from how the word dramaturgy should be translated into Chinese and how the concept of dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg could be adopted in the Chinese theatre context since 2009.

The most significant debate has been between Li Yinan and Sun Huizhu. Li Yinan, as I noted in my Introduction, is a Professor at the Central Academy of Drama of China, Beijing. After many years studying and working in Germany, she has made efforts to

introduce the German concept and working methods of dramaturgy to China since 2009. At the beginning of 2015, she established the Department of Dramaturgy and Applied Theatre at the Central Academy of Drama and took up its Head of Department position. Li's major dramaturgical works include *Miss Special* (2009), *Stockholm Syndrome* (2010), *About Disappearance* (2014) and *Home* (2015). In 2021, she published *Overview of Dramaturgy* (*Xijiu gouzuo gailun* 戏剧构作概论) in Beijing as a basic reading for her students.

In 2009, when curating the International Symposium of Dramaturgy in Beijing (together with the Goethe-Institute China), Li translated the word 'dramaturgy' as *Xijiu Gouzuo* 戏剧构作 for the first time. She separated the German word *Dramaturgie* into two Greek word roots: *drama* and *ergon*. The former word initially meant 'do'; after Aristotle's *Poetics*, it was gradually divided into two meanings: 'plot' and 'action'. The latter word meant 'effect'. Li found it was impossible to find an existing Chinese word that could cover both roots, so she literally translated the Greek word into two Chinese words: *Xiju* 戏剧 which means 'drama', and *Gouzuo* 构作 which corresponds to *ergon*; that is, 'constructing a theatre work'. According to Li, dramaturgy is not only a technical term in the field of theatre but also a method of thinking and reflecting (Tian, 2010: 82).

After coining the new term and advocating for the concept in China, Li established a dramaturgy course and gradually developed it into a bachelor's programme in 2015 at the Central Academy of Drama, as noted above. As she recalled, almost all her colleagues were against her translation because it was hard to recruit students when

people did not know what *Xiju Gouzuo* 戏剧构作 meant. Her colleagues preferred to use the term ‘programme consulting’ (*xiangmu cehua* 项目策划) (ADN Re/View Vol. 2, 2021: 22).

However, Li insisted on avoiding using the word ‘consulting’. She explained further that the function of dramaturgy should be understood as an active engagement in all aspects of theatre making rather than an external involvement by providing some suggestions to theatre practitioners (Tian, 2010: 82). Throughout her teaching and practice, Li has valued the transparency and constancy of reflection, dialogue and discussion with her students, which she thought were lacking in knowledge of Chinese theatre. In an interview, Li explained:

The concept of dramaturgy originated in Germany in the age of enlightenment and has been widely adopted in the theatre of the English-speaking world through Brecht and other dramaturgs’ important supplements and developments. For Chinese theatre, the very important lesson we could learn from it is to challenge the personal dictatorship of the authority (director, artistic director or even administrative leader) and the pyramid hierarchy in theatre by using collective creation (Author’s interview, Dec. 2017).

Li explained further that she thought Chinese people are used to an obedient style of thinking by following existing rules but lack challenging awareness and reflective analysis. From a broader perspective, the Confucian system in the traditional feudal society lasted more than 2000 years; it emphasised loyalty to superiors and has exerted a fundamental influence on Chinese people’s thought and behaviour up to the present day. During the above-mentioned interview, Li continued to explain:

Narrowing down to the theatre field, in traditional Chinese opera, the learning pattern demands students copying everything from their masters. This model continues in Chinese spoken dramas as well. Take *Teahouse* as an example. We have to admit that it has already become a ‘classic in the museum’ from both playwriting and performing perspectives. Younger actors from BPAT imitated and copied vividly not only every line but also every movement, expression and gesture from the original production but did not dare to make a single change. In my opinion, it is not conducive to our theatre development. So I especially hope to introduce dramaturgy as an analysis method from Germany to help our theatre creation and education (Author’s interview, Dec. 2017).

In addition, Li emphasised “political responsibility and reflect[ion] on social issues in theatre”, which she called a “re-politicisation of theatre” (Author’s interview, Dec. 2017).

In terms of the reason for theatre’s re-politicisation, Li explained her viewpoint regarding the general environment of theatre-making:

Initially, the government regarded spoken drama as a propaganda tool and provided substantial financial support to state theatres. Since 2000, spoken drama has seriously deteriorated. Television and other media replaced the spoken drama’s position for propaganda. Hence, most of the theatre-makers had to make their own living; the ultimate purpose is market profits. There is less diversity in our theatre market. Although some young theatre-makers have their ideas, it is still a situation of struggling in isolation (Author’s interview, Dec. 2017).

In addition, Li believed that dramaturgy as a way of thinking could help theatre-makers construct unique ideas during the production process that do not necessarily follow the laws of the market: “If you only purchase things that meet the

lowest audience needs by relying on existing market surveys, they will get bored quickly. Without a clear idea, it would be problematic for theatre-makers to survive. Re-politicisation does not oppose entertainment, although it highlights the social and educational functions of theatre.” She stated that, “If we incorporate dramaturgy in the operation of the theatre, it could help to lead the audiences.” (Author’s interview, Dec. 2017).

In order to fulfill the mission of re-politicisation, Li encouraged her students to explore the connection between theatre and society during the dramaturgy course. She chose documentary theatre rather than other forms and taught students through a wide range of reading, interviewing, discussing and rehearsing activities.

A different perspective on the definition and understanding of the term ‘dramaturgy’ came from Sun Huizhu (William Huizhu Sun), Professor at the Shanghai Theatre Academy. Sun questioned Li’s translation and believed that the word dramaturgy is polysemous and covers three related yet quite different things: 1) theatre studies; 2) approaches to, structures and techniques of playwriting; and 3) the work of the dramaturg, a profession not yet clarified in China (Sun, 2015: 81).

Sun noted that two well-known books on dramaturgy from Western countries, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *Hamburg Dramaturgy* and William Archer’s *Playmaking* had in fact already been translated into Chinese in 1981 and 1980 respectively. The Chinese title of the former, *Hanbao Juping* 汉堡剧评, literally means ‘drama review’, and the latter has been translated as *Juzuo Fa* 剧作法, which simply means ‘methods

of playwriting'. Sun concluded that these two translations did not help in clarifying the word dramaturgy, "let alone promoting the related profession" (Sun, 2015: 81).

Sun further considered that when Li Yinan translated dramaturgy by using the self-created word *Gouzuo* 构作, this could be misunderstood as a completely new Western concept, which is not related to theatre studies and playwriting techniques.

