

A Chinese Director's Theory of Performance: On Jiao Juyin's System of Directing

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Translated with an introduction by Shiao-ling Yu

This translation consists of excerpts from a book on Jiao Juyin, who was a distinguished director of Chinese spoken drama. The selections translated here highlight Jiao's two principal theories: the Theory of Mental Images and "On Nationalizing Spoken Drama." The first represents his adaptation of the Stanislavsky system; the second outlines his ideas for integrating Western realistic drama, which gave birth to Chinese spoken drama, with the techniques and aesthetic principles of traditional Chinese opera.

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Jiao Juyin^a (1905–1975) was a leading practitioner of the Stanislavsky system in China and one of the two most influential directors of Chinese spoken drama (*huaaju*^b). (The other director was the Shanghai-based Huang Zuolin,^c 1906–1994.) A graduate of the prestigious Yanjing University in Beijing, Jiao established the Beijing Xiqu Training School in 1930 and served as its president. During his four-year tenure at this school, he gained hands-on experience in *xiqu*^d (traditional Chinese opera).

From 1935 to 1938 he attended Paris University to study European and French drama and work on his doctoral dissertation, "Chinese Drama Today." Upon completion of his studies, Jiao returned to

China shortly after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. During the war years he taught school, tried his hand at directing, and began to study Russian drama and theatre, translating Chekhov's plays and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko's memoir *My Life in the Russian Theatre*. It was through these works that Jiao came to know the Stanislavsky system, which opened the door to his search for a Chinese system of performance.

Jiao's career as a professional director began with the establishment of the Beijing People's Art Theatre (BPAT; Beijing Renmin Yishu Juyuan^c) in 1952, where he was one of its founding members and served as its director until being removed from this position in 1966 when the Cultural Revolution broke out. Under Jiao's leadership, this theatre—modeled after the Moscow Art Theatre—became the preeminent national company of spoken drama. The plays that he directed, such as Lao She's^f *Longxu gou*^g (Dragon Beard Ditch) and *Cha guan*^h (Teahouse) and Guo Moruo'sⁱ historical plays, as well as the actors he trained all helped BPAT to develop its unique style of performance. Jiao's contribution to this theatre was so great that a Chinese drama scholar once claimed that Jiao Juyin's system of directing and the BPRT school of performance were one and the same.¹

Jiao Juyin's most important contribution to Chinese theatre was his adaptation of the theory and practice of Western realistic drama to create a modern *huaju* with distinct native characteristics. The Stanislavsky system was a point of departure for his creative endeavors. Taking the Russian master's principle that performance should "begin with life," Jiao formulated the Theory of Mental Images (*xinxiang xue*^j), which calls for the actors to form images of the characters in their mind before performing them on the stage. Jiao's method of actor training may be divided into three stages: experiencing life, developing mental images, and creating stage images. The mental images serve as a bridge between real life and stage performance. This process is what Jiao called "from external to internal, from internal to external."

The Theory of Mental Images was first applied to the production of *Dragon Beard Ditch* in 1951.² Jiao asked his actors to become thoroughly familiar with the lives of their characters and the environment of Beijing in order to "reproduce life" on the stage. This emphasis on real life was an antidote to the prevailing formalistic style of performance at the time. In the course of directing this play, Jiao noticed another problem among Chinese actors—namely, their mistaken understanding of Stanislavsky's theory of "psychological preparation," which led them to overemphasize their own experiences but neglect the creation of characters. Jiao's theory aimed at correcting this erro-

neous tendency by giving equal importance to developing mental images and creating stage images.

