

**Can the Conventions of Indigenous Kunqu Opera Training be Useful
for the Contemporary Actor?**

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Declaration of Authorship I Yunlin Xiang hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Abstract

The ancient Chinese theatre system was described in *Xian Qing Ou Ji* by Li Yu (1611-1680), and can be translated as ‘Speaking honestly, if an actor wants to perform a role, it means that the actor speaks instead of the, so the actor has to put their heart into the role to be real during the performance. Actors need to be in the scene personally and there should be true feeling in it.’ The meaning of this is that when an actor is performing, the actor should convey their emotions to the audience and must put their whole heart into the character’s background to show their imagination on the stage, this is also an important theory by Stanislavski. From ancient theatre theory to contemporary theatre theory, and from Chinese theatre to the European theatre, both imagination and physical techniques are crucial to performance.

The purpose of this study is to research how Kunqu opera’s performance convention and formula also may improve actors’ performance techniques. Chinese has a three-character phrase, ‘*jing qi shen*’, meaning essence, energy, spirit in English. Originating from Chapter 67 of the *Dao De Jing* by Lao Zi, it has various interpretations in different fields. In this study, this phrase relates to the training of skills that can help actors in providing skilled performances.

This research process has included filming a documentary about Suzhou Kunju Theatre and Hengdian Film Studio, interviewing scholars and actors. There was one experimental study workshop with students for two weeks to test techniques in the Goldsmiths University of London studio. Actors’ skills relate to their imagination and physical movement. The results show that the research has enriched existing universal performance training methods and the significance of this study proves the physical training benefits of Kunqu opera. The workshop integrated Chinese theatre and European theatre practice for further expansion and development.

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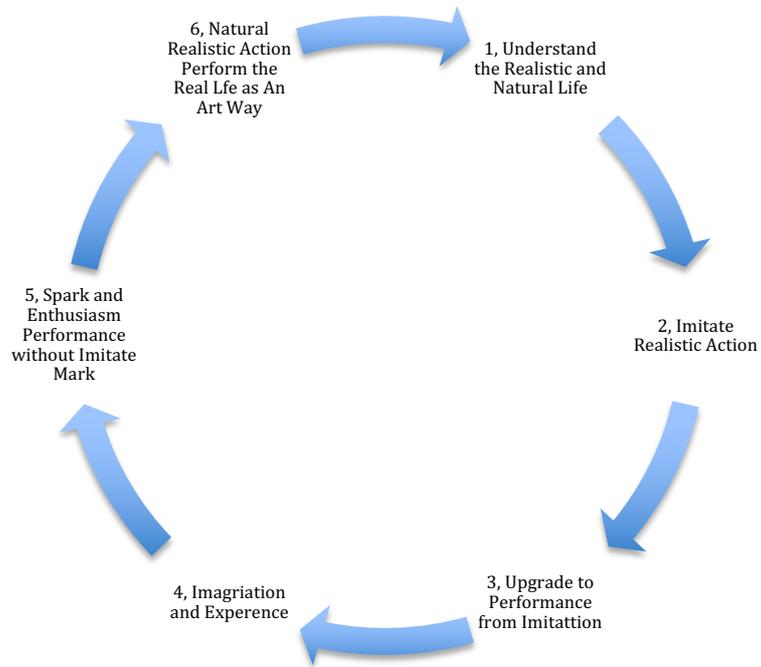


Figure 1. Performing art process

Chapter I: Kunqu Opera's Development

1. Background

1.1 Origins of Chinese Opera

There are hundreds of regional operas besides Beijing opera in China. In Northeast China, for example, there is a regional style of opera with Two Person Act. This genre of traditional opera is essentially the same type of drama as traditional Chinese drama, but its form is more similar to Vsevolod Meyerhold's system in that the way the Two Person Act is performed somewhat resembles life. However, each of the actors in this Two Person Act duet has unique skills and leaves no trace in performance. It is a natural performance and through observation, each actor has very strong control ability. Its dissimilarity from Beijing opera is that each actor is highly emphatically trained. There may be omnipotent or versatile actors who are able to sing, dance and perform kung fu. Meanwhile, Beijing opera requires actors to master their basic skills, namely speaking, singing, acting, reading and fighting. Two Person Act actors began to burgeon in the early 1990s, with their stage performances demonstrating a modest, relaxed rhythm. A unique style of performance was created by utilising its traditional advantages in combination with the dramatic stage of contemporary society.

In a recent reality television show on Dragon TV in Shanghai called *Happy Comedian*, all of the five participating teams were famous Chinese comic stars, two of whom were dramatic actors from a Two Person Act team who provided innovative comedy to the audience. In this weekly TV show, Vsevolod Meyerhold's dramatic pattern can always be identified, which also illustrates the point that Vsevolod Meyerhold's organic modelling technique is of use for actors' training. Likewise, the basic skill training in Chinese drama has a certain promotive effect on actors' acting skills. The training in Chinese drama is not merely external training, internal expression should also be trained along with physical training, such as the training

with eye expressions and gestures. If an actor does not approach their character mindfully, then their eye expressions and gestures may be very rigid. Therefore, when training actors in Chinese theatre, romantic charm is trained along with their body. There is a common phrase in Chinese theatre that ‘no skill is developed without madness’, originating from a line by Cheng Dieyi in the film *Farewell to My Concubine*. This means that actors cannot get into character and play them incisively and vividly without being possessed by the devil, and this phrase is used to characterise the extremity of concentration when acting.

Actors use their bodies to form characters through their movements, including the characteristics of a role, and this is a required skill for an actor. Actors use their bodies as the basis of their performance. An actor’s physical skills and their control and coordination abilities have a direct impact on their external skills in a performance. The actors’ training system developed by Meyerhold requires actors to practise activities like ballet, gymnastics and acrobatics. Chinese traditional dramas prescribe the same training for actors, but the difference is that the warming-up exercises in Chinese traditional dramas are more concrete, including exercises in the expression of one’s eyes, hands and feet, facial muscles and other joints. These exercises require an actor to begin from childhood. The phrase ‘one minute on the stage takes ten-years of practice’ can clearly describe the learning status of Chinese traditional drama actors. It is also a teaching method that has been inherited from Chinese traditional theatre since ancient times. Such strict warming-up training provides natural characteristics for actors tackling characters, with both genuine internal and external refinement.

These exercises not only train the actor’s external skills, crucially they also help provide enthusiasm for actors about their role. Enthusiasm for performance, rather than apathy, is required for convivial or depressed characteristics, or for silent and expressionless frozen performances among other forms of acting.

The exercises appears to combine the basic skills in Chinese traditional Beijing opera as the basis of its practice. The Yin and yang philosophy explained the world's genesis in ancient China by making all things stem from Tao. Tao engenders one, one engenders two, two engenders three, and three engenders all things. All things fall into yin and yang components, which are fused together to compose all things and matter. The Yin and yang as observed by ordinary people have many forms of expression, such as day and night, summer and winter, spring and autumn, sunrise and sunset, male and female and cold and hot.

Yin and yang are manifested not only in natural but also biological phenomena, even in the evolution of food. Yin represents the accumulation and elementary stage of the development of things, whereas yang is the degree of positivity as things develop to a stage. All things can progress ahead along a sinuous path, with climaxes and low ebbs. It is very appropriate to provide explanations with the yin and yang theory in the study of performance because yin and yang place a particular emphasis on balance. It is not until balance is well achieved for anything that ultimate success comes. Performance is an embodiment of modest looseness. Both over-exaggeration and over-implicitness by actors make a difference to the result of a performance, while balance is what actors need to intensively practice. Actors should not act out of balance in an extreme way as this would then have extreme outcomes

Actors can neither perform too nervously nor too loosely, which fully embodies the ¹yin and yang philosophy. They should also combine their physical performance and inner performance in an organic and harmonious way, which is also a manifestation of the yin and yang balance.

Stanislavsky and Meyerhold both gave full credit to the Chinese dramatic master Mei Lanfang (1894-1961), which shows that Mei's acting in Beijing opera received social

¹ Mei Lanfang was a famous Beijing opera actor.

acknowledgement in the professional domain. This not only shaped the actor's strong body movements but also led to subtlety and passion in coexistence in the actor's approach. Such implicitness is a representation of freehand, namely a pattern of expression that bears spiritual similarity to real life but differs from life per se via artistic forms, with art stemming from life and being higher than life. Beijing opera performance depicts a true story onto a stage in a manner of moderate looseness. Stanislavsky demanded that actors should experience life, it is essential. Actors should know about all sorts of characters in all social communities, strata and all walks of life, which requires a close understanding of the social environment as well as psychological research into the role itself, getting a distinctive and clear taste of a role.

1.2 Kunqiang, Kunqu and Kunju

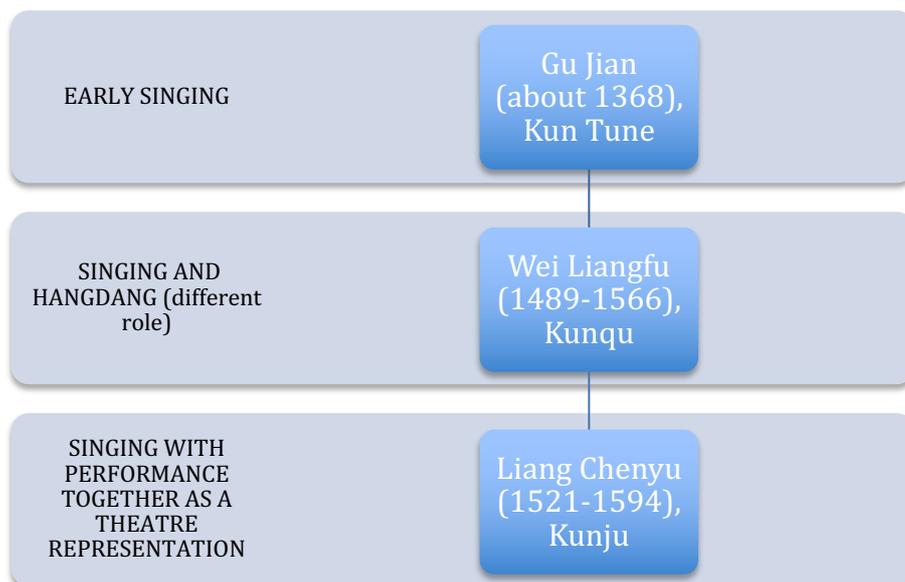


Figure 1.1. Three notable stages and people in Kunqu opera's development

Kunqiang (Kun tune) – This relates to sound intensity. This refers to the tune style of the aria, which is sung by people without the use of makeup or acting.

昆 *kun* (a district of Suzhou), 腔 *qiang* (sing/tune)



Figure 1.2. Chinese Calligraphy “Kun Qiang” by Yang Zaichun (1943-), Dec. 2017

It originated in the Kunshan² area at the end of the Yuan dynasty (AD 1271-1368) and has a history that spans more than 600 years. Since the Song (AD 960- 1279) and Yuan dynasties, Chinese opera has been classified into the south and the north; in southern opera, different singing methods are used in different places. At the end of the Yuan dynasty, influenced by Yuan Zaju opera, Gu Jian organised and improved the original tune of southern opera, which was popular in the Kunshan area, and called it the ‘Kunshan tune’, which can be regarded as the beginnings of Kunqu. It emerged in the form of singing without the use of makeup or acting, making the melody of the Kunshan tune more refined and gentler as there were no big gongs or bass drums.

Kunshan tune started to spread across several regions. Initially, it only spread across the Suzhou area but, during the Wanli era of the Ming dynasty (AD 1573-1620), it expanded from the centre of Suzhou to south of the Yangzi River and north of the

² One area in Jiangsu Province in China

Qiantang River. It gradually spread to Fujian, Jiangxi, Guangdong, Hubei, Hunan, Sichuan, Henan and Hebei. By the end of the Wanli era of the Ming dynasty, it had also spread to Beijing. In this way, Kunshan tune became the most influential type of opera tune from the middle of the Ming dynasty (AD 1436-1566) to the middle of the Qing dynasty (AD 1728-1820). During the Kunshan tune period, a number of scholars discussed the methods used in the tune. At that time, a litterateur called Gu Ying built a music hall stage in Kunshan called Yu Shan Cao Tang, which attracted fans of Kunshan tune from across the country, such as Gu Jian, Gao Ming, Yang Tiedi and Ni Yuanzhen. As recorded in *Nan Ci Yin Zheng*, written by Wei, ‘Gu Jian lived in Kunshan, was skilful in Nanci and good at writing odes, Wang Baobao (Köke Temür) heard Gu Jian sing a song and did not give up after many fights with him. Gu Jian was good at finding the marvels of Nanqu, so he was honoured as the originator of Kunqu opera.’ Today, there is a Gu Jian memorial hall in the town of Qiandeng in Kunshan.

Kunqu (Kun opera) - This refers to ups and downs form of song, tune and melody. Like the Kunshan tune, it was sung, but Kunqu’s melody was gentler than that of Kunqiang.

昆 kun, 曲 qu (music)



Figure 1.3. Chinese Calligraphy “Kun Qu” by Yang Zaichun (1943-), Dec. 2017

During the Jiajing period of the Ming dynasty (AD 1522-1566), because the Kunshan tune was only developed in the Kunshan area, Wei Liangfu, an opera musician from Jiangxi province, travelled to Kunshan to reform and innovate the rhythm rules and singing style of Kun qiang. At that time, the four most notable melodies in China were the Haiyan tune, the Yiyang tune, the Yuyao tune and the Kunshan tune. Wei learned the merits of these other tunes, understood the characteristics of the Kunshan tune, studied the characteristics of Beiqu (northern opera)³, used the singing method of Beiqu and played the flute, xiao, sheng, pipa and string instruments together to accompany the Kunshan tune. This created a new singing method for the tune that integrated the merits of Nan Qu and Bei Qu.

As recorded in the paper by Yang Ruiqing ‘Wei Liangfu’s main contribution was to integrate Bei Qu and Nan Qu (southern opera⁴)⁵ in a new tune: Kun tune. At that time,

³ Beiqu: A style of opera originating from the north of China during the Tang and Song dynasty

⁴ Nanqu: A type of opera originating from the south of China during the late Song dynasty to the early Ming dynasty

⁵ Yang,R,Q, *Kun Qiang, Kun Qu, Kun Ju Bu Neng Hun Xiao*[N]. *Zhong Guo Yi Shu Bao*,

Kunshan tune was called Kunqu and was also referred to as the Shuimo tune.’ During the reign of the Qianlong Emperor of the Qing dynasty, Kunqu developed further. After this, Kunqu was dominant among theatrical troupes and it now has a history of 600 to 700 years as a form of opera. Kunqu was formed of a professional band, including instrument players and a singer. Often, the Kunqu masters were invited to sing by wealthy and influential families to perform in their gardens.

Kunju (Kun theatre) - *Ju* means ‘opera’ and it refers to the action of singing and acting in Chinese. In these shows, the actor not only sings but also performs together with physical actions. During its development, it has evolved into *ju* which is also called Kunju (or Kun opera). Today, all Chinese performing groups are named after Kunju theatre.

昆 kun, 剧 ju (movement and singing)



Figure 1.4. Chinese Calligraphy “Kun Ju” by Yang Zaichun (1943-), Dec. 2017

Hi Liang Chenyu (AD1521-1594) developed the singing form of Kunqu opera into a physical action and divided the performance forms of the profession by developing on the work of Wei. He researched and learnt Kunqu knowledge from Wei. Therefore, from the Jiajing period of the Ming dynasty, the operatic forms of acting and singing that were divided according to profession on the stage were known as Kunqu opera. Liang wrote the well-known play *Huan Sha Ji (Tale of Rinsing Yarn)* in about 1521-1594, and there is a clear division between the actors from the beginning of the play. The performances and the different styles of makeup, costumes and props made Kunqu a subtle expression of the plot of a story and added personality to the roles with the addition of the physical actions in the performances.

The meanings of Kunshan qiang, Kunqu and Kunju should not be confused. Kunshan tune is singing without makeup or acting, Kunqu opera is singing with background music, while Kunju theatre is performed on a stage using a combination of singing and acting. These three different terms also represent three different stages of development, which form a connecting link between the preceding stage and the following stage. According to Yang, it is apparent that: ‘the three stages come down in one continuous line and develop serially, and when the whole process of the development of opera was completed, the melody form developed from simple to exquisite, and the singing form developed from singing without makeup and acting to singing with accompaniment. The Kunshan tune is old, Kunqu opera is new and Kunju theatre is fully developed; the three have different meanings and should not be confused.’⁶

⁶ Yang,R,Q, *Kun Qiang, Kun Qu, Kun Ju Bu Neng Hun Xiao*[N]. Zhong Guo Yi Shu Bao, 2014-01-03(008)



Figure 1.5. Kunju Chuan xi Suo site opposite the Suzhou Kunju Theatre, picture was taken in July 2017

In order to cultivate the performing talents of people from all walks of life, the Kunqu Opera School (in Chinese: Kunju Chuanxi Suo) was established in Suzhou to teach Kunju in 1921. Today, in order to protect influential Chinese opera music, the United Nations has included Chinese Kunqu opera on its intangible cultural heritage list. As some performance techniques in Kunju have been passed onto other types of opera, it is important to preserve the singing style of Kunqu for future generations. When concepts develop, the product of this development is based on the original concept, so it is understandable that Kunju theatre includes elements of Kunqu opera. In the reference book *The Chinese Kunqu Dictionary*, published by Nanjing University, the title in Chinese characters uses the term Kunju but in English, it is Kunqu, which proves that Kunju theatre includes Kunqu opera (Wu, 2001). Kunqu opera is a singing form of Kunju theatre; the development of the physical actions of Kunju theatre is obvious in Beijing opera. Beijing opera performances became much more improved after Mei Lanfang recommended that actors study Kunju theatre techniques.