In addition, Sun pointed out that, as the Chinese translator of Hans-Thies Lehmann's book *Postdramatic Theatre*, Li overemphasised post-dramatic theatre's value, and her collective way of teaching concentrated on documentary theatre rather than other widely absorbed theatre forms. Sun felt that these approaches of Li would inevitably lead to certain negative effects, impairing the fundamental value of literature for theatre-works, and misleading young students to some extent by creating confusion.

According to Sun, considering the current conditions of theatre development in China, especially the serious shortage of high-quality original scripts, it would be dangerous and harmful to use misleading terms and risk confusing people (Sun, 2016:8).

In his essay titled "Official and Unofficial Dramaturg: Dramaturgy in China" (Sun, 2015), Sun pointed out that after the PRC was established in 1949, many newly-established theatre companies set up an office or a department they called the Artistic Office or Office of Artistic Creation with the function of selecting playwrights, arranging directors and critics/editors to deal with the repertoire, and supervising drama production. In his opinion, this office or department actually fulfilled the role of dramaturgy, although the term itself was not used (Sun, 2015: 81).

In addition, Sun considered that there were also “unofficial dramaturgs whose official titles could be archivists, critics, playwrights, directors and/or administrators” (Sun, 2015: 86). Sun took the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre (SDAC) as an example; its Artistic Office was headed by Yu Rongjun, the SDAC’s artistic director and its best-known playwright, who had written and produced more than 30 plays internationally since 2000. Sun stated that Yu Rongjun was “virtually the SDAC’s chief dramaturg without the exact title” because the duties of his Artistic Office covered:

1. maintaining relationships with playwrights, directors and experts of all types;
2. coordinating major creative artists’ theatre-going regularly and sending them to attend academic symposia;
3. organising juries of screenplays to sit on artistic committees;
4. regularly organising the office of the artistic committee’s meetings to discuss the selection of plays for productions, to recommend various contests, and to make season plans;
5. training young playwrights and directors, and commissioning new works;
6. editing the SDAC’s journal;
7. recording, editing and publishing the SDAC’s historical documents;
8. planning and promoting the SDAC’s productions, especially key plays;
9. discussing with playwrights how to improve their plays; contacting and deciding on directors and other personnel; appointing producers to work on

approved plays; planning production seasons by utilising all possible plays and coordinating the SDAC's personnel and resources;

10. supervising rehearsals and productions when needed, and organising critical symposia to improve the running shows.

It is apparent, as Sun notes, that much of the Artistic Office's work was dramaturgical, even though none of the staff members had the official title of dramaturg.

From these illustrations, we can see the actual concept of dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg in Chinese theatre have not been limited to a particular term with a clear boundary. However, all the activities discussed above indicate that the function of dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg do exist in the Chinese spoken drama production process.

5.4 Dramaturg activities in current spoken drama production

In recent years, dramaturgical practices have begun to be applied more explicitly in Chinese theatre; a typical example is the role Yu Rongjun played in his involvement at SDAC. During my interview with him in July 2019, he mentioned that he was very active as an artistic director at this theatre company, including writing three plays per year on average, while overseeing general dramaturgical work of the SDAC on more than a dozen productions. In fact, Yu was not professionally trained in the study of drama, but in the totally different field of sports medicine. Yu's enthusiasm for theatre led him to join the SDAC as an assistant in the Publicity Department initially in 1995,

and later he gradually became involved in playwriting and became resident playwright at the theatre company, eventually being promoted to artistic director.

During my interview with Yu, he emphasised that working from the point of view of marketing provided him with crucial experience on how the type and quality of theatre works might be received by the audience. He felt this approach was the key to his dramaturgical thinking, which was distinct from the mindset of those who were initially trained as playwrights. Yu stated that there was a distinct gap between theory and practice in Chinese theatre. On the one hand, as Yu pointed out (and as my own training largely confirmed), young playwrights who graduated from the academy of drama gained minimal practical experience of the production process. At school they learned rigid theories on playwriting. He felt that the plays they wrote lacked curiosity about the world and observation of reality and could hardly be staged. On the other hand, there was a huge demand for good scripts with an audience-oriented perspective. The producer or manager of the theatre could do nothing without good scripts. In addition, Yu notes, “[t]here is one more problem not only in China. Many young playwrights who have written one or two successful plays tend to turn their focus on television and film because of higher pay, and not focus on theatre”. However, referring to himself, Yu described how he started writing based on his rich experience that was relevant to the audience. “I want to describe the relationship between the playwright and audience as a kind of battle. If your work is not creative enough, you will be abandoned by the audience. The fact is the knowledge of the audience about theatre is far beyond lots of playwrights because many audiences have numerous

opportunities to see first-class plays from all around the world now”. Yu explained further: “In terms of this battle, I see the artistic process as an adventure. It is necessary to explore more possibilities and push boundaries. But the fundamental problem for many Chinese artists is that they tend to stay in a safe place, even without censorship” (Author’s interview, Jul. 2019).

Unlike Li Yinan, Yu has been inspired by the role of the dramaturg in the UK where he attended the International Playwrights Programme of the Royal Court Theatre in 2008. After finishing the first draft of his play about the Wenchuan Earthquake (*Wenchuan dizhen* 汶川地震), Yu began a long-term collaboration with the dramaturg Elyse Dodgson, the Literary Manager at the Royal Court Theatre. Dodgson provided Yu with different materials about earthquakes, from news images, videos to novels, movies and poetry. Dodgson asked several questions about the play’s draft: “I remember one of the questions was, do you think the audience could build a dialogue with the Wenchuan Earthquake from your play five years later? Ten years then? I changed my mind after reading these materials and answering those questions, then re-wrote an entirely new draft”. According to Yu, what Dodgson offered him as a dramaturg was a point of view with distance from the actual event. Through this feedback, Yu developed his work, not just in terms of talking about the earthquake itself, but becoming a meeting point of time and space. After returning from the UK, Yu continued to use this approach in his later scripts. Every time he finished the first draft of a new play, the Artistic Office ran a workshop to discuss it. During the workshops, Yu would first read the draft, and then everyone would ask him questions

which he tried to answer. Questions he could not answer would be discussed to find the appropriate solutions.

In addition to his experience with Dodgson and the Royal Court, Yu also visited the West Yorkshire Playhouse in 2002, and its model inspired him to develop the Artistic Office in the SDAC. He explained:

Its curating department reported directly to the Artistic Director, and only one young lady, Alex Chisholm, worked there. When she opened the files, there were 290 documents about playwrights from all over the UK, of which 125 were from Leeds. Information from the address, phone number, agent company to the details of the writing experience was well documented. Alex Chisholm knew all the playwrights very well. Even more surprising was that she received new scripts and concepts nearly every day. She read all these scripts with the assistant of the artistic director and then wrote reports (Author's interview, Jul. 2019).

