The Competition Between Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu And Cheng’s European Tour

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The paper discusses the competition and the relationship between Cheng Yanqiu and his master Mei Lanfang, two great masters of Dan role of Beijing Opera. It analyzes Cheng’s success by exploring the term of Cheng Party which refers to the support of the elites of the time. The paper also probes into the artistic views of Cheng’s as a reformer of the traditional Chinese theater art by taking his European tour.

Keywords: Beijing Opera, Dan, Cheng Party, Ling Ren, European tour

After Cheng Yanqiu became a great success in his Shanghai tour in 1923, his competition with his master Mei Lanfang began. At first their competition was subtle but in 1946 it reached to its climax. The two great masters of Dan role gave their best shows in Shanghai and contributed to the development of the art of Dan of Beijing Opera. In 1932 Cheng went onto an European tour for inspection of art and this later helped him to become a theorist and reformer of drama as well as a great artist of Beijing Opera.

The Competition Between Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu

Cheng Yanqiu was having a much harder time in studying the art of Beijing Opera than Mei Lanfang. Neither did he have the sonorously golden voice of Mei’s. Talented, hard-working and following advice of his intelligent supporters, he created a very different style of performance than Mei’s, which was featured for its new kind of singing pattern and it could compete with Mei’s singing. When he was singing to express the deepest emotions his voice was as fine as floating gossamer. The audience had to hold their breaths at the time. It is the

1 Cheng Yanqiu: 程砚秋 (1904-1958) famous Beijing Opera artist. His style of performance won such acclaim over the years that it came to be known as the “Cheng Yanqiu school.”


3 Singing pattern: Here it refers to the fixed pattern of singing in Beijing Opera as singing in Beijing Opera has the certain melodies that express the sentiments of the dramatic persona. It is named as Chang Qiang 唱腔. There are two chief types of melodies: Xipi 西皮 and Erhuang 二黄. It has also absorbed the music of Kun Qu Opera 昆曲 and Bangzi 梆子 (Clapper’s music).

Kunqu Opera 昆曲, also called Kunshanqiang, is said to be the mother of all Chinese operas. Its beginnings can be traced to the late Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), some 600 years ago, in the lower Yangtze Valley.
most exquisite part of his art and nobody else can reach that. That’s why the relationship between Mei and Cheng was becoming subtle as their arts were equally matched and fell almost in a rivalry. In his earliest time Cheng’s stage name was Junong.\(^4\) In 1918 Luo Yinggong had this name changed to Yanqiu. Later it was said that the change of the name had an implied meaning. In the autumn only chrysanthemum could endure the coldness and its cold-resistance implied it could last longer than the vulnerable orchid. But actually orchid is also of top grade with a different fragrance and charms.

On September 18, 1923, five months after Cheng’s marriage, Cheng took his company “He Sheng She”\(^5\) to Shanghai. Luo Yinggong\(^6\) went to Shanghai with them, arranging everything himself. The shows won grand momentum, receiving more than 50 flower baskets every night. The ticket box was fulfilled and there was still much audience standing watching. “The beauty won the world and the autumn voice came from the sea”? It was claimed by Jin Zhaoyan\(^8\) (also called Jin ZhongSun) praising Cheng’s shows with his name quoted. Jin was a great playwright, born in Jinhua, Zhejiang. Studying at the Imperial University of Peking University\(^9\) as the first group of graduates, he began his writing career after his graduation. In 1924 he began to write for Cheng Yanqiu. The first play was Jade Hairpin. Then he wrote for him a dozen others including, “Imperial Concubine Mei” “Tears of Deserted Mountain”, “Dream of the Boudoir” etc. The red couplets written by Luo Yinggong, on black

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\(^4\) Junong: 菊侬. It was Cheng Yanqiu’s early stage name. In Mei Lanfang’s name there is a Chinese character of 兰 Lan meaning Orchid and the character 菊 Ju in Cheng’s name means Chrysanthemum. Orchid stands for Mei’s name (Lanfang) and Chrysanthemum for Cheng’s name (Junong).

Yanqiu: Yanqiu 艳秋. Later it was changed again to Yanqiu 砚秋 which he kept to use for the rest of his life. 艳 and 砚 are homophones in Chinese. The old name 艳秋 means beautiful autumn while the new name 砚秋 means cultivating the field for the harvest in the autumn.