1.3 Samples of Kunqu Opera

Kunqu opera often features melodious music and loud singing; it can create strong emotions in people, whether it depicts a pleasant story or one with a great deal of conflict. There is often a continuous theme throughout the performance. For example, in one scene of *The Peony Pavilion* named *You Yuan Jing Meng*, the hero and heroine meet and fall in love at first sight in a peony pavilion in a dream, and they secretly join for life until death. The Kunqu opera story uses a melodious flute, which represents thousands of years of Chinese philosophy and culture; the sound is vivid and can evoke emotions among the audience.

Most of the scripts in Kunqu opera are adapted from classical Chinese literature; the lines are antiquated and the writers were well-known in their time and are still famous in the literary field today. For example, *The Peony Pavilion* was written by a playwright named Tang Xianzu, who was an imperial court official and scholar.

Kunqu opera performance uses a framework that combines work from the Song (AD 960-1279) and Yuan (AD1271-1638) dynasties and zaju, which is a Chinese variety play and a generic term for a style of entertainment in which dance, song, monologue, balladry and farcical skits are given an integrated presentation.⁷ Zhezixi ‘selected scenes from unrelated operas, performed without narrative sequence’⁸, and each scene has its own story but still focuses on a key plot to connect with the next chapter of the opera. This means that many of the highlights from the opera can be performed independently. From the perspective of literary language, Kunqu opera inherits the advantages and strengths of ancient poetry from the Tang (AD 618-907), Song and

⁷ Za Ju: Zaju. (2000). In M. Banham (ed.), *The Cambridge Guide to Theater* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/cupthea/zaju/0?institutionId=1872>

⁸ Stenberg, J., & Jingjing, Zhang. (2015). Scholar Dong and Madam Li Step Out: Are There National Audiences for Chinese Traditional Regional Theatre? *Theatre Research International*, 40(1), 50-66.

Yuan dynasties, using long and short sentences to make lyrics. It makes traditional Chinese music euphonic through its tone, rhythm and syntax. It is different from Beijing opera, which uses seven-character poetry that has evolved based on seven words alongside ten words to sing a fixed number of words in each sentence.

Kunqu opera has been through over 600 years of development and evolution and has become a highly sophisticated form of drama. A conference entitled *To help China draw a ten-year plan for protecting and revitalizing Kunqu Opera* was held by the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) and the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China in 2001. Kunqu opera has a rich and colourful repertoire, with elegant diction, melodious tunes, delicate dancing, strong martial arts skills and sincere performances. It contains poetry, painting, literature, music, song and dance in one performance and is a highly integrated art form. The Chinese government and UNESCO have discussed the preservation and expansion of Kunqu opera. The Chinese government thinks highly of it and indicates that traditional and transnational cultures have gradually started to communicate with each other.

Kunqu opera uses a romaunt script structure and each play usually has more than 20 zhezixi (folded scripts). Each zhezixi can tell a short story within a larger play and can also relate to the main story while also being a small episode on its own. Many zhizixi scripts can be a play on their own..

In classical Kunqu opera, there is a relationship between the works and the historical context. From an early play like *Huan Sha Ji* through to *Ming Feng Ji* and *The Peony Pavilion*, to Qing dynasty works like *Qing Zhong Pu*, *Shi Wu Guan* and *Tao Hua Shan*, and even the romantic stories, the content features the social situation at the time as a background and shows the reality of people's lives. Analysis of the content of Kunqu opera's classical scripts in their context is provided in *Lin Chuan Si Meng*

*(Four Dreams of Linchuan)*⁹. The playwright Tang Xianzu (AD 1550-1616) criticised the feudal ethical code, exposed the dark side of officialdom, eulogised everlasting love and yearned for personal liberation. His work presented sharp revelations and profound analysis, as well as eulogised ideals.

Tang showed a typical generalisation of the dark politics during the late Ming dynasty in his works. In *The Peony Pavilion*, the characters Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei meet in a dream; Du Liniang dies of lovesickness but she comes back to life at the end of the story. The play exposed the feudal destruction of human nature and praised the young generation who wanted to break free of the shackles of feudal despotism to pursue their liberation. In the play *Zi Chai Ji*, the character Huo Xiaoyu's faithful love is praised and the feudal system that damaged human society at that time was exposed. The play also reflected the emotional opposition between the good and evil forces in the world.

In the play *Han Dan Ji*, Lu Sheng dreams of his civil and martial virtues in relation to his career as an official. Tang took inspiration from his examination of the darkness of imperial and feudal officialdom at that time. He exposed the corrupt feudal ruling class and the inevitable declining fate of his written work. *The Peony Pavilion* praises real love, while *Han Dan Ji* focuses on exposing darkness. The stories have two different themes that complement and corroborate each other. Tang conveyed his true feelings in his writing, criticising feudal darkness using his script and true emotions.

Chinese opera can be roughly divided into two structural types: qupaiti and banqiangti. Both of these are music for singing. Kunqu opera music follows a qupaiti structure and there are more than 1,000 qupai tunes. Kunqu opera singing also can either be Beiqu or Nanqu. Kunqu opera performers sing in a mildly delicate tone and their articulation is generally very gentle. There are four tones and the actors have a

⁹ Tang Xianzu's four play collection for *The Peony Pavilion*, *The Purple Flute*, *Record of Han Dan*, *Record of Southern Bough*.

broad range and need to sing with their real voice to harmonise with the other actors, which is very difficult. Kunqu operas often feature flutes as musical accompaniments.

The performance and the musical features of Kunqu opera mean that the dances are highly energetic and are as important as the singing when the actor is performing. Through their elegant performances, the actors dance and express their inner feelings when they are singing and acting to assist in the audience's interpretation of the lines. Through expressive imagery, transformation and a variety of decorative techniques, the dance movements in Kunqu opera are often considered by audiences as being very appealing; the movements are continuous and only through a long period of training can this combination of singing and dancing be realised. Sometimes, more enthusiastic dances such as fighting movements, along with more intense singing, can be used. In essence, Kunqu opera is a combination of dancing and singing in a synchronous performance. Every line, word and phrase has a fixed pose and facial expression to accompany it.

In the field of literature, most Kunqu opera scripts follow a romaunt style and a few of the scripts are in the zaju form. This is the traditional Chinese performance framework, and most of the authors of these plays were writers, playwrights or intellectuals.

2 Beijing Opera's Abrupt Rise and Kunqu Opera's Decline

2.1 Scramble between Kunqu Opera and Others

In the early years of the Qing dynasty, Kunqu was called Elegance Part, while other local operas were called Flower Parts. This esteemed title not only illustrates the aesthetic tastes and values of the ruling class at the time, but it also reflects the position of Kunqu in terms of opera as a whole. With its advantages, Kunqu established itself during a competition against rival opera forms over a period of 300 years. It was until late 18th century that Flower Parts raised up and flourished, which created a major new

challenge for Kunqu. This new competition continued for more than a century and, eventually, Kunqu lost the competition. Kunqu's market share decreased and its position in Chinese theatre also decreased, making Kunqu's power gradually decline. This is a famous conflict between Kunqu opera and other forms of opera in the history of Chinese theatre.

The conflict between Kunqu opera and other forms of opera was evident in Beijing. In the middle to late Emperor Qianlong period (AD 1736-1795), Kunqu massively declined and other local operas were on the rise, with Beijing opera emerging as dominant. In 1784, Tan Cui wrote in the poem *Za Yin*: 'No one would like to enjoy Kunqu, they choose *Er Huang*¹⁰'. Since 1790, when several Anhui province troupes went to Beijing, the capital has been in a state of chaos in theatre history of Chinese, thus showing that Kunqu had gone to Beijing.

2.2 Beijing Opera and Kunqu Opera Performance

Zaju, also known as northern Zaju in the Yuan dynasty, is a northern form of Han Chinese opera singing. During the Yuan dynasty, Chinese opera matured and this later had a deep impact on Kunqu opera. Kunqu opera then influenced Beijing opera, which improved Chinese opera as an artform.

Not only has Beijing opera been influenced by Yuan opera, but so have most traditional forms of Chinese opera. Yuan opera is an early dramatic form. Beijing opera began nearly 200 years ago in 1876¹¹ and it developed and grew into the contemporary Chinese theatre arts. Beijing opera and Yuan opera are quite different in terms of the specific forms of expression. For example, Yuan opera demonstrates less performance than Beijing opera but many traditional plays in Beijing opera are based on Yuan opera.

¹⁰ A Beijing opera tune.

¹¹ Qing dynasty Guangxu Period

Although Beijing opera only has 200 to 300 years of history, it has been influenced by 5,000 years of Chinese cultural development and has absorbed various forms of opera, as well as philosophy, thus representing China.

Mei Baojiu¹² recalled the words of Mei Lanfan: ‘after learning the basic Kunqu opera techniques, singing pihuang (the main melody in Beijing opera) becomes easier’, which is why Mei Lanfan’s performances of Beijing opera were different from traditional performance methods.’¹³ Mei Lanfan learnt a lot of Kunqu performance poses and singing, which merged with his body and thoughts, enabling him to become a distinctive master of Beijing opera.

Mei Baojiu said that ‘He constantly absorbed different performance methods from the external world, identified other people’s strong points to make up for his own deficiencies, and showed progress in his learning, which promoted cultural integration in his performance.’¹⁴ From ancient times to the present, there has been progress in human history because of continuous integration. Mei Lanfan trained with a combination of different kinds of Chinese theatre and most of the knowledge he learnt was from Kunqu Opera; he combined Beijing opera and Kunqu opera to improve his performances. The new performing style of Beijing opera was very popular and improved the Beijing Opera’s technique; it was the key point for Beijing opera’s performance development process.

Mei Baojiu stated that: the inner connection between the Mei School and Kunqu opera is mainly embodied in the performance. The feature of Kunqu opera is singing with dancing, singing is not interrupted while the actors move.¹⁵

¹² Mei Lanfan’s child

¹³ Mei Baojiu (2008), *Mei Pai Yi Shu Yu Kunqu Opera*, *Shanghai Theatre*, 2008-7

¹⁴ Mei Baojiu (2008), *Mei Pai Yi Shu Yu Kunqu Opera*, *Shanghai Theatre*, 2008-7

¹⁵ Mei Baojiu (2008), *Mei Pai Yi Shu Yu Kunqu Opera*, *Shanghai Theatre*, 2008-7

The movements of Kunqu opera are standardised and delicate. Taking the hand technique of the Dan (female character) role, for example, Qi Rushan lists more than 60 kinds of techniques as the model. Mei invited Ding Lansun, a famous performing artist in Kunqu opera to rearrange the movements in *Duan Qiao, Legend of the White Snake*; he acted with movements that were soft and exact. He used an orchid finger gesture. Mei Baojiu said that: ‘My father felt good, and applied this hand technique into the Beijing Opera, which broke the allegation that dan (female characters) were not permitted to expose their thumbs. In his old age, he performed Mu Guiying commands, where he applied this finger gesture into the movement of putting the mirror and looking, and obtain a good effect.’¹⁶ Mei learnt finger techniques from Kunqu opera and used these in Beijing opera.

Of course, there are still many limitations in Kunqu opera, which we cannot apply mechanically. For example, in the performance of *Yun Lu (Clouded Way)* in *Tian Nv San Hua*, the Kunqu opera performance should be uninterrupted.

In the above quote, Mei Baojiu means that Kunqu opera can be used as a reference. However, it should not necessarily be all of it. That being said, if a modern drama actor can master Kunqu opera’s many basic performance movements, singing tunes and rhythm, they will surely improve their overall performance on the stage. Moreover, their inner creativity will likely be more developed to give a good performance, which will make the characters’ features more rounded. Mei Lanfang learnt various performance methods and discussed them with actors, which undoubtedly helped him to become a master of performance in China. At a conference, Yu Zhenfei said: ‘When Mr Mei passed away, we could not find a better performer than him. His life is modest with moral integrity.’¹⁷ He continued:

¹⁶ Mei Baojiu (2008), *Mei Pai Yi Shu Yu Kunqu Opera*, *Shanghai Theatre*, 2008-7

¹⁷ Juyong (2004), *Qian Wu Gu Ren Hou Wu Lai Zhe- Yu Zhenfei Yi Mei Lanfang*, *Peking Opera of China*, 2004-11

Mr Mei adapted *Mu Guiying Commands*, a previous Henan Yu opera into a Beijing opera. It was at this period of time that I and Yan Huizhu went to Beijing to perform the opera *Pei Shaojun and Li Qianjun*. Upon my arrival, Mr Mei told me, ‘Look at this script of *Mu Guiying Commands*. Here is one scene from “Holding the Seal”’, and I absorbed the movements of Yang Xiao Lou’s *Tie Long Shan* and merged them into it.¹⁸

This reveals that Mei not only propagated the slogan of ‘learning widely from others’ strong points’ but he also applied it in practice. He usually observed others’ singing and absorbed it into his own performance. When necessary, he would put it into practical use. Therefore, for the spoken scenes in the opera, it is not easy to determine their difficulty but they do include the four skills of singing, speaking, acting and kung fu. There are five canons, which are the hands, the eyes, the body, the intention and the stances. For just these skills, performers should spend at least six to seven years learning and perfecting them. However, this does not mean that performers cannot further master these skills after they have learnt them. Mei often said:

Dare to step out of the conventions, for example, the rules which our predecessors made. Students should learn the stylized things. But if you only move these stylized things, you cannot play out the inherent emotion. So, you should stand on a higher level of thinking, and recreate it through artistic exaggeration. It is very difficult.¹⁹

3 Kunqu Opera’s Techniques Influence Most Chinese Traditional Theatre

3.1 Research at Suzhou Kunju Theatre

¹⁸ Juyong (2004), *Qian Wu Gu Ren Hou Wu Lai Zhe- Yu Zhenfei Yi Mei Lanfang, Peking Opera of China*, 2004-11

¹⁹ Ju, Y. (2004), *Qian Wu Gu Ren Hou Wu Lai Zhe- Yu Zhenfei Yi Mei Lanfang, Peking Opera of China*, 2004-11

During an interview in July 2017, Ding Yu Ming, a young actor at the Suzhou Kunju Theatre said: ‘Daily practice is to pave the way for creating characters better’. This means that practice and psychological creation need to mutually complement and interact with each other. Many Chinese film actors and actresses have transferred from being opera actors and they generally believe that the learning experience of opera enriches their performances of contemporary works and makes their creations more powerful and free.

During the video of the young actors’ exercises at Suzhou Kunju Theatre in the morning, movements for stamina training were included in *chuan shou*, *shuan yao*, *dao shou*, *shuang fei yan*, *wo yu*, *sao tui* and *pao yuan chang*.



Figure 1.6 Actors training in the morning at Suzhou Kunju Theatre, picture was taken in July 2017

Chuan shou (Hand crossing): This is a performance formula term. This is a kind of hand gesture and its details are as follows. Drop one’s arms naturally, look straight ahead and step forward (the dan steps with the right foot behind the left foot and the Sheng steps towards the left in a ‘T’ shape), lift the left hand, then turn it so that the wrist and palm face down. Then, lift the right palm towards the front of the chest with the fingertips facing upward and the palm facing inward and make the back of the wrist lie on the left wrist facing the right palm. Next, make the right hand cross the left palm and lift it in the upper right direction, cross the left palm in a lower left direction, make the back of the hand face forward, turn one’s body towards the right front direction with the eyes looking at the left front direction. The above formula is

called right hand crossing. In reverse, it is called left hand crossing (Wang Zhenglai ed.2002).²⁰

Shuan yao (Twist waist): This is a performance formula term and the four movements of bowing forward, bowing to the left, bending back and bending to the right of the waist are consecutive. The performer stands in a big 'ba zibu' (or the Chinese character 八; the form of the feet look like this character), with feet a bit wider than the shoulders and hands with palms facing upwards, which is called 'jian juzhi' (sword fingers). The arms perform 'shun feng qi', or raising the right hand slightly higher than the left arm when it is horizontal, fingertips pointing upwards on the right side, putting the left hand towards the upper right side or in front of the chest. Standing upright and straight, the performer looks at the right hand and slightly bends their two legs, the left hand moves down to the left side, the right hand moves with the body, then the body bends forward to the same height as the knees. The head is raised and the back is straight, becoming the 'qian wan yao (bend forward)'. Then, the right hand moves around to the left from the back of the right side, and the upper body and waist move around in a circle towards the left side; this is 'zuo ce yao (waist sway to left side)'.

The waist should be strong to maintain balance. The right hand then continues to move from the right side to the back of the right side and the left hand moves to the back of the left side. The performer looks up with a straight back and then bends backwards, which is 'xia yao shi' (bend back from waist). From behind the back, the left hand moves to the right side, and the upper body and waist move to the right side, which is the 'you ce yao' (bending to the right side). The left hand continues by moving to the left side to go through 'qian wan yao' (bending the waist forward) to the left side with a straight arm on the right side. Standing still, the right hand follows towards the upper left side or left in front of the chest, looking forward and striking a

²⁰ Wu Xinlei (2002), *Dictionary of Chinese Kunqu Opera*, pub: Nan jing da xue chu ban she

pose. The actions need to be carried out continuously and finished within a series. If the performer continues by completing more than one of these series, it is called ‘shuan yao’ (succession of waist twists).²¹

Shuan yao is used in performances on stage mainly to show a character’s valour and vigour. For instance, it is performed by Zhang Fei in *Lu Cao Ji*, *Hua Dang*, Hu Sanniang in *Bao Jian Ji*, *Ye Ben* and Yang Bjie in *Dang Ma*; most dan roles include this sequence. It also keeps the body in balance. The arms should not be too close together and they should be shoulder width apart. The performer should not look down at the ground or their hat could fall off.

Dao shou (Hand reversing): This is a performance formula term. This is a kind of hand gesture and the details of it are as follows. Drop both arms naturally and step in the shape of ‘ding zibu’ (the feet stand in a shape like a Chinese character ‘丁’, which looks like the English letter T) facing the left while looking in a left front direction. Lift both hands to the left with the palms down. The two hands are crossed from the left side over the top of the head, crossing towards the lower left to form a circle of 360 degrees from the right upper direction and the right lower direction. The above sequence is called left hand reversing. In reverse, it is called right hand reversing (Wang Zhenglai ed.2002).