In Yu's view, the Artistic Office in the SDAC itself played the role of dramaturg.

Comparing this situation to that in many other theatres whose repertoire was determined only by the theatre leader, Yu claimed that the SDAC's script selecting process was clearly more democratic. The process can be described as follows:

1. The preliminary review: two of 18 people from the Artistic Office read the same script and decide whether it can progress to the next step for possible production or should not be used.
2. The results of the preliminary review are sent to the Artistic Committee which comprises four theatre leaders to decide on further options.

3. There is also a ‘pool of experts’, comprised of more than 30 people within the theatre. The script is read by four members of the Artistic Committee and three members of the ‘pool of experts’.
4. All the members of the Artistic Office discuss the final results of these scripts at a bi-monthly meeting.

Yu conceded: “At this stage, I also work as a dramaturg to some extent. I have not only participated in the artistic process, but [I am] also in charge of involving the production team, the audience and critics”. He said that in the future, he hoped that the Artistic Office could entirely fulfil the dramaturg’s role. “But for now, it is still difficult. Because we have to produce 50-60 works per year, it would be a massive work if we followed the dramaturgical rules in every single step. In this situation, it is easier to run the profession of the dramaturg with collective efforts, rather than relying on individuals” (Author’s interview, Jul. 2019).

The example of Yu is evidence of considerable active involvement by dramaturgs in contemporary theatre-making in China. However, in more recent years, the function of dramaturgy and the role the dramaturg have also been adopted in other performing arts, including dance theatre. The following section will provide further details in this regard.

5.5 Adopting dramaturgy in dance theatre

As we discussed in the previous section, the concept of dramaturgy has given rise to various debates and discussions in China, ranging from the academic to the practical.

In this section, the focus will move beyond spoken drama to explore what role the dramaturg can play in Chinese dance theatre, given that dance theatre is another key performing art which influences theatre-goers. The major dance theatres performing on stage can be divided into dance-drama with historical narratives in traditional dance format, or folk dance with an ethnic dance format, or western style dance such as ballet; these occur in a myriad of folk, social, ethnic and international variations. An example of a typical historical dance drama was the 1978 *Flower Rain along Silk Road* (*Silu hua yu* 丝路花雨, also translated *Along the Silk Road*). This dance drama was based on an inspiration by dance historian Dong Xijiu, upon visiting Dunhuang in 1977, who made a recommendation to the Gansu Ministers of Culture that directly resulted in the creation of the influential dance drama one year later, sparking the explosion of a new field in the Dunhuang performing arts in the post-Cultural Revolutionary era. Ethnic-culturally based dance dramas have had a relatively long history in China, such as *Ashima* (阿诗玛) and *Dynamic Yunnan* (*Yunnan yingxiang* 云南映象). Western-style dance dramas, such as famous ballet dramas from Russia and other European countries, have also had a long history in China, and have led China to develop its own ballet drama such as *White Haired Girl* (*Bai mao nü* 白毛女) and *Red Detachment of Women* (*Hongse niangzi jun* 红色娘子军).

In this section, I present a recent example of how dramaturgy was adopted in Chinese dance theatre-making through a foreign influence; namely, the case of Fabrizio Massini. With early experience as a theatre performer and director, Massini started to research the Chinese language and culture in 2002 at the University of Florence (BA

in Intercultural Studies) and then at SOAS at the University of London (MA in Chinese Theatre and Film). After receiving his Bachelor and Master's degree in Florence and London, he moved to Beijing, with a research residency at the Central Academy of Drama. Since 2009, he has been working in China as a performing arts producer, curator and dramaturg.

As the Artistic Director at Ibsen International in Beijing (2016-2019), Massini curated and managed a number of dance dramaturgy workshops, which introduced the concept of dramaturgy beyond spoken drama to dance drama in China for the first time. In the workshops, he and other participants (including Chinese and foreign dancers, choreographers and theatre-makers) discussed historical and contemporary concepts of dramaturgy and their relevance within the dance field. Different dramaturgical methods and how these can be adopted in different stages of the creative process were explored through practical exercises and group discussion.

In my interview with Massini in 2019, he indicated that, in his view, dramaturgy as a concept can be defined as “the evolution of ideas through time” and “the compositional, cohesive or sense-making aspects of a performance”. According to Massini, dramaturgy can also be understood as a collaborative practice connecting the art world and society or interpreting the artwork for its audience. Hence, during the creative process of dance, the dramaturg should act as an “outside eye” to assist the choreographers in building up the development of a dance work by questioning, contextualising and observing.

During the interview, Massini explained how he started this journey as a dramaturg in the process of dance drama-making: “By chance, I led the dancers to perform in northern Europe in 2016. As a dance dramaturg from Berlin, Thomas Schaupp was running a workshop in Norway at that time. And we had a warm-up discussion. What I found was that both Thomas Schaupp and the Chinese dancers desired to know more about each other enthusiastically. So I arranged serious dance dramaturgy workshops in China then and invited Thomas Schaupp to come.”

Massini observed that most Chinese dancers have excellent physical skills but lack critical and independent thinking; he therefore believed that dance dramaturgy could promote open thinking. Massini claims:

Dramaturgy offers a dynamic structure, which is similar to the process of translation. In my opinion, dramaturgy should not just be a foreign concept which anyone can grab for some reason, but a practical method of reflection and questioning in theatre. It is not a single line from the West to the East, either. The process of dramaturgy is based on everyone’s discussion, interaction and integration (Author’s interview, Nov.2019).

Massini intended to explore the following questions during his dramaturgy workshops:

- 1) Does the concept of dramaturgy suit the creative context in China?
- 2) If the concept is suitable, how does it work? Is it possible for dramaturgy to adjust and develop itself in China?
- 3) Can dramaturgy solve Chinese artists’ problems encountered during the artistic process?

Seeking answers to these questions from the workshop participants, Massini found it interesting that many of the participants, particularly the Chinese, expected dramaturgy to be “a magic stick”, which could solve all problems in a second: “Unfortunately,” as he observed, “there is no magic in dramaturgy but a way of exploring”. Massini also noted:

There was some disagreement between Thomas Schaupp and me as well. When I tried to show some directions (for example, what was the next step, where were we now) to the participants, he always asked me to stop. He said that there was no standard in dramaturgy, and no routine about a dramaturgy workshop either. The ambiguity was the most crucial thing in the process of exploring; everything should start with it (Author’s interview, Nov.2019).

Referring to the question of the Chinese context, Massini and Schaupp listed several key words to guide the process in the workshop; the first one was ‘context’, followed by ‘intention’, ‘openness’ and ‘dynamic’. In discussions about these keywords with the workshop participants, another issue was raised: the participants found they did not share the same basic understanding of this so-called ‘common ground’.