\(^5\) He Sheng she: 和声社 Harmonious Voice Society. Founded on Jan 28, 1922 Cheng Yanqiu began his debut as a performer. Rong Dixinian 荣蝶仙 (1893-? ) Cheng’s first master was the manager. Luo Yinggong 罗瘿公 (1872-1924) was the playwright. Wang Yaoqing 王瑶卿 (1881-1954) was the director of art. In August 1924 he changed it into Ming Sheng She (Sound Flourishing Society) 明盛社, his father-in-law Guo Xianglin 果湘林 (1881-1965) worked as the manager of the new company and Wang Yaoqing left. Luo Yinggong passed away and Jin Zhongsun 金仲荪 (note 10) worked as the playwright. On August 20, 1925 Cheng reformed it and changed the name into Ming He She (Society of Sounds Harmony) 明和社. On April 21 1937 it was reformed again into Qiu Sheng She (The Society of Voice of Autumn) 秋声社 and was operating until 1953.

\(^6\) Luo Yinggong: 罗瘿公 (1872-1924) a disciple of Kang Youwei (康有为)’s, modern poet and Beijing Opera playwright. Luo played a very important role in Cheng Yanqiu’s success. He was the latter’s strict teacher, adviser, path-finder, planner, play-wright and actual supporter.

Kang Youwei: 康有为 (1858-1927), Chinese scholar, a leader of the Reform Movement of 1898 and a key figure in the intellectual development of modern China. During the last years of Qing dynasty (1636-1912) and the early years of the Republic of China (1912-1949) he sought to promote Confucianism as an antidote against “moral degeneration” and indiscriminate Westernization.


\(^7\) Yan se tian xia zhong, qiu sheng hai shang lai 艳色天下重，秋声海上来 These two lines begin with the characters in Cheng Yanqiu’s name, in which Yan 艳 means beauty and Qiu 秋 means autumn in Chinese.

\(^8\) Jin Zhaoyan (1879-1945) 金兆棪 also named as Jin Zhongsun 金仲荪. Poet, educator, Beijing Opera playwright. He had written and edited several plays for Cheng Yanqiu. The most famous plays are Wen Ji Gui Han 文姬归汉 Wen Ji’s Captivity and Return. Huang Shan Lei 荒山泪 Tears of Deserted Mountain, Chun Gui Meng 春闺梦 Dream of the Boudoir, Mei Fei 梅妃 Imperial Concubine Mei, Bi Yu Zan 碧玉簪 Jade Hairpin etc.

\(^9\) Imperial University of Peking: jing shi da xue tang 京师大学堂 (1898-1911) Peking University is China’s first national comprehensive university. Its lineage dates back to the Imperial University of Peking, founded in 1898. After the Revolution of 1911, the university was renamed as the National University of Peking; since 1949, it has been referred to as Peking University. Through that lineage, Peking University is honored as the founding institution of higher education in China in modern times (https://english.pku.edu.cn/about.html. Accessed 1 April 2022)
velvet and red silk, were hanging in front of the stage. At the theater, one could see over 200 cars and numerous horse carriages. Since his debut, Cheng became occupied with various kinds of shows such as tea time shows, private residence shows and performances at theaters. He was exhausted from such activities and having no time to take a rest. But he still looked radiant and his voice could soar into the clouds and crack the rocks. Luo Yinggong was happy for him as well as worrying about him. He told Cheng, “You have won surprisingly great popularity during this tour. But it also arouses people’s jealousy. And someone may incite your relationship with your master Mr. Mei Lanfang.” These words were an important hint as well as a reminder.

Cheng Yanqiu returned to Beijing on November 15th. Mei Lanfang went to the railway station to greet him and ten days later Mei took his own company to Shanghai for a performance tour.