Pao yuan chang (Running circle): This is a performance sequence term. This is a kind of step gesture, which is also called the ‘running circle’. It is categorised into two sequences: the sheng sequence and the dan sequence. The details of the stamina training for the sheng sequence are as follows. Hold one’s left fist to the side of one’s left rib, using the right hand to form the ‘dan shan bang’ gesture (the gesture of the ‘first appearance on the stage’) and forming the ‘corrugated palms’. This involves turning one arm to place the right hand onto the right side of the forehead and folding

²¹ Hong, Weizhu (2002), *Kun Qu Ci Dian*, Pub, Yilan Xian: Guo li chuan tong yi shu zhong xin, P597-598

one arm to the chest using one's left hand. It requires the following left T-shape steps. The left toes are lifted slightly towards the outside, kicking the heel, hooking the instep, marching forward and crossing over. Meanwhile, the right foot moves on and moves naturally with the essential movements being similar to the left foot. The two feet move alternately according to these above requirements. The specific requirements also include being subtle in the upper part of the body and strong in the lower part of the body, relaxing the neck and shoulders and abdominal curls. The steps should be slow at first and then fast with uniformity and flexible strength. The stride should be within eight inches to one foot. The details of the stamina training for the dan sequence are as follows. Touch one's waist using the left hand and use the right hand to form the 'dan shan bang' gesture and stamp with the right foot. When starting the movement, the instep is hooked with the right foot. The other essential movements are similar to those for the stamina training for the sheng sequence. The stride should be within three to four inches, which is appropriate. The following should be considered: levelling the shoulders, buckling the chest, swaying the waist, protruding the stomach and sticking out the hips (Wang Zhenglai ed.2002).

In these conventions, the movements practise the body from head to toe. According to the *Dictionary of Kunqu Opera* (2001), there are the following skills: 34 types of feet trainings; 49 types of hands, palms and arms trainings; nine types of eye trainings; 12 types of water sleeves skills; five types of hairstyling skills; 14 types of facial expression skills; nine types of Lingzi²² work skills; six types of fan skills; five types of yunshou skills; three types of candlelight skills; three types of walking skills; 42 types of characteristic movement skills; 14 types of stunts skills; 15 types of soft blanket skills; 14 types of hard; 72 types of stage weapon prop skills; 21 types of sheng roles with mixed hand convention; 20 types of sheng roles with mixed water sleeves conventions; 20 types of sheng roles with mixed folding fan sequences; 20 types of dan roles with mixed hand convention; 20 types of dan roles with mixed water sleeves

²² Lingzi: long pheasant tail feathers worn on warriors' helmets in Chinese opera. (*A New English-Chinese Dictionary*, 2011.01.01)

sequences; 23 types of dan roles with mixed variety fan sequences.

There are many performance conventions in Kunqu opera so actors and students cannot really learn all of them. However, there are different types of roles (in Chinese: hang dang) in Kunqu opera. Actors of all types train with the basic convention and have targeted meticulous training with their own type of role.

In one scene of *The Peony Pavilion*, a tutor called Du Bao teaches a poem in *Classic of Poetry* (1046-771 BC) to main female role Du Liniang. The poem is ‘Two ospreys cry on the islet in the river; The fair maiden attracts [the] gentleman’s heart’. Du feels very sad and sentimental after hearing this poetry. She starts expecting love after she travels to see the beautiful flowers in the family garden with her maidservant. When she goes back to her boudoir, she feels tired and sleeps on the desk. Then, she dreams of a handsome young man holding a willow branch who is called Liu Mengmei. They fall in love and get married without their parents’ permission at the Peony Pavilion in Du’s dream. After she wakes up, she finds herself alone in her bedroom. There is no Liu and the marriage was a dream. Du gets lovesick and dies. Thus, this play features very traditional scenes of Kunqu opera, like *Youyuan* (Travelling in the Garden), *Jingmeng* (Dream Interrupted) and *Xunmeng* (Seeking the Dream).

Dreaming of a lover, she fell sick; once sick she became ever worse; and finally, after painting her own portrait as a legacy to the world, she died. Dead for three years, still she was able to live again when in the dark underworld her quest for the object of her dream was fulfilled. To be as Bridal Du is truly to have known love.²³

The Peony Pavilion is the most famous Kunqu opera work of the Ming dynasty dramatist Tang Xianzu (1550-1616). *The Peony Pavilion*, *The Purple Hairpin*, *The*

²³ Tang Xianzu (1550-1616), *The Peony Pavilion*: Mudan ting, 2nd ed. P9, pub: Bloomington: Indiana University Press c2002

Handan Dream and *Nanke Dream* are collectively known as the *Four Dreams at Yu Mingtang* (also known as the *Four Dreams of Linchuan*). *The Peony Pavilion* includes a lot of ghosts and heresies. The play praises the spirit of the scholar in Liu Mengmei and Du Liniang in pursuing free love, and it is firmly against oppression. The words reflect that as long as there is love in a couple's hearts, whether they are alive or dead, one who is alive can die for love, and in contrast, one who is dead can also be reborn because of love. This is true love that can overcome any difficulties and can survive through any pain. The story also shows Taoist ideas in that one can detach their inner spirit completely and get absolute freedom, which complements Zhuangzi's concept of universal unification and freedom.

You Yuan Jing Meng (An Amazing Dream) is the scene of Liu and Du's first meeting; the actors express an affectionate, shy impulsion and pure love through their eyes. As Kunqu opera itself is an elegant and subtle theatre art form, the music used is soft and graceful, the actor's figures show grace and elegance and the lyrics and speech are melodious, sounding like the tune of a flute-based musical instrument.

Du is a 16-year-old girl and the daughter of the satrap. She knows nothing about the back garden as she has grown up in the boudoir. The famous tune *Zao Luo Pao* describes the scene of the day that Du's personal maid Chunxiang finds a beautiful garden and takes her to view it. They are surprised at the amazing view and realise that if they had never found this garden, they would not have known such a beautiful and attractive sight.

At this moment, Du is holding a folding fan, and Chunxiang is holding a circular flat fan. They convey the emotions of the characters with gestures and singing on the stage, referring to the surrounding environment and the weather.



Figure 1.7 *An Amazing Dream, The Peony Pavilion*, published by Ye Shi Nan Shu Ying in Qing Qianlong renzi [57 nian, 1792], this book was included in the SOAS Library.

Du Liniang:

Chunxiang:

(Sings)

The flying clouds at dawn and the drizzling rain at dusk

The emerald pavilion shrouded in rosy clouds;

Fine threads of rain amidst slices of gentle breeze,

Gilded pleasure boat in waves of mist:

All the glories of spring are little treasured by screen-secluded maid!²⁴

The lyrics ‘Fine threads of rain amidst slices of gentle breeze, Gilded pleasure boat in waves of mist’ vividly describe the action of boating in a breeze, and Chunxiang uses a flexible wrist action to hold the fans to express the flowing movement of hazy sprays and cloud. Du conceals her face shyly with the fan, and her eyes show her admiration and longing for the future. In addition to their appearance, the expression in their eyes is an important method of communicating lines for the actors. The eyes can accurately convey the emotions of the characters to the audience when they are speaking or singing, and their eyes and feet work in harmony with their figure so that the audience better understands the performance. In the *Youth Edition of the Peony*

²⁴ Fu Hongchu (2012), *Chinese Drama*, pub: Bei jing da xue chu ban she, p225

*Pavilion*²⁵ and Du was played by Shen Fengying. Shen Guofang acts the innocent and illiterate Chunxiang vividly, and her expressive eyes enrich the unique character.

The two young girls are pleasantly surprised when they first see the spring garden. After returning to the boudoir, Du is still immersed in the scene of lakes and mountains and the beauty of flowers in full bloom. When she rests beside a desk, she has a dream of falling in love at first sight with a handsome and refined young man who is holding a willow branch. They privately marry under the Peony Pavilion.

Liu Mengmei:

Lady, my heart is filled with love for you.

(Sings):

[Red Mountain Peach]

For your beauty that flowers with the flowing river of time.

I sought you everywhere.

But you languish in your chamber.

(Speaks):

Lady, let's talk over there.

Liniang:

Where?

Liu Mengmei (Sings):

Well...around yonder peony lattice.

Right by the pond-side hill;

Let us undo our color button and loosen our sash.

Bite the ends of your sleeve.

And bear with this tender sleep.

(Sing together):

²⁵ Pai Hsien-Yung arranged and edited Youth Edition play (2004-), *The Peony Pavilion*.

Have we met somewhere before?

Gazing at each other in wonder.

As we meet in this wonderful place, without speaking a word.

*(Exit together)*²⁶

When Liu (the sheng role) sings ‘For your beauty that flowers with the flowing river of time. I sought you everywhere. But you languish in your chamber’, the dan and sheng actors look at each other and, at the same time, they swing their sleeves to portray the fluidity of time and space. Symmetrical performance is one of the features of Kunqu opera and, as the actors sing about love, they perform hazy movements to reflect their love in the Peony Pavilion. The hazy loose movement on the stage is a representation of life and the actors perform it very soulfully. They give a good performance because they have practised the four basic skills to convey the story to the audience. Another aspect is the five canons, which help performers to interpret deep emotions. This is not only to put themselves into a role but also to involve the audience in the story so that they feel sad or happy with the characters.

Regarding the actors themselves, after a long training period for the basic skills, they can naturally show emotions. In the videos for the Suzhou Kunju Theatre, the young actors' shuan yao (twist waist) is combined with hand and eye movements. They keep their eyes on their hands and maintain a regular and consistent movement with their waists, maintaining a balance between the upper and lower parts of the body. The breathing makes the movement smooth, while the eyes also move smoothly, just like running water, which can be said to represent internal and external unity, or the ‘yin and yang’²⁷ balance. One can express feelings through actions and languages. Therefore, if actors want to act their roles well, they need to

²⁶ Lindy Li Mark (2008), translated youth edition *The Peony of Pavilion*. digital Chinese text with English translation, pub: Digital Heritage

²⁷ Yin and yang philosophy was a feature of the Taoist school by Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi.

experience each character, just as Stanislavski's theatrical performance system explains. They need to integrate themselves with the role, experience it and express it.

Actors cannot be required to understand the deep-seated thoughts of every person as it can be very difficult to understand others' grief or joy. People often say that they understand others or they sympathise with others, but understanding and sympathy are not the same. Understanding is having the same feelings as others; sympathy is feeling emotions for other people. Therefore, regardless of the life of the actors, they cannot completely understand others' feelings without experiencing them. For example, one cannot really understand the pain and distress of one who has lost their loved ones if they have never experienced such a thing. Moreover, if two characters fall in love, just like Du and Liu, then people without such an experience may not understand such pleasure. Therefore, having experience is a very important skill for actors. Through their journey from childhood to old age, if the actors experience real life, they can act the roles with feeling on stage. Conversely, if an actor does not perform using true experiences, they should learn more performing skills to represent profound emotions. No matter whether it is innate or not, actors should all learn knowledge to improve and reinforce their performance skills.

But muscles can fire action potentials and produce rhythmic contractions without neuronal input – no one doubts that the heart keeps its own counsel. Is it possible that muscles can direct locomotory behaviour on their own? In a recent issue of *The Journal of Physiology*, Zhao-Wen Wang's group (Liu et al., 2011) suggests that it is possible.²⁸

The above article discusses the process of the memory function of the muscle, which

²⁸ Liu, Q., & Jorgensen, E. (2011). *Muscle memory*. *Journal of Physiology*, 589(4), 775-776.

can produce movement without innervation. This is the memory of the muscles formed by performing the same action for a long time; this is also called 'practice' in performance studies. The muscle memory function can evolve into subconscious actions over time and then an actor's stage creativity is not affected due to them not having to think about the action. The actor Ding says on video: 'For example, when we are doing this position with the hand in front of the abdomen, after a long period of daily practice, the position of each hand is the same, neither too high nor low, neither before nor after'. The actor to practise physical movements on the stage in order to express their creative thinking better and more accurately.

3.2 Highly Sophisticated Movement and Imagination Techniques

This study researches physical training and imagination and the complementary relationship between them. External and internal factors build a comprehensive artistic picture through the human and physically dynamic body. It is necessary for actors to go through inner experiences as without fully understanding and interpreting the characters in a play, the performance would be lacking.

An actor's physical exercises are generally very basic. An actor puts effort into expressing the personality of their characters to the audience through their inner feelings. However, due to the limitations of the external conditions of their body, they may fail to achieve unity between the internal and external factors during a performance. The Chinese saying 'you can boil dumplings in a teapot but you cannot pour them out of the teapot'²⁹ means that something in the heart cannot be expressed accurately by means of external capabilities. There are some occasions in real life when the inner feelings cannot be expressed verbally but when body language can be used to convey these feelings to an audience. When encountering such a role, an actor's physical performance is an interpretation of inner activity.

²⁹ A saying in Chinese, it means not thinking clearly.

For this reason, there is a question as to whether gymnasts or dancers would make good actors through their physical movements. Stanislavski maintains that actors should actively feel a role's emotions and convert their own emotions into art. Such artistic appreciative ability and performance calls for continuous accomplishment in and enthusiasm for literature and art and in-depth exploration into the role, as well as a need to approach the performance with consideration of the role's historic background. Therefore, both single shapes and single appreciative abilities can perfectly express a role's profound significance. Of course, perfection does not necessarily exist, but people from all walks of life aim to reach a higher state of mind. Only through this can society advance and can human civilisation progress unceasingly.

To integrate inner and outer performance, not only are techniques and enthusiasm for creating a role required but so is the capability to shape the characteristics of a role in order to achieve a higher level of performance. Movement training is the first step to cultivating an actor's inner imagination. As actors practise more frequently, they will gain experience of the significance of the performance via exercises. For example, traditional Chinese drama actors who have practised for ten years demonstrate evident distinctions on the stage from those who have practised for one year. Moreover, there are many film and television actors today who can switch roles without undergoing regular performance training. They are involved in this career because of their enthusiasm and gift for acting.

Nonetheless, the majority of actors who do not undergo professional performance training demonstrate poorer abilities in terms of dialogue and the external shaping of the body. However, film and television performance can disguise the actors' deficiencies when the actor may not be very good at their lines or movement by using advanced digital technology during post-production. That being said, actors' gestures and expressions can be amplified in a shot and presented to the audience. Although digital technology can disguise this, it is still present. For stage actors, the deficiencies

in their dialogue and movement cannot be disguised. They face the audience directly, rather than the camera.

It is not possible to repeat a stage performance that has gone wrong. Although the audience cannot meticulously observe the performance of the actors' expressions like they do on screen, they can fully observe the roles that the actors are portraying. Therefore, both stage actors and film and television actors must be refined internally and externally; their physical and mental creativity must be practised together so as to present a good performance to the audience.

Hegel pointed out that 'the common purposes and actions of human beings have to be individually embodied as animate substantial existence by means of poems' (1835, *Lectures on Aesthetics*).³⁰ He objected to the personalisation of abstract purport and superficial individual embodiments. He demanded an integral to coordinate mood, character, action and purpose and to write animated and personalised characters. Hegel also expounds the essential differences between imitating characters and imitating actions. Imitating actions is a common process in conveying roles. However, imitating characters is the individual actor's understandings of the roles. Therefore, students can imitate the actions of teachers to achieve the goal of learning skills during physical raining. This kind of learning is common among students. However, individuals are different. Individuals may not get the same benefits from the same education. With the constant accumulation and grasp of knowledge and skills, individual actors gradually become different in thoughts, psychology and external skills in the actor group.³¹

When actors finish performing their actions, this experience seems to be a circular

³⁰ Wang, Z,L,. *Xi Ju Ben Ti Lun Ji Yi Jing Ju Wei Dai Biao De Zhong Guo Xi Qu Zhi Te Zheng* [J]. *Wen Xue Ping Lun*, 2002,(06):136-147.

³¹ Wang, Z,L,. *Xi Ju Ben Ti Lun Ji Yi Jing Ju Wei Dai Biao De Zhong Guo Xi Qu Zhi Te Zheng* [J]. *Wen Xue Ping Lun*, 2002,(06):136-147.

process going from imitation and practising their actions offstage many times to experiencing the behavioural characteristics of the actions that are performed as part of their roles. Stanislavski strongly agreed with Meyerhold's ideas of biomechanics training when he met Meyerhold again in his later years. Additionally, Meyerhold also said that he and Stanislavski sought for the same goal in art, as if they were digging the same tunnel.³² The difference between them was that they dug the tunnel from two different directions, although they were sure to converge eventually. Stanislavski and Meyerhold acknowledge that the physical training of actors and the performances that show experiences from real life supplement and complete each other.

But how are we to find something of a general nature that is applicable to *all* as the road to the achievement of the final goal of creative art by everyone individually? Let us see if we cannot find in the nature of the human feelings themselves steps that are common to all and on which, as on the rungs of a ladder, everyone can climb up so as to attain the desired end of becoming a creative artist on the stage (1962: 163, Schechner).³³

From this passage, it can be seen that Stanislavski objected to imitating the performances of others. However, he did not deny the fact that actors should imitate and learn from their teachers during training as this process is the only road to the creation of an individualised performance. The performance of actors is a rigorous process of psychological activity and responses, which is reflected through physical actions, facial expressions and sound. However, these seemingly external performances are not professional if they completely depend on natural instincts without professional training. Even if an actor has talent and plays a role well, their

³² Li,W. (2014) *Exploration and analysis of Meyerhold Biomechanics*[J], *Xin Shi Ji Ju Tan*, (2):38-43)

³³ Richard Schechner (1981), *Between theatre anthropology*, pub: University Of Pennsylvania Press, p 214

performance is limited without professional training.

The Stanislavski system shows that the fundamental process of performance art is to create vivid character images through the body, mind and the real experiences of the actors. For this reason, actors are first required to draw upon real experiences on the stage, understand the given situations and relationships between the characters as they would in real life, judge and consider everything happening on the stage carefully, act using real psychological desires and obtain a real and organic self-perception on the stage. This basic law of performance art should be followed by actors.