Massini thought the Chinese translation of the original English key words had caused a particular problem in terms of different interpretation. Massini knew that the discussion would be meaningless until they addressed these different interpretations through a new and proper translation. Take the word ‘dynamic’ for example: Massini initially translated it as 动态 in Chinese, which emphasised a state of movement, but it could also mean 活跃的 to indicate ‘full of energy or active’. During the workshops, Massini found that the emphasis of ‘dynamic’ in the context of

dramaturgy was the changing trend of images, rhythms and expression, rather than the status of a particular situation. So he eventually changed the translation to 动势, which emphasised the momentum of energetic movement instead.

Massini stated that re-clarifying the common ground was essential: “Take the narrative, for instance. I had talked to many Chinese choreographers about their non-narrative works. What I clarified was, a clear structure was necessary, no matter whether your piece of work was narrative or non-narrative”.

Based on his experiences described in the above examples, Massini realised that there was no ideal dramaturgical process: “We were continually coping with new questions in an ongoing exploration”. During this exploration, the method he often used was putting four people in one group and naming them A, B, C and D. In a first round A explained his/her intention, B asked A questions about this intention, C then asked B why he/she selected these questions and D was in charge of taking notes. The cycle then continued to the next round. Many participants felt that they were able to re-define their intention during the entire process and discovered how to communicate by asking questions.

Massini explained: “The dramaturg not only presents the direction to the director by asking questions, but also plays a mediating role between artists and audiences, and the identity of the dramaturg is wrestling between different parts.” According to Massini, the dramaturg’s thinking should be both subjective and objective. On the one hand, he/she actively helps artists to clarify their thoughts. On the other hand, he/she

shows respect and keeps a proper distance from other artists in the process of theatre-making.

Having worked as the dramaturg in spoken drama and dance theatre, Massini maintained the language of dance was unique:

In my opinion, the situation of spoken drama and dance in China has changed hugely since 2009. It was an exciting time for spoken drama around 2001 to 2010. With several new spaces opened for performing arts, a lot of creative and evocative works came on stage. Many young theatre practitioners had just graduated from university; they intended to push boundaries through their work. Besides, the attitude of authorities was much more generous and friendly. Compared to spoken drama, dance works at that time seemed shallow and rigid (Author's interview, Nov.2019).

Massini indicated: "Now the situation is exactly the opposite. The creation of spoken drama is boring. It is hard to find talented new works on stage. The theatre-makers are still the same as ten years ago, and they repeat themselves. Whereas dance theatre has become more active recently".

Why has there been this overwhelming change? Massini has discussed it with many people:

Censorship is the direct reason. If you write a play, the first step of the censor is looking at the text. In this regard, dance is vague and abstract, and hence hard to control. In my observation, there is another reason: many emerging dance makers have come back to China to start their careers; they share similar backgrounds, were initially coached in China, went abroad to study, and have come back with broader views and refreshing thoughts (Author's interview, Nov.2019).

In light of this situation, Massini found that there is enough space and it is the right time for dance dramaturgy in China. He articulated this thought in this way:

The contemporary dance history in China is different from any other country. There is a considerable gap between revolutionary dance and modern forms. Without recognising this, people would misunderstand and even be disgusted about what is on the stage. From the aspect of dance education, the emphasis is the skill of body movement, rather than the knowledge of dance theory and ideas of choreography. Due to these reasons, dancers often seemed perfect in techniques but disjointed in the structure. And dramaturgy could be effective in dealing with this problem (Author's interview, Nov.2019).

From the 1980s to the 1990s, China experienced a 'Cultural Craze' (*Wenhua re* 文化热). Many famous foreign artists were invited to China and told Chinese people what 'the best art' was. Since the reform and opening-up policy, Chinese people have enthusiastically desired to absorb things that come from other countries. However, after several years of listening to advice from foreign 'masters', many people noticed that there was no absolute 'best standard of art'.

With regard to the above-mentioned phenomenon, Massini pointed out: "An interesting paradox is a competent dramaturg should have the self-awareness that 'I am not omnipotent'. The role of the dramaturg is to promote others' thinking and provide more possibilities rather than teaching." As noted above, Massini described that the process of dramaturgy in a cross-cultural context was similar to translating, which needed immense patience in trying different methods and collecting feedback from various aspects.

Although it seems that dramaturgy has now become a fashion of sorts in Chinese theatre, the concept and the role of the dramaturg is still vague for most audiences and even theatre-makers. In this regard, Massini believes that the difficulty is to identify who is a qualified dramaturg: “Besides, I don’t think the whole system in China is already prepared to embrace the role of the dramaturg. Take dance theatre as an example. Although it has proven effective, it is still too early to conclude that every choreographer must collaborate with a dramaturg. And, we have to face all the uncertainty and variability if we want to be a dramaturg in China, like all the other things”.

5.6 Summary

This chapter has offered a sketch of the development trajectory of dramaturgy in contemporary China, predominantly in the spoken drama area as well as some initial development in other performing arts, such as dance theatre. The overall development of dramaturgy in China has taken place through foreign influence, mainly from Germany. However, this development also has a number of Chinese characteristics. Traditionally, theatre-making was managed and mostly controlled by directors, a characteristic rooted in the Soviet Union system of the 1950s. Therefore, the new role of the dramaturg and the overall influence of dramaturgy have had their limitations. On the other hand, with the wave of reform in social and economic systems, Chinese theatres also embraced innovative ways of running their business, including maintaining the balance between political sensitivity, with the concern of censors, and economic survival through securing box office income. In dealing with multiple

challenges under the government's new developmental policies, theatre companies borrowed many new ways from Western countries, including adopting certain elements of dramaturgy with modifications and localisation processes. By doing so, the theatre companies have created some unique phenomena. Hence, the following and concluding chapter will compare and contrast the development and the impact of dramaturgy in China with those of other countries, namely Germany, the UK and the US. These observations will allow meaningful implications to be identified regarding the development of dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg in different countries, as well as the underpinning social, political and economic influences, with possible future research directions.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This thesis has investigated the development of the concept of dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg in the context of contemporary Chinese theatre. The thesis started by identifying some key issues facing theatre production in relation to the adoption of dramaturgy in China. While dramaturgy research has attracted considerable attention in Western countries over the last two decades, with observation and analysis of the development of dramaturgy in different theatre cultures, research of dramaturgy in China is still at an infant stage with limited outcomes. For most Chinese theatre production teams, audiences and even critics, the concept of dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg are not easily grasped. People easily underestimate and even misunderstand the function of dramaturgy and are confused about the role of dramaturg in theatre-making.