Then Mei and Cheng began to compete with their shows in Shanghai. In the beginning their competition was subtle and was not easy to be identified. They may put it just at the theatrical programs. They both would put on the shows that the other had. In 1927 the newspaper Shun Tian Times sponsored an activity of electing the famous Dan actors in China and the readers voted for the Four Great Masters of Dan who turned out to be Mei Lanfang, Shang Xiaoyun\(^{10}\), Cheng Yanqiu and Xun Huisheng\(^{11}\). Since then, their competitions became obvious. In the end of 1946 they were giving rival shows in the two theaters of “Crystal Palace”\(^{12}\) and “Tian Chan Stage”\(^{13}\), having reached the climax. On all newspapers the supporters of two grand masters fired at each other. The two parties were well-matched and of equal rivalry. When the two theatrical box-tickets were all sold out it was the audience and the spectators that took advantage of the shows by benefiting their ears. In the end, Cheng used his trump card. He continuously gave five shows of The Lucky Purse,\(^{14}\) then the scales tipped to him. After the shows his disciple Zhao Rongchen\(^{15}\) put twenty eight gold bars in the bank.

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\(^{10}\) Shang Xiaoyun: 尚小云 (1900-1976) famous Beijing Opera artist. His style of performance has been known as the “Shang Xiaoyun school.”

\(^{11}\) Xun Huisheng: 荀慧生 (1900-1968) famous Beijing Opera artist. His style of performance has been known as the “Xun Huisheng school.”

\(^{12}\) Crystal Palace: It refers to Huang Jin Da Xi Yuan 黄金大戏院 which is located at No1. Jin Ling Zhong Lu 金陵中路, Shanghai. It was founded by Huang Jinrong 黄金荣 (1868-1953). It was opened in 1930 and in the initial stage films were on there instead of Beijing Opera plays. Huang was the only Chinese inspector general at Shanghai French Concession from 1898 to 1927. He later became head of Qing Bang 青帮, a secret society in Shanghai.

\(^{13}\) Tian Chan Stage: Tian Chan Wu Tai 天蟾舞台. Today it is named as Yi Fu Stage with its Chinese name as 天蟾逸夫舞台. It is located at 701 Fu Zhou Road 福州路, in the business center of Shanghai. Founded in 1925, it is a theater with the longest history. The name of the theater comes from a mythology in which the toad (chan chu 蟾蜍) breaks the osmanthus branches on the moon, implying that it prevails another theater with the name as The Red Osmanthus First Stage (Dan Gui Di Yi Tai 丹桂第一台) at the time. As the most grandiose theater for Beijing Opera shows, it was featured of inviting Beijing Opera performers to give shows for dozens of years. It has an influential position in the history of the development of Beijing Opera as performers became famous on this stage and audience became fans entering this theater.

\(^{14}\) The Lucky Purse: Suo Lin Nang 锁麟囊. It refers to the play written by Weng Ouhong 翁偶虹 (1908-1994) in 1937 for Cheng Yanqiu. It tells the story of a rich young woman who gave a jewel purse on her wedding day to a poor bride and later she was returned with good reward for her good virtue. It is the most famous play that Cheng Yanqiu performed in his life and it was also his favorite play. The play had its debut in Shanghai at Crystal Palace (黄金大戏院) in May 1940. It was later presented in Peking in 1941.

Weng Ouhong (1908-1994) 翁偶虹: Beijing Opera playwright, theorist, educator. He wrote dozens of famous plays for famous artists including Cheng Yanqiu. The most famous plays he wrote are The Lucky Purse (Suo Lin Nang 锁麟囊), The Monkey King (Da Nao Tian Gong 大闹天宫) and one of the Eight Sample Plays, (Yang Ban Xi 样板戏) The Red Lantern, (Hong Deng Ji 红灯记) etc.

\(^{15}\) Zhao Rongchen: 赵荣琛 (1916-1996) Dan actor. He learnt from Cheng Yanqiu by correspondence until 1946 Cheng accepted him as his disciple at a formal ceremony.
Among the four great masters of Dan role, the other two had no intention of catching up with Mei. Only Cheng Yanqiu was ambitious. It was the same case in Beijing. “All the other theaters in Beijing were silent when Mei and Cheng rivaled and they were well-matched. Mei was more senior and enjoyed a prominent status while Cheng was soaring up fiercely, thus forming two forces.” Luo Yinggong’s words came right to the point. Not only did he figure out the situation but also he got the two masters’ mental states. Cheng, who used to be an alcohol addict and a heavy smoker, now quitted the two hobbies and the playing of Mahjang. Luo put it as “Cheng was eager to seek after his fame so he could restrain himself.” He believed that Mei Lanfang connected so well with people that he had a large supporting party. When Mei found that Cheng had already soared fiercely and would strive to be strong after returning from Shanghai, he treated him in a more perfunctory way.

