

Yao Yi-Wei: A Modern Chinese Playwright*

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Among the outstanding playwrights in modern Chinese theatre, Yao Yi-wei is likely the most serious. He is also a critic and theorist and, in fact, is better known for that. Starting to write for the stage in 1963, Yao has now published seven plays: *People from Phoenixville* (來自鳳凰鎮的人, 1963), *Flying Tiger Sun Steals a Bride* (孫飛虎搶親, 1965), *The Jade Goddess of Mercy* (碾玉觀音, 1967), *Red Nose* (紅鼻子, 1969), *Shen Sheng* (申生, 1971), *The Chest* (一口箱子, 1973), and *Fu Ch'ing Chu* (傅青主, 1978).¹ He is now on the verge of completing his eighth play tentatively entitled *Come Along with Me* (我們一同走走看). *Shen Sheng* and *The Chest* have been translated into English as *The Crown Prince Shen Sheng* and *Suitcase* respectively.² With the exception of *Flying Tiger Sun*, *Shen Sheng*, and *Fu Ch'ing Chu*,³ all the rest have been staged more than once, and *The Jade Goddess* in an adapted film version was awarded a high prize in an Asian Film Festivals. *The Chest* was also produced in English in 1968 in Taipei, using a new translation entitled *The Trunk*.⁴ However, very little has been written on his plays and the productions. The present study is chiefly based upon the reading of his plays as works of literature and theatre and only the aspects that interest me most, both in terms of idea and form, will be tackled. For the convenience of those who need to refresh their memory of these plays, plot outlines are provided in Appendix I. The analyses of the scripts will follow the chronological order of the publication.

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1. People from Phoenixville

The Chinese title of the play could mean a person or several persons from Phoenixville as there are four characters related to the place: Chu (or Shen) Wan-ling, her brother Hsi-kou, Chou, and Hsia. Among them Chu is obviously the protagonist. She wishes to be a phoenix to perch in a wu-tung tree—the only tree that a phoenix alights upon according to legend. And she sings twice:

Phoenixville has a golden phoenix;
Phoenixville has a little girl.
The phoenix flies up the wu-tung tree;
The little girl is married to the big family Wang.⁴ (pp. 25, 80)

She had fallen in love with Hsia who appeared to her to be a promising youth—her wu-tung tree. But he went away as a result of her father's objection. She kept waiting for his return, yet not a single word from him ever came to her. Her hope became despair, which in turn grew into hatred. But she still kept on hoping that some day he would return a great hero, or a doctor, to comfort her on her death bed. Then Hsia's actual appearance as a priest in Act I destroys her hope and imagination or dream (p. 64). Now she decides to kill herself. Symbolically the suicide puts an end to her past all together and her sleep after that is a transition. When she wakes up, physically and symbolically, she says to Hsia that she has decided to live "because—because I have met with a man whose life is worse than mine, who needs imagination to live on more than I do . . . I can't let him down; I can't destroy his imagination . . ." (p. 67).

Life is after all positive though it may have its dark moments. To Chu, Chou's intrusion into her house and life is as sudden and mysterious as Hsia's re-appearance. When Hsia left her, he was looking for worldly prosperity. Who could have known that he would return as a priest? And who could have known that Chu's innocent kindness toward Chou years ago would turn out to him "like a floating log to a drowning man in the sea" when he felt nothing to be worthy and almost killed himself (p. 54). Even Chu's idiot brother hopes for toy cars and, ironically, would answer Hsia's questions for the sake of money (pp. 28-30). The maid-servant maintains her hope in her little brother and waits for him to grow up (p. 11).

To live is to hope and hope encourages men to live. However, there seems to be another level of meaning in the play when we come to think of the married couple, Mr. and Mrs. P'an, and the flower girl. Mrs. P'an wishes that her husband had a better position because, as Chu points out to her, she feels superior to him. This sense of superiority makes Mrs. P'an feel discontent and fail to enjoy the happiness of her present life. And this realization comes to Chu only after her attempted suicide. It not only helps her send the P'an's home with happiness in their hearts but enables her to forgive Hsia, a change which enlightens her life in the future.

The idea of discontent as the root of unhappiness is also expressed through the blind flower girl. Before Chu tries to kill herself, the flower girl says to her:

... I have seen many, many people, I know them. They — they love only what they don't have, but not what they already have. So they are unhappy.

And she continues murmuring, though Chu refuses to listen:

A blind flower girl, with flowers she tries to make people not to worry and not to feel sad. Miss, you learn from me, learn to close your eyes, you will feel calm, you will then be happy with everything. (p. 8)

When Chu finally sends her away, the girl gives her a flower and adds: "Wear this on your head; it will bless you," then retires with "a mysterious smile" (p. 8). But Chu is deaf and blind. Man often has to learn to live and/or to love life through painful experience. Man is selfish, but, interestingly, he finds better reason to live when he feels that he is living for others, as seen from the lives of Chu, Chou, and even Hsia.

With his first play, Yao was quite ambitious, both thematically and technically. He handles the main action quite successfully. But he has not made the best use of the minor characters. The idiot brother is a good example, about whom he says in the "Afterthought":

A friend of mine thought that it is not appropriate to make Hsi-kou an idiot. I gave lots of thought to this character. . . . There are different kinds of idiots. . . . I use the simplest type—one with a retarded mind, one who remains always in childhood in knowledge and experience, . . . It does not

matter whether or not he is called an idiot or Hsi-kou, or by any other name, because the meaning of this character cannot be decided by himself, but by the wholeness of the play.⁵

The playwright is right to have the idiot or fool in the play, who has a significant function. We see Hsi-kou five times and hear him once: his existence is first introduced to us by a very brief appearance and by the sound he makes off-stage imitating car horns. He begins to function in the plot when he returns to the room through the window. Through him, a common virtue possessed by Chu and Chou is discovered—both are sympathetic and willing to help. But his next appearance at the end of Act I only serves to “frighten” Hsia. He is most interesting when we see him again at the rise of the curtain for Act II. Hsia is trying to make him talk by promising him money (pp. 28-30). Not only is the money bait ironic, but the “conversation” is suggestive and has the effect of the theatre of the absurd. It reveals to us a very rough picture of Hsi-kou’s past and the past of his family at Phoenixville, but the sketch is not clear enough to kill our interest to wish to know more—a good technique to arouse and maintain suspense, which could hardly be done as dramatically through characters of a normal type. A few lines from the play may show my point better than any explanation:

HSIA. Tell me, do you know Phoenixville?

HSI-KOU [*with silly smiles*]. Hi-hi, phoenix, phoe—[Shakes his head.]

HSIA. Your old home—the place you used to live?

HSI-KOU [*happily*]. I live in house. (p. 28)

Then the subject of their conversation changes to his father:

HSIA. He drank?

HSI-KOU. He drank, drank a lot of wine; mother not drink, sister not drink, I not drink!

HSIA. What happened later?

HSI-KOU. Later—later—no more later.

HSIA. Try to think what happened later.

HSI-KOU [*thinks*]. Drh—[*Remembers.*] You give me the money.

HSIA. Try to think what happened to your papa later.

HSI-KOU. You give me money. I want money. You cheat me.

(pp. 29-30)

He comes back on stage by the end of Act II, functioning only as an agent to wake up his sister. Then, as the curtain rises for Act III, he is sleeping on the sofa and is awoken by Ch'in, who tries to find out from him where Chu is, with no result of course. We neither see him nor hear him again except that Chu mentions him once as "my poor brother" (p. 62). So far we can say that Hsi-kou performs an important function in the play as a simple idiot. However, when I think of the fact that he is the main character's brother, I expect to see more of him especially in relation to Chu in terms of theme and dramatic interest.

However, Yao has undoubtedly proved his talent as a playwright. The minor defects do not take away his success in careful plot planning and characterization, and the idea behind them.

2. Flying Tiger Sun Steals a Bride

Superficially, the play is a re-interpretation of the Romance of the Western Chamber, which has long been a favorite story to the Chinese people. It is therefore traditionally Chinese in plot. However, Yao's treatment of the story has nothing in common with the traditional dramatization of the romance from the T'ang dynasty to contemporary China. The idea of bride stealing is quite common in Chinese folk tales and fiction, and the man in that case is always a rascal. Yao's Sun does not fall into the pattern. If the following lines which question the significance of appearance and reality can represent the main idea of the play, themetically *Flying Tiger Sun* is more modern than traditional. Here are the lines recited by Sun to Shuang-wen:

I heard that you are going to marry that Cheng Heng.
Why? Cheng Heng is not the man you love.
He carries you over to his house in a bridal-sedan-chair.
Is not that the same as my kidnapping.
I am also a man in love with you,
Yet had never a chance to be around your side.
Tell me if this is fair or unfair indeed. (pp. 154-55)

In the traditional fiction and drama, Sun is a bad bandit and tries to steal Yingying (now Shuang-wen) simply because she is pretty. The motivation is physical, not spiritual. Yao's Sun has the dual personality of

a bad man and a true gentleman.

The portrayal of a dual personality is common among many modern writers, especially in Western literature. In this light, one may say that Yao has received Western influence. To a certain extent, Sun is comparable to Brecht's Shen-te in *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, who has to put up a false face (as Shui Ta) to survive in the hostile society. But unlike the *Good Woman*, in *Flying Tiger Sun* all characters have this dual personality more or less. Chang, Shuang-wen, her maid Ah-hung, and Cheng all have a face they project to the world or an appearance as the world sees it, and a hidden one true to their inner nature. Nevertheless, to say that Yao took the idea of the dual nature of a man first from the West could be very wrong. Human nature as both good and evil has been one of the major arguments in the long history of Chinese thought, though traditionally it is seldom treated by novelists or dramatists in one character.