Hence, this thesis was designed and developed to address four key research questions:

1. Why have educators and theatre-makers adopted the concept of dramaturgy in China?
2. How have educators and theatre-makers adopted the concept of dramaturgy in China?

3. What are the similarities and differences, in terms of adopting dramaturgy and dramaturgical practices, between China and other Western countries?

4. What are the similarities and differences of dramaturgical practice in different performing arts, such as spoken drama and dance theatre?

This final chapter will conclude the thesis by summarising the overall outcome of my thesis, responding directly to these key questions. Further discussion and implications regarding the concept of dramaturgy and the role of dramaturg will then be illustrated through an international comparative lens. In addition, implications for policy and practice will be elaborated. Finally, the key contributions of this thesis, limitations and future research direction will be highlighted.

6.2 Responding to the key research questions

With regard to the first research question, namely, ‘Why have educators and theatre-makers adopted the concept of dramaturgy in China?’, people in different positions have responded differently. For example, educators have adopted the concept of dramaturgy in their teaching in order to build the link between the theatre and social reality, to try and generate more transparency in the creative process and, in so doing, to disrupt some practices that have favoured personal dictatorships and a pyramid hierarchy in Chinese theatre. In addition, educators believe that the concept of dramaturgy is essential for teaching effective methodological approaches to theatre-making.

On the other hand, for spoken drama-makers, adopting the concept of dramaturgy may not only help comparative analysis between different theatre cultures, but may also improve the quality of theatre works as well as assisting to develop repertoire, manage companies' daily operations, and promote engagement in exchange activities with foreign theatre companies and institutions. In addition, by adopting the concept of dramaturgy, production teams can implement the essential functions of the dramaturg in developing, selecting, translating, and revising the play texts, informing production teams in relation to the cultural, historical and social background related to the play, changing and monitoring the production process, connecting and mediating the relationships between director, actors and other team members, and communicating with authorities, critics and audiences. Dance theatre-makers have adopted the concept of dramaturgy in order to support choreographers in developing their independent thinking, building up the creative process by constantly questioning, conceptualising and observing, as well as interpreting their artwork for their audiences.

Answering the second research question – ‘How have educators and theatre-makers adopted the concept of dramaturgy in China?’ – has revealed that educators have emphasised that the way of teaching theatre production should include the important concept of dramaturgy, and students must be able to understand and implement the entire concept of dramaturgy before graduation. Therefore, theatre educators have started to introduce the concept of dramaturgy by introducing new courses with newly developed materials and demonstrating the function of the dramaturg in practice, with

the use of videos of foreign production practices, as well as through role plays for students to practise in the classroom. Further development has included translating foreign plays and participating in theatre production practices by students selecting, developing and producing a play under the guidance of educators.

Theatre-makers have also adopted the concept of dramaturgy in China, with an emphasis on playing a visionary and decision-making role throughout the entire creative process. Therefore, spoken drama-makers have started practising the concept of dramaturgy by leading or participating in the Artistic Office in making decisions on theatre work selections, development, and revisions. In addition, spoken drama-makers have also been in charge of maintaining relationships with playwrights, cultivating young playwrights and directors, editing theatre journals, recording, editing and publishing theatre's historical documents, and supervising rehearsals and organising critical symposia to improve the theatre production. Dance theatre-makers have adopted the concept of dramaturgy in emphasising their supporting role by creating and managing several dance dramaturgy workshops with a variety of themes. These workshops introduced dramaturgy beyond spoken drama, applying it to dance drama and discussing historical and contemporary concepts of dramaturgy and their relevance within the dance field. The dance theatre-makers whom I interviewed for the thesis maintained that there was no one standard in dramaturgy and demonstrated this view during their workshops. For example, the workshop instructors only chose certain keywords to guide the process and divided the process into several stages, including intention explanation, discussion of questions and implementation of

solutions. In addition, the instructors emphasised documenting the whole process with written and video recordings and reviewing these in subsequent workshops.

As the many examples described in earlier chapters indicated, before the concept of dramaturgy was adopted in China, dramaturgical contributions had, of course, been made and shared by many people in various positions, including translators, playwrights, directors and other specialists, but without having the specific title of dramaturg. In more recent years, the profession of the dramaturg has been more consciously and explicitly adopted in a number of theatre production teams in China, although the function is less comprehensive and significant than in other theatre cultures, in particular lacking decision-making power. Most of the power in theatre production is still held by the director, and the appointed dramaturg has been used as an assistant to the production teams rather than a leader of the theatre production.

Based on these observations, the reality in China is that educators have not been able to adopt the concept of dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg in a significant way despite introducing new knowledge through course development, and practical experiences based on observation of and participation in the real activities of a dramaturg in action. Although theatre-makers have also realised the importance of the concept of dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg, the evidence shows that there is a lack of official recognition of the dramaturg as a professional position with a leadership function in theatre-making. This reality demonstrates the lack of a fully developed dramaturgy in China.

Turning to the third research question – ‘What are the similarities and differences, in terms of adopting dramaturgy and dramaturgical practices, between China and other Western countries?’ – a number of perspectives can be presented based on political and social environments, cultural differences and people’s values and understanding.

First, considering China’s unique political, social, and economic situation, the adoption of dramaturgy in China inevitably differs from that in Germany and other Western countries. In responding to both political restrictions and market demand, the evolution of dramaturgy in China has some unique characteristics. As discussed in Chapter 4, faced with political restrictions, Chinese spoken drama-makers have gradually accumulated rich experience using different dramaturgical approaches to balance artistic expression and censorship, such as using historically distant material to allude to present concerns. Moreover, while negotiating with censorship, theatre-makers have paid equal respect to audiences and a shared mutual understanding with these audiences. Thus, one of the most critical roles of the dramaturg in China is to manage these approaches and support the tacit understanding between theatre-makers and audiences, which is different from Western countries.

In terms of commercial considerations, dramaturgy in Chinese theatre lies in-between the German model and the Anglo-Saxon model in the UK and the US. While state theatres in China receive financial support from the government, similar to the situation of state theatres in Germany, individual theatre studios and freelance theatre-makers do not enjoy such support. These theatre-makers have to struggle to gain financial independence, similar to the situation of the commercial theatres in the

UK and the US. Since financial viability is crucial for theatre development, dramaturgs could increase the cost of theatre-making, something less problematic with the German model, but seen as a financial burden in the UK and the US model.

Second, the adoption of dramaturgy in China differs from that in Western countries due to cultural differences. It is noted that Chinese theatre lacks democratic consciousness deriving from the influence of traditional Chinese theatre as well as the Soviet theatre system where directors hold significant responsibility, resulting in the director-centric model. Thus, there is a general tendency to respect the director and avoid significant dissent, favouring a forced consensus rather than open debate in relation to diverse opinions.