In such a situation Luo Yinggong, standing on the side of Cheng, tended to set the countermeasures himself. In February 1924, having learnt that Mei Lanfang had spent 70000 silver taels on his head decorates and costumes, Luo wrote to his friend Yuan Bokui. “It is still not sure if Yu Shuang can make so much money in the future. He has already spent 10,000 tales on the costumes already. He cannot ever compete with Mei on costumes. His only way to excel is the singing part.” Luo Yinggong set the strategy for Cheng Yanqiu, “I have advised Yushuang that he should be neither close nor stay far from Mei.” What does it mean? It means that one should stay close and far as well as being warm and cold. Being calm and clear-headed one should be self-controlled. When one intends to show his consideration he behaves appropriately and naturally. For the purpose of developing human relationship and out of practical needs they behaved very worldly and naturally with etiquettes. This was the ideal state in a traditional society for a gentleman. It is not easy to learn the social conduct without a good command of worldly codes and perception of the social wisdom.

Mei Langfang had the presence of nobility and Cheng Yanqiu had that of a scholar. Mei was more gifted while Cheng was more hard-working. They both did their best. Despite of their fierce competition, they were behaving gently and showing modesty and courtesy. Here is an example. On Nov. 11th, 1933 Mei Lanfang, having moved to Shanghai, had his 40th birthday celebrated. Cheng Yanqiu went to his master’s birthday party and kowtowed to Mei. The participants exclaimed that he had not forgotten his master. In spite of their rivalry onstage they would not hurt their personal harmonious relationship. For the nights they were rivals while on the following day they greeted each other with good manners and etiquettes. They were following traditional codes of virtues and worldly rules and in this conduct they demonstrated their full understanding of the world and life, betraying their very good self-cultivations of morals.

In the following year (1924) Luo Yinggong fell ill and was treated in a German hospital. Cheng went there every day to feed him and his visits never stopped. On Sept. 2, Luo found himself to the end of his life and wrote

16 Silver tael: It refers to a silver coin used in the times of the Republic of China (1912-1949). On a silver standard, one silver tael is 23.9024808 grams.
17 head decorates: On Beijing Opera stage the characters have different head decorates according to their roles.
18 YuanBokui: 袁伯夔 (1881-1940) director of The Printing and Casting Bureau (印铸局) of the Republic of China.
19 Yushuang 玉霜. It refers to the styled name (zi 字) of Cheng Yanqiu’s. In the past a man of higher social status had a styled name taken at the age of twenty, by which he was sometimes called by his peers to show respect and intimacy. But the elderly called the younger by his name instead of by his styled name.
20 Kowtow: Kowtow is an ancient etiquette in China. In the apprenticeship of Beijing Opera the disciples regarded their masters as their parents. They kowtowed to their masters at grand receptions including the master’s birthday party etc.
his will. In the midnight of Sept. 16, Luo wrote that “it’ll be best to find a grave on the Fragrance Hill\textsuperscript{21}.” Right after that he died at the age of 52.

When Luo passed away none of his relatives was there. Cheng was the first to arrive! When reading the pages of his master’s wish, he burst into cry and almost fainted. On returning home he set up a mourning hall and kept copying classics at the desk apart from the mournings in the morning and at the night. The literary figures were generally poor. Since his daughter’s death and his wife’s going mentally ill Luo Yinggong went poorer and fell into financial difficulties. He made a living just by writing. So all the costs for the mourning, the coffin and the grave were on Cheng Yanqiu and he would do everything in a perfect way. The day of the funeral procession found Cheng in the mourning costume holding the coffin and crying bitterly. It was reckoned that from the day Luo fell ill until his death Cheng had spent over 10,000 yuan but he never mentioned a word of money. It was even hard for a Shi Da Fu\textsuperscript{22}, But as Ling Ren\textsuperscript{23} Cheng did it. That’s why Kang Youwei\textsuperscript{24} wrote a poem to praise Cheng Yanqiu as “Yi Ling\textsuperscript{25}.” Mourning over the death of his great master, Cheng was dressed in the white mourning costume and ceased performing for over one month. Once having the remembrances of the past he could not help with tears.