Flying Tiger Sun is traditionally Chinese more in linguistic form than in idea and theatrical form and structure. In his "Afterthought" Yao says very clearly that he is trying to write after the traditional Chinese theatre and folk art, and he adds:

I adopted a very popular verse language (通俗的韻文體) and try to establish a "reciting" (誦) form for our theatre [today]. To me if we cannot establish the "reciting" form, we can only put on speech (口語) drama and will never have verse drama. Our theatre will then remain a cripple and cannot firmly stand up. In relation to music, each second half of a sung line is repeated, intended to be the "supporting tune" (幫腔), and can be sung by actors on and off the stage, and even by the audience.⁶

The language of the play is very different from that of *Phoenixville*. *Phoenixville* is composed of prose common to everyday speech; in *Flying Tiger Sun*, the author uses various kinds of language: free verse, which is to be recited but not spoken, forms the main body of the play and serves for plot advancement, commenting, and thinking aloud; short prose dialogue is for transitional lines, to be spoken between the free verse. There are also lines sung by the chorus-like dancers, written after folk songs or popular ballads. The language forms of these two plays fit pretty well the different settings—the everyday speech for the modern background of *Phoenixville* and the verse form for *Flying Tiger Sun* that sets its time in the past.

Among the lines for recitation, there is one type specially worth no-

ting: the use of duplicating structure or parroting, that is, one character repeating the lines of another. There are at least half a dozen instances in the play. (Parroting can be found in most of his plays, but never as many as in this one.) In most cases, Yao uses it very successfully, with slight variations or exact micmicking. For instance, in the beginning of Act II, when Shuang-wen, Chang, and Ah-hung are alone on stage, the parroting goes like this:

SHUANG-WEN. We have been sitting here very long!
CHANG. Very long!
AH-HUNG. Maybe very long!
SHANG-WEN. Summer is about over!
CHANG. Summer is really about over!
AH-HUNG. Summer is not yet over!
SHUANG-WEN. When summer is over it is autumn.
CHANG. When summer is over it is autumn.
AH-HUNG. Summer is not yet over.
SHUANG-WEN. Autumn is coming! [*With sudden excitement.*]
Autumn is coming!
CHANG [*Murmurs*]. Autumn is coming!
AH-HUNG. Autumn is not yet coming!
SHUANG-WEN. That was an autumn of great beauty.
[*Then recites in a very clear but flat tone.*]
That was an autumn of great beauty,
That was an autumn full of white clouds,
That was an autumn with a ground covered by yellow
flowers,
That was an autumn with west wind,
That was an autumn when the wild geese flew to the
south,
That was an autumn when the frost forest was tinted
with drunk [red]. (pp. 115-16)

The passage shows two basic forms of duplicating Yao likes to use: (1) exact parroting; (2) similar sentence patterns with partial variation. And the last five lines about autumn are of special interest. Basically or superficially, these five lines are kind of paraphrase of the following lines from the *Yüan Western Chamber* generally attributed to Wang Shih-fu (王實甫):

碧雲天
黃花地
西風緊
北雁南飛
曉來誰染霜林醉

Blue-cloud sky,
Yellow-flower ground;
West wind blowing hard,
Northern geese southward flying.
Since the dawn who has tinted the
frost forest drunk [red]?

Almost identical lines are adopted in later Western Chamber drama of the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties.⁷ But Yao's lines do not seem to be an attempt of imitation; they are to me a device to remind us of the Yüan play, and thus produce a montage effect.

Sometimes Yao seems to overuse the duplicating technique. It is especially obvious in the following example, though the lines are to be spoken very quickly:

SHUANG-WEN. We didn't cry, laugh, love, hope!
AH-HUNG. We didn't cry, laugh, love, hope!
SUN. We didn't cry, laugh, love, hope!
CHANG. We didn't cry, laugh, love, hope!

Then Shuang-wen continues:

We have no choice, or have been chosen.
We can't tell one thing from another, can't think, can't understand.
We simply hide behind a high wall!
We simply hide in our clothes.
We hide in a hole.
We are mice.
Mice, mice, mice, mice. (pp. 164-65)

Each of these seven lines is repeated by the other three in exactly the same order and manner as shown above.

As a whole the language of this play is beautiful and poetic, and is of absorbing interest to read, though challenging to the actors. Maybe the playwright himself was also so absorbed in the beauty of a language capable of being recited that he forgot for a while the audience and the stage. When Sun and Chang first enter and the two travelers are talking about them to their faces, the readers, who know their identities from the stage direction, may enjoy the ironic fun very much. But the audience, who does not know

they are Sun and Chang yet, will miss all the comic and ironic effects.

As for whether or not Yao needs to use recitation, prose speech, and songs together, and as to how such a combination in this play may work on stage, it is better to wait for experienced actors and directors to find out for us in the theatre.

3. The Jade Goddess of Mercy

As the late Professor Yü Ta-kang (俞大綱) has pointed out, the plot of this play is based upon a folktale of the Sung dynasty with the same title. Yü also says that Yao has well preserved "the spirit of the original tale, and has treated the romance with the sentiment and thought of a modern man. What Yao expresses here is the traditional Chinese spirit of silent self-sacrifice for an ideal life under great suffering." And the play "bridges the modern and the traditional, the Chinese and the Western theatre arts."⁸

Generally speaking, *The Jade Goddess* deserves Yü's favorable comments. It is perhaps more traditionally Chinese than *Flying Tiger Sun* in language, in form, and in theme. With the experience of his second play, the author by now knew better the difficulties of treating historical or legendary stories and the problems of staging such plays. Though he still uses reciting, speaking, and singing in this play, reciting now appears only once when Hsiu-hsiu asks her son to memorize a short classical passage about love, marriage and death (pp. 239-41), which Chang Chien (張健) takes as a very successful episode to express the unselfish-giving and selfish-taking dual nature of love.⁹ Singing by a chorus is only used to open the play. Professor Yü sees this as an extension of the chanting of entrance lines of the traditional Chinese theatre.¹⁰ The rest of the play is composed of prose dialogue in "poetized daily speech, without any intentional flowery expression or rhetorical unnaturalness." The play preserves the beautiful style of the classical Chinese verse drama.¹¹

Duplicating or parroting is also more successfully employed here than in *Flying Tiger Sun*. When Ts'ui goes to bid goodbye to Hsiu-hsiu in Act I, she first asks where he is going and when he is leaving. Then Ts'ui says that they should talk about something else as they do not have much time to be together:

HSIU-HSIU. What shall we talk about?
 TS'UI. What shall we talk about?—Let's talk about something happy.
 HSIU-HSIU. Let's talk about something happy.—
 TS'UI. Let's talk about something happy—those old days.
 HSIU-HSIU. Those old days.
 TS'UI. The places we have been to.
 HSIU-HSIU. The places we have been to.
 TS'UI. The mountains we've climbed.
 HSIU-HSIU. The mountains we've climbed.
 TS'UI. We flew kites in the mountains.
 HSIU-HSIU. We flew kites in the mountains.
 TS'UI. We caught crickets in the grass.
 HSIU-HSIU. We caught crickets in the grass.
 TS'UI. We were singing, laughing, shouting, and jumping.
 HSIU-HSIU. We were singing, laughing, shouting, and jumping. (p. 205)

Here their memory goes back from places to action, and the use of language—a shift from nouns to verbs—well matches the change. This leads their conversation to the jade sculpture, to Ts'ui's dream of creating a human goddess of mercy, not a supernatural being, to Hsiu-hsiu's discovery of happiness of living "according to one's own will" (p. 207), and finally to her "calm" decision of leaving with him. "I—am going—with—you!" (p. 208) Their conversation ends in another parrotting:

TS'UI. But to where shall we go?
 HSIU-HSIU. To where?
 TS'UI. To where?
 HSIU-HSIU. The world is big.
 TS'UI. The world is big.
 HSIU-HSIU. We will find a place.
 TS'UI. We will find a place.
 HSIU-HSIU. A place we can settle down.
 TS'UI. A place we can settle down.
 HSIU-HSIU. There must be.
 TS'UI. Must be?
 HSIU-HSIU. Isn't it?
 TS'UI. Yes—yes—. (p. 209)

It should also be noticed that here the intitative position is taken over by Hsiu-hsiu, who has now become very independent. All these parrotings are very well planned, but take very good actors to make them work. Other-

wise, the effect may be undesirably comic.

In plot and theme, the play has a very clear focus on Ts'ui and Hsiu-hsiu. We are hardly allowed for a moment to forget their presence. Now what is the play about? Is it a tragedy of love as a result of unreasonable insistence on an older social code? I hesitate to call it a tragedy of love: Ts'ui dies happily and Hsiu-hsiu lives on for the sake of their son. Besides, the love between them is not exactly of the romantic type, though it cannot be denied that there is strong affection between them. Hsiu-hsiu first leaves her parents with Ts'ui because of the rebellious blood in her (p. 203), because she wants to live a free life, not because of love for him. When she settles down with Ts'ui, her happiness lies in helping the poor. When she finds Ts'ui again in the snow and takes him home, she refuses to confess her real identity to him. In a word, he has never been the real center of her life and she has never lived purely for his sake. She has her own ideal of life, which is changing or progressing as a human being. Neither has Ts'ui loved her with all his heart. He confesses to her that when he is working on the sculpture, he is not thinking of her at all. If the work resembles her, it is not his intention. It cannot mean that he is shy to admit the truth. One cannot be a true lover who does not even have the courage to admit his love to the girl he loves.