Despite the introduction of dramaturgs in recent years, directors in China remain reluctant to relinquish power, illustrating the difficulty of fully adopting dramaturgical practices in China. Although the important role of dramaturgs has been recognised, there are still some who hold strong opinions that dramaturgs are an unnecessary role in theatre production.

Third, the adoption of dramaturgy in China differs from that in Western countries due to people's values and understanding. Some believe that the concept of dramaturgy is only a fashion trend in Western countries and lacks substance. These people consider it is pointless to adopt dramaturgy given its role can be undertaken by others, as was the case historically. In contrast, other people see dramaturgy as a magic wand that can instantly solve problems in Chinese theatre. Both views fail to acknowledge the

true value and capacity of dramaturgy. On the one hand, those who believe dramaturgy is an unnecessary concept misunderstand the true value and the unique contribution the dramaturg can bring to a theatre production and that its role cannot be replaced easily by others. On the other hand, those who believe the dramaturg can solve all problems within the theatre production overestimate its function by not realising its limitations as a quick solution provider and that it functions rather to instigate incremental change in the entire theatre production process.

My final research question asks ‘What are the similarities and differences of dramaturgical practice in different performing arts, such as spoken drama and dance theatre?’, and evidence from previous chapters shows that, in comparison to spoken drama, dance theatre has adopted dramaturgy in a more significant and comprehensive manner in China. Unlike the director-centric model of spoken drama, dance theatre primarily focuses on choreographies. Thus, when narrative and contextualised elements become more significant in dance theatre production, the involvement of dramaturgs has been increasingly important in terms of storytelling, background research, collaborating with choreographers, informing and educating performers and audiences, and communicating with authorities and critics.

Additionally, differently from spoken drama, dance language relies on audiences’ interpretation, which allows for more accessible and rich expressions and potentially avoids censorship. The presence of dramaturgs facilitates smoother communication with audiences, critics and authorities, providing a broader space for interpretation,

and leading to greater freedom and flexibility in conveying ideas through body language and feedback, thus enhancing the dramaturg's role of transmission.

6.3 Implications for the concept of dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg

Based on the evidence in the previous chapters as well as the discussion in this chapter so far, we can identify a number of key aspects regarding conventional and emerging elements in the concept of dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg. Table 6.1 demonstrates these key elements.

Table 6.1: Conventional and emerging concept of dramaturgy and role of the dramaturg

Conventional concept of dramaturgy	Conventional role of the dramaturg	Emerging elements of the concept of dramaturgy	Emerging elements of the role of the dramaturg
a. Dramaturgy means a comprehensive concept of play-making.	a. The dramaturg is a play-maker or play-composer.	a. Dramaturgy is an intermediary between theatre and the real world.	a. The role of the dramaturg is actively engaging with the entire production process.
b. Dramaturgy is closely related to the agenda of establishing a national cultural identity.	b. The role of the dramaturg is that of an educator.	b. Dramaturgy is transforming from action-driven to process-driven.	b. The role of the dramaturg is transforming from an expert to a dynamic facilitator.
c. Dramaturgy is an intermediate between scripts and plays on stage.	c. The role of the dramaturg combines playwright and critic.	c. Dramaturgy is an operating system with multiple functions and comprehensive processes.	c. The dramaturg creates and works through the operating system and plays the role of transmission in the entire process.

Conventional concept of dramaturgy and role of the dramaturg

The conventional concept of dramaturgy includes the following key elements: first, in its earliest definition, dramaturgy focused on the concept of play-making. In some theatre cultures, it was seen as equivalent to play-writing. Therefore, since its inception, this concept has been adopted as a core part in theatre-making and has had a very close relationship with play texts. Accordingly, the role of the dramaturg is that of a play-maker or play-composer, who is capable of organising and presenting various dramatic themes in a meaningful and comprehensive order.

Second, the starting point of dramaturgy in many countries was closely related to the agenda of establishing national cultural identities. Therefore, the concept is not only bound to literal and theatrical perspectives, but also social and political contexts. Thus, the role of dramaturg is that of the educator, who not only needs to build a distinctive national dramatic literature, but also lead audiences' awareness and understanding through subtle theatre works and the function of selecting, translating and developing drama.

Third, since Lessing's times, dramaturgy has been seen as an intermediary between scripts and plays on stage. Distinct from the work of playwriting, dramaturgy helps build the architecture of the theatrical events involved in the confluence of components in a work and determines how they are constructed to generate meaning for the audience. Therefore, the role of the dramaturg combines the profession of

playwright and critic with high playwriting skills and a critical sense of transforming play texts into theatre production accordingly.

Newly emerging elements in the concept of dramaturgy and role of the dramaturg

From the latter half of the twentieth century, with the development of theatre-making, new elements in the concept of dramaturgy and role of the dramaturg also emerged, including the following as described below.

First, since Brecht's times, dramaturgy (and the dramaturg) has been seen as an intermediary between theatre and the 'real world'. One essential mission of dramaturgy is to bring theatre works and audiences together to achieve a broader horizon of social relevance. Therefore, the play text is regarded as the raw material from which the performance is composed, which can be shaped or adapted according to the needs of the performance. While the director is responsible for stage presentation, the dramaturg's role includes managing texts, collecting research and other background material, establishing rehearsal concepts and creating production programmes.

Second, since the 1980s, postmodern theory has influenced the conventional way of making theatre. Under the banner of 'post-dramatic' theatre, the traditional hierarchy of theatrical elements has almost vanished. As the text is no longer the central factor, all the other elements, such as space, light, sound, music, movement, and gestures, tend to have equal weight in the performance process. Therefore, the concept of dramaturgy is transforming from action-driven to process-driven. The role of the

dramaturg is also transforming from an expert to a dynamic facilitator, negotiator, and communicator during the creative process. These roles require the dramaturg to constantly reflect the interaction with other stakeholders and manage differences with effective communication skills.

Third, with the spread of the concept of dramaturgy worldwide, the process of translating the term ‘dramaturgy’ is also constantly redefining the concept itself.

Based on this ongoing development, theatre scholars and makers choose the concept of dramaturgy with ambiguity and operate it as a system. Given dramaturgy has been adopted as an operating system, the dramaturg creates and works within this system and plays the role of transmission by exploring the relationship of different theatrical elements arising from various combinations of cultures and genres, as well as keeping a dynamic relationship between production teams, audiences, critics, and authorities.