After Luo’s death Cheng went to his grave to mourn before and after he made a performance tour. On Luo’s death anniversary he always mourned at his grave and never ceased for twenty years. On April 5 1943, Cheng took his two sons, Yongyuan and Yongjiang to take a train from Xi Zhi Men at 8 am to get off at Huang Cun. Then they walked for 1.5 kilometers to arrive at Si PingTai Cemetry. When seeing the nails on the wooden plate removed he was very sad. “Time flies and people die. We enjoyed life but it’s a dream now.” On returning home he wrote in his diary, “Two families are taking care of the cemetery and it can be desolate like this. In years when I die and without offering sacrifices and paying respects it will be wasteland.” True feelings are manifested in times of misfortune. Things can always change. But he never did.

The Cheng Party and His Intimate Friends

The newspapers and his fans that supported him were named as Cheng Party. For whoever it was, Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu’s artistic achievements not only came from themselves but also from the support of many others, such as Luo Yinggong and Yuan Bokui etc. They had supported Cheng Yanqiu fully, with all their hearts and souls. After Luo Yinggong passed away, Li Yuying\textsuperscript{26} was another prominent supporter. (His styled name is Shi Zeng. Li was born in Gaoyang, Hebei province to an official family. Also a biologist having studied

\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] Fragrance Hill: Xiang Shan 香山 It is located in Haidian District of Beijing, covering 160 hectares. The main peak of the mountain is the Xianglu peak 香炉峰 with a height of 557 meters.
\item[22] Shi Da Fu: 士大夫 literati and official. Here it refers to the literati class and officialdom in feudal China.
\item[23] Ling Ren: 伶人 a special term referring to the performers, musicians and others who worked in the industry of traditional Chinese theater art. In the old times Ling Ren had very low social status. It is also in the title of the book Ling Ren Wang Shi (伶人往事 A Memoir of Beijing Opera Performers) from which the article is translated and abridged.
\item[24] See note 7.
\item[25] Yi Ling: 义伶 Here it refers to a performer with code of Loyalty and Brotherhood. Yi 义, in the ancient time refers to a spiritual or mental code, for which one tends to take risks and courage to give help to one’s friends.
\item[26] Li Yuying: 李煜瀛 (1881-1973) educator, one of the founders of the the Palace Museum. He initiated and organized “Go to France For Work-study Program” and made great contribution to the Sino-French cultural exchanges. His styled name is Shi Zeng 石曾.
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In France, member of Tung Meng Hui, the Chinese Revolutionary League, professor at Peking University and president of Sino-France University, Nationalist Central Inspection Commission for Qing Royal Family Aftermath.)

In 1930 he co-founded with Cheng Yanqiu the attached college, National Traditional Theater Art and Music College. The attached school was set up at No. 56 Muchang Hutong, outside Chong Wen Men. It recruited both girls and boys and kept on running until the year of 1941. On seeing Mei Lanfang win numerous praises on his U.S. performance tour, Li began to be bustling about for Cheng’s going abroad tour. On Jan. 1, 1932, Cheng Yanqiu had it posted on a newspaper, claiming that his name should be changed from Yanqiu (“艳秋”) to Yanqiu (“砚秋”), meaning that he would be like a farmer cultivating for the harvest in the autumn instead of showing his beauty to people. On the 14th, he would go to Europe on a tour of inspecting drama. Apparently Cheng changed his name for his European tour.

Another prominent figure to support him was Chen Shutong. At the age of 29, he went to study at Tokyo University of Political Science and Law. Born in Hangzhou he studied in Japan and after returning from Japan he became president of National Industrial Bank Co. Ltd. He was also founder of the first girl school in Hangzhou.

27 The Chinese Revolutionary League: Tung Meng Hui 同盟会 The Tongmenghui (Chinese: 同盟會; Pinyin: Tóngménghuì; Wade-Giles: T‘ung-meng Hui; lit. United Allegiance Society), also known as the Chinese United League or the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance, was a secret society and underground resistance movement organized by Sun Yat-sen and Song Jiaoren in Tokyo, Japan, on August 20, 1905. This new alliance was created through the unification of Sun’s Xingzhonghui, or Revive China Society, the Guangfuhui, or Restoration Society, and other Chinese revolutionary groups. Combining republican, nationalist, and socialist objectives, the Tongmenghui’s political platform was “to overthrow the Manchu empire and to restore China to the Chinese, to establish a republic, and to distribute land equally among the people.” (Chinese: 驅除韃虜, 恢復中華, 創立民國, 平均地權) (“Tongmenghui.” New World Encyclopedia,.15 Jun 2018, 21:20 UTC. 31 Mar 2022, 15:54 <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Tongmenghui&oldid=1012342>. Accessed 31 March 2022.)