To me, the play is more than the romantic love between an artist and an unusual girl. The author is here probing an old but always fresh problem—the relationship between life and art. Ts'ui the artist makes the sculpture; Hsiu-hsiu, the human goddess of mercy, is the inspiration of the work. But why is the sculpture the Goddess of Mercy? The Chinese original for the Goddess is *Kuan-yin* (觀音), meaning literally “looking upon” or “contemplating all sounds and voices in the world.” She is often regarded as a symbol of salvation and progeny.

As an artist, Ts'ui makes his sculpture after a beautiful vision that has been in him for many years, and now the piece of good jade helps him realize his dream of expressing or materializing the vision. In other words, the content has now found the medium to give it a form. At this moment, the artist just follows his intuition, which, to me, is an outflow of the conscious and the unconscious. The idea of an unconscious or half-conscious creating process is revealed first in the fact that the sculpture resembles Hsiu-hsiu. The artist forgets himself and everything else when he is working on the jade (pp. 206-7). It is then unmistakably re-inforced by the second piece of

Goddess of Mercy which resembles the young Hsiu-hsiu again, which the artist makes many years later when he is blind. In relation to this, we must not forget that Ts'ui, as he tells Winter Plum, has a strong desire to make a sculpture of a beggar:

The one sitting by the temple every day, the beggar with no legs. He has a plate in front of him, for passers-by to drop something in. But he never asks for anything. Whenever I pass by there, I look at him. He has smiles at the corners of his mouth. You can't exactly call that smiling. . . and—his eyes . . . that send out an unusual light. Is that hatred? No. Is that irony? No. Is that pity? No. Is that begging for mercy? No, no. Not any of these. What is that? . . . What is he thinking? Could it be that he is really a *spectator*? (p. 216, emphasis mine)

Is the beggar another form of *Kuan-yin*? He may be and he may not be. But he is undoubtedly another form of inspiration for the artist. If the play is a story of love, what then is the function of the beggar episode?

Besides, art is more than a simple copy of life. It is something divine, too. So the sculpture is at the same time the Goddess of Mercy and Hsiu-hsiu—the young Hsiu-hsiu naturally, who is not practical-minded yet. As a human artist, Ts'ui is right in saying that as “none of us has seen gods we have no idea if gods ever exist” (p. 206). Though he does not think that God is dead, as some Existentialists do, he cannot find Him anywhere; he has to turn to man for inspiration. He can only create something he “understands, something after what [he] has touched, something [he] respects and likes, something ideal, something really most beautiful, something living among us” (p. 206). And at this point, it might be interesting to mention that in the original story of the Sung dynasty, the Hsiu-hsiu who runs away with Ts'ui is a ghost. Yao has changed it into a living soul.

What is more, the author seems to agree that art and life can be married to each other; but when the mundane elements in life completely dominate life, art has to seek inspiration in another world, or art no longer has a place in this world. On the other hand, life without art is also painful. This idea is clearly suggested in the last speech by Hsiu-hsiu:

[He] has found the Hsiu-hsiu of his own heart, that is not me, not me, not me; it is the Hsiu-hsiu of the old days, not the present one. No, no, no, [confusedly]. Neither. It is the Hsiu-hsiu of his own vision, the Hsiu-

hisu that never really exists. (p. 268)

Superficially, these words could mean that she has to find something to cling to in order to live on—for the sake of their child. In order to live, she has to deny her love and sorrow for Ts'ui, as it would be easier if she can pretend that he never really exists for her. But it is more meaningful to read these lines symbolically: when art forsakes life, life must still go on. The play is not pessimistic; as long as life goes on, there is jade and the artist to make something beautiful out of it, which "may or may not sell for a good price" (p. 266). Art is something beautiful "for all the painful, for those with broken hope . . . to give them hope, to give them beauty, to give them faith" (p. 235). Ts'ui is dead, but his blood still runs in his child. To read the play in this light, we might say that the playwright is repeating something we have already seen in his first play. In this connection, what Chang Chien says is worth our attention. He concludes in his short study of the play:

Undoubtedly, Ts'ui is a man of dreams. The conflict between dream and reality is woven together and, then, each goes its own way. The subject matter is already treated in his *People from Phoenixville*. But it is now more deeply explored.¹²

True, we do not see as much struggle in *Phoenixville* as we can feel in this play. But it seems to me that in these plays dream and reality, or life and art or hope, are not really separated.

There is however something about this play that still puzzles me: the blindness of the artist. Though it is well prepared in terms of plot development, what does it signify? Is the blindness like that of Oedipus the King? Is art blind? Or is it that there is no symbolic meaning at all? I fail to find anything definite in the play that may help answer this question.

4. Red Nose

After taking materials from the past for two plays, Yao returns to a contemporary setting in *Red Nose*. But the play is completely different from *People from Phoenixville* in structure, characterization and the use of language.

Structurally, *Red Nose* resembles Gorki's *The Lower Depths* and Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*, especially the latter. Hotel P'eng-lai (蓬萊, meaning the Fairy Island of the immortals on the East Sea of China) is more comparable to Harry Hope's Saloon than to the cavelike basement in *The Lower Depths*, both in function and in the ironically symbolical level of the names. Red Nose bears closer comparability to Hickey than to Luka. He and Hickey are kind of clowns who make others happy by putting on a false face and, when the plays end, both are released, in a sense, of the burden of life. The similarities should end here. *Red Nose* is not *The Iceman Cometh* or *The Lower Depths* and it is, in various aspects, not as deep and great as the two Western masterpieces. The motley group of has-beens waiting in Harry Hope's Saloon have suffered much more in life and have lived through greater failures than Yao's people, who are confined in Hotel P'eng-lai mostly by external force for a much shorter span of time. They all leave the hotel when the play ends. The most significant difference lies in the way the characters choose to live. Hickey's trouble is not of an ordinary type. He confesses:

You see, Evelyn loved me. And I loved her. That was the trouble. It would have been easy to find a way out if she hadn't loved me so much. Or if I hadn't loved her. But as it was, there was only one possible way. (He pauses—then adds simply) I had to kill her.¹³

Then, for some strange reason (which O'Neill does not explain), Hickey travels to the saloon to tell the people there the story of how and why he killed his wife, and then decides to go to the Chair himself. Red Nose left home because of some small differences with his wife, and is not willing to go back when his wife finds him in the hotel.

Both Luka and Hickey bring disturbance to the seeming calm of the people in the basement and the saloon by waking them up to the consciousness of themselves. They bring to them hope and death. But Red Nose makes everyone but his wife happy.

So much for the comparison. In *Red Nose* the playwright has used a special device to mark the clear-cut division between the acts; that is, each act is given a topic, which, like the Title Lines (題目正名) of the Yüan drama, suggests the theme of the act. The topics are:

- Act I : Falling of calamity (降禍);
Act II : Removing of calamity (消災);
Act III: Thanking gods (謝神); and
Act IV: Offering sacrifice (獻祭).

In the first act, in addition to the common calamity of the landfall that blocks the road, each character has his trouble: Ts'eng and Hu are worried about money problems, Ch'iu fails to compose any more music, the Yehs suffer from the idiocy of their daughter, Mr. p'eng is made sad by the news of the air-crash as his son is supposed to be on that flight, the vaudeville people are afraid of finding no place to stay for the night. All these calamities are included in the list of all human troubles pointed out by Red Nose in his first show improvised at the hotel (pp. 302-3) as a means of appealing to the manager. Psychologically, the show wakes them up to their worries and startles them. Structurally, it builds up a relation between Red Nose and the other people there for the later development of the play.

The calamities begin to disappear in the second act: P'eng finds his son still alive, Ts'eng and Hu's money problem is solved, the little idiot-like girl begins to have some reaction, Ch'iu finds the voice in his heart, and the vaudeville actors are allowed to stay and find means to pay for the expensive hotel. With the exception of Ts'eng and Hu's resolution, all the rest are related directly to Red Nose. Act III is the shortest of the four. Here P'eng invites the company to do a show as an expression of his thanks to God or gods for his son's being alive. In this play within a play, Red Nose raises the question of what is happiness and who in the world is really happy. Though the show is rather didactic and is not very skillfully introduced, the way Yao chooses to answer this very old question is interesting. It is interesting not because the person who answers the question is his wife, whose appearance is in a sense a *deus ex machina*; it is interesting because the person who says she knows the answer really does not know it at all, and because the question gives the whole play a focus.

The main activity of the last act is to offer sacrifice and the sacrifice obviously seems to be Red Nose, who gives himself to the sea. This, in addition to what he does in Act II, may lead us to conclude that the play has a very clear theme—self-sacrifice for others. "When a person sacrifices himself for others, he is most happy," says he to his wife. "When Buddha left his palace, when Christ was ready to be crucified on the Cross, when Wu Feng

... rode [to the aboriginal tribe] to offer himself as their live sacrifice, they were then the happiest persons in the world" (p. 348).

But Red Nose is not Christ, nor Buddha, nor Wu Feng. He has only the courage to act when he is behind the mask, as he confesses to his wife:

When I put on the mask I have no fear. I have no fear at all. I feel free, I feel free at last—living freely in my own world. I feel that I can look at others calmly and am no longer afraid of myself. (p. 346)

It is difficult to imagine this courage and feeling of freedom existing only behind a mask either to be a virtue in itself or to be a positive message from the playwright. In *Flying Tiger Sun*, we have seen that the people who try to hide behind costumes or clothes are compared to mice hidden in holes. The red-nose mask is of the same nature as the clothes or costumes. Even if we try to compare the red-nose mask with the bandit costume, it is still hard to associate Red Nose with the spirit of self-sacrifice for others since the people who use the bandit costume (Sun and Chang) lack this spirit. Regardless of the help he gives to P'eng, Ch'iu, and others, Red Nose is not trying to save the dance girl when he runs to the sea—it could be very different if he were not wearing the mask this time. The false alarm of the drowning of the girl is a practical joke, but a practical joke that should be taken very seriously. It is not a joke played by the dance girl on Red Nose, but one the playwright plays on us readers and audiences. It seems more reasonable and meaningful to believe that Red Nose is running away from his wife for good as he cannot face her without the mask and she persists in removing it. Alas! he still does not have the courage to set himself free without the mask.