An actor's spoken skills are based on breathing and pronunciation exercises and daily vocalisations. Sometimes, when actors perform a play without lines on the stage, they can express and convey their thoughts to the audience through movement alone. Of course, facial expressions are also very important and the emotions are communicated directly to the audience so that every part of the body is used during the performance. In addition to the voice, other elements are essential. Training also starts with these basic exercises. As for literature, music, poetry and painting, actors can also study these fields if they are interested in them, but it is not necessary for them to be familiar with them. These fields can be studied according to their interests and choices. However, these fields can indeed be helpful when creating a role. Nevertheless, movement is the initial training for an actor. As explained by Meyerhold (1914, p.94), a well-known dramatist:

Movement is the most powerful means of expression in the creation of a theatrical production. Deprived of words, costumes, footlights, wings, [and a] theatre auditorium, and left only with the actor and his mastery of movement, the theatre would still remain theatre. The spectator would learn the thoughts and motives of the actor by his

movements, his gestures and his facial expressions.³⁴

This quotation shows that Meyerhold's proposition is that physical training can support performance skills. If actors do not show movements, their inner creation and expression may not be well suited to the demands of multiple roles. Therefore, movement skills are the most powerful element in all performances.

Internal creativity can create vivid characters but if an actor's performance skills, rhythm and line delivery are not suitable, the actor may not be able to express all their thoughts on the stage. In other words, only when the movement skills reach a certain level can they be combined with further consideration and creation to create a role.

Performance indeed includes skills but there are also parts of performance where there is no skill. This means that while the best performances indeed use techniques, there may be no trace of acting; it is like the role is part of real life. This includes movement, rhythm and breathing techniques. The imitation of other people's actions may look like simple work. However, to make the audience feel that a play is natural and real and that it is not a contrived performance, the actors need to practise many exercises to become capable on the stage; all performances rely on imitation for further creation.

Meyerhold's biomechanics technique strengthens the control of the body's abilities and its balance, as well as control over rhythm on the stage. All of these factors are part of good basic training and further psychological creation.

³⁴Almalaw and Mel Gordon (1996) *Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics. Actor in Revolutionary Russia*. McFarland & Company, Inc., p.23

As part of traditional Chinese opera training methods, a young actor learns posture exercises from a master from the beginning of their learning period. Over time, the actor will study new projects at different levels. During their study, masters also teach students music, literature and singing so as to strengthen the students' performances on the stage. This is because, in Chinese opera, singing and dialogue are integrated into the performance, which greatly increases the difficulty during study. Hence, in ancient times, when masters chose students, they would look at the child applicant's body shape, appearance and voice, and if the external conditions did not match the teacher's requirements, the master would not accept the student.

Many students spend ten years learning movement and creation, depending on each student's circumstances. While a good student may be able to perform on stage earlier than ten years, some students who do not reach the master's requirements may need to practise more until they can perform on stage. When they are ready to start performing, the master will allow them to perform on stage in front of an audience. Therefore, since ancient times in China, if an actor gives an operatic performance on the stage, this means that the actor has experienced a great deal of hard work behind the stage that people might not know about. They practise every day and there are movement exercises for every part of the body, as well as vocal exercises and music and literature to study. These are very lengthy courses that students need to study every day. Therefore, most opera actors study the integrated arts. Further to this, although Mei Lanfang trained hard for several decades, he also had artistic skills and talent.

To be able to demonstrate skilled actions combined with powerful psychological creation, movement is the basis of a performance. If there is no basic movement, enthusiasm alone cannot create a good interpretation of a role.

The basic skills are only put in the performance conventions terms and are embodied through the performance sequence terms. Although basic

skills are everywhere in Kunqu opera, they are generally not performed as one single form. Although the performance conventions terms are a performing arts cell, their status is technical. When the performance sequence terms are in a dramatic perspective that means the technique acquires a new artistic level and becomes an integral part of the performing arts.³⁵

3.3 Kunqu Opera Actors and Contemporary Drama

Hou Changrong, the television actor who played the two roles of Liu Xianglian and the Prince of Peiching in the television series *Dream of Red Mansions* (1987), graduated from Jiangsu Provincial Drama School in 1978 and focused on xiao sheng (young male characters). He belongs to a generation of descendants of Yangzhou opera taught at Jin schools, named after Jin Wangui's school of performance. As with Kunqu opera, roles include sheng (male roles), dan (female roles), jing (painted face roles) and chou (clown roles) in Yangzhou opera. Many of the performance styles are taken from Kunqu opera and Beijing opera. In the modern theatrical repertoire, Yangzhou opera also draws some inspiration from drama, but its traditional comedic features have not been changed. Hou believes that his background of Chinese traditional opera has helped with his performance work on television series and films.

In September 2017, the television series *Nothing Gold Can Stay* was a modern television series and the lead actress Sun Li is recognised as a top actress in the film and television industry. Her performance has enabled the audience to understand the innermost feelings of the well-rounded characters. Her speciality was being a dancer and having changed work to performing arts, she is a physically skilled actress and is full of passion in the performance. Hou played the character of Sun Li's uncle in this television series and played opposite Sun Li. During his performance, the

³⁵ Wu Xinlei (2011), *Kun Qu Yi Shu Gai Lun (Kunqu Art Theory)*, pub: Shan xi chuan mei ji tuan·Shan xi jiao yu chu ban she, p107

rolling of his eyes or a line made the character vivid and the performance more distinct. Therefore, regardless of whether it is dance or opera, actors should learn more performance knowledge to enrich their own thoughts and performances.



Figure 1.8 *Nothing Gold Can Stay* stage photos for Hou Changrong, pictures downloaded from Hou's Weibo page



Figure 1.9 *Nothing Gold Can Stay* stage photos for Hou Changrong, pictures downloaded from Hou's Weibo page

Pitches includes a passage of Garin's words in his book *Vsevolod Meyerhold* (2003): Biomechanical training might be compared to a pianist's studies...Mastering ... technical difficulties of the exercises and etudes does not provide the student with a prescription for the [lyical] energy necessary, let's say, to perform Chopin's nocturne[s]...yet he must master the techniques in order to master [it]. Technique

arms the imagination.³⁶

Garin was one of Meyerhold's students. In this paragraph, Garin gives the example of executant performances like Chopin's nocturnes and explains that a lot of practice of techniques is needed to demonstrate the lyrical sensitivity. It also proves that training is the basis of imagination and passion.

Every organ of the human body is moving and full of vitality and life. Every cell of the human body pushes life forward through ceaseless movement, while the universe that is independent of the individuals is also continuously moving and developing. All of the species in nature, such as animals and plants, as well as geology and the atmosphere are evolving in a state of movement. Human thought is also continuously developing and changing, which is also a process of ideological movement. Like Meyerhold, who learnt a strong foundation of dramatic performance from Stanislavski, Eisenstein introduced the montage theory in combination with Meyerhold's theoretical basis. Step-by-step, the external body movements and the internal ideological movements and conclusions are moving. Therefore, the importance of movement to humankind cannot be overlooked.

It is in this way that Meyerhold's biomechanics combine movement with the characteristics of dramatic performance so that the actions of the human body can be trained and that the connotations and meanings of performance can be expressed in a skilful way. Pitches comments in *Vsevolod Meyerhold*: 'You have never seen a pianist practice scale in the music hall, yet you know their touching performance is an outcome of thousands of hours of practice'³⁷. Likewise, the body's morphology in biomechanics, or the modelling sketches, do not appear on the stage but can influence an actor's movements in front of the audience.

³⁶ Jonathan Pitches (2003), *Vsevolod Meyerhold*, Routledge, p 67

³⁷ Jonathan Pitches (2003), *Vsevolod Meyerhold*, pub: Routledge, p67

Chapter II: Kunqu Opera Freestyle Movement

1 Kunqu Performance

1.1 Kunqu Methods

The hands, eyes, body, intention and the stances are the basic skill trainings of performance known as the four skills. The five methods are typically called the five canons. The hands means hand gesture technique; the eyes means eye expression techniques; the body means techniques that use the neck, shoulders, waist and hips; the stances refer to the techniques of different footwork; intention refers to 'impression' and is from the *Heart Sutra*, which says 'No eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body or mind (the six senses of the *Heart Sutra*); no forms, sounds, scent, tastes, touch, dharmas (the six dusts)'. Intention is related to the 'imagining of things' so intention plays a role in coordinating the five canons. These five methods are not only linked to physical shape and inner creation, but they also make the performance more coordinated and unified.

The four skills and the five canons are terms relating to the basic skills in performance that Chinese theatre actors need to train and possess. The four skills are singing, speaking, acting and kung fu.

Singing, speaking, acting are the basis of performance. These are the four types of Kunqu opera stage performances and they are known as the customary four skills. Singing refers to singing voices, speaking refers to spoken lines, acting refers to body movements and facial expressions and kung fu refers to the general terms for martial arts. Opera performance art is mainly made up of the two major elements of song and dance. Singing and speaking belong to the category of song, and acting and kung fu belong to the category of dance.

There are more than 300 kinds of traditional operas, including Kunqu opera in China,

and the opera actors need to practise the four skills and five canons within all of these operatic styles. Although the performance styles show little differences due to various local customs, history and other related factors, there is no doubt that they have been influenced by Kunqu opera. In Yu Qiuyu's book *The History of Chinese Theatre* (in Chinese *Zhongguo Xiqu Shi*) it is recorded that: 'The theories in Chinese traditional theatre history are largely from Kunqu opera. Neither with Kunqu theory during the Ming or Qing dynasties did Chinese theatre have a systemic theory until Wang Guowei's³⁸ appearance.'³⁹

Kunqu opera has an important status in the history of Chinese opera. Kunqu opera included Yuan zaju, nanqu and beiqu forms, among other local operas, and it came to affect all of Chinese local opera in its rise in Chinese theatre history.

The foreword written about Kunqu theory in Yu's *The History of Chinese Theatre* features a reference to Li Yu's *Xian Qing Oau Ji*. Yu explains that actors do not only need to possess physical techniques, but also imagination. A translation of the original Chinese of Li Yu's *Xian Qing Ou Ji* is:

Speaker, talk from the heart, if an actor wants to perform a role, it means that the actor speaks instead of the role, so the actor has to put their real heart into the role, to be real during the performance. An actor needs to be personally on the scene and there should be true feeling in it.⁴⁰

This means that when an actor is performing, the actor should deliver their emotions to the audience and must put their whole heart into the character to show imagination

³⁸ Wang Guowei (03/12/1877-02/06/1927) was a famous Chinese scholar from the late Qing dynasty to the early Republic of China period.

³⁹ Yu, Qiuyu (2013), *Zhong Guo Xi Ju Shi*, pub: Chang Jiang Wen Yi Chu Ban She, P186

⁴⁰ Li Yu (1611-1680), *Xian Qing Ou Ji*, Chapter 3 [*Yu Qiu Xiao Si*], Pub: Tai Wan Shi Dai Shu Ju Yin Hang, 1975, p50

on the stage. This is also an important theory for Stanislavski. From ancient theatre theory to contemporary theatre theory, and from China to the West, both imagination and physical techniques are relevant to performance.

Another important point of this topic is that Kunqu opera is a useful option for actors during training. As shown above, if Mei Lanfang did not learn from his Kunqu experience, he would not have deviated from the Beijing opera style to improve it, so Mei enhanced his acting technique via Kunqu opera.

Yu and Mei repeatedly stressed the importance of emotion and the shape of the body. Emotion and shape complement one another and need to be combined together. This is also related to the theory of the yin and yang of all things, as Chinese people often say. The actor Ding said in the practice work video: ‘When the teacher arranged the show, the teacher repeatedly reminded the actors to use emotion and to drive and control the body with emotion’. This also shows that both in the past and in today's society, Kunqu opera teaching always focuses on actors' inner and outer learning of skills, and the traditions of Chinese drama are passed on by teachers from generation to generation.

There are four skills that are shared forms of performance in Kunqu opera and Beijing opera, which are singing, speaking, acting and kung fu, as well as the five canons, which are the hands, the eyes, the body, intentions and stances. Specifically, the four skills are singing through singing voices, speaking through reciting lines, acting through dancing and shape and martial arts and kung fu. The five canons are the techniques of the hands, the eyes, the body, the intentions and the stances through which an actor further exercises the four skills to express their inner feelings. Expressive performances combine the four skills with the five canons, making the actors' depiction of the characters' emotions more accurate on the stage.

According to the historical data recorded in *Book IX, Li yuan Yuan, Zhong Guo Gu*

Dian Xi Qu Lun Zhu Ji Cheng (Huang Fanchuo, Tang dynasty AD618-917), there are eight important aspects in performance.

1) Eight important aspects in terms of character appearance

STATUS	FACE	EYES	BODY/VOICE	BODY/FEET
Noble	Commanding	Focused	Sounds low and deep	Heavy step
Wealthy	Joyful	Smiling eyes	Finger	Slow
Impoverished	Sickly	Eyes are glassy	Tense shoulders	Snotty nose
Lowly	Looks sideways	Evil look	Shrugs	Movements are fast
Stupid	Dull	Unfocused eyes	Open mouth	Shaking head
Lunatic	Angry	Staring at one point	Crying and smiling	Casual walk
Sick	Tired	Tearful eyes	Panting	Trembling
Drunk	Sleepy	Unfocused eyes	Body is saggy	Feet dragging

Figure 2.1. Eight important aspects for forms of character

2) Eight key points for four emotions

EMOTION	KEY POINTS	FACE/EYES/FEET	BODY/FACE	VOICE
Pleasure	Shaking one's head as a key point	Gleaming eyes	Smiling	Joyful
Anger	Glaring as a key point	Wrinkled nose	Head up	Hateful
Sorrow	Crying as a key point	Stamping feet	Stiff face	Sorrowful
Frightened	Open mouth as a key point	Red in the face	Body trembling with fear	Exhausted

Figure 2.2. Key points of four emotions

3) Eights key points body movements

Eyes lead first with eyesight as a guide to performance.
Slightly shake one's head.
Steps should be steady, with the steps stabilised and keeping at a moderate pace.
Use hands for action as hand movements can indicate and assist in the performance to express various emotions.
Practise in front of a mirror.
No day off as the practice of basic skills cannot be interrupted (Gu Lingsen, <i>Zhong guo kunju da ci dian</i>). ⁴¹

Figure 2.3. Key points body movements

The above three figures relate to the theory for summarising traditional Chinese theatre into different category roles. In the eight important aspects, people's social strata are identified from their physical movements, and general body movements can be imitated in an actor's performance. Beginning at the imitation level, actors can then go on to improve their creative interpretation. Therefore, the theory and methods in these external skills are effective ways for actors to learn basic knowledge but the raising of a performance to a higher level is determined by people's individual ideas. Therefore, methods and techniques are the basis of an actor's performance, which are ways for actors to develop their art.

Nicola Savarese wrote: 'Asian performers do not, strictly speaking, undergo training; starting in early childhood, they often learn a performance score by imitating a master, and repeat it until they have mastered it perfectly and can both perform it on their own and link it to another score without becoming confused' (Barba and Savarese, 2006, 281).⁴²

⁴¹ Hong, Weizhu (2002), *Kun Qu Ci Dian*, Pub, Yilan Xian: Guo li chuan tong yi shu zhong xin, P639

⁴² Li Ruru (2010), *The Soul of Beijing Opera*, pub: Hongkong University Press, p 59

Kunqu opera performers train their four skills and five canons as a child and in feudal Chinese theatres, masters would choose young students under 10 years old. Practices have changed today. For instance, Ding Yuming started studying Kunqu opera at 15 years old and studied performance for five years so that he could perform on the stage, it is different from ancient times.

Kunqu opera actors go through training to make their bodies powerful and get energy for inspiration. Imagination, as Stanislavski points out, should relate directly to the physical body so that movement can match the imagination. Chinese opera actors learn sequences as a technique but not mechanically because performance conventions include the character's mood and features.

Mr. Mei often said, 'techniques lie in the art, and techniques are different from the art'. My understanding is that art is just art, and the art includes techniques, which includes five skills that you should grasp. But if you only own those techniques, you cannot be called an artist.⁴³

Yu Zhenfei accepted Mei's point that techniques are useful but they are only the skills needed to be able to importantly connect imagination with the performance as an artist.

Although these roles suggest a narrow status and narrow characters, they still show general features that actors can use for guidance. The eight key points are merely a reference but they still offer a clear visual character image. Yu Zhenfei wrote:

Mr. Mei said: 'the most important thing for us is to describe emotions from various characters, but emotions should be depicted by a certain

⁴³ Ju, Y. (2004), *Qian Wu Gu Ren Hou Wu Lai Zhe- Yu Zhenfei Yi Mei Lanfang*, Peking Opera of China, 2004-11

method. Without those expression methods, you cannot depict those emotions; if you only have those expression methods without emotions that can be called living, it is performing dead opera. You should combine your own art creation with the developing times.⁴⁴

Both Mei and Yu considered how to improve performing art in depth by Kunqu Opera, they suggested people to learn it for increasing movement and imagination techniques.

1.2 Type of Role

The younger performers only practise a few parts of the movements at Suzhou Kunju Theatre. Some of those movements require other actors in different roles so that they can practise together. The movements vary among different roles. The role classification in Kunqu opera is very specific, parts of which are for xiao sheng to train exclusively. Xiao sheng is also classified into jin sheng, da guan sheng, qiong sheng and ling zi sheng, whose movements are also slightly different.

There are also specific classifications of dan in Kunqu opera, including yi dan, er dan, san dan, si dan, wu dan, liu dan and qi dan. Yi (meaning 'first' in English) dan is the old dan, while er (second) dan is zheng dan, which relates to a role in a big, green dress, such as Zhao Wuniang in *Pi Pa Ji (Tale of the Pipa)* and Jiao Guiying in *Yang Gao*. San (third) dan relates to zuo dan; si (fourth) dan relates to dao ma man; wu (fifth) dan relates to gui men dan such as Du Liniang in *The Peony Pavillion*, Yang Guifei in *Chang Sheng Dian (The Palace of Eternal Youth)* and Cui Yingying in *Xi Xiang Ji (Romance of the Western Wing)*; liu (sixth) dan is hua dan, who are younger and livelier than gui men dan. These roles are the uneducated women at the bottom of society with straightforward, courageous and enthusiastic personalities. Qi (seventh)

⁴⁴Ju, Y. (2004), *Qian Wu Gu Ren Hou Wu Lai Zhe- Yu Zhenfei Yi Mei Lanfang*, Peking Opera of China, 2004-11

dan is er duo dan, referring to the role of palace maids, such as Nian Nu in *The Palace of Eternal Youth*. Additionally, there are roles for clowns. These movements practise actors' coordination and balance for their hands, eyes, bodies and feet.