The emerging role of the dramaturg prioritises supporting the team and organisation first to achieve a greater common good, rather than placing the dramaturg as the central focus of the team and prioritising the dramaturg’s individual objectives. In order to achieve this, dramaturgs need several qualities, such as comprehensive knowledge, strong mental resilience, open-mindedness, sensitivity and vision, as well as excellent communication skills. More importantly, in a transitional society such as China, dramaturgs also need to support theatre works to keep balancing the needs from artistic, political and economic perspectives.

6.4 Implications for practice, policy, and further development

This research unveils several implications for the future practice, policy, and development of dramaturgy in Chinese theatre. First, Chinese theatre is facing both political restrictions and demand in the market, presenting challenges for dramaturgs in dealing with censorship and maintaining financial viability. Ideally, dramaturgs should become the first line of defence in preserving theatre's development. In order to achieve this goal, dramaturgs should maintain their sensitivity in play selection, ensuring the balance between artistic expression and socio-political awareness. In addition, dramaturgs also need to predict and navigate the financial dimensions of productions, including budget considerations that weigh creative aspirations against economic realities. By assessing expenses and projecting market returns, dramaturgs contribute to the financial stability of theatre and its ability to produce diverse and engaging works.

Second, in facing the socio-political and economic situation discussed above, dramaturgs can either passively accept reality or take the initiative to become agents of change and influence their artistic and socio-political environment. This may involve collaborating with media, critics, and audiences to establish new theatre norms. To achieve this goal, dramaturgs should have effective leadership skills and engage with key relevant stakeholders, making collective effort for future change.

Third, from a theatre management perspective, a critical aspect of fostering the development of dramaturgy is promoting tolerance and support. Embracing diversity

within a healthy theatre ecosystem is essential for accommodating varied expectations and demands within Chinese theatre. As society evolves, creating space for open debate, freedom of expression and equitable platforms for disagreement and argument is also imperative.

Last but not least, the role of education is crucial for future development. Currently, education on dramaturgy in China is still in its infant stage with a small number of education institutions offering undergraduate programmes. Further development linking the education curriculum with the reform of the performing arts industry as well as providing real world experience for students participating in theatre production, could be key agenda for improving education on dramaturgy.

It is noteworthy that education in dramaturgy faces a dual challenge. On the one hand, there is the imperative of garnering attention and recognition for the role of the dramaturg in Chinese theatre. On the other hand, for dramaturgs themselves, demonstrating the significance and tangible contributions inherent in the theatre-making process are also essential. Thus, education in dramaturgy could unfold as a gradual maturation process akin to an apprenticeship model, progressing from apprentices to masters through the accumulation of experiences and practical skills. It is imperative for students to comprehend that mastery in dramaturgy is not an instantaneous achievement but rather an incremental evolution. The development of an effective educational framework demands a systematic approach to nurturing students' proficiency in dramaturgy, encompassing meticulous guidance on both its theoretical and practical dimensions.

6.5 Key contributions, limitations, and future research directions

This research makes a number of contributions. First, by conducting a comparative analysis between foreign and Chinese dramaturgical practices, the study provides insights into the similarities and differences among different theatre cultures. This study also illustrates the potential areas for convergence and divergence, enriching the discourse on the development of dramaturgy.

Second, by tracing the historical evolution of dramaturgy, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how the concept of dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg has evolved over time. This historical perspective sheds light on different theatre cultures and contextual factors that have shaped the development of dramaturgy.

Third, the fieldwork and case studies undertaken in this study contribute to the development of new emerging elements of dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg in China today. These elements go beyond conventional definitions, incorporating different theatre cultures, particularly Chinese cultural, social, political, and economic dimensions. In addition, the findings of this study enrich and emphasise the dramaturg's transmission role between production teams, audiences, critics, and authorities, as well as between artistic, sociological and economic dimensions.

This study also has a number of limitations, primarily as a result of limited resources (as noted, very little has been hitherto published on this topic in China) and more particularly the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The constraints on conducting fieldwork precluded a more comprehensive exploration, using a larger

number of case studies, of how dramaturgical thinking is being translated into practice. Additionally, the depth of insights that could be gained are limited by the absence of direct comparisons with other Asian theatre cultures, such as those of Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as a wider array of European experiences. Future research could, then, prioritise international comparison by involving more case studies in Europe, America and Asia. This approach would enable a diverse range of shared perspectives and experiences, thus contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of dramaturgy in relation to the social and cultural contexts. Regular platform discussions could be organised to facilitate theoretical and practical debates among scholars and practitioners, fostering the exchange of ideas and exploring new approaches and understanding in dramaturgy.

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Glossary of Names, Titles, and Specific Expressions in the Main Text

English/Romanisation	<i>pinyin</i>	汉字
<i>Absolute Signal</i>	<i>Juedui xinhao</i>	绝对信号
<i>Aimeiju</i>		爱美剧
<i>Ashima</i>		阿诗玛
<i>'Beijing Drifters'</i>	<i>Beipiao</i>	北漂
Beijing Fringe Festival	<i>Beijing qingnian xijujie</i>	北京青年戏剧节
Beijing-Shanghai Directors' Conference	<i>Jing Hu daoyan huiyi</i>	京沪导演会议
<i>Bus Stop</i>	<i>Chezhan</i>	车站
<i>Cai Wenji</i>		蔡文姬
Cao Yu		曹禺
Chen Dabei		陈大悲
Chen Liangting		陈良廷
Chen Liting		陈鲤庭
Chen Xinyi		陈薪伊
Chen Yi		陈毅

<i>China Art News</i>	<i>Zhongguo yishubao</i>	中国艺术报
Chinese League of Left-Wing Dramatists	<i>Zuoyi xijujia lianmeng</i>	左翼戏剧家联盟
Chinese National Theatre Anti-Enemy Association	<i>Zhonghua quanguo xijujie kangdi xiehui</i>	中华全国戏剧界抗敌协会
Chinese Xiqu School	<i>Zhonghua xiqu xuexiao</i>	中华戏曲学校
‘classical literature that delivers social and political messages as a vehicle’	<i>wen yi zai dao</i>	文以载道
‘Cultural Craze’	<i>Wenhua re</i>	文化热
<i>Defend the Marco Polo Bridge</i>	<i>Baowei Lugouqiao</i>	保卫卢沟桥
Deng Xiaoping		邓小平
Diao Guangtan		刁光覃
Ding Xilin		丁西林
Dong Xijiu		董锡玖
<i>Dragon Beard Ditch</i>	<i>Longxu gou</i>	龙须沟
<i>Dynamic Yunnan</i>	<i>Yunnan yingxiang</i>	云南映象
Eunuch Pang		庞太监