Even if we count his last action as a selfless noble act, not as a desperate attempt at freeing himself from the human bondage of his wife, his sacrifice is still different in nature from those of Christ, Buddha, and Wu Feng. Born in a good family, married to a good wife who takes as good care of him as his parents did, Red Nose does not have to do anything or worry about anything for himself. He is deprived of the first right of a man—to do something. He says:

Then one day I asked myself: What am I for in the world? What is the significance of my existence? I asked myself: What can you do? What

do you want to do? I kept on thinking and thinking, and then I began to feel uneasy No wonder Buddha did not want to live the life of a prince and left his royal family. (pp. 346-7)

He dreamed being a Buddha, a Christ, or at least a Wu Feng. But he is an ordinary man, "more ordinary than the ordinary. [He is] timid, cowardly, weak . . . shy . . . afraid of sleeping alone, afraid of darkness, afraid of everything, even a little mouse, a small insect, . . . afraid of putting on new clothes, . . . afraid of being sick, afraid of death" (pp.348-9). He has to hide behind a mask—the mask of a vaudeville clown. Christ wore no mask on the Cross, Buddha had no mask, and though Wu Feng had on a red cape when he rode to the aborigines that cape was not a mask, either, at least not of the same nature as Red Nose's.

Judged in a deeper sense, the whole play is an irony on the dilemma of human existence, or the dual nature of all men—a mixture of cowardice and a conscious and unconscious noble spirit; it is not a praise of self-sacrifice as a virtue or a means to achieve true happiness. The universal meaning of this dilemma is reinforced by the four stages or acts of the play, which suggest the ancient ritual of human struggle and suffering and man's relationship to fate. Red Nose, as I see it, is the most tragic character of all Yao's creations, and the most interesting and complex, too. He was given the name Shen-tz'u (神賜), meaning sent or blessed by gods or God, but that name exists only for his wife, and parents too perhaps. We are never told what his last name is.

He is, in a sense, a degenerated Don Quixote.

5. Shen Sheng

Each act of the play begins with a chorus of courtmaids to provide atmosphere, to serve as an exposition, to comment on and/or to lament the fate of the characters and human beings as a whole. The oracle and the spells and prayers of the old lady in black arouse in us something fearful and mysterious. All these elements may contribute a kind of remote, past feeling to the story. They may also suggest the influence Yao received from the Western classical drama, especially the Greek tragedy, in his writing of this

play. And the soliloquies—three times by Li-chi and once by Shao-chi—appear also to be of Western influence. But it must be pointed out that the use of chorus and singing is not foreign to classical Chinese theatre and that thinking-aloud and self-description of action are especially common there. Though it is safe to say that *Shen Sheng* bears some characteristics of both the Western and Chinese classical plays, it is difficult to say how much the playwright borrowed, consciously or unconsciously, from each. So it is with the poetic language of the play: it is basically Chinese but occasionally one may detect the flavour of Shakespeare's blank verse. The study of his source of influence would be a good topic in itself. At the present moment, I would like to turn to the theme of the play.

Unmistakenly, there is a strong contrast between good and evil. Good, embodied in Prince Shen Sheng and Shao-chi, is passive. It is stricken down by the evil force represented by Li-chi, the court lady, and jester Shih, who, traditionally and ironically, are finally destroyed by their own work. In this light, the play can be read as a continued treatment of the dual personality of human beings that Yao first wrote about in *Flying Tiger Sun*. He offers no moral judgment in the early play but has now a clear message to preach: "Good and evil are twin brothers" (p. 372) and all evils are born out of an excessive desire for vain glories and power, which ends up in self-destruction.

At this point, a problem needs to be clarified: who is the protagonist of the play, Shen Sheng or Li-chi? Judged from the title of the play, it should be the prince. But he, like the ghosts in Ibsen's *Ghosts*, never physically appears on stage. He is only mentioned from the very beginning to the first half of the last act, on the average of once every three pages—sometimes a line or two, sometimes just his name, and a few times in long descriptions by the chorus. Supposing we accept him as the central character, we may say that the theme of the play is the victimizing of a good soul who is chosen for power but does not have the ambition and will to fight or live for it. Nor does he have the intention to fight for his rights due to his virtue as a man and a son, like Hippolytus in Euripides's tragedy.

The character that dominates is undoubtedly Li-chi, who is the incarnation of desire for power. The riddle-song that appears twice in the play, first in Act III spoken between the old lady in black and the court jester Shih (p. 432) and then in Act IV near the closing of the play sung between Li-chi and Shao-chi (pp. 460-61), tells the fate of the sisters:

In front of the gate there are two trees;
One is short and the other tall.
There come two magpies.
In which tree will they nest all?

In front of the gate there are two trees;
One is short and the other tall.
There come two magpies;
They will all nest in the tree tall.

Suddenly there rises a blast,
That uproots the tree tall.
Where are the nests now?
Where do they fall?

Suddenly there rises a blast,
That uproots the tree tall.
Where are the nests now?
On to the ground they all fall.

Here, if we consider alone the falling of the nests from a high place, the fall could be associated with Shen Sheng, especially when one recalls the earlier comments on him by Shih:

The higher one's reputation and position goes, the greater jealousy he invites and, therefore, the greater chance for him to fall. This is just the meaning of what the proverb says: "The higher you climb the worse you fall." (p. 388)

And then the fall could be applied to anybody in a similar situation.¹⁴ But we must notice that the birds actively choose to nest on the tall tree. And this active struggle for high position or power tells all the difference between Li-chi and Prince Shen Sheng. From this analysis, it seems better to treat Li-chi as the central character of the play. And then, what is the tragedy? Li-chi's going to extremes violates the Chinese moral principle of the golden mean and her downfall merely serves her right. In that case, the whole moral or lesson could be summarized by Robert Frost's "Fire and Ice":

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.

From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate,
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.¹⁵

Why does Shao-chi fall "to the ground" too? She is, as the court jester says, the only "good person because she is like a child, because she is innocent, because she does not know the ins and outs of the world, because she never makes trouble" (p. 386). Why does she have to suffer the same fate as her evil sister? If being Li-chi's sister is not her fault, there is no reason for her and her son to die an unnatural death. This mysterious and puzzling situation seems to me the most interesting and powerful suggestion in the play. *Shen Sheng* is, from the tragic point of view, comparable to Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The deaths of Goneril and Regan are nothing tragic. That of old Lear is not a horror either because it is the right penalty for his foolishness, though his death touches the deep sympathy of our tender hearts. It is the death of Cordelia that not only suggests the indifference of nature and fate to mankind, but arouses in us great fear and pity.

The ambiguity of who is the protagonist seems to imply that *Shen Sheng* is not successful in terms of unity and focus. However, the play is successful whether we treat Shen Sheng or Li-chi as the central character. Good plays of ambiguous protagonists like this are not wanting in the history of world drama; Euripides's *Hippolytus* and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* are ready examples.

6. The Chest

The Chest is the shortest of all Yao's plays and, constructed of four scenes, it is the only one without act division. The play has been translated into English as *Suitcase* and *The Trunk*. I prefer *The Chest* as included in the appendix¹⁶ of this study for the reason that the container or box Ah-san carries is not originally designed for traveling; it is used to treasure one's souvenirs and it may also be symbolically interpreted as the human chest.

According to what Yao told me, the play was inspired by a news

report of a missing box containing medicinal radium and his own attaché case that accompanied him to and back from abroad. The playwright's own story was like this: when he walked out of the gate at the Taipei airport terminal with the case in hand and saw his family and friends, he suddenly asked himself: "What have I got in my attaché case? What have other people got in theirs?" The news report and his epiphany at the airport could be helpful in the study of this play but will not be included in the following analysis. My interest here is first to see what influences Yao received from both the Chinese and Western theatres and, then, to find the meaning of the play.

The late Professor Yü Ta-kang, an authority on classical Chinese drama and theatre, sees significant elements of traditional Chinese theatre in this play. He says:

I like this play very much; it contains the good tradition of the "critical spirit" of Chinese drama with modern ideas and form. Everyone who has a basic knowledge of Chinese theatre will know that the ancient Court Comedy (優戲) had decisive influence on later Chinese theatre. In the Court Comedy, "The Military Counselor" (參軍戲, *ts'un-chün hsi*) of the T'ang dynasty, and the Variety Drama (雜劇, *tsa-chü*) of the Sung period, playwrights very often used clowns and seemingly farcical language as a means of satire and comment on current practices and fashions. . . . Yao's two characters in *The Chest* are of the clown type, very close to the T'ang "Military Counselor," in which one of the two comedians was usually clever and the other stupid. The contrast between them produced the dramatic humour, which aimed to satirize and criticize.¹⁷

Yü adds that *The Chest* has of course a much better dramatic structure than the ancient comedy or farce, and the satire has a much wider implication, too.¹⁸

In reaction to the première of the play, Andreas Weiland, who sees Beckett and Ionesco in the production, says, "I think the significance of the play lies in the fact that it is truly a cross-breed: partly Western-influenced, and partly in search of the local folk tradition."¹⁹

I agree with both of them. The scenery of the first scene is very much like that of *Waiting for Godot*: a country road, a slope, and a tree, only Yao does not mention what his tree looks like. Lao-ta and Ah-san are in some sense like Gogo and Didi. But as the action progresses, they are much more comparable to George and Lennie of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*,

both in appearance and situation. George and Ah-san are small; Lennie and Lao-ta, big and powerful but brainless. They are all out of job and are looking for a new one. Later they are chased by people and finally one of them dies. But the similarities must end at this superficial level. Yao has his own ideas to sell, and his satire has manifold levels of meaning.