2 Movement Conventions and Imagination

2.1 Freedom and Convention in Realistic Performances

Liu Xiao Ling Tong, who played the role of Sun Wukong in the 1986 CCTV⁴⁵ version of the television series *Journey to the West*, is Zhang Jinlai. Liu Xiao Ling Tong began learning traditional opera and martial arts from his father when he was young. After graduating from high school in Shanghai, he was admitted to the Zhejiang Kunju Theatre Art School and specialised in wu sheng, which is a term for an actor who plays a martial arts character.

Liu Xiao Ling Tong's family is considered the family of the character of the Monkey King. His great-grandfather started performing this role, then his grandfather, father, brother and then himself. His father began studying to act as the Monkey King at the age of six and he had the stage name Liu Ling Tong. Meanwhile, their father was the master of performing arts in the role of the Monkey King in Shao opera and was known as the Southern Monkey King. When Zhang's second brother, Zhang Jinxing, started acting as the Monkey King, his father called this brother Liu Xiao Ling Tong. Unfortunately, his brother died of leukaemia in 1966. When Zhang acted in *Journey to the West* in 1982, his father decided to reverse the names Xiao (in English: little) and Liu (in English: sixth) so he had the name Liu Xiao Ling Tong.

Depictions of the Monkey King, otherwise known as Sun Wukong, has become a classic in Chinese cinema and television screen. Liu Xiao Ling Tong is committed to disseminating traditional opera and has given more than 800 lectures in his home. As a messenger of Chinese cultural communication, he has brought traditional Chinese

⁴⁵ CCTV: China Central Television

culture to many parts of the world. Monkey's posture, which shows temper and vigour and the gestures of the role demonstrate the inner transformation of the Monkey King and the process of gradual maturing. He is made from stone and has no family. He learns the magical arts, obtains the dharma vessel, breaks into the heavenly palace, formally acknowledges Tang Monk as his master and goes on a pilgrimage for the Buddhist scriptures. The Monkey King's arrogance is always due to his true skills and genuine knowledge. Liu Xiao Ling Tong performed Monkey King, as well as his Winning Buddha, are always thrilling.

When CCTV prepared to shoot *Journey to the West* in 1982, which is one of the Chinese four great classical novels, Liu Ling Tong brought Liu Xiao Ling Tong to Beijing for an interview. Liu Ling Tong observed and analysed the dynamic state of a monkey in a zoo with Liu Xiao Ling Tong. As he had learnt his skills since childhood, his Monkey King comes across as full of spirituality, free, easy-going and vivid. The actor has a strong artistry based on his family background, operatic education, his father's advice, his diligent studies, rigorous training and his understanding.

The expressions he shows in the film were heavily practised, and as Liu Xiao Ling Tong says: 'the performance of a body is in the face, the performance of a face is in the eyes'⁴⁶, which shows that the eyes can be used to convey emotion. He continued: 'His performance of the Monkey King has not been outdone by any later versions of the role'.

Zhang Shenbo said in his article *From the Film Version of 'The Monkey King (2014)' to Chinese Theatre Performance Convention* (2014):

Liu Xiao Ling Tong himself is the Monkey King. Mr. Liu Xiao Ling

⁴⁶ Dong, Y, 'Mei Hou Wang' Liu Xiao Ling Tong, Zhang Jinlai [J], Dang Dai Dian Shi 1993-04

Tong benefited from the rich heritage of the opera, and his performance comes from life and is higher than life.



Figure 2.4 Liu Xiaolingtong playing the Monkey King in *Journey to the West*



Figure 2.5. Liu Xiaolingtong studied emotion from a monkey for *Journey to the West*

According to the *Dictionary of Chinese Kunqu Opera* records, the Eyes performance conventions:

Shy eyes: This is a performance convention term, where one lowers one's head, keeps one's jaw back and eyes down, or slightly turns one's head away when making eye contact. One turns around slightly and hides one's face with a long sleeve, a fan in one's hand or a handkerchief or other prop to express shyness (Xi Yan ed.2002).

Angry eyes: This is a performance sequence term, where one opens one's eyes wide, while frowning, fixing one's eyebrows and looking at the opposite character physical in anger (Xi Yan ed. 2002).

Surprised eyes: This is a performance sequence term, where one takes a breath, opens one's mouth, raises one's eyebrows, widely opens one's eyes and leans back slightly. This is used to express consternation and panic (Xi Yan ed. 2002).

Arrogant eyes: This is a performance sequence term with one's chest out, grinning, raising one's eyebrows and chin, while the eyeballs roll upwards or look sideways to express arrogance (Xi Yan ed. 2002).

Drunken eyes: This is a performance sequence term where one relaxes one's facial muscles, droops one's eyelids, look inattentive and matches this with irregular footsteps to express drunkenness or pretend drunkenness (Xi Yan ed. 2002).

Rolling eyes: This is a performance sequence term, with wide-open eyes, frowning and rolling one's eyeballs to show that the performer is planning something (Xi Yan ed. 2002).

Thinking eyes: This is a performance sequence term where one opens one's eyes and rolls one's eyeballs to express thought or calculation (Xi Yan ed. 2002).

Searching eyes: This is a performance sequence term where one stands on tiptoes, with one's chest out, mouth open and head up slightly, looking at a distant goal to express that the performer is searching (Xi Yan ed. 2002).⁴⁷

These eye exercises practise the eye so that it can better and more accurately convey the information of the role.

Everyone has different preferences. Some people may like the Monkey King played by Liu Xiao Ling Tong and some people may like the Monkey King played by

⁴⁷ Wu Xinlei (2002), *Dictionary of Chinese Kunqu opera*, Pub: Nnjing da xue chu ban she, P585

Donnie Yen, while others could like the Monkey King played by other actors. However, it is undeniable that the image of The Monkey King played by Liu Xiao Ling Tong is deeply rooted among several generations. In current Chinese society, the portrayal of the Monkey King played by Liu Xiao Ling Tong is the first one that comes to mind, which is because the Monkey King has been shaped by him successfully, being a classic representation.

The Monkey King as played by Liu Xiao Ling Tong has been performed in a skilled and enthusiastic manner like a real monkey. This means that there is no trace of performance or imitation in it, being a natural depiction that is beyond performance while also being a performance that is pursued and imitated by other people in the performing arts. This is similar to Zhuangzi's theory on great beauty, that the most beautiful things are natural rather than artificially created and that performance art is the result of an artistic imagination of imitated life. A natural and fluid performance removes the traces of imitation from the performance through intense studying and training. An artistic process is presented in the performance so the acting needs to be learnt, and it also needs to return to life and nature.

Opera education is the basis as a performer because opera actors need to practise their sequenced movements. Strong, practised movements play a fundamental role in the process of role performance becoming more creative. Zhou Chuanying, a Kunqu opera performing artist, once said: Big physical actions can protect the performance for their own type of roles, and small actions can shape roles into in-depth and meticulous characters.⁴⁸

'Big, physical actions identify the school the actor follows for their movements while the small actions reveal the personal characteristics of the role. Technically, the performance movements of Kunqu opera are standardised but, from the perspective of

⁴⁸ Luo D, edit Zhou Chuanying's nuncupation, *Kun Ju Sheng Ya Liu Shi Nian* [J], Shanghai Wen Yi Chu Ban She, 1988

art, they feature both flexibility and creativity. Therefore, opera programmes contain rich details from life and are more artistic than life itself after being performed (Wang, 2012).

2.2 Realism Performances with Zhuang Zi Aesthetics

While there is no specific work by Zhuang Zi that discusses his aesthetic thoughts, Zhuang Zi expressed his views on beauty when he was presenting his philosophy. Lao Zi was the founder of the Taoist school and the creator of Taoist aesthetics. Lao Zi believed that the natural principle of thought in Taoism follows the law of the universe, as well as beauty and art, and is also a cardinal principle that must be followed in the appreciation and creation of beauty and art. Lao Zi observed beauty and art as criticisms of the evil and disasters brought about by civilised society, so while revealing beauty and truth, a strong critical spirit is shown.

Zhuang Zi further developed the aesthetic thoughts of Lao Zi; he fully unfolded the aesthetic thoughts which either existed in Lao Zi philosophy or those that needed to be expanded upon. He touched on almost all of the problems in ancient Chinese aesthetics. For this reason, Zhuang Zi is an important representative of the aesthetic thought of the Taoist school and a prime example of Taoist aesthetic thought. The Taoist aesthetics and Confucian aesthetics that stood opposite each other and were created by Lao Zi and completed by Zhuang Zi became two major trends in ancient Chinese aesthetics.

Zhuang Zi mainly discussed his ideas about aesthetics from three perspectives. Firstly, he inherited the idea of ‘abandon sacrament and wisdom’ (Lao Zi, Chapter 1, *Dao De Jing*,) and denied the existence of beauty and ugliness. One was that beauty and ugliness were not accepted, negating the objective existence of beauty; everything is ‘uniform’, regardless of whether it is beautiful or ugly, or superior or inferior. Lao Zi

said ‘iridescent colors cause blindness. Euphonious music causes deafness’ (Lao Zi, Chapter 12, *Dao De Jing*). This negates the aesthetic effect of beauty and ugliness. In other words, Zhuang Zi did not recognise the effects of beauty and ugliness. As Chen 2006, p. 2639)says ‘The perception of this order was recorded in *The Twenty-Fifth Year of Duke Zhao* in *Zuo’s Commentary on Spring and Autumn Annals*: “The pneuma sends out five flavors of acidity, salty, pungent, sweet and bitter, [which] turns into five colors of cyan, yellow, red, white and bright, [and] appears [as the] five [musical instruments] of gong, shang, jue, zhi and yu”’.⁴⁹ Zhuang Zi’s view on beauty and ugliness came from his philosophical thinking that everything is uniform and there are no differences between all things.

The second perspective is that Zhuang Zi’ limited the concept of beauty and ugliness to the appreciation of humans, which made him different from Darwin. Darwin thought that animals also have a sense of beauty, such as when a peacock displays its feathers. Zhuang Zi’ argued that beauty and ugliness are human concepts, rather than related to animals. This is a very important thought and means that Zhuang Zi’ regarded beauty as having social content beyond the concept of pleasure. For this reason, the thoughts of Zhuang Zi’ are profound, relating to a puzzle in aesthetics of the relationship between beauty and humans. Beauty is closely related to people and their place in society, which is a unique source of spiritual pleasure and a judgment of value among people.

The third perspective is that Zhuang Zi’’s view on beauty is both negative and relative, saying that: ‘Both Mao Qiang and Li Ji were beauties and ... people appreciated them; when the fish saw them, it swam to deep water, when the bird saw them, it flew higher in the sky, when the elk saw them, it ran faster. Do these three animals know true beauty?’ (Zhuang Zi (369-286 BC), *Zhuang Zi, Qi Wu Lun (Essay*

⁴⁹ Zhang, X.J. *The Great Semblance Is Invisible- Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi’s Cognitive Aesthetics* [J], *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, 2016:08, Vol.6, No. 8, 882-894

on the Uniformity of All Things).

Above paragraph confirms the thoughts of Zhuang Zi'. No one can tell what is the most beautiful, which is consistent with his philosophy. Zhuang Zi'believed that the most beautiful objects are in nature and that everything has an individual beauty; this also means that everything is the same in the world so it is difficult to define true beauty. The reasoning of his belief was that beauty is not absolute, rather 'beauty has its own beauty' (Zhuang Zi, *Qi Wu Lun (Essay on the Uniformity of All Things)*), so there is no objective standard of beauty.

The three views of Zhuang Zi'on beauty and ugliness both inherit the thoughts of Lao Zi and also show his own developments. There is a similarity between Zhuang Zi' and Lao Zi in that they know what beauty is in their minds and they both have made accomplishments in the field of Chinese aesthetics.

Zhuang Zi'explained an important aesthetic category in the book *Zhuang Zi*, which is the 'loftiness' or the magnificence of the Chinese style Generally speaking, the magnificence of China is not similar to the loftiness of the West. However, Zhuang Zi's concepts of aesthetics are unique. The image of magnificence portrayed in *Zhuang Zi* by ZhuangZi is also a noble image. *Zhuang Zi: The Happy Excursion* describes the two noble images of Kun and Peng:

North Ming has a fish, which is called Kun. Kun is too big, and does not know how big it is. When Kun wants to go south, it will transform into a bird, whose name changes to Peng. No one knows how big Peng is and it flies angrily, while its wings can be seen as clouds covering the sky.

The images of Kun and Peng, with their power and scale, represent the characteristics of both magnificence and loftiness. Using this allegorical fairy tale, Zhuang Zi'

expresses an important aesthetic concept, which is unique among the pre-Qin (Paleolithic-BC221) thinkers.

The aesthetic works of Zhuang Zi's philosophy need understanding and recognition and they also rely on experience and feelings. Additionally, cognition and summarisation can only be found via experience and feelings. Zhuang Zi uses fables to express his philosophy and aesthetic thoughts through specific depictions and the use of figurative language. Kun and Peng, as described by Zhuang Zi, reflect the spirit of an era and the spirit of a nation. This is where the aesthetics of Zhuang Zi are superior to those of other scholars, also having a great influence on later generations.

2.3 Role Portrayal and Zhuang Zi's Natural Aesthetics

Art is often related to skills, such as music, painting, dance and opera, and these skills are essential for being considered beautiful. Although there is no direct mention of the word 'aesthetics' in *Pao Ding Jie Niu* (English: *Dismemberment of Ox by Paodin*), it is a well-known allusion in China, where people talk about how Pao Ding was an experienced butcher who dismembered an ox. His cleavers moved freely and easily through flesh, sinews and bones after many years of practice every day, so that he did not even need to think about the dismemberment of the ox. Practice can increase one's skill to eventually reach perfection.

'Lead the very thin blade through the great cavities ... He danced in rhythm to *The Mulberry Grove*; [he] moved in concert with the strains of *The Managing Chief*' (Chen, 2007, p. 116).⁵⁰ This sentence comes from Zhang Xianjun's article to explain Zhuang Zi's Aesthetics perspective.

⁵⁰Zhang, X.J., another translation of *Pao Ding Jie Niu* in English, *The Great Semblance Is Invisible—Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi's Cognitive Aesthetics*, Journal of Literature and Art Studies, August 2016, Vol. 6, No. 8, 882-894

The story pursues the highest state of the unity between beauty and kindness. Kindness is a part of beauty and beauty is a part of kindness. From an aesthetic standpoint, *Pao Ding Jie Niu* does not create beauty or the acme of beauty. The story illustrates that the creation of beauty is based on the practice of the creation of social beauty and artistic beauty. Zhuang Zi's theory on the unity between beauty and kindness has also played an important role in the later development of Chinese art. Chinese art has often been a pursuit of the truth, or pursuing a kind of 'image out of images' and 'ideas not expressed in words'.

Pao Ding Jie Niu can also be explained by the phrase 'practice makes perfect'. '*Pao Ding Jie Niu* is a well-known Chinese idiom that practice leads to proficiency. It was originally from Chapter 31, *Jing Hua Yuan (The Marriage of Flower in the Mirror)*⁵¹: 'Jiu Gong, please stop talking. As the common saying [goes]: "Practice makes perfect"'. This idiom is used a lot in Chinese and it can be used in daily life, studies or work, as well as in most situations in life. It indicates that skill proficiency is easy to enhance. This is shown in *Pao Ding Jie Niu*, where a skill naturally becomes a habit. This kind of learning and training can eventually become commonplace and represents a return to nature. This, combined with a natural expression form to explain what is real natural, it could be said beauty is the real nature, which can also be called true beauty. *The Woodworker Ching Was Carving Wood* places more emphasis on people using skilled technology, creating art in accordance with the laws of beauty, where finally 'heaven joins heaven', and all who see it are as amazed as if they were seeing the work of a spiritual being. Therefore, the spirit of heaven joining heaven also embodies a free creative spirit.⁵² Therefore, this can be applied to performance, with stage performance art being a realistic representation of natural life for audiences.

⁵¹Li Ruzhen (1763-1830), *Jing Hua Yuan (The Marriage of Flower in the Mirror)*, chapter 31.

⁵² Zhang, X.J., another translation of *Pao Ding Jie Niu* in English, *The Great Semblance Is Invisible—Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi's Cognitive Aesthetics*, Journal of Literature and Art Studies, August 2016, Vol. 6, No. 8, 882-894

Lao Zi's student Zhuang Zi' is an important figure who inherited Lao Zi's thoughts and developed them in further depth. He respected Taoist philosophy and complied with the natural laws of all things, respecting the harmony between humanity and nature. His aesthetic thoughts also demonstrated the beauty of nature and freedom.

It can be seen in *Zhuang Zi: Zhibeiyou* that 'all beauty in natural is pure and universal, with there being clear rules for the four seasons; the rise and fall of all things is regular in nature'. This relates to the supreme power of nature with no artificial influence. Zhuang Zi studied the truth of the universe with Lao Zi and developed his study.

The great Chinese philosopher Zhuang Zi'advocates that people act and imitate the laws of nature He believes that the pure beauty of nature is the true beauty of the universe. Everything has its own laws, is in harmony and is beautiful, with Zhuang Zi upholding natural beauty. This is the same as the natural and fluent performance pursued by the performing arts but there is a difference in that performance is a form of imitation. The performing arts that the current generation is trying to inherit, develop and continuously improve are works of art.

Zhuang Zi believed that great beauty is the highest standard of beauty and that it exists in the vast space of the universe. Zhuang Zi also believed that the law of the universe is the highest beauty and that the highest beauty exists in the laws of the universe, which shows how Zhuang Zi studied in the universe and its beauty from a holistic perspective' or something like that.