28 National Traditional Theater Art and Music College: 中华戏曲音乐学院. It was set up by Cheng Yanqiu with an attached college.

29 Chong Wen Men: 崇文门 It is located in the south of Beijing city, one of the 11 city gates of Yuan dynasty (1271- 1368).

30 Please see note 6.

31 Chen Shutong: 陈叔通 (1876-1966). Political activist, patriotic democrat and member of the late Qing (1636-1912) Imperial Academy, director of All-China Federation of Industry of Commerce, vice chairman of National People’s Congress. He was from Hangzhou. He passed the Imperial Examination and obtained the third degree Jin Shi (zhong kui mao ke er jia di 38 名进士) and was appointed as compiler and editor of the Imperial Academy (qing han lin yuan bian xiu 清翰林院编修).

32 National Industrial Bank Co. Ltd.: It refers to Zhe Jiang Xing Ye Yin Hang 浙江兴业银行. Founded in 1907 it was one of the earliest commercial banks in China. The first president was Ye Jingkui.
founder of “Vernacular Chinese Newspaper”\textsuperscript{33} and “Shanghai He Zhong Library”\textsuperscript{34}. He had much greater influence than anyone else on Cheng Yanqiu in his later life and in his career. As for how to behave he gave his precise guidance to Cheng.

In the same year when Cheng went onto his performance tour in Shanghai, Chen Shutong, just like Luo Yinggong revived, would write to Cheng to give him “long distance education” from time to time. When he heard that Jiang Miaoxiang\textsuperscript{35}, the Xiao Sheng\textsuperscript{36} player, had parted from Cheng, he wrote in the letter on November 24, claiming that “Big brother, you are a noble man when you treat people according to their characters. But when dealing with business, you need to give in sometimes.”

Two days later he sent another letter to Cheng, advising him that “Miaoxiang has already released it onto newspaper. But don’t get angry or get depressed. You need to be determined to go through it. And don’t break up with him. You need to look through everything and be tolerant. I have one more word to say. Your money is not easy to make. Do not buy stocks. Neither put it in banks for more interests. If you want to put it aside Bank of China and National Industrial Bank Co. Ltd.\textsuperscript{37} are a good choice. Please trust me. I know banks better.”

Like Mei Lanfang and Ma Lianliang\textsuperscript{38}, Cheng Yanqiu is a reformer for traditional Chinese theater art. On January 4 1932, he went on a European drama tour and wrote a letter named as “A letter for Adieu”. Every time reading this letter I find him much more brilliant than today’s theorists. Here is an excerpt. “The oriental culture is obviously different from the western one. Thus the drama in the orient and that in the west are apparently different. But let’s have a look at the present tendency. Everything will be integrated into one organization of the whole world and it is of no doubt that the drama in the future will be integrated into one. At present our job is to

\textsuperscript{33} Vernacular Chinese Newspaper: bai hua bao 白话报. It is a newspaper founded in 1901 and ceased in 1910. The founders included Lin Xie 林獬 (1874-1926) and others. (https://baike.sogou.com/v71873807.htm?fromTitle=%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E7%99%BD%E8%AF%9D%E6%8A%A5 Accessed 1 April 2022.)

Vernacular Chinese is the written language commonly used by modern Han people. ( Wade-Giles romanization) pai-hua (baihua 白话), vernacular style of Chinese that was adopted as a written language in a movement to revitalize the Classical Chinese literary language and make it more accessible to the common people. Started in 1917 by the philosopher and historian Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962), the baihua literary movement succeeded in making baihua the language of textbooks, periodicals, newspapers, and public documents, thus causing a definite change in Chinese cultural life. (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. “baihua”. Encyclopedia Britannica, 2 Nov. 2016, https://www.britannica.com/topic/baihua. Accessed 31 March 2022.)