On one level, the play is a satire on the blindness or the childishness of some people, the attraction of easy money, the ignorance of others' rights, and the insufficiency of the law. On another level, it is questioning the value of the traditional heritage and its burden on us, symbolized by the heavy, big chest Ah-san has inherited from his father and his father from his father. It is a satire on the chasers and the chasees as well. First, we are not told if Ah-san's chest really resembles the missing box with radium, or how much they look alike. What we know for sure is that both are old and big. The crowd starts chasing before they really know what they are after; Lao-ta and Ah-san start running before they really are aware of what they are trying to run away from. Secondly, Ah-san is right to think that "sometimes we can like something, even if it's useless and not worth a cent." He may also say that people "can't have any reason" (p. 496) to take away or look into his chest. But he is too stubborn; he has no reason to insist on his own decision when the policeman explains:

Suppose they look alike, what harm can we do if you just let us have a look at it? If yours isn't the one we're looking for, we'll give it back to you intact. You won't lose anything. (p. 500)

He refuses to listen to Lao-ta, too. He tries to guard his chest with his life and finally suffers the penalty of death, which is in a sense a joke. Undoubtedly, there are people like Ah-san. They deserve our sympathy and pity, though their stubbornness may sometimes make us angry. However, these people are not indifferent to others. For instance, Ah-san thinks that the people are after Lao-ta. So when he learns that Lao-ta has been to the place some years before, he asks with great concern and seriousness if Lao-ta caused any trouble there:

AH-SAN. Did yo get into any trouble?

LAO-TA. Any trouble? I can't remember.

AH-SAN. Try and think.

LAO-TA. Oh, yeah, I remember now. That year, it was over a chick.

I was at odds with a hoodlum here. He tries to make trouble with me along with several of his pals, but I knocked them all out with a bench. That gave me a name here!

AN-SAN. No wonder.

LAO-TA. You'd better get it straight, Ah-san. I quarrel with people, sometimes, I stick up for people if I think somebody's pushin' 'em around, but I'm not the kind would steal or rob anybody. I've never done nothing real bad.

AN-SAN. I think somebody must of recognized you.

LAO-TAO. You think they are noticing me?

AN-SAN. I think so.

LAO-TA [laughs]. You're out of your mind. You—they were looking at you!

AH-SAN. Me—me—but how come?

LAO-TA. That big trunk of yours! (p. 490)

Ah-san's misunderstanding and ignorance of the chasers' intention may make us laugh. But what moves us most deeply is Ah-san's deep concern for Lao-ta which makes him forget his own situation. The playwright is very tricky here. He makes us laugh with Lao-ta when he says "That big trunk of yours!" But Ah-san's serious attitude and innocence immediately makes us feel sorry for having laughed.

The plot of *The Chest* is basically a comedy of errors. It could easily become a farce in the hands of lesser writers. Thanks to Yao, it is a meaningful tragicomedy.

7. Fu Ch'ing Chu

This play is different from the other six in various aspects. The story is based upon historical and biographical research; the prologues and epilogue are poems in the regular meter of classical style; the singing is preceded by the chanting of the Set-the-scene-poem (定場詩) as in Peking Opera. The author also strongly recommends the use of traditional Chinese music instruments. Obviously, he has tried very hard, too hard perhaps, to create a pure Chinese play without any Western flavor. The play is Chinese except in the borrowing of lighting. However, it is likely that he was too much pre-occupied by his personal admiration for Fu which cost him the sufficient artistic distance necessary in creation. This, plus the long disuse of his pen

and mind as a playwright, made the first part of the play rather weak. For instance, the scene of the trial lacks dramatic conflict and action and appears long and dull. For the same reasons, the second scene in prison is too directly didactic. Take the following for example:

- CHANG. You know it's not that we don't want to live. Some people want you to die.
- WANG. If people don't let you live, there is all the more reason to live. You must try every possible means to live. This is why to live is more difficult than to die.
- CHANG. That depends on how you are going to live.
- WANG. Right. To live like pigs and dogs is easy. If we are to live not like pigs and dogs, but to live a real man's life, to live with real value, to live with meaning, to live in order to bear all bitterness and all responsibilities, that is not so easy. No matter how cruel they are, how badly they try to harm us, if we can manage to live in such difficult circumstances, to struggle to survive, that shows people that our hope is still alive—at least there is still hope, even if the hope is very weak and small, it is there. It will grow, like a seed, slowly grows from a bud to a big tree.
- CHANG. Not everybody can do it.
- WANG. Of course not. Only a few can, maybe only a few among the few.
- CHANG. Not me.
- WANG. Not you, not me either. It's him [*Points to FU*]. Only he can. (pp. 213-14)

Scene iii develops more or less along the same lines. After the dying prisoner C gives Fu the oral message that they are going to rise on the night when the moon is full, the dialogue is too long and repetitious to sound serious:

- PRISONER C. I've delivered the message?
- FU. You have.
- PRISONER C. I—I've done my job.
- FU. You've done your job.
- PRISONER C. You don't think I am mad?
- FU. You are not mad. I know.
- PRISONER C. I am not mad.
- FU. You are not mad.

PRISONER C. Maybe I am mad.
 FU. You are not mad.
 PRISONER C. Now—now it doesn't matter whether I am mad or not.
 FU. Don't think that way.
 PRISONER C. I've delivered the message?
 FU. You have.
 PRISONER C. You know I've done only one thing all my life.
 FU. You take a rest. Don't talk.
 PRISONER C. I've done only one thing all my life.
 FU. A big thing.
 PRISONER C. Really?
 FU. Really.
 PRISONER C. I have done it?
 FU. You have done it.
 ALL. You have done it.
 PRISONER C. I've done my job?
 ALL. You've done your job.
 PRISONER C. I—am—going.
 ALL. No, No, you mustn't go.
 PRISONER C. I am going. I am tired. (pp. 232-34)

I feel that the repetition, which carries the flavor of a comic scene from Peking Opera, suits better plays of light comedy, or satirical plays of the theatre of the absurd.

Part Two is on the whole much more successful than Part One. The introduction of the drunkard and the rich man in scene i adds greatly to dramatic interest. As Fu will only help the poor, the rich man is obliged to put on used clothes and asks the others there not to tell Fu the truth. This gives the drunkard a good chance to blackmail him for money in order to buy liquor. Through both dialogue and action, the scene successfully dramatizes Fu as a kind, generous, and humorous old man and shows people's respect for him. Take for instance the following episode: Fu is going to operate on the leg of a patient. He signals to his grandson Lien-pao to prepare for the operation:

FU [to the patient]. Do you drink?
 PATIENT. No, sir.
 FU. That's even better.
 [LIEN-PAO hands a cup of wine to the patient.]
 FU. Drink it!
 [As soon as the patient drinks the wine, the knife in FU's hand

cut into the leg. The patient screams.]

FU. All right. No problem now. There is no longer any pain, is there? This is so-called "short pain is better than long pain."
(p. 250)

Scene ii shifts to Fu's hut in the country. Winter is coming; his son and grandsons are repairing the hut in case it snows—a good creation of atmosphere and further exposition of Fu's personality. The symbols—nature and winter—are traditionally Chinese and also universal, I believe. Fu has firm principles of living and lives up to them even in times of difficulty, but he is not as stubborn as Ah-san in *The Chest*.

The last scene in the monastery is very well written indeed. Here Yao has come to his best expression of dramatic art. In this scene, Fu's noble character is fully portrayed through his attitude toward others and the attitude of others toward him. Not only this; the scene is rich in implication as a comment on society and the nature of mankind. The scene is interesting right from the first line:

LITTLE MONK. Master, this family has been here for three months. Why haven't they gone?

OLD MONK. Not so loud. Watch your tongue.

LITTLE MONK. Master, didn't you say they are poor bums?

OLD MONK [whispers]. Nonsense. Who said that?

LITTLE MONK. You did, sir. You told us to pay no attention to them the day they arrived.

OLD MONK. It's different now. Who could have known what they were at that time. But if you have an eye in your head, you should have recognized it by now.

LITTLE MONK. Recognized what?

OLD MONK. You are as stupid as a bull. Haven't you noticed these days that officials of high rank, people of the royal family, and even the Prime Minister and the Great Scholar of Wen-hua Hall of the Palace have come to see him with great respect?

LITTLE MONK. You ordered me to stay away. How could I have found out who they are. (pp. 269-70)

The irony is reinforced immediately by the following episode. Fu's old friend Tai T'ing-shih comes to see him. When the old monk learns that

Tai has no official rank at all, he says that it is not likely Fu will see him. To his great surprise, Fu is politely admitted at once.

The play is as a whole not Yao's best. As analysed above, the first part is rather weak. The main reason is likely that his pen for playwriting was getting a little rusty because he had laid it aside for too long. But he seems to have surpassed his past achievement in part two. Whether or not the play is successful as a work of theatre, it is significant in his career. Yao once said to me, in reaction to an article of mine concerning the future direction of Chinese theatre, that he would write plays for the Chinese and of the Chinese in form and content. With this play, he has undoubtedly come closer to this ideal of devoting himself to modern Chinese theatre.