Dragon Beard Ditch adhered closely to the Stanislavsky system, which enjoyed a privileged position in China because of the close relationship between the newly established People's Republic and the former Soviet Union. In 1956, party authorities announced the Hundred Flowers campaign, which promised a more liberal policy toward literature and arts—"let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend." This year also marked the beginning of Jiao's experiments with introducing the artistic techniques of *xiqu* to the plays he directed. In *Teahouse* (1958), for example, he used the convention of "striking a pose" (*liang xiang*^k) to call attention to the entrance of certain important characters. In the historical play *Cai Wenji*^l (1959), he employed supernumeraries (*longtao*^m) carrying flags and moving around the stage in different formations to indicate different locations, thus eliminating the need for elaborate scenery. The use of native form was in keeping with the official policy at the time. In 1958, Mao Zedong launched a folk song movement in support of the Great Leap Forward campaign, and writers were urged to sing the praises of the campaign's achievements by using native and folk forms. But the search for a "native form" (*minzu xingshi*ⁿ) for *huaju* began long before the founding of the People's Republic. The movement of "nationalizing spoken drama" (*huaju minzuhua*^o) started in the 1930s and continued into the 1940s with the goal of making this imported dramatic form more accessible to China's masses. How to use the traditional *xiqu* to "nationalize" *huaju* was a hotly debated issue among Chinese dramatists. Creating a Chinese system of performance by integrating the artistic techniques and aesthetic principles of *xiqu* with the realistic traditions of Western drama was a lifelong pursuit for Jiao. Both his theoretical writings and stage productions were directed toward this goal.

Jiao's essay "Lun huaju minzuhua"^p (On Nationalizing Spoken Drama) was to be a summation of his thoughts on this subject, but the ever tightening control of literature and arts following the Anti-Rightist campaign of 1957 did not allow him to finish it.³ Only an outline has survived. By examining this outline in connection with his other writings and the plays he directed, however, it is possible to gain a general picture of Jiao Juyin's system of directing. In the very beginning of this outline, Jiao raised the question of the relationship between the actors and the audience by stating that "the audience and the dramatists create jointly." The importance given to the audience reflects a fundamental principle of *xiqu* and the social function of theatre in China. In his discussion of "spiritual essence" (*shen*^q) versus "physical appearance

or form” (*xing*^r), Jiao agreed with traditional Chinese aesthetics by stressing the primacy of the former. He pointed out, however, that the audience can only experience the “spirit” through the “appearance,” and he therefore paid special attention to the actors’ use of facial expressions, gestures, and movements to convey the emotions and thoughts of the characters they portrayed. Emphasis on spiritual essence made him realize that artistic truth is not identical with truth in life. To express this essential verity, he turned to another concept in Chinese aesthetics: “the real” (*shi*^s) versus “the imaginary” (*xu*^t). The realistic Stanislavsky system would be supplemented with the symbolic way of presenting *xiqu*. The ultimate goal of his Chinese school of directing was “to use the form of modern *huaju* to express the spirit of traditional *xiqu*” (Jiao 1979, 151).

Jiao Juyin died during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), leaving his dream of establishing a Chinese school of directing unfulfilled. When another generation of Chinese dramatists searched anew for a way to revitalize the stagnant Chinese stage in the 1980s, they turned to modern Western drama, such as the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht and the theatre of the absurd, to overcome the limitations of the realistic theatre and the Stanislavsky system. But they agreed with Jiao that Chinese *huaju* should both be modern and possess Chinese characteristics. The experimental drama of the 1980s carried on Jiao’s creative method of combining a Western dramatic system with the artistic techniques of *xiqu*. The following translation is from the book *Lun Jiao Juyin daoyan xuepai*¹¹ (On Jiao Juyin’s System of Directing), pp. 33–41 and 171–178.