May Fourth Movement, intellectual revolution and sociopolitical reform movement that occurred in China in 1917-21. The movement was directed toward national independence, emancipation of the individual, and rebuilding society and culture. In 1915, in the face of Japanese encroachment on China, young intellectuals, inspired by “New Youth” (新青年 Xinqingnian), a monthly magazine edited by the iconoclastic intellectual revolutionary Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879-1942), began agitating for the reform and strengthening of Chinese. (https://www.britannica.com/facts/May-Fourth-Movement. Accessed 31 March 2022.)

34 Shanghai Hezhong Library: he zhong tu shu guan (上海合众图书馆). Proposed by Ye Jingkui 叶景葵 (See note 33) and several other intellectuals it was founded in1939. In 1953, proposed by Zhang Yuanji 张元济 (1867-1959) and Chen Shutong 陈叔通, it was donated to the government. In 1957 it was integrated into Shanghai Library.

35 Jiang Miao Xiang: 姜妙香 (1890-1972) famous Xiao Sheng actor. For many years he was playing a supporting role for Mei Lanfang.

36 Xiao Sheng: 小生 It refers to the role of young men in traditional Chinese theater art. In Beijing Opera, there are altogether four roles, Sheng 生 for men, Dan 旦 for women, Jing 净, referring to the roles with Painted faces and Chou 丑 referring to Clowns. The above mentioned roles are also named as Hang Dang 行当.

37 National Industrial Bank Co. Ltd.: See note 34.

38 Ma Lianliang: 马连良 (1901-1966) famous Beijing Opera Lao Sheng actor and his performance style is acclaimed as Ma Lianliang school. Lao Sheng 老生 refers to the role of elderly men. They usually have long beards and they walk in the steps raising their feet sideways in 45 degrees. They mainly sing and recite to tell a story.
seek how to communicate between the drama of the orient and that of the west and how to communicate Chinese drama with western drama. We do not only require that it is communicated theoretically but also would like to see if it is possible to communicate practically. The Facial Make-up\textsuperscript{39} of Chinese drama seems to be a mystery and magic while in the western drama it might also exist. In the book of “On the Stage Makeup” by Xu Xingzhi\textsuperscript{40}, it is an illustration of western Facial Makeup if you can tell different features from an actor’s facial expressions. In addition, in the past western drama was shrouded in the air of realism while Chinese drama went to the other extreme to which we took a whip to symbolize riding a horse and moved a chair to represent a door. The climax of western realism is over and the new symbolism rises. The great backgrounds on which rested the life of drama now are compromised by colors and lines, without preserving realistic things such as the great nature of real mountains and water. Since Gordon Craig\textsuperscript{41} proposed to replace actors by puppets even actors are not to be allowed onto the stage. The new tendency of western drama, on the one hand, proves that Chinese drama is very noble and on the other hand, it proves that it is possible to be integrated into the world drama as one being. That is just one example that we may refer to in the western drama. My imagination is quite limited but I would love to set hope upon my predecessors, seniors and contemporaries. You may propose all the connections between Chinese and western drama and I propose that you entrust me to observe and study in Europe. In this way when I return to China I may possibly give some valuable suggestions ……”. The contemporaries believed that Mei Lanfang’s visit of America was to introduce the mature traditional Chinese theater art to the West while Cheng Yanqiu’s European tour was a study tour for the reformation of Chinese drama.

On Jan. 5 Mei Lanfang held an Adieu ceremony for him. On the 13th, Cheng Yanqiu set out from Tianjin on a Japanese ship to get to Dalian and changed a train westward. He firstly arrived in Moscow and then in Paris. In May he got to Germany. He paid a visit to Berlin Music Observatory where he was shocked by piano playing and the tenors’ singings. The 27-year-old young man was passionate and sensitive in his inner heart. Looking back onto the cruelty of his art studying period he became deeply touched by the scientific nature, theoretical elements and humane warmth of western art education. Since then Cheng had more thoughts. He participated actively in exchanges with German musicians and negotiated co-operations with them. He composed for Li Bai\textsuperscript{42} and Du Fu\textsuperscript{43}’s poems. He also got involved in the experiment of playing for his music composing. In a letter he wrote to his wife he said he would like to take his family to settle down in Germany and that he wanted to study at Berlin 

\textsuperscript{39} Facial Make-up: lian pu 脸谱. Here it refers to the different makeup of the role of Jing 净 in Beijing Opera. The role of Jing also named as Painted Faces (花脸 hualian) has complicated patterns while the clowns usually have a big white paint onto their faces. The Painted Faces refer to the roles who have their different designs to symbolize different characters. Different colors onto the faces symbolize different meanings of characters, e.g. red stands for loyalty and courage, black for rashness and justice, purple for calmness and uprightness, yellow for bravery and fierceness, blue for strong-mindedness and manipulation and golden and silver are colors for immortals.