Conclusion

With his rich knowledge of Chinese literature and theatre and Western drama, Yao has adopted the dramatic techniques of the Occidental and the Oriental masters of drama as a result of both conscious and unconscious effort. Sometimes it is easy to recognize the source of his borrowing, as in his use of lighting; in most cases, it is very difficult to say for sure which has given him the greater influence, the Western or the Chinese classical drama. However, Yao is basically an original writer and his plays can be enjoyed by readers as well as by theatregoers. In looking at the seven plays as a whole, one may find that he is careful in plot development and characterization. His techniques of expression have improved during these years. For instance, in his first two plays, *Phoenixville* and *Flying Tiger Sun*, there are a number of places where the actions are illogically developed, not sufficiently motivated, or too emotional to believe. In *Phoenixville*, the song of the blind flower girl is too weak as a means to stimulate or urge Chu Wan-ling to take the action of suicide. This song only says that she picks the flowers by herself and that she wishes people would buy them to wear (p. 15). It seems to me that this song could be omitted without any significant loss. If Yao has further chance to re-revise this play, he may use another song, which is cut in his revised version included in 姚一葦戲劇六種 (*Yao's Six Plays*), in place of the blind flower girl's song. This omitted song, sung off stage when Chu is sleeping after she is saved from the suicide, goes:

The moon shines into the boudoir;
The girl there is thinking of her lover.
Her lover is far away at the end of heaven
With women high and low and has no intention of returning.

The moon shines on the river;
My beloved darling, Oh, you are far away in a strangers' land.
The strangers' land is never as sweet as home, but
What could I do as he has a heart of cold iron.²⁰

Its function there is ambiguous; therefore, its being there may puzzle the reader and audience and slow down the action. But the song is good by itself and could be used to intensify Chu's inner struggle right before she attempts suicide.

There are other minor defects. When Chu is just out of danger and Chou asks her how many pills she took, she says without hesitation, "Twenty" (p. 18). We are never told that she knows the number of the pills except that "she pours all the pills out and hurriedly swallows them with water" (p. 15). By the end of Act I, when Hsia is kneeling there praying, it is hard to believe that Hsi-kou's appearance would make him "so frightened that he falls on the floor" (p. 27). This over-exaggeration may produce an unnecessary comic effect at that moment. Act II, according to what Hsia and Hsi-kou are doing when the curtain rises, must happen right after the close of Act I. But the stage direction says that it is "two hours after the last act" (p. 27). In the same act, when Chou and Hsia are talking about Phoenixville, in the space of half a page, they "jump up" four times: First, Chou jumps up at remembering the name of a street; then, when Chou says the name of the street Hsia jumps up; next, Hsia's mention of a doctor makes Chou jump up; this, in turn, reminds Chou of a monument plaque on the doctor's door; and finally, Hsia jumps up and cries: "Heavens, my Heavens, my God!" (p. 34) The emotion is exaggerated to the degree of being sentimental, if not ridiculous.

Here is another incident that happens between Chu and her maidservant a little before Chu tries to kill herself.

CHU [*takes the ear-rings off her ears*]. Just a minute. [*She gives the ear-rings to her.*] For you, keep them.

MAID [*jumps up startled*]. You are—

CHU [*smiles*]. Nothing. This is a pair made of emerald worth about a

thousand dollars.

MAID [*suspiciously*]. So valuable! (p. 11)

She gave the maid things like used clothing before. So, it seems more logical and natural to make the maid first feel happy or suspicious and then jump up startled by the high price of the ear-rings.

In *Flying Tiger Sun*, in addition to the negligence of the audience of the entrance of Sun and Chang as already pointed out, there is another example worth reconsideration. When the three blind men are gone, Shuang-wen asks Chang who they are. After learning that they are three blind men, she says: "They are like us" (p. 123). Here the line seems not in keeping with the situation, her mind at the moment, and her character. She is a self-centered person who thinks only of herself and does nothing for others. It is therefore better to make her say "We are like them."

Such defects are not easily found in his later plays, but exaggerated emotions seem to be a constant weakness even though their frequency of occurrence is much lower. In *Red Nose*, his third play, when P'eng is talking to Red Nose about his son going abroad against his wife's wishes, suddenly he begins to talk with great anger as if his son were before him and, in a moment, taking Red Nose to be his son he even hits him again and again (p. 317). The change is too sudden and lacks a good transition to make it work. A very similar situation is found in Yao's sixth play *The Chest*. When Lao-ta and Ah-san are trying to figure out if their ex-employer has cheated them, Lao-ta suddenly raises his voice and begins to use the second person pronoun as if the boss were right before him (p. 465). This kind of abrupt change of tone without allowing space for transition may cause little difficulty in reading, but will promise serious problems to actors on stage. However, it would be a great mistake to assume that Yao's plays are difficult to stage simply because of such problems. True, all his plays take very good actors and especially capable directors to make them work. But the real difficulties lie in the deep and rich implications, not in these minor defects.

Generally speaking Yao writes with the stage and the characters in his mind's eye. However, like many successful playwrights he is sometimes preoccupied by the beauty of language, his own emotion of the moment, or what not. Sun and Chang's first entrance in the first act of *Flying Tiger Sun*, as already analyzed above, is an obvious example of forgetting the audience. The use of act-topics in *Red Nose* is another. Obviously these topics would

not reach the audience and are not intended for the audience as there is no stage direction to indicate the use of any special devices, like the use of legends in the Brechtian epic theatre, to make them known to the audience.

Two similar examples of a slightly different nature can be found in *Shen-Sheng* and *The Chest*. In the first play, when Shao-chi is told that something "fearful" is behind her, the stage direction says she "is scared and moves backward" (p. 381). In the last scene of *The Chest*, Yao assigns all the lines to policeman A without any reason while policeman B is present and has nothing to do or say.

As already mentioned, Yao's language is basically poetic and he likes especially the use of duplicating or parroting, for which, Professor Yü thinks, the playwright is indebted to the classical Chinese drama. And Yü has also correctly pointed out that the repetitive lines in the traditional plays are mostly used for explanation of story whereas Yao has successfully employed them for intensifying the theme and characters' emotions.²⁰ But Yao seemed to have overused the device when he first came to try it in his second play *Flying Tiger Sun*. In relation to the beauty of language, Yao's diction is also carefully chosen, though minor faults can still be found. For instance, the use of " 妞兒 " (a chick or bird for a young girl) in *Flying Tiger Sun* (p. 89) is questionable. In my impression, the word did not come into use so early in the history of the Chinese language.

Owing to the influence of the classical Chinese theatre, Yao likes to use music and singing too. Singing appears in all his plays with the exception of *The Chest*. Usually more than one character is involved when a song is introduced. This, I think, is a wise decision as group singing is more inviting and effective in theatre.

Yao employs all possible devices of the theatre. Supernatural or mysterious elements are also found in his plays. The most obvious example is the old lady in black in *Shen Sheng*. Animal images are not particularly interesting in his plays, except for the mice in *Flying Tiger Sun* and, perhaps, the magpies in *Shen Sheng*. Though mice image is also mentioned as a synonym for timidity and shyness in *Shen Sheng* and *The Chest*, they have not come to the symbolic level of importance there.

The minor defects pointed out above do not take away from the total achievement of Yao's work. He is on the whole a well-disciplined and hard-working playwright of the modern Chinese theatre. For instance, he wrote the first six plays regularly in the span of two years each. Here, one may

wonder why he did not write for so long after the completion of his sixth play. This he answers very clearly by himself when he writes about his experience of working on his seventh play *Fu Ch'ing-chu*. He says:

Although six plays have been published, they are like bubbles in the air and have hardly been noticed. Then in March of this year when *The Chest* was put on stage, when I was sitting in the last row watching, my thoughts swelled like the tide of the sea. I felt that I must continue to write—continue to write the rest of my days.²²

He wanted to write for the stage, but felt greatly disappointed by the average results of the productions of his plays.²³ From now on, let us sincerely hope that he will not stop writing again for the modern theatre of China.

Notes

1. The first six plays are available in 姚一葦戲劇六種 (台北：華欣文化事業中心，1975); the seventh in 現代文學，復刊第三期 (March 1978), pp. 199-278. All page numbers in the text of this study refer to these two sources. The seven are also available in separate editions published by different book companies. When quotations from these separate editions are used, they will be further footnoted. All English translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.
2. *The Crown Pince Shen-Sheng*, trans. by Marion Taylor and others, (台北：華岡出版社，1972); *Suitcase*, trans. by Chou Shan (台北：華岡出版社，1974).
3. *Flying Tiger Sun* was staged once by an amateur student group at Taiwan University and *Fu Ch'ing Chu* was partly produced in class by students of Tamkang College.
4. *The Trunk*, trans. by Joseph Yen, (1978), MS.
5. 來自鳳凰鎮的人 (台北：現代文學社，1963), p. 58.
6. 孫飛虎搶親 (台北：現代文學社，1965), p. 57.
7. For brief comparison of this passage in different versions, see Mei-shu Hwang, "Peking Opera: A Study on the Art of Translating the Script with Special Reference to Structure and Conventions," (Dissertation, Florida State University, 1976), pp. 13-23.
8. Yu, Ta-kanq (俞大綱)，"舞台傳統的延伸，" 新生報 (Jan. 30, 1967); available in his 戲劇縱橫談 (台北：傳記文學社，1970), pp. 175-80. The book contains another two articles on the two productions of the play.
9. Chang Chien (張健)，"讀碾玉觀音，" 大華晚報 (Feb. 20, 1967), available in Yao's 碾玉觀音 (台北：文學季刊社，1967), p. 61. Chang also says that *The Jade Goddess* is easier for readers than *Flying Tiger Sun*. Yu's article cited in the last footnote is also available here.
10. Yu "舞台傳統的延伸，" 戲劇縱橫談，p.178.