Zhuang Zi thought that the main characteristic of beauty is that 'great beauty is silent', which means that a person should not boast their own beauty. This reflects the thoughts of Zhuang Zi' whereby Taoism follows nature and that great beauty must be found in nature. It is both a form of rational ego and an intuitive experience; it is often an underlying rationality rather than a superficial phenomenon, which reflects the

level of theoretical thinking in the pre-Qin era. The philosophy and aesthetics discussed by Zhuang Zi'are also a kind of intuitive experience. Aesthetics cannot be separated from philosophy or it will not be possible to recognise the underlying rationality. The aesthetic thoughts of Zhuang Zi can enlighten the study of contemporary aesthetics.

In short, the conditions of society have determined the philosophical concepts of Zhuang Zi', and his philosophical concepts have determined his attitude towards life, with his attitude towards life determining his aesthetic ideology. The views of Zhuang Zi' on beauty are purely aesthetic without utilitarian concepts. His philosophy has played an important role in the later development of arts and aesthetics and has helped make art not just the simple simulation of reality but a profound life experience, an emotional attitude and a form of self-expression.

Artistic work comes from life and life is a natural phenomenon among people. Therefore, the reactions of nature and human beings relate to art. Further to this, the essence of performance conveys real emotions to audiences. More natural performances move audiences, which can be considered to be the highest level for an actor's performance. Performing arts often combine literary works and nature.

3 Kunqu Opera's Performance Merits

3.1 Helping to Explain Imagination with Roles

The exercise created in this thesis caters to the life background of different actors. Not every theatre or film actor in China has studied Chinese traditional opera with the majority of actors having studied stage drama and film or television performance. There are a few Chinese traditional actors who have switched from professional opera performance to dramatic performance in China. This set of exercises is not only applicable to Chinese actors but also helpful for any actors or professionals in any country who work in the performing arts. Despite the differences in language

expression, body language is a silent messenger, and such expressive power is a perfect combination of the mind and body. Kunqu Opera can help promote actors' physical and mental training to a certain degree so that they can adequately display their ideas and thoughts to an audience to physically and mentally express themselves as a whole.

From September to November 2016, there was a work placement schedule in the Performance Department of the Beijing Film Academy (BFA). BFA students were from the second-year class and they took professional performing classes for two days a week. Their other lectures included literature, art history and physics, but they also had several elective courses in with evening lectures, with the schedule being rather full for second-year students at BFA. I cannot show all students' schedules at BFA because I was only in contact with second-year students during this work placement.

In the professional performing classes, there were about 20 students in each class and three teachers guided them in three separate groups. The teachers taught students in great detail about lines, their physiques and creativity as well as helping students to analyse lines in terms of the literary context and the character, as well as how to consider artistic creations based on the role's background.

The morning classes ran from 8am until 12 noon, and the afternoon professional performance classes ran from 1:30pm until 4:30pm. From 8am to 9am in the morning, there was a warm-up training in which all students would follow a teacher's recitation, and this teacher would guide students in different emotional response training with a variety of music. After finishing the warm-up training, another teacher would summarise the students' responses and then begin to rehearse a play with the group.

During the work placement period, three groups of students in this class were rehearsing three plays, which were *Thunderstorm*, *Orphan of Zhao* and *Waiting for*

You in Heaven. The historical backgrounds of these three plays are different but they all clearly reflect that Confucian philosophy has permeated Chinese people's thinking. Confucian philosophy was influenced by Taoist philosophy; it was extended to art and it also relates to Chinese actors' methods of performance on the stage. In this way, Chinese people, and actors among them, have studied Confucian philosophy for since pre-Qin in China. Hence, when creating a performance, they need to return to the Confucian ideological system and then back to the stage for performance art, as this is the process for people's thinking.

Confucianism has embodied the national performance philosophy of China and this then extended to Taoism. The Taoist philosophy of the yin and yang theory of balance affected Confucianism's middle of the road.⁵³ It warns people not to do extreme things, and things will develop in the opposite direction when they become extreme, which is a common idea among many Chinese people. It also reminds people to handle matters appropriately, which is reflected by yin and yang. In regard to the performing arts, when actors stand on the stage, both the body's external movement and the internal creation must be handled appropriately during performance, meaning that the performance will shape the role naturally and smoothly to show a sense of a comprehensive performance of a creative process for audiences.

3.2 Helping Actors to Feel Deeply and Explain in Given Circumstances

Actors in China are the basic several sources from performance academic school; the second source is the opera students transferred to drama; the third source is the people who play martial arts; the fourth source is dance; the fifth source is the people who are interested in acting but do not learn the professional course, wherein they are transferred from other non-related industries to performance. The following are professional actors who have graduated from different majors, with an investigation

⁵³Zisi (Spring and Autumn period), *Doctrine of the Mean*

and analysis of technology.

In conclusion, performance is both a technical and special career that can show people's talents. Some people are interested in acting but after a period of studying it, they may not get a professional breakthrough. Meanwhile, some people never study acting, but have a great deal of success with performing. Hence, while some people study acting, they may not necessarily evolve their performances. In contrast, some people never study acting and speech may not be a good show. However, these are just the minority and most people go through formal academic teaching to start their acting careers. Considering the aforementioned examples, it can be concluded that performance is a combination of mind and action. It is not only about having the mentality but also performance skills. If opera-trained actors change to drama acting, they will likely have better control abilities than other people, which can be proven by many actors' cases.

This paper argues that a basic training method should be designed to simplify opera, while practising sound and every part of the body, and these training methods could be applied to students or new actors. This could save the actors a great deal of time to mature. For an actor studying acting and an actor standing on the stage or in front of the camera, the actual work is different. Most actors often need to go through a number of experiences to appreciate performance. They can then enhance their professional skills. This process varies in terms of the number of works needed and some may require dozens of works. This study hopes to use traditional Kunqu opera to train students to make them mature quicker so they can start a professional career. Actors can save on learning time and a lot of practical work.

Chapter III: Kunqu Opera and Contemporary Drama

1. Origin of Drama in China

1.1 Huaju from 1906

Chunliu She was a pioneer of Chinese modern drama and was affected by European and American drama, and it also referenced experience and stage performance. After the 1930s, Chinese drama gradually accepted Soviet drama and fully began to reproduce it after the 1950s. Although the relationship changed between the two countries, it was still influenced by the Soviet drama system for a long time.⁵⁴

In the field of performance, the Stanislavski system has been widespread in China since the 1930s. Early in the 1930s and 1940s, artists and scholars in the field of drama, film and translation, including Zhang Min, Zheng Junli, Huang Zuolin, Qu Baiyin, He Menghu and Jiang Chunfang (Lin Ling), started to translate and introduce various works from the Stanislavski system, as well as different versions of pieces in Russian, English and Japanese. In contrast to from *Life in Art* (2005), translated by Qu Baiyin, and *An Actor Prepares* (Stanislavski, the first volume, 1950), translated by Zheng Junli, which were complete, the other pieces were scattered and were not systematic.

The Stanislavski system helped Chinese realistic dramas to develop and grow and promoted the development of modern dramas. Furthermore, the Stanislavski system and the development of modern dramas supplemented each other.

The development of the Stanislavski system has a similar social background to the development of Chinese realistic dramas. The Stanislavski system started in the 20th century following the Russian Revolution. At the beginning of the 20th century, China was also living in an era in which the political situation was unstable, and life was

⁵⁴ Zhu Hengfu (2016), *Chinese Drama in History and Reality*, pub: Xueyuan Chubanshe, p232

difficult for people. Due to the increasing exploitation and oppression of feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism, the living standards of the ordinary people at the bottom of society were declining. In an era of turbulent political situations and war, drama naturally became a tool to publicise political opinions, educate the public and reform society.

Stanislavski represented European Stanislavski's experimentalism influenced through his experimentalism, which influenced the system in China's drama school. A master teaches their students basic skills, requires them to practise them in the drama class and stresses that actors should experience the personal characteristics and thoughts of their roles and grasp their personal characteristics through practice. Mei Lanfang once said:

For some actors on the stage, people say that they perform like the person in the role. This is not only referring to their costume and makeup but also their singing and movements which support the role in the play, as if they are the role. At the same time, the audience is enthralled with their performance and forget that they are actors and think of them as the character in the play. This is the state of performing art in which it is difficult to distinguish between the actor and the role. That is, the actor has integrated themselves with the role of the play.⁵⁵

From this passage, it can be seen that Mei's concept of dramatic performance deepened the ideological essence of the roles and truly integrated the actors with the roles, which is consistent with Stanislavski's performance experimentalism.

Stanislavski was the master of Soviet drama and his system was treated accordingly in China, from suspicion to criticism and from criticism to

⁵⁵ Mei Lanfang (1953), *Wu Tai Sheng Huo Si Shi Nian*, Chapter1, pub: Xiang gang xi ju chu ban she, p113

denial. After 1976, his system was recognised and accepted again in the world of Chinese drama, literature and art. Before and after 1978, the Shanghai Theatre Academy and the Central Academy of Drama jointly held many seminars on the system and appealed to people to take a scientific and down-to-earth attitude to analyse and study the Stanislavski system.⁵⁶

Following the Chinese economy's reform and opening-up after 1978, literature and art transitioned from being closed to open and gradually became diversified, thus breaking the previous situation where the Stanislavski system occupied a dominant position, leading to the presentation of a range of Chinese dramas in terms of creation methods. In the future, people may still want to study the Stanislavski system. As more performance schools emerge, actors can freely choose their appropriate performance methods or combine many methods together to benefit from the various schools.

1.2 Soviet Era Art and China

Meyerhold experienced great changes in Russia during his lifetime. The victory of the October Revolution in 1917 marked the start of a new era. Meyerhold was an artist who was ready to accept new things and he devoted his life to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and drama. His drama also reflected his political standpoints, with culture being the best propaganda tool for politics and the economy. The great dramatic master passed away in 1940. Meyerhold was also deeply affected by Chinese drama in the 1920s and 1930s, when China was in a state of turmoil. Warlords had set up separatist regimes by force of arms and the masses could barely make a living, and knew little about the arts. Even during this turbulent period, Mei still visited the Soviet Union, Japan and the United States, and was warmly welcomed

⁵⁶ Wang, F. M., *Stanislavski "System" in China*, Journal of Zhejiang Vocational Academy of Art, March, 2011, Vol.9, No.1

by local audience in these places.

Mei's contribution to Chinese drama remains notable even today. In today's China, particularly since the 1979 reform and opening-up, the government has offered extensive support of the arts with an active response to pluralistic development. Today's dramatic systems, represented by Stanislavski, Brecht and Meyerhold, have been influenced by different schools of thought in Chinese drama. Chinese drama is also accepting of Western drama and continues to be reformed. One factor that must be noted is that Beijing opera is not a mere representation of Chinese culture but is also the representation of Mei's dramatic system. The cultural significance of Beijing opera contains the representation of over 5,000 years of Chinese civilisation; it can be said to be an integral artistic system in dramatic terms and an art form with a long history in cultural terms that covers almost all artistic forms. Modern China participates in cultural exchanges with different countries as China's dramatic features have always been developing and progressing.

All forms of dramatic performance always have a common goal, namely, internal and external possession, whether for Stanislavski's inside-to-outside approach or Meyerhold's outside-to-inside approach. Only by having a common goal can a stage performance achieve a standard of art that returns to nature and is higher than nature. Chinese drama is an internally and externally refined artistic expression that has a promotive role in improving the performance skills of actors on stage or on screen.

During the period between 1913 and 1922, Meyerhold introduced biomechanics training, with biomechanics being a new mode of expression for contradictions and conflicts using body language. Biomechanics involves training actors in their artistry and skills for them to complete the most complicated tasks while imitating a performance. As actors create a form of plastic arts within a limited space, the proper use of the body as a means of artistic expression requires actors to engage in further study and training. Meyerhold progressively realised that the real path to developing

an actor's experiences and mentality must be explored. Biomechanics can help actors to produce experiences in a natural manner through their movements. Only through certain body postures and states can the path to the heart of a role be found. A variety of body postures and states are major tools for actors while biomechanics also attaches great importance to the rhythm and tempo of an actor's performance.

Meyerhold required actors not only to be able to control their bodies but also their emotions. In the process of dramatic reformation, he gave full consideration to the features of Chinese and Japanese dramas, namely, that an actor's basic skills must be well trained, which is an essential task for Chinese dramatic actors to complete before performing on stage. Moreover, they must practise their skills daily, such as by exercising certain body parts, controlling one's facial muscles and leg training, not to mention practising one's movement skills all over one's body. Meyerhold insisted that actors must learn these skills through rigorous physical training so that they are able to perform any hard-to-act roles. His biomechanics training aimed to prepare actors for the future with comprehensive development in drama skills while a multitude of approaches to performing arts in China became essential techniques in this training method. He considered actors' training a priority because he believed that only through regular training could actors develop and perfect their craft and perform creatively in a free and relaxed way.

Meyerhold once said that 'technique arms the imagination'.⁵⁷ This embodies the combination of Stanislavski's theory (imagination) and Meyerhold's theory (technique). Technique arms the imagination, which is consistent with the argument that exercise is the foundation of traditional Chinese dramatic performance. Through technique, students can take control of their body language, develop their craft and perfect it through practice, which can be used to develop the personal characteristics of actors. Mei provided a typical example of this. The practice of biomechanics and

⁵⁷ Jonathan Pitches (2003), *Vsevolod Meyerhold*, pub: Routledge, p,105

skills practice in Chinese opera are different in terms of approach but they offer equally satisfactory results. Despite the differences in the forms they express, the movement itself is a kind of training for physical agility. Both theories focus on the skill of taking control of the body through training methods for the body's movement and then performing external movements accurately before giving an equally accurate expression of internal mental movements. This idea embodies the combination of Stanislavski's theory (imagination) and Meyerhold's theory (technique).

2. Modern Western and Chinese Theatre

2.1 The Stanislavski Method in China

Beijing opera is representative of traditional Chinese opera, the characteristics of which have been introduced above. However, the training procedure in Beijing opera involves students imitating and learning from their masters, blending in their own characteristics and thoughts through years of exercises, and finally producing personalities and performance styles through performance skill training. It seems that people from most walks of life follow a learning process like this, developing their learning from universal and common knowledge and expanding it to personal and innovative knowledge. Basic knowledge is like a foundation and actors should lay a firm and solid foundation in the process of learning how to perform so that they can express themselves and easily create works.

The Beijing opera body shape training is similar to the strength training in ballet or gymnastics. However, there are differences in the mode and content. For example, Beijing opera has romantic charm and this romantic charm embodies the inner world of an actor in shaping a role. In particular, internal mental activities are conveyed through eye expressions.

Stanislavski placed emphasis on inner experiences and neglected physical actions during the early stages of his creative activities. However, he attended courses for

body shape training, like ballet. He stressed that actors should try to be extremely natural or show completely natural experimentalism when performing on stage. Every subtle action process has to be the result of an inner experience and he strongly believed in the natural instincts of acting, which needs to mimic the processes of life. It is very important for actors to truly understand the inner world of roles as without this ability, actors will find it very difficult to play a role vividly and audiences may not believe that an actor is the person in the role. Everyone is different in terms of appearance, posture and behaviour. However, different actors demonstrate different ideologies when giving a performance by experiencing their role's inner world. Considering this, the importance of body shape training can be discussed. However, this does not mean that inner creativity should be neglected as it is of great significance that an actor experiences a role. Without this, creation would not exist, let alone enthusiasm and love for performance. The importance of body shape training for actors is emphasised again here as, considering the success of Stanislavski in the long-term teaching of experimentation, this system is also very important for actors. Nevertheless, many Chinese opera actors have studied Stanislavski's courses and Mei Lanfang was among the most famous of these.

In 1935, Mei Lanfang embarked on a performance tour in the Soviet Union. This involved a historic meeting of two drama masters from China and the Soviet Union. He was warmly greeted by the Soviet government and Stanislavski. Mei's performance was praised by Stanislavski as 'regular free action', meaning that Mei's use of performance sequences expressed a free and natural work. Mei learned about experimentalism from the Stanislavski system and this was the first time that a Chinese opera artist had had contact and interacted with Stanislavski academically. Chinese and Soviet drama academia started to learn from each other and exchange ideas, with learning from each other's strong points to offset their weaknesses being the purpose of this exchange and learning. People can make progress by broadening their horizons and examining themselves after looking at the rest of the world. Training through a variety of ways was also the original intention of this

cross-cultural drama anthropology. Such an important historic moment was deeply influential for both the history of drama in China and the world.

The artistic achievements of Mei Lanfang make him a representative and symbol of the Chinese opera system. His innovation in singing, dancing, recitation, acting, make-up and costumes led to the combination of songs, dances and acting from ancient Chinese drama and created the unique artistic style of the Mei Lanfang School. Moreover, he created the new role of *dan* through comprehensively and organically combining the singing methods and performing arts of various types of *dan* (female characters in Beijing opera), including *qingyi*, *dan*, *guimendan*, *tiedan* and *daomadan*. This greatly enriched the melodies in *dan* singing and formed a unique artistic school, commonly known as the Mei Lanfang School. Mei Lanfang, Cheng Yanqiu, Shang Xiaoyun and Xun Huisheng shared the title of the four top *dans*⁵⁸ at that time.

The physical training for Beijing opera is similar to that of other types of Chinese opera, although it involves different methods of singing. Compared to the other types of Chinese opera, Beijing opera includes more wide-ranging elements and more sophisticated artistic performances, of which Mei is a typical incarnation. Mei showed constant development, continuous pursuit of excellence and a persistent exploration of professional knowledge in the field of Beijing opera arts, along with an integration of Chinese traditional culture in terms of literature, music, dance, painting, rhyme and clothing in his performance. For this reason, the Mei School *dan* art that he created shows not only appealing figures, songs and dances but also delicate and natural depictions of characters' psychological states. Thus, it has become an important part of Beijing opera.