\textsuperscript{40} Xu Xingzhi: 许幸之 (1904-1991) painter, poet, art critic, film and drama director. His works includes “On the Stage Makeup” (《舞台化装论》) etc.

\textsuperscript{41} Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966): Edward Gordon Craig was born in 1872 as son of the actress Ellen Terry and the architect, stage designer and theatre director Edward William Godwin. He achieved an international breakthrough with his programmatic essay “The Art of the Theatre”. Edward Gordon Craig became the reformer of the stage design which had been dominated by the aesthetic of depiction and illusionism. During his lifetime he was barely able to realise his radically new theatre concept and his abstract stage aesthetic, basing on light and shadow; but his journalistic influence still lasted in the 20th century. (http://www.edward-gordon-craig.com/ accessed 1 April 2022)

\textsuperscript{42} Li Bai: 李白 (701-762) Great Romanticism poet of Tang dynasty, named respectfully as Shi Xian 诗仙 Poet-Fiery.

\textsuperscript{43} Du Fu: 杜甫 (712-770) Great Realism poet of Tang dynasty, named respectfully as Shi Sheng 诗圣 Poet-Saint.
University. To show his determination he began to smoke and took alcohol again. He began to eat fat and smoke cigar. One month later he added weight terribly. And he took a picture after adding weight and sent it back to Beijing. Chen Shutong was so shocked to hear this that he sent several telegrams to push him back in excuse of his colleagues’ having a hard life and asked him to go back. When Cheng received the telegrams, he went into very bad mood.

He had to return to Beijing though unwillingly. He returned to Li Yuan Hang\textsuperscript{44}. So in his later study tour he mainly was searching for books, play-scripts and pictures. In all he had purchased 2000 play-scripts, 500 pictures and 800 different books.

On June 1 1934 he took his first son, 10-year-old Yongguang\textsuperscript{45} and set out from Shanghai to Switzerland via Italy and France. He put him into a school in Geneva on his own expenses. Cheng Yanqiu never forgot his promise in his youth: He would never permit his children to be in the industry of Beijing Opera and he kept his promise. He must have great love and joy as well as hatred and sadness for his performing career.

Summary

The paper gives a panoramic view of the development of the art of Dan role in Beijing Opera in its heyday in the 1920s and 1930s by discussing the competition of two great masters for playing Dan Role. In the discussion of their competition the author points out that apart from his own talents and efforts Cheng’s great success contributes much to his supporters as well as fundraisers and intimate friends who all were identified by one term: Cheng party. Although Cheng’s European tour initially was out of will of competing with Mei Lanfang who had already made a performance tour in the U.S., it later proved to be an inspection tour of western art. Cheng’s artistic views reflect that he was a great reformer and his European tour actually owed to his will and efforts of reforming traditional Chinese theater art. From this part of Cheng Yanqiu’s biographical story we can conclude that Cheng Yanqiu’s efforts as a performer and a reformer both have helped to make him one of the greatest masters of Beijing Opera and have greatly helped the formation and development of Cheng’s art as an exquisite school while pushing the Dan role art of Beijing Opera to a climax. His European inspection tour has greatly helped him to become a reformer as well as a theorist of drama and this is rarely seen among traditional Chinese theater artist.

References


\textsuperscript{44} Li Yuan Hang: 梨园行 refers to Beijing Opera industry. Li Yuan (梨园) means the garden of pears in which Li Longji (李白) (685-762) Xuan Zong Emperor of Tang dynasty (618-907) (唐玄宗) planted pears in one of his royal gardens and later he supported a band of performers there to entertain him and the royal family. That is why the performers claim Li Yuan as another name for the industry of traditional Chinese theater art.

\textsuperscript{45} Yongguang: Here it refers to Cheng Yongguang 程永光 (1924-?): Cheng Yanqiu’s first son. He married a French lady and worked for the cultural exchanges of China and France for his whole life.