11. *Ibid.*
12. Chang, " 讀碾玉觀音 ."
13. Eugene O'Neil, *The Iceman Cometh*, (New York: Random House, 1946), p. 227.
14. The same idea and proverb can be found in his next play *A Chest* (p. 469).
15. Robert Frost, "Fire and Ice," *Complete Poems of Robert Frost* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), p. 268.
16. My translation is based upon Yao's new revision of the play for the first production in 1977. But as its Chinese original is not yet available in print, the following analysis deal with the version included in 姚一葦戲劇六種 .
17. Yü Ta-kang, "由 '一口箱子' 演出引發的個人感想," 中國時報 (March 21, 1977).
18. *Ibid.*
19. A Jadis (pen name of Andreas Weiland), "Yao Yi-wei's 'A Suitcase,'" *Street*, 1 (1977), p. 47.
20. 來自鳳凰鎮的人 , p. 20.
21. Yü, "舞台傳統的延伸," 戲劇縱橫談 , p. 179.
22. Yao Yi-wei, "我寫傅青主," 中國時報 (December 20, 1977).
23. According to Professor Yü, *The Jade Goddess* was once successfully staged. See 戲劇縱橫談 , pp. 181-92.

APPENDIX I

PLOT OUTLINES

1. People from Phoenixville (3 acts)

In the living-room of the home of Chu Wan-ling, a pretty young woman of about 30, a young man is waiting. Soon she returns. He asks for her hand in marriage but is refused and sent away. The maidservant says a priest Hsia has visited again, asking if Chu's last name were Shen. She says no. After sending everybody away, Chu writes a letter and swallows a bottle of sleeping pills.

A few minutes later, a stranger named Chou Ta-hsiung steals into the room looking for food. He finds Chu's letter on the desk, which says that she is killing herself merely because she is tired of living. Chou saves her life and tells her that he was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for killing

a person by accident. During his seven years in prison, he grew from a restlessness to a calm contemplation, in which he found nothing significant. Then just as he was thinking of ending his life, he thought of an incident at Phoenixville many years ago when one day he was very ill and was left outside of a door by his "friends." A young girl gave him a gold ring, telling him to sell it to buy some food and medicine. The incident came back to him as a beam of light to a ship that has lost its direction on a stormy sea. His desire to see her again was so strong that he escaped from the prison.

Chu rings for the maid to take Chou to a nearby restaurant. During his absence, three things happen: (1) Hsia visits again and this time Chu admits that she is his Shen Wan-ling and forgives him; (2) Chu helps a married couple come to a mutual understanding; (3) Chu refuses to spend the night with a Mr. Ch'in as they agreed to and says that she is no longer anybody's mistress. She is going back to her hometown Phoenixville. Ch'in becomes very angry and tries to kill her, but Chou returns and throws Ch'in out. After that Chou says that he is going back to prison because he almost killed Ch'in a moment ago; he still cannot control his bad temper. By now he knows that Chu is also from Phoenixville and asks her to return the ring to the girl if she can find her. He admires Chu's determination to live a new life.

As Chou is handing the ring to Chu, she asks him to see if there is a line inside reading "To Ah-ling, Happy 15th Birthday Anniversary—Long Life." Chu is the girl Chou is looking for. She sees him back to prison and goes back to Phoenixville to wait for him.

2. Flying Tiger Sun Steals a Bride (3 acts)

In a pavilion by the roadside, two travelers are talking about the coming wedding of Cheng Heng and Ts'ui Shuang-wen and about Flying Tiger Sun, a bandit leader. One of them says that Sun is handsome and kind-hearted while the other insists that Sun is a monster—ugly, bald, cruel, and lumpy. At this moment, two young men also come into the pavilion. One is Sun, richly dressed; the other is Chang, Shuang-wen's old lover, wearing plain, dirty clothes. They join the chat without revealing their true identities. Soon the travelers leave and Sun recognizes Chang, who confesses that he has failed in the State Examination and cannot marry Shuang-wen. But he desires

to see her just once more. Sun advises him to disguise himself as one of the escorts in the wedding procession. He also exchanges his fine clothes with Chang for the purpose.

The wedding group enter and Chang is among them. After the farewell ceremony between the bride and her family and relatives, traveler B returns to report that Sun is coming with several hundreds of bandits. Cheng, the bridegroom, rides away with his men. Now Chang, Shuang-wen and her maid Ah-hung are left alone like "three puppets." They murmur monotonously about their waiting and a certain autumn day they recollect. Then three blindmen come to take a short rest but soon leave.

Traveler B comes back again, saying that the bandits are near. As the three are wondering about what to do, Cheng returns and says that he is going to get an army from his father to beat the bandits and save his bride should she be caught by the time he comes back. Before leaving, he advises Shuang-wen to exchange her dress with Ah-hung for her own safety. Soon Sun arrives in his ugly bandit costume and takes the three to his mountain base.

There follows a long dream-like talk between Chang and Shuang-wen about their past, which was interrupted by the entrance of Sun, who is now dressed like a young scholar as we see him in the first act. Sun says that he also loves Shuang-wen and wants to have a fair competition with Chang. Now Shuang-wen insists on changing back her clothes with Ah-hung, but the maid refuses. At the same time, Sun suggests that Chang try on his bandit costume.

Suddenly Cheng returns with an army and everybody starts to run for life. In the epilogue, travelers A and B return and start another argument: One says that Cheng has married Ts'ui and that Sun has been captured and beheaded; the other insists that the bride is not Shuang-wen but the maid, and the one beheaded is not Sun either but somebody in his bandit costume.

3. The Jade Goddess of Mercy (3 acts)

Four maids are sweeping in the hall. They are all overwhelmed by a jade sculpture of the Goddess of Mercy on the table, not because of its fine craftsmanship, but because of the fact that the sculpture is a copy of their master Lord Han's only daughter Hsiu-hsiu. The work has been done by Ts'ui

Ning, a poor relative of the family.

Lady Han asks her husband to send Ts'ui away at once for the good of their daughter. But to their surprise, Hsiu-hsiu has already fallen in love with Ts'ui and convinces him to take her away with him. So, the lovers and a maid Winter Plum escape to a far away place. Ts'ui, now under a false name Li, starts a jade crafts-shop. But there is little market for his sculptures. They have to lead a poor life. Hsiu-hsiu has sold all her jewelry, however, not for their living expenses, but for helping poor neighbors.

Searching through the old jewelry and some pieces of Ts'ui's sculptures, Kuo Li, the head servant of the Han's, finds the three. Hsiu-hsiu promises to return to her parents on the condition that Kuo would let Ts'ui alone, as she knows that her father will kill Ts'ui for taking her away. Kuo cannot but agree. So Hsiu-hsiu goes back to her parents with Winter Plum and a baby in her womb. Thirteen years later, both Lord and Lady Han are dead. On a snowy evening, Hsiu-hsiu hears the music of the flute, following which Winter Plum and Kou Li find Ts'ui lying unconscious in the snow.

Ts'ui is now not only in poor health, but is blind. But when he feels a little better, he wants to leave immediately to continue looking for his Hsiu-hsiu. Hsiu-hsiu will not tell him who she is for the sake of the child. Yet she makes him stay by promising him to find Hsiu-hsiu for him. Ts'ui recovers gradually. He makes another sculpture of the Goddess of Mercy, which again resembles the young Hsiu-hsiu. On the completion of the work, he says he has found his Hsiu-hsiu and is going to join her in another world, giving the sculpture to the family as a token of his appreciation of their hospitality. He dies in peace before Hsiu-hsiu makes up her mind to tell him the truth about who she is.

4. Red Nose (4 acts)

On an autumn evening, several people are confined in P'eng-lai Hotel because the road is blocked by rocks washed down from the mountain slopes. Two businessmen named Ts'eng and Hu are eager to leave in order to see a Mr. P'eng for financial help. A Yeh family fails to enjoy their vacation because of the mental health of their nine-year old daughter. Ch'iu, a music composer, comes there for inspiration but finds despair instead. Mr. P'eng, who is hurrying home to welcome his son back from the States, is

also forced to stop there for the night.

Then the news comes: a plane has crashed in a fog. P'eng finds the flight number and schedule identical to those of his son. A vaudeville company arrives, but there is no vacancy. The company immediately improvises a show, in which Red Nose describes all types of unexpected human disasters or accidents like air-crashes, bankruptcy, and mental disease. He succeeds in arousing the sympathy of the hotel manager, who promises to put them up for the night. But the show also disturbs the people.

Act II begins with the company waiting in the hall for the manager to find rooms for them. Then, P'eng comes to Red Nose, who tells him that the air-crash does not necessarily mean the death of his son. After P'eng feels better and returns to his room, Ch'iu falls from the stairs. Red Nose helps him up and asks him if he has ever listened to a mysterious voice in his heart. Ch'iu listens and runs upstairs to write music. Then, the Yeh family comes in and the daughter begins to follow Red Nose's song and steps and dances with him. One by one the others come back to the hall and are puzzled by what they see. Among them there is a new woman's face. The scene is interrupted by P'eng's shouting that his son is still alive. Then he hires the company to do a show to congratulate himself. The next act is mostly the play within the play, in which Red Nose has a one-man show: A king offers a very high reward for anybody who can tell him what is true happiness and who is the happiest person in the world. At this moment, the new woman steps into the acting area and says: "I know it; I can answer it." Then she calls Red Nose Shen-tz'u. He is frightened. She is his wife. When she takes off his red-nose mask, he covers his face with both hands.