KS thought that uniting future dramatic and opera students in a studio would enrich

⁵⁸ Top four famous actors performing female roles in Chinese theatre.

both; the drama students would approach voice work, intonation, tempo-rhythm more seriously and would understand the importance of music in art; and the opera students would appreciate the necessity of learning about true communion with the partner, action on stage.⁵⁹

The theory of the Stanislavski acting 'system', daily exercises to music, sketches acted out for the purpose of giving a basis to the most varied kind of body positions, movements in space, the freeing of muscular tenseness and finally the principal and most interesting work, the singing of arias and lyrical ballads (in the execution of which the students synthesized all the component parts of the 'system') - all this preparatory work was done by the students before they began to put on any Studio productions.⁶⁰

Mei's artistic performance system is derived from the recognition and honour that he obtained at home and abroad on behalf of traditional Chinese operatic arts. Research into Mei's artistic performance system is essentially research into the artistic system of Chinese opera performance. The exploration of this issue should go beyond the dan in Beijing opera, as well as the performing experience and perceptions of Mei and other performing masters and schools of Chinese opera arts throughout various historical periods. The purpose of this is to discover artistic expression principles and performance laws that performers have commonly used, as well as their common artistic expressions, performance methods, expression characteristics and performance styles. Their particularities lie in their unique artistic school styles, which result from their differences in physical conditions, artistic heritage, artistic practices and cultural and artistic accomplishments.

Stanislavski set two goals for the students, the first being to achieve expressive and

⁵⁹ Rose Whyman (2008), *The Stanislavsky system of Acting* Cambridge University Press, P136

⁶⁰ Rose Whyman (2008), *The Stanislavsky system of Acting* Cambridge University Press, P136

incisive diction as 'not a single word must fail to reach the audience'. The second goal was to free themselves from tension, especially in the arms, wrists and fingers, 'for the purpose of achieving easy, simple, handling of themselves onstage'.⁶¹

Performers' coordinated and precise actions can result in an audience better understanding their characters. Furthermore, from the perspective of the performers themselves, long-term practice and good coordination can help them to overcome the first barrier to performance. This barrier is that most performers will subconsciously focus first on their external and basic performance skills, such as having suitable and elegant actions, eye expressions and line delivery, and will neglect a true understanding of the characters. Thus, at the point when many performers manage to effectively control their bodies' and have just begun to fully understand the characters, the plays come to an end. Therefore, performers having good control of their facial muscles, as well as of the rest of their muscles and joints, is derived from the long-term practice of basic skills and this can help them quickly get into playing a character. Further to this, Mei can serve as a model for performers in their training of eye expressions and actions. A performer's accomplishments are partially decided by their talent, and primarily by their continuous training, learning and understanding.

The Stanislavski system refers to a drama performance system that features integration with the scene, the simulation of a real scene and the creation of the illusion of real life. In this system, performers devotedly integrate themselves with the characters to such an extent that they can forget themselves, and they use vivid and realistic performances to reproduce life on the stage within a concentrated space and time. The audience can get involved in the plot of the dramatic production, feel emotionally connected to it and the characters and can eventually become part of the plot. In this way, the performers can achieve their purpose of indirectly communicating with the audience.

⁶¹ Rose Whyman (2008), *The Stanislavsky System of Acting*, pub: Cambridge University Press, P137

Stanislavski's *An Actor's Work* (p. 40) states: 'So, drama is an action we can see being performed, and, when he comes on, the actor becomes an agent in that action'. It enables performers to express emotions to indirectly embody thoughts in the play and produce something that resembles life for the performing arts for the performing arts.

Stanislavski's aesthetics theory, his view of the artist and his 'naturalism' are all based in 'nature' and so are his ideas of actor training. Before Stanislavski there was a call for a more 'naturel' Russian acting style. In the mid-nineteenth century Ostrovosky's essays discussed realism and naturalism, and Pushkin and Gogol discussed 'truth'. Stanislavski referred to their work, Tolstoy's, and critics such as Vissarion Belinsky in the development of his ideas. The Russian actor Mikhail Shchepkin, the German Saxe-Meiningen Court Theatre and Anton Chekhov were also formative influences.⁶²

Stanislavski was a thorough realist and demonstrated strong experiential learning, with experience being the foundation of all artistic creation. However, the interior and exterior are one whole and cannot be neglected while experience is emphasised as the interior and exterior can create living art through the unification of the interior and exterior. Only better and more in-depth experience can provide a better embodiment of a role. Moreover, only more accurate and vivid embodiments can demonstrate content using real experience, which is self-evident. While emphasising the experience of actors. However, the content relating to this topic is limited and the methods for it are not as specific and in-depth as they are for experience. Therefore, his peers mistakenly assumed that Stanislavski only paid attention to experience and neglected embodiment. The embodiment of external forms is also compulsory for performance actors when they learn about Stanislavski's experimentalism.

⁶²Rose Whyman (2008), *The Stanislavsky System of Acting*, Cambridge University Press, p.13

Chinese operas focus on actors' forms of movement and their imagination. The actors flexibly portray dramatic situations and personal characteristics through stylised physical actions and corresponding music for their voices, spoken parts and romantic charm. Chinese operas pay particular attention to the stylised expressive force of the actors' bodies. To enable the actors to master complicated physical skills, including singing, acting, recitation and acrobatics, teachers have to provide strict and long-term physical training for them when they become teenagers. As the actions are very difficult, the actors learn from and imitate senior artists in terms of their body shape training during the initial stages of their learning. Therefore, it is essential for actors to imitate the actions and romantic charm of their teachers during their education.

Stanislavski and Chinese operas differ in their thinking regarding dramas. The former was opposed to the division of role types and pursued the description of personal characteristics with high individualisation and rich typical significance, rather than the depiction of similarities between roles. In other words, he seemed to construct roles. Chinese operas are different in that Chinese opera classifies roles into sheng, dan, jing, mo and chou characters. However, Stanislavski has played a guiding role in influencing modern Chinese drama.

There are two different performance methods used by Stanislavski and Mei. Stanislavski emphasised closeness between movements in real life and the imagination, while Mei aimed to evoke the spirit of life in his performances. However, they respected each other and learnt the different elements of each other's methods. After watching Mei's performance, Stanislavski (1935) said: 'Dr. Mei's realistic performance methods make for our exploration and research ... Chinese drama is a regular free action ... Mei Lanfang remembered the words in his heart based on repeated thinking and experiencing'.

2.2 Meyerhold and Chinese Theatre

Shao Ning was a teacher at the Shanghai Theatre Academy from 1994 to 1995; her

article *Meyerhold and Chinese Opera* was published in *Academic Journal* (1995). The paper mainly summarises the similarities between Meyerhold's theory and Chinese theatre. It introduces the family background, learning, innovative dramatic performance experience and political convictions of Meyerhold. It also presents his pursuit of continuous innovation in drama and how to integrate the European classics and Chinese operas. He always presented new dramatic forms to audiences, either through actors' performances or in details on and off the stage such as stage design, music and lighting. This paper explains the collision of hypothetical drama between Meyerhold and Chinese theatre.

The paper finds that the first Westerner to learn the beneficial elements of Chinese theatre was an English man named Gordon Craig in the late 19th century, while Meyerhold became interested in Chinese theatre in Russia in the 1920s and 1930s. He was a dramatist who understood the essence of Chinese theatre in depth and referenced the theory of Chinese performance and opera. It was not only the theatrical view of Meyerhold but also his aesthetic ideology that showed similarities to Chinese opera. Although there were great differences in their forms, Meyerhold studied performance intensely and created his own form of theatre.

As Shao Ning argues 'Meyerhold's mode of expression was exaggerated, elongated and stylized. He wanted to build stage pictures which expressed the central idea of the scene without the need for words.'⁶³ He also proposed the declaration of drama in his book *Meyerhold on Theatre* where: 'against naturalistic theatre, the suppositive, histrionic and demotic character drama absorbed beneficial factors from European ancient drama tradition, Eastern drama and folk performances'.⁶⁴ It is stated in Shao's paper that Meyerhold respected the drama of Shakespeare and Pushkin as these two great dramatists recognised that drama was not real life. Meyerhold absorbed many national forms of drama from other countries, including Chinese drama, and he

⁶³Jonathan Pitches (2003), *Vsevolod Meyerhold*, pub: Routledge, p115

⁶⁴Vsevolod Meyerhold (1978), Translator: Edward Braun, *Meyerhold On Theatre*, pub: Bloomsbury, p

increased the expressive force of theatre through diversified means. His approach to art was formed in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Suppositive drama, which he had always pursued, is an important characteristic of Chinese drama. Therefore, after Mei visited the Soviet Union to perform in 1935, Meyerhold was greatly touched. He thought that the Beijing opera that Mei showed had the same goals as his suppositive drama, only using different methods to achieve that goal.

The similarities between Meyerhold's drama theory and Chinese drama theory are not only expressed through histrionic performances but also through music, rhythm and stage design. Music is a critical element in Meyerhold's directing as he was the first Russian dramatist who paid attention to the relationship between performance and music. He was influenced by the German opera master Richard Wagner at the end of the 19th century.

As Shao Ning argues 'Meyerhold also realized the moving poem played with a bamboo flute due to the work *About Chinese Poetry* written by Soviet sinologist, Vasily Mikhaylovich Alekseyev. Vasily Mikhaylovich Alekseyev (1916, p. 40) wrote in his book: 'The bamboo flute sounded in the morning. When the thick smoke wafted, and when the earth got warmer, the bamboo flute was reverberating deeply in the air. It was as clear as spring water, and harmoniously blended together with the music'.⁶⁵

Meyerhold used bamboo as a curtain for his stage when rehearsing *Bubus, the Teacher*, in 1925, with the sound of bamboo bumping against more bamboo when the actors came on the stage from the side curtain. This sound effect, which was like clear spring water, provided a new experience to the audience.

Meyerhold thought that the rhythm of music can finetune an actor's performance and

⁶⁵ Shao,N, *Meyerhold and Chinese Theatre (Mei ye he de he zhong guo xi qu)*[J], Academic Journal , (1995-5-15)

he emphasised the function of music in drama. This has many similarities with Chinese opera, which uses music to add atmosphere to the vocals, providing a mood and stage atmosphere.

Meyerhold considered the actors on stage to be artists that needed to be practised. He was affected by many performance skills in East Asian opera, like Japanese and Chinese operas, to create the theory of biomechanics.

Biomechanics has features in common with Beijing opera in terms of physical exercises. They both involve the development processes of physical actions. However, there are some differences between them. Exercising the body and the five sensory organs of Beijing opera has an unconscious emotional colouring. For instance, actions like eye expressions and the swinging of sleeves are exercises consistent with emotions because they attach importance to the integration of the spirit, aura and the energy of the actors with their bodies, hearts and spirit.

Shao conducted a careful analysis of how Meyerhold used Chinese opera elements and other East Asian dramatic elements to complement European forms of drama in his many dramatic works. After viewing Mei's live performances, Meyerhold had more enthusiasm for studying Chinese opera and knew more about the art form, which had a great influence on him as a director.

Biomechanics training is similar to Kunqu performance sequences; they have the same qualities but are represented differently. Both of them practise physical performance and they also feature their own techniques. Performance includes passion, inspiration, emotions and a need to deliver and communicate emotions to the audience. Techniques can help to upgrade performances into art and avoid staying at the practice stage as performance is a kind of art and art needs practice to be perfected. Therefore, in this study, movement training is seen as the basis of an imaginative performance.

After studying different kinds of drama schools, Meyerhold absorbed the artistic

characteristics and methods of the schools that were seen as beneficial to the development of Russian drama, but he never simulated or copied these dramatic characteristics. Meyerhold created drama after researching multiple cultures and considering the dramatic characteristics of Russian drama, developing and reforming the dramatic arts. He was seen as one of the greatest maestros of stage art of the 20th century.

In Shao's paper, from a professional viewpoint, she makes a careful analysis of Meyerhold's stage works that involved elements of Chinese opera to help the reader understand which parts of Chinese opera were used by Meyerhold. Therefore, it is a professional paper for the analysis of dramatic works and directors and it confirms the essence of suppositive drama and Chinese operas. The paper makes the argument that directed behaviour is a performing art in which the directors must cooperate with the actors by using various methods. In the paper, Shao mainly provides a conclusion while organising relevant studies according to a timeline of Meyerhold's career.

Shao only gives a brief mention of Stanislavski and does not emphasise the fact that in Meyerhold's early dramas, he still followed Stanislavski's model of creation. Although, at that time, Meyerhold had his own ideas and did not follow all of the features of naturalism explained by his teacher, Stanislavski, he did not deny that naturalism was the basis for his dramatic innovations. Therefore, he took Stanislavski's theory as the basis for his innovative theory, which means that it was the basis for the innovation of traditional Russian drama. On this basis, Meyerhold guided traditional Russian dramas, as well as later Soviet Union dramas in new periods of development. Society makes continual improvements and people study ceaselessly for their future innovation and development. Stanislavski had a close relationship with Meyerhold and they did not oppose each other. Naturalism is a part of life but art is purer than life. Meyerhold made drama more artistic, with hypothetical drama being his artistic and dramatic form.

Drama is very practical, which has been proven in the contemporary drama field. It has appeared in both films and dramas. For his efforts, Meyerhold made many achievements, although he also suffered through controversy and difficult experiences. Meyerhold lived in turbulent times in which the political situation was unstable. He was also the first dramatist to be part of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and created innovation in his dramas. He wrote many well-known works and lived a notable life, using different cultures to enrich his works, which reflects the fact that Meyerhold had a diversified approach. He did not reject foreign cultures and instead, he absorbed the cultural elements of foreign cultures that attracted him and used them to create Russian dramas. Shao's paper stresses Meyerhold's biomechanics, which is a theory influenced by East Asian drama and Chinese operas. The artistic requirements of Meyerhold's biomechanics, which are used for the physical fitness training of actors, are similar to the artistic requirements of Chinese operas. The actors themselves need to become the medium of expression for the art form and the controllability of new performing studies directly influences the level of inward expression for the actors.

Shao introduces the fact that Meyerhold used Chinese opera as a reference but does not explain the usage of the Meyerhold system in China. In the early 1980s, Chinese people began to have contact with Meyerhold's theories. However, Shao Ning did not explain Meyerhold's political situation, which was very significant in his life. Meyerhold's political thoughts influenced his uniqueness. As one of the first Russian directors to join the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, he expressed political interest in society during his time. He yearned for innovation and the reformation of tradition. His dramatic career experienced high points and low points but nothing stopped him from pursuing the development of dramatic innovation. Each of his works showed advancement, and this step-by-step advancement was the basis of him becoming a great dramatist. Politics are inseparable from culture and the economy, which have always interacted with each other in every country since ancient times.

2.4 Learning from Each Others' Strengths to Increase Drama Development

As Yu Zhenfei said: 'In order to improve yourself, you should perform more with good performers. You should absorb personal styles and features from others. If you learn some from others, you will improve yourself. It is insufficient to just learn something from professional actor or opera schools.'⁶⁶

As Eugenio Barba mentions in his book *Theatre Anthropology*: 'In Peking Opera, the actor's entire movement system is built on the principle that every movement must begin in the opposite to that in which the movement will ultimately be carried out.'⁶⁷

From the perspective of Biomechanics, this opposite action is a relative and complementary point in Beijing opera. This performance of movement relates to the maintenance of the body's balance and stability. From an aesthetic perspective, this movement is symmetrical. Ideologically, this balance is very similar to the relativity in yin and yang theory. Physically, from the inside to the outside and from the outside to the inside, they are maintained by natural laws.

Barba has studied world drama cultures, compared their similarities and differences and extracted their advantages in terms of training for actors with the aim to globalise theatrical performances. It might be fair to say that performance is more integrated. Beijing opera continues to develop to this day. The artform is based on real life, although it aims to exaggerate the movements of real life as a performing art. Therefore, actors train to have a strong body so that they can easily portray their artistic creations in contemporary drama performances. It is a movement process involving an expression of art and the reflection of natural life.

⁶⁶ Ju, Y. (2004), *Qian Wu Gu Ren Hou Wu Lai Zhe- Yu Zhenfei Yi Mei Lanfang* (J), Peking Opera of China, 2004-11

⁶⁷ Barba, E., & Fowler, R. (1982). *Theatre Anthropology*. *The Drama Review: TDR*, 26(2), 5-32. doi:10.2307/1145428

Since the 20th century, there has been a trend of theatre anthropology in Western dramas. Paying close attention to the meaning of the body and including 'empty space' on the stage are the main features of this trend. Therefore, referring to the historical experiences of international forms of drama is not only necessary but is also very beneficial. The source of theatre anthropology is scientific anthropology and it borrows the concept of 'body skill' from ethnonyms and ethnology. This skill involves introducing the concept of an extra-daily skill of the body. Drama anthropologists pay attention to the cultural practices that have an intuitive histrionic nature. Barba goes on academic excursions around the world with the aim of studying different cultural traditions from a historical perspective. The purpose of this is to gradually determine the skill of actors based on a comprehensive inspection of Eastern and Western performance art. Imagination in performance process leads physical action and this generalised explanation enables the body to be personalised and for individual attributes to develop.

Chapter IV: Conclusion

1. Being Natural and Normal in Performance

There exist differences between Chinese and European dramatic performance methods. Traditional Chinese drama has a grandiose characteristic, that has been compared to freehand brushwork in Chinese painting characteristic. Simply put, all aspects of drama, including the actor's performance, make-up, costume and music, are expressed in grandiose ways rather than in a realistic style. However, the elements of Chinese drama originate from life, with certain distinctions from reality via artistic processing. For example, with the facial makeup in Beijing opera, actors do not disguise themselves. The Chinese adage 'Art is based on life yet is higher than life' can completely explain the form of expression in Chinese opera.