Evolution Troupe	<i>Jinhua tuan</i>	进化团
‘formalised performance’	<i>chengshi</i>	程式
<i>Four Generations under One Roof</i>	<i>Sishi tongtang</i>	四世同堂
Gao Xingjian		高行健
Ge Yihong		葛一虹
Guan Hanqing		关汉卿
Guo Moruo		郭沫若
Han Ermao		韩尔茂
Hong Shen		洪深
Hu Kaiqi		胡开奇
Hu Shi		胡适
Hu Weimin		胡伟民
Hu Yaobang		胡耀邦
‘ <i>Huaju Sinicization</i> ’	<i>Huaju minzuhua</i>	话剧民族化
Huang Ying		黄盈
Huang Zuolin		黄佐临
<i>If I were Real</i>	<i>Jiaru wo shi zhende</i>	假如我是真的

<i>In the Land of Silence</i>	<i>Yu wu sheng chu</i>	于无声处
‘internal performances’	<i>neibu yanchu</i>	内部演出
Ji Junxiang		纪君祥
Jiang Qing		江青
Jiao Juyin		焦菊隐
Jin Haishu		金海曙
Jin Shan		金山
Jin Shoushen		金受申
Ke Luotai		柯洛泰
Lan Ping		蓝苹
Lao She		老舍
Li Jianming		李健鸣
Li Longyun		李龙云
Li Shizeng		李石曾
Li Xiaozhang		李小璋

Li Yinan		李亦男
Lin Shu		林纾
Lin Zhaohua		林兆华
‘Literary Consultant’	<i>Wenxue guwen</i>	文学顾问
‘Literary Master’	<i>Wenxue shi</i>	文学师
Lu Xun		鲁迅
Lü Xiaoping		吕效平
Lyceum Theatre	<i>Lanxin da xiyuan</i>	兰心大戏院
Marco Polo Bridge Incident	<i>Lugouqiao shibian</i>	卢沟桥事变
Master Chang		常四爷
Master Qin		秦二爷
<i>Mayor Chen Yi</i>	<i>Chenyi shizhang</i>	陈毅市长
<i>Meng Jinghui</i>		孟京辉
‘mental image’	<i>xin xiang</i>	心象
Mother’s Song	<i>Muqin de ge</i>	母亲的歌
Mou Sen		牟森

New Culture Movement	<i>Xin wenhua yundong</i>	新文化运动
New drama	<i>Xinju</i>	新剧
New Youth	<i>Xin qingnian</i>	新青年
<i>Ode to Integrity</i>	<i>Zhengqi ge</i>	正气歌
Old drama	<i>Jiuju</i>	旧剧
Ouyang Yuqian		欧阳予倩
<i>Overview of Dramaturgy</i>	<i>Xiju gouzuo gailun</i>	戏剧构作概论
Peking Man	<i>Beijing ren</i>	北京人
‘plot summary’	<i>mubiao zhi</i>	幕表制
‘programme consulting’	<i>xiangmu cehua</i>	项目策划
<i>Put Down Your Whip</i>	<i>Fangxia nide bianzi</i>	放下你的鞭子
Qu Yuan		屈原
<i>Red Detachment of Women</i>	<i>Hongse niangzi jun</i>	红色娘子军
Ren Tianzhi		任天知
<i>Rhinoceros in Love</i>	<i>Lian'ai zhong de xiniu</i>	恋爱中的犀牛
‘setting wrong things right’	<i>boluan fan zheng</i>	拨乱反正
Sha Yexin		沙叶新
<i>Shang Yang</i>		商鞅

Shanghai Stage Society	<i>Shanghai xiju xieshe</i>	上海戏剧协社
<i>Small Well Lane</i>	<i>Xiaojing hutong</i>	小井胡同
Spoken drama	<i>Huaju</i>	话剧
Spring Sun Society	<i>Chunyang she</i>	春阳社
Spring Willow Society	<i>Chunliu she</i>	春柳社
‘striking a pose’	<i>liang xiang</i>	亮相
Sun Huizhu		孙惠柱
Sunrise	<i>Richu</i>	日出
Supreme Nation	<i>Guojia zhishang</i>	国家至上
Taotao Theatre	<i>Taotao daxiyuan</i>	陶陶大戏院
<i>Teahouse</i>	<i>Chaguan</i>	茶馆
Tian Han		田汉
Tian Qinxin		田沁鑫
<i>The East Is Red</i>	<i>Dongfang hong</i>	东方红
<i>The Field of Life and Death</i>	<i>Shengsi chang</i>	生死场
<i>The Flower Rain along Silk Road</i>	<i>Silu hua yu</i>	丝路花雨
<i>The Headstrong Doctor</i>	<i>Gangbi de yisheng</i>	刚愎的医生
<i>The Injustice of Dou’e</i>	<i>Dou’e yuan</i>	窦娥冤

The Main Event in Life	<i>Zhongshen dashi</i>	终身大事
The Orphan of Zhao	<i>Zhaoshi gu'er</i>	赵氏孤儿
<i>The Other Shore</i>	<i>Bi'an</i>	彼岸
The Savage Land	<i>Yuanye</i>	原野
<i>Three Dollars in National Currency</i>	<i>Sankuaiqian guobi</i>	三块钱国币
Thunderstorm	<i>Leiyu</i>	雷雨
Tong Chao		童超
Tong Daoming		童道明
Tong Di		童弟
<i>Torrent</i>	<i>Kuangbiao</i>	狂飙
Under Shanghai Eaves	<i>Shanghai wuyan xia</i>	上海屋檐下
Wang Chong		王翀
Wang Lifa		王利发
Wang Ping		王苹
Wenchuan Earthquake	<i>Wenchuan dizhen</i>	汶川地震
<i>White Haired Girl</i>	<i>Bai mao nü</i>	白毛女
<i>Wild Man</i>	<i>Yeren</i>	野人

Windmill Art Society	<i>Mofeng yishe</i>	磨风艺社
Wu Xiaojiang		吴晓江
Wu Xue		吴雪
Wu Zuguang		吴祖光
Xia Chun		夏淳
Xia Yan		夏衍
Xiao Hong		萧红
Xiao Qian		萧乾
<i>Xiju Gouzuo</i>		戏剧构作
Xu Xiaozhong		徐晓钟
Yao Ke		姚克
Yu Rongjun		喻荣军
Zeng Xiaogu		曾孝谷
Zhang Min		章泯
Zhang Pengchun		张彭春
Zhao Dan		赵丹
Zhao Miao		赵淼
Zhao Qiyang		赵起扬

Zhou Enlai		周恩来
Zhu Lianxiu		朱帘秀
Zhu Lin		朱琳
Zong Fuxian		宗福先
Zou Lulu		邹鲁路