When the lights come up for Act IV, Red Nose is talking with his wife about their past. He says that after he left home, he tried to be a salesman, school teacher, and reporter, but he only dares to face people behind his mask and, therefore, has become the clown in the vaudeville company. He thinks that happiness lies in self-sacrifice. The conversation is interrupted by a sudden shouting that one of the dance girls has been swallowed by the sea while swimming. Red Nose puts on his mask and runs to the sea. The girl swims back by herself in beautiful style, which attracts all the people's attention. When somebody says that Red Nose has gone to save her, she cries that he cannot swim at all.

The weather clears up, the road is open, and everybody is on his way to his destination. The play ends with Red Nose's wife repeating "I know he

won't come back."

5. Shen Sheng (4 acts)

The plot is roughly based on the murder of Prince Shen Sheng of the Spring-Autumn period around the 7th century B.C. in China.

When the curtain rises, the stage is filled with the voices of a crowd shouting: "Victory! Victory! . . . Welcome, Prince Shen Sheng!" which is followed by the singing of a chorus composed of courtmaids. The songs tell of the history of the country, the royal family, an oracle, and the personality of the prince—as brave as a lion and as tender as a lamb, a man of good fortune but also the most unfortunate. The last song ends with a lamentation on evils in the wake of human desire for power.

Now a court lady comes on stage and sends away the maids. Then Lady Shao-chi joins her. A little later her elder sister Lady Li-chi enters. After this brief exposition, an old lady in black is discovered alone on stage, praying to gods that the evil may die and the good live. There follows further exposition of the sisters: Li-chu is ambitious and wicked; Shao-chi, contented and kind.

Li-chi is plotting, with the help of the court lady and her lover, a court jester named Shih, for the throne for her son Hsi-ch'i. They first try to get rid of Shen Sheng. As they know that the prince will never say anything for himself and will never argue with his father the king, they frame him by putting poison on some food supposed to come from him, and let the king find it out. The plan succeeds and Shen Sheng hangs himself. Hsi-ch'i is therefore designated heir to the kingdom. But he is soon killed by Shen Sheng's friends. Still ambitious about power, Li-chi forces Shao-chi's son Chao-tzu to succeed Hsi-ch'i as heir, which, as Shao-chi anticipates, means his death.

At last Li-chi decides to go to the lake in the royal garden, begging Shao-chi to live on. Shao-chi refuses and follows her to the lake. The old lady in black appears again, calling to heaven: "Blood, blood, . . . gods, help them, please help them"

6. The Chest (4 scenes)

Along a country path, Lao-ta is carrying his bicycle up the slope with great ease. Ah-san, with a big chest on the back of his bike, is exhausted. Lao-ta helps him to come up the slope unwillingly. Now they sit down for a rest and Ah-san begins to talk about the number of days, which leads to the cause of their being fired. In order to see which of them is responsible, Lao-ta insists on a physical re-creation of the accident, which cost them their jobs. The experimental fall is so heavy that both of them become unconscious. When Lao-ta becomes conscious at first he thinks that Ah-san is playing at being dead and then thinks that he is really dead. While he is blaming himself, Ah-san wakes up too. They continue their way to a place over the mountains.

The scene is now a small restaurant. The radio is announcing that a box with medicinal radium in it is lost and that the radium is dangerous to the human body. The doctor who owns it offers a reward of \$20,000 to whoever will return it to him. This immediately attracts the attention of all the people there, who begin to make all kinds of guesses of how the box got lost, where it could be, etc., etc. Now Lao-ta and Ah-san come in for food. The sight of the chest in Ah-san's hand starts a turmoil at once, and then one of the customers comes over to chat with Ah-san. When Lao-ta finds him suspicious, he tries to teach him a lesson. The fighting is stopped; as soon as Lao-ta and Ah-san leave the restaurant, some try to get hold of the phone to report to the police, some start following the two tramps.

When light comes back on stage, Lao-ta and Ah-san are in an old temple. The dialogue now goes from discussion of Ah-san's chest to the memory of his father, who inherited the chest from his father. Gradually each of them is lost in his own past. Their thinking aloud is broken by distant barking and human voices. Immediately after they leave the temple, a group of people and two policemen arrive.

Later the tramps are discovered in a high old wooden watch-tower. The policemen explain to them that their chest looks very much like the missing box and that they want to have a look at it. But Ah-san refuses. Lao-ta, intending to put an end to the misunderstanding, tries to take the chest from Ah-san to let the policemen examine it. The chest falls to the ground while they are struggling for it. At once Ah-san jumps down for the chest and falls unconscious. Nobody notices him; the people are all busy

taking old things out of the chest—old clothes, old text-books, old toys, and an old school certificate of honor. Feeling greatly disappointed, the people begin to leave. At this moment, one of the policemen finds that Ah-san is dead. Suddenly some people shout that they saw Lao-ta push Ah-san down. Lao-ta does not say a word to defend himself but murmurs, "Ah-san, Ah-san, I did it, I killed you." He is led away by the policemen and the crowd disappears one by one, leaving Ah-san's body alone on the ground.

7. Fu Ch'ing-chu (in two parts)

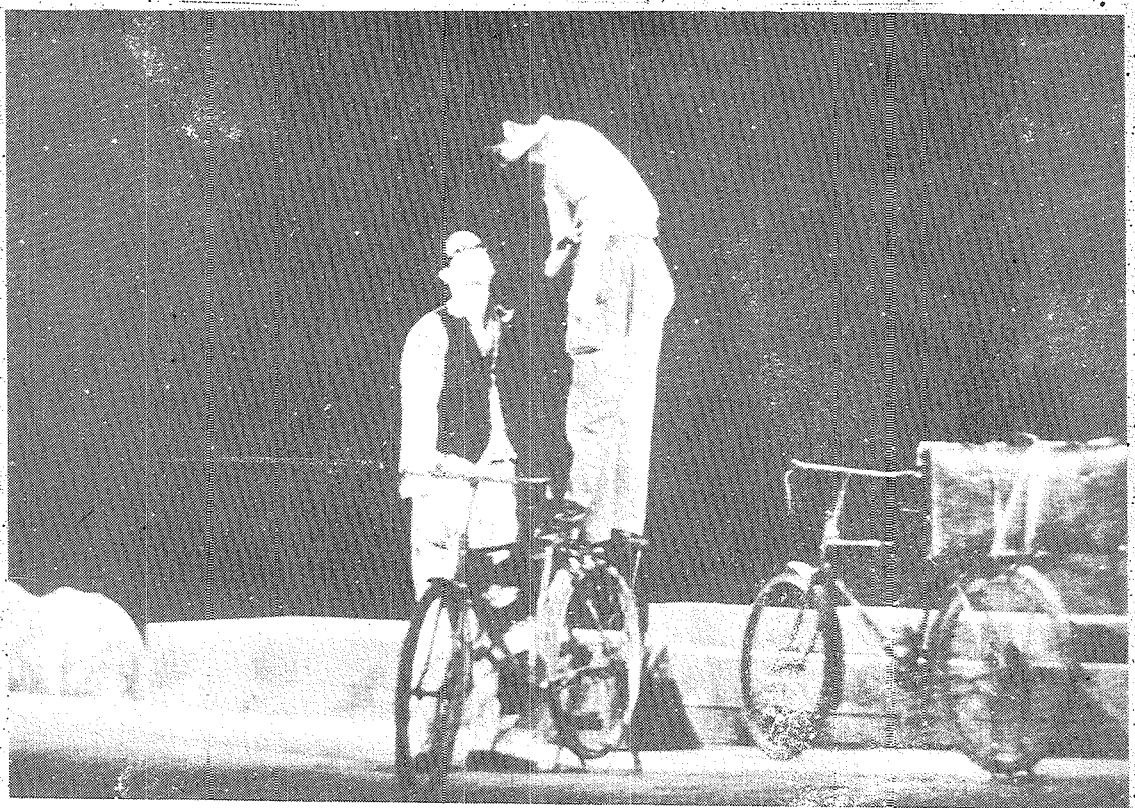
Part One begins with a prologue sung by an old blind story-teller, who relates that among the people who rose against the Ch'ing law, there was a national hero named Fu Ch'ing-chu, also known as Chu-i tao-jen, who was captured and put in prison.

The first scene is a court trial. The inhumane torture fails to make Fu talk. He is put back in prison. The second scene in prison shows how his comrades try to bring in a doctor. Then in the next scene, a doctor secretly reports himself as one of the rebels in order to get into prison to save Fu's life. In this scene, the value of life and death and the philosophy of killing as a means of self-defence are discussed among the prisoners.

Like Part One, Part Two begins also with a prologue sung by the blind old man about the failure of the heroes, Fu's life as a doctor in the country, and the Ch'ing government's offering official positions to the learned as a means to change the direction of people's attention.

The first scene opens with a group of poor sick villagers waiting by the roadside for Fu, who soon appears and is shown a kind, generous, and humorous old man. The next scene shifts to his home. An old friend named Tai T'ing-shih comes to persuade him to publish his poems and to accept the government offer of a high rank of honor. Fu agrees to give him the poems but refuses to accept his advice about the rank. But an order soon arrives to summon him to the Capital to see the Emperor. He stabs himself in the leg; but he is still carried to Peking. When they are nearing the Capital, Fu stops at a monastery and will not budge another step. At last, an official is sent to the monastery to force the honor upon him.

The play ends with an epilogue: Fu is on his way home, carried in a sedan by his two grandsons. Then the same blind old man sings the greatness of Fu's personality.



Scene i: LAO-TA. Ready, one, two, three!

Scene iv: LAO-TA. I did it – I killed you. . .