Theory of Mental Images: A Bridge Between Starting from Life and Creating Artistic Images

In the course of his study and application of the Stanislavsky system, Jiao Juyin developed a number of new ideas. As someone who had a profound understanding of China’s own culture and art, he wanted to find a suitable vehicle to depict the lives and emotions of the Chinese people. The Theory of Mental Images, which he proposed during the production of *Dragon Beard Ditch*, was one of these ideas. He wrote: “The first step in creating characters is not to live in the characters immediately. *You must first let your character live in you, then you can live in your character.* You must first nurture the image of that character in your mind—from its embryonic stage to final formation, from a fuzzy image to a flesh-and-blood living being, from its inner feelings to outer appearances—then you can live in it” (Jiao 1979, 82). By absorbing the essence of the Stanislavsky system, drawing on European performance theories such as those of Diderot, and blending them with

Chinese aesthetic tradition, Jiao Juyin formulated the Theory of Mental Images and used it in his production of *Dragon Beard Ditch*. The result was not only a successful staging of the play but also a creative concept in the theory of directing.

Jiao Juyin's Theory of Mental Images did not come by accident; it had been brewing for a long time. By the time he applied it to the production of *Dragon Beard Ditch*, it had become part of his system of directing. Jiao first used the term "mental images"—sometimes referred to as "imagery" (*yixiang*^v)—in his translation of Danchenko's book *My Life in the Russian Theatre*.⁴ When he came to direct *Dragon Beard Ditch*, he used the unfamiliar term "mental images" during the entire process of its production. Why did he choose this unfamiliar term instead of the well-known terminology of the Stanislavsky system? Why did he insist on the importance of cultivating "mental images" by the actors? To understand his intent, it is necessary to examine the actual situation at the time.

Jiao Juyin attached great importance to Stanislavsky's theory of "experiencing life." He believed that the formalist tendency of showing off performance techniques did not accord with truth and could not reflect the "real life" of *Dragon Beard Ditch* that he had in mind. In the 1950s, however, a state of confusion existed in the understanding and application of Stanislavsky's theory of "experiencing life." At that time, most Chinese actors had only read *An Actor Prepares* translated by Cheng Junli^w and Zhang Min^x in the late 1930s through the early 1940s, which contains only that part of the original book which deals with the psychological preparation of actors. The part about creating artistic images through external techniques had not been introduced to China. Under the influence of this partial rendition of *An Actor Prepares*, many actors regarded psychological preparation as something abstract and mysterious, and no one dared to touch the question of "representation." As a consequence, most actors were enmeshed in a web of misunderstanding and unable to act. No matter what characters they were supposed to portray, the actors always ended up portraying themselves; they could not create characters with distinct personalities. If the director asked them to change their body form or facial appearance to suit the needs of the characters, they maintained that doing so would destroy their self-image and truthfulness. Some even regarded this instruction as a formalist method, which no actor should touch.

Jiao Juyin therefore had to correct the actors' two erroneous creative methods and performance habits: their emphasis on psychological preparation without action and their formalist tendency of showing off acting techniques. To overcome this obstacle to performance, he adopted two approaches. One was for the actors to delve

deeply into the realities of life to learn about the various character types in order to broaden their vision. The other was his requirement that actors develop “mental images” of their characters. His goal was twofold: to let those who were infatuated with rigid forms and techniques find source material for stage performance from ordinary lives and to help those who had an incomplete understanding of the Stanislavsky system create characters based on actual observation and experience.

To cultivate “mental images” of the characters, Jiao frequently suggested innovative methods to aid the actors’ progress in their creative work. Besides asking the actors to keep a diary of their observations about life, he also asked them, after a period of “experiencing life,” to list their characters’ clothing, hairstyle, physical appearance, characteristic expressions and movements, the types of props they use, and their habits and hobbies. This profile actually amounted to “mental images” of the characters that the actors were about to portray. From these reports, the director obtained a good understanding of the actors’ state of creation; he was also able to gauge the distance between the actors and their roles as well as detect any problems. Although the “mental images” sketched in the character profiles were still immature, the actors were well on their way to creating the stage images of their characters.