The phrase 'freehand brushwork' to describe this stems from a critical term in Chinese painting, which means that the image in the painting is somewhat 'unlike' the real-life object but it has 'similarity in spirit' to the specific object via transformation and highlights a certain spiritual idiosyncrasy of the object or expresses the artist's special perception of the object. Chen Duo claimed that 'freehand brushwork', as the 'keynote of Chinese arts', was consistent with the reality of Chinese arts. Chinese arts lay an emphasis on freehand brushwork. As one of the traditional Chinese arts, drama has distinctive features of freehand brushwork. Su Yuanshang said that 'Traditional Chinese drama tends to have a distance from life and the voice and appearance in the performance presents real-life via artistic transformation'. However, such representation, as distinguished from the portrayal of the reality of life, stems from the portrayal of the masses' real lives through the script, the costumes or the actor's performance. Therefore, the physical training of actors on the stage in traditional Chinese drama continues until they perform on the stage, hence the saying that 'one minute on the stage takes ten years of practice'. Artistic 'spiritual similarity' can be conveyed via the body language of Chinese actors and can withstand the test of any

stage audience and even contemporary high-tech cameras. The cultural highlights that Beijing opera has provided international drama, as well as its value to performing arts, have been acknowledged by the likes of Meyerhold, Stanislavsky and Brecht. As a component of Chinese drama, Beijing opera has many artistic achievements. There are other Chinese regional operas that also have features and have also cultivated a batch of rising traditional artists, such as *Er Ren Zhuan* in the northeast of China, where an actress and actor duet can generally fall into three categories. One is the form of antiphonal singing in which the two people pretend to be one clown and one female character who speaks while singing and sings while dancing. This is perceived as the genuine form of 'song-and-dance duet'. Another is called *Danchutou*, in which one person sings and dances, while the third is a form called *Lachangxi*, in which the actors appear and sing on the stage as various characters.

In *My Life of Art*, Stanislavsky mentioned that experiencing the characteristics of art was for actors to achieve subconscious creation via conscious mental techniques. He required actors 'to think, hope, seek and act like living people as completely equally proper, logical and orderly as the roles on the stage and in the roles' living environment'. He called this an experiential role as part of experimentalism, asking actors to bring themselves into the role through inner imagination. This was also what Meyerhold said at a later point, whose ultimate artistic objective aligned with Stanislavsky in regard to the performing arts, only having different means. Stanislavsky approached the performing arts by driving body language via inner emotions, while Meyerhold explored the inner expressions in-depth via external body movements. The ultimate similarity of both was to render to the audience an internal and external combined performance on the stage, and a lack of either would distort the performance. Techniques can help in movement. According to Newton's second law of motion namely that the direction of an object's motion must conform to the resultant external force on it, an actor's inner performance interacts with their external techniques as the resultant external force. As physical training involves a certain amount of change, the resultant external force acts as an accelerating effect on the

object itself. In other words, actors' physical training not only involves an improvement of internal performance, but also an increase in the ability to utilise the character's traits and potential. Therefore, for an actor who is enthusiastic about performance, the in-depth connotations of the performing arts cannot be rendered without being refined internally and externally.

For actors, biomechanics is the first step towards truly experiencing a role from within. These external skills are solidly integrated with the actor's body. After training, the actor's increased insight and perception into the performing arts may become discrepant, and some may become talented in performance while some others may remain unchanged. However, the performance skills in terms of accurately conveying a script are still useful for these unchanged dramatic performers. The importance of such performance of body language on the stage is indelible. Chaplin, who was renowned as a talent, rendered Meyerhold's biomechanics in a skilful way despite never having received training in biomechanics, which illustrates the value of biomechanics.

2. Imagination and Physical

It is necessary for actors to go through inner experiences. Without understanding and interpreting characters in a play using inner emotions, the performance would risk being insufficient.

It is common knowledge in China that a person with formal Beijing opera training usually has good performance skills. However, these kinds of advantages, other than through Chinese martial arts that received recognition through the likes of Bruce Lee, seldom travel well outside China due to the lack of disseminators and, most importantly, a systematic way to enable it. After thousands of years, many of these skills and methods are still thriving in China.

Both actors in Beijing opera and other forms of traditional Chinese opera deserve praise for their physical skills and can be acknowledged for the accuracy of their body language on the stage. Therefore, the practice of basic skills for traditional Chinese opera and the practice of Meyerhold's biomechanics are different in approach but equally satisfactory in their results. They are vitally important to actors' performances because their physical skills provide them with a basic, primary level of performance, while their inner expression places them on a higher second level of performance. Without the accurate and vivid expression of body language on the first level, it would be difficult to achieve higher performance on the second level. If they cannot express their inner emotions, the performance would be lacking. This is why actors should be encouraged to engage in physical practice. Many examples can demonstrate that teaching actors basic skills in traditional Chinese drama is conducive to their performance on the stage. This is because the physical training in traditional Chinese drama is very comprehensive, covering all parts of the human body. The next is training in pronunciation, singing and recitation among Chinese dramatic actors. The next is training of the five sensory organs and romantic charm. Such training can lay a solid foundation for an actor stepping towards higher artistic pursuits. For example, the Chinese actor Jackie Chan, actress Qin Hailu and comedian Song Xiaobao all present personal characteristics incisively and vividly and bring the audience into the plot through their skilful performances on the stage, be it in comedies or tragedies.

The experience-based style of performance advocated by Stanislavsky is essential for the enthusiasm and perceptive ability of a professional actor. This style can help actors to demonstrate enthusiasm in their careers as experience trains an actor emotionally. He believed that once an actor's emotional performance reached a certain level, it would naturally drive their external physical expression. Meyerhold was innovative and laid the groundwork for montages. He also developed innovative body shaping techniques in actors' training, thinking that actors' external expressions can develop their inner expressions once a certain level is reached. Be it inner

emotion driving physical performance or vice versa, the combination of experience of the role and physical performance is recognised, both interacting and supporting each other as an indispensable whole. The yin and yang theory of balance can help make performances more complete.

Lines and body language are respectively yang and yin, and body language can also be subdivided into yin and yang. This is because, in traditional Taoism, everything contains yin and yang. Regarding line delivery, dance and martial arts, all of these involve breath control. Instead of being held, the breath circulates within the body, and the state of circular flow is conveyed via the external limbs and organs. Training for taiji also involves this process.

Drama has a long history and it is an important part of human culture. Dramatic literature, music, dance, art and other artistic fields can shape the image of performance art and reveal social contradictions that reflect real life.

There are many styles of performance art that have evolved along with the development of human society. It is difficult to investigate the origin of performance arts. Performing and relying on dynamic physical movements are dynamic human activities. In ancient times, performance emerged as a form of entertainment, such as through small tricks or wrestling, after all the labour had been done. These performance forms were later developed into singing, dance and drama. With the gradual progression of society, the performing arts have developed organically.

Performance is a natural and dramatic form of expression and the performing arts are not limited to theatrical drama, especially in recent times. There is also film and television drama, with acting and motion capturing technology, which involves acting out a digital role in front of a camera. Drama is both one of the oldest and also the youngest performance arts. If using the ancient Greek tragedies and comedies as the origin of theatre, theatrical performance has a history of more than 2,000 years. When

theatre is compared to other performance arts, drama is much more dynamic and demanding and is performed in a relatively fixed space and always with a live performance.

Both the fields of yin and yang philosophy and physics are relative and unified. Whether referring to Einstein's special relativity or the ideological philosophy of humans, they are both explaining the world or the universe as a whole. They are also different; everything has an individual form in an indivisible whole. Therefore, yin and yang relativity is based on physics. In the field of art, everything reflects the yin and yang relationship and is complete.

The human constructed mind is combined with the body to suggest an ideology that can govern the body's movements. After humans started walking upright, this movement progressed along with the development of humankind. The progress of civilisation is inseparable from the scope of movement as movement is the basis of material development. In performance studies, there are many ways for an actor to perform their movements. The 20th century was a war-torn era typified by political, economic and cultural disorder and many factors were changing in this period as people sought the best way to develop in this period of reform. During this period, theatre also progressed and showed reform due to the political and economic turmoil.

3. Harmonious Acting by Using Kunqu Opera Methods

Aristotle gave the definition of tragedy: 'Tragedy is the imitation of a serious and complete action with a certain length ... Imitation is expressed through the action of characters instead of adopting narration ... Emotions of this kind are cultivated through causing sympathy and fear⁶⁸ ... Because tragedies do not imitate people, but people's actions, life and happiness'. According to Aristotle, people did not take actions to show characters but rather showed characters while taking actions.

⁶⁸Aristotle, translated by Luo Niansheng (1982), *Poetics, pub*: People's Literature Publishing House, p19

Therefore, the aim of tragic art lied in organising plots.

Hegel's dramatic theory was subject to the theory of his poems. Poems are divided into three types, namely epic poems, lyrical poems and dramatic poems. Epic poems describe a complete action and a character taking action. Unlike epic poems, lyrical poems demonstrate the inner world of the subjects. Dramatic poems are the unification of the objective principle of epic poems and the subjective principle of lyrical poems through reconciliation and mutual transformation. Therefore, dramas 'should be considered as poems and the highest level of arts in general' in the Hegel system (*Aesthetics*, Volume 3).

Hegel also developed upon the concept of 'action' in Aristotle's dramatic theory, emphasising that it was the fusion of the subject and object. From the perspective of Hegel, a specific mood is always developed into a motive or driving force in dramas and this is manifested as actions through a will to realise inner ideals. In this way, the mood of the subject becomes external, namely objectifying itself, thus shifting to the reality of epic poetry. However, external manifestation is not merely a simple event in the objective world as it also relates to the intention and purpose of the subject. The consequences resulting from actions are caused by the conscious will of the subject and react to the character and situation of the subject. The subject is the foundation of the reality and absorbs the reality, which is the principle of lyrical poetry working in dramatic poetry . Only in this way can actions be dramatic actions.

Hegel pointed out that 'the common purposes and actions of human beings have to be individually embodied as animate substantial existence by means of poems' (*Aesthetics*, Volume 3). He objected to the personalisation of abstract purports and superficial individual embodiment. He demanded an integral whole to be coordinating in mood, character, action and purpose, while writing animate and personalised characters. It also expounds the essential difference between imitating characters and actions. Imitating actions is common in roles. However, imitating personal characters

is individual actors' understanding of the roles. Therefore, student actors imitate the actions of their teachers to learn skills during physical training. This kind of learning is a common form of learning among students. However, individuals are different. Individuals may not get the same results by receiving the same education. With the constant accumulation and learning of knowledge and skills, individual actors gradually become different in their thoughts, psychology and external skills in groups.

When actors perform, it seems to be a circular process of imitation and practising offstage to experience the behavioural characteristics of a role. Therefore, Stanislavsky profoundly agreed with Meyerhold's biomechanics when seeing Meyerhold again in his later years. In addition, Meyerhold also said that he and Stanislavsky sought the same goal in art, as if they were digging the same tunnel from two different directions that would be sure to eventually converge. In the opinion of this paper, it acknowledges that the physical training of actors and experiencing real life supplement and unify each other.

As Richard states: 'But how are we to find something of a general nature that is applicable to *all* as the road to the achievement of the final goal of creative art by everyone individually? Let us see if we cannot find in the nature of the human feelings themselves steps that are common to all and on which, as on the rungs of a ladder, everyone can climb up so as to attain the desired end of becoming a creative artist on the stage.' [1962.163]⁶⁹

This passage shows that Stanislavsky objected to imitating the performance of others. However, he did not deny that actors should imitate and learn from their teachers in training. This process is the only road to the creation of an individualised performance. Actors' performances are a rigorous process including a psychological response, which is reflected through physical actions, facial expressions and sound.

⁶⁹ Richard Schechner (1981), *Between theatre anthropology*, pub: University Of Pennsylvania Press, p 214

However, these seemingly external performances are not enough as they completely depend on natural instincts and lack professional training. The chances are very few, even though there are talented people who can play a role well without receiving professional training.

The Stanislavsky system shows that the fundamental of performance art is to create vivid character images using the actors' bodies, minds and real experiences. For this reason, actors are first required to follow the objective law of life on the stage, feel given situations and the relationship between characters in person according to the logic of average people, judge and think about everything happening on the stage carefully, take actions actively with real psychological desires and obtain a real, organic and accurate self-perception of the stage. This basic law of performance art should be well followed.

Performance studies appear in artforms from multiple cultures; it is not a simple and superficial performance on the stage. For the actors, performance is a process that involves a learning and training system, wherein learning and practising are continued for a long time. An actor's line skills come from breath and pronunciation exercises, as well as daily vocalisation. An actor's movement is more important than the sound of an expression. Sometimes when actors perform a play without lines on stage, they can express and convey their thoughts to audiences just by movement. Of course, facial expressions are also very important and the emotions are communicated directly to audiences so that every part of the body is used while performing. In addition to the voice, there are other essential elements. Training also starts from these basic exercises. As for literature, music perception and poetry, painting and other artistic edification, many actors also like to study these fields if they are interested in them, but it is not considered as necessary homework. These can be left according to their interest and taken as elective tasks. However, these options are very helpful for creating roles, with movement being the initial training for an actor, as stated by Meyerhold. As Meyerhold wrote in 1914:

Movement is the most powerful means of expression in the creation of a theatrical production. Deprived of words, costumes, footlights, wings, theatre auditorium, and left only with the actor and his mastery of movement, the theatre would still remain theatre. The spectator would learn the thoughts and motives of the actor by his movements, his gestures and his facial expressions. (From Meyerhold's description of his course, '*Techniques of Movement on the Stage*' in Lyubov'k term apel'sinam, no. 4-5. P.94)⁷⁰

This shows that Meyerhold proposes that physical exercises maintain performance skills at the beginning of studies. If actors do not study movement properly as a first step, their inner creation and expressions may not be performed well in multiple roles. Therefore, movement skills are the most powerful element in all performances.

Some people have a misunderstanding that acting just requires a short-term training course that lasts for a few months and while this is a misunderstanding, it is correct in some level. They misunderstand that performance is easy to learn and easy to demonstrate if there is passion, but acting involves almost all art styles. However, this perspective also correctly points out that the talent, the actor's creativity in the role, and their inner strength are important. Despite this, when determined people face difficulties, they tackle them with the same determination. It is unrealistic as inner creation creates vivid characters for an actor, but if an actor's performance skill, rhythm and lines are not suitable, the actor may not express all their thoughts on stage. In other words, only when physical skills reach a certain level, can actors use further consideration to shape their roles.

⁷⁰ALMA LAW and MEL GORDON (1996) Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics. Actor in Revolutionary Russia. McFarland & Company, Inc., p.23

Performance requires skills, but there also is no sign of skill. This means that while the best performances use acting techniques in performance, there is no trace of acting, as if the events are really happening in real life. These techniques include movement, rhythm and breathing control. The imitation of other people's actions may look simple. However, if a play is to make audiences feel that the actions are natural and real, and that it is not a contrived performance, the actors need to do many exercises to become capable off the stage because all the performances rely on imitation to get further creation.

Meyerhold's biomechanics strengthens the control of the body's movement ability and balance, as well as control of rhythm on the stage; it is all of these that lead to a good basic training and foreshadowing the further psychological creation.

As part of traditional Chinese opera training methods, young actors learn posture exercises from their master from the beginning of their drama learning period. An increase in age will also lead to new learning about projects on different levels. During study, masters also teach students music, literature and singing so as to strengthen students' performance on the stage because in Chinese opera, singing, actor's lines and performances are integrated with the performers, which greatly increases the difficulty during study. Hence, in ancient times, when master choosing students, they would consider the child applicant's bone structure, appearance and sound. If external conditions did not reach the teacher's requirements, they would not accept them as an apprentice.

Students likely need to study movement and creation for ten years, but depending on the circumstances of the apprenticeship, a good student could perform earlier on the stage. Some acting students may not meet their teacher's requirements and they need to do more practice before performing on stage and being allowed in front of audiences, an actor on stage performing opera means that the actor did a great deal of hard work every day no matter the circumstances that people would not be aware of off stage. These practices relate to every part of the body, voice exercises, music,

literature and so on, with huge courses that students are required to complete each day. Even the likes of Mei Lanfang would have worked hard for several decades.

Therefore, the above quotation Meyerhold's record is a certain scientific theoretical as basic, the material accumulation to achieve the amount of change, there is a qualitative leap. The human mind is powerful and creativity and passion is essential for professional performers, while they also need basic education on performance studies to express themselves internally and externally. Good performance requires creativity and basic physical skills to express the creativity.

People live on Earth, which is one of the eight planets of the solar system in the Milky Way galaxy. There are also other galaxies like the Magellanic Clouds where humans have never been. Human survival on Earth is linked through an inextricable relationship with the universe, where the universe accommodates Earth and Earth provides human and countless other lifeforms. Therefore, the energy of Earth comes from the universe and human energy comes from Earth, so humans and the universe are also in a close, mutual relationship.

In this way, it is logical that there is also an inextricable relationship between energy with the universe in the human body. In this, humans breath air, which provides energy to the body Some may think that there is a powerful invisible force from the universe that affects them through breathing. Thus, in performance creation, breathing control embodies the rhythm of the performance and the performance of the rhythm reflects the role's temperament creation. This performance comes from the actor's own practice and training, or maybe there is an invisible energy in their mind.

The performance world is full of countless dramatic stories. Characters exist in the stories, which requires actors to use their bodies and consciousness to explain their role's interpretation so as to become active characters. Hence, different actors interpreting the same role will have different results because everyone's body is different, everyone's thinking is different, and everyone has a different understanding,

making role shaping different for different actors. In such a diverse field, there are questions regarding the nature of universality. Based on a variety of different phenomena described above, these differences have the same background in that the learning process is drama. In the process, every student substantially studies the same drama course. Through the same access to basic education, students can develop and create their unique qualities.

When Mei Lanfang performed in Russia in 1935, the Russian director Meyerhold thought he had the same theory as Mei Lanfang. He was also a student of Stanislavski, who deemed actors' physical training to be very important. Hence, in his theatre, the actors always did training, but the value of this was not recognised by society at the time. Therefore, his theatre was subsequently ordered to be closed. After this, Stanislavski invited Meyerhold to return to his theatre and continue acting as the director. After Stanislavski watched Mei Lanfang's acting, he also praised saying that: 'Chinese drama is regular free movement'.

Drama training needs to focus on physical and mental training, but if there is just mental training, the movements will not be suitable. Performances cannot be their best without a balance between the internal and external. A combination of both is best for audiences and could realise real performance art.

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