Yu Shizhi,^y the actor who played Madman Cheng in *Dragon Beard Ditch*, developed his “mental image” early, having gained a fairly accurate image of his character during the period of experiencing life (before rehearsal). For different actors and different characters, “mental images” might form early or late, but this formation followed a general pattern. After reading Lao She’s script, Yu Shizhi discussed his character with Jiao, and they agreed that Madman Cheng should be a folksinger because there were references to his storytelling with clapper accompaniments in the script. And having a folksinger in the cast could enhance the special features of old Beijing and *Dragon Beard Ditch*. After a period of experiencing life, Yu Shizhi wrote a detailed biography of his character and showed it to Lao She, who gladly revised and polished his portrayal of this character along the lines suggested. How was Yu able to form a “mental image” so quickly and write a character’s biography that met with Lao She’s approval?

First: Although Yu was not familiar with the lives of folksingers, he could empathize with their hardships based on his own poor family background. His experience of trying to support his mother by giving performances from city to city was useful, too, for his portrayal of the vagabond lifestyle of the old folk artists. Even before he observed

and tried to understand the lives of folksingers, Yu already had an advantage over actors who had no knowledge about the lives of the poor. Thus he was able to inject depth of feeling into his character.

Second: These favorable factors alone were not enough for Yu to produce a “mental image” of his character, however, which existed as a series of fragmentary impressions. It was not until Yu paid a visit to the “King of Drum Singers,” Rong Jiancheng,² and met a singing instructor recommended by Rong in a teahouse that the image of his character gradually took shape, much like the process of developing a photonegative. Upon meeting these two figures in person, Yu’s sensitive imagination was captured by the drum singer’s serene bearing, quiet dignity, slightly raised eyebrows, downcast eyes, expressive hand gestures, clear and deliberate tone of voice, as well as the singing instructor’s manner of greeting the teahouse customers with a half bow and slightly bent knees. Step by step, the elusive image of Yu’s character assumed a more concrete shape with the inspiration provided by these two people. At this time, and only at this time, could it be said that a “mental image” was born. Although still small and incomplete, Yu’s image was becoming a flesh-and-blood creation that possessed life and action.

Third: While the example of how Yu Shizhi developed the image of Madman Cheng could be said to represent the best way to obtain a “mental image,” it was an image at an early stage of development and primarily composed of a character’s fleeting smile or movement as envisioned in the actor’s mind. This image constituted a valuable accomplishment, but it was still unstable, immature, and a long way from the stage image of a living person with individual characteristics. The pressing issue was how to stabilize this image and make it mature. Faced with this problem, Jiao Juyin emphasized the importance of practice—a key facet of his Theory of Mental Images. Through practice, the actor transformed his “mental image” into an organic part of himself and made it come alive; in other words, the life of the “mental image” took its bodily form in the actor. Only through repeated practice could an actor ascertain whether the character’s gesture, gait, eye expression, or tone of voice matched his own capability. If the actor’s “mental image” of his character could not be reproduced in himself—for example, a fat actor who formed the “mental image” of a thin character—then he had no one to blame but his own fantasy. When every expression and movement of the “mental image” was expressed in the actor’s body and mannerisms through practice, the creative process took a step forward.

Even though Yu Shizhi formed the “mental image” of his char-

acter early on through his observation and experience of the lives of folksingers, it was only after he had repeatedly practiced Madman Cheng's graceful hand gestures, his posture of bending slightly at the waist, his way of greeting people with a half bow and bent knees, his slow and melodious voice, as well as his gentle and refined gait, that the "mental image" of this character found a bodily form in the actor. Only at this point did the actor achieve Jiao Juyin's injunction: "You must first let your character live in you, then you can live in your character." This admonition to "let your character live in you" means making the image of your character come alive in your mind so that you can make it come and go at will. Through constant practice, the actor transforms his "mental image" into the image of a live person. And as soon as the actor forms a mental image, he practices it on himself. While practice is of vital importance in Jiao Juyin's Theory of Mental Images, it does not constitute the entire body of his theory.

And fourth: Even though the "mental image" has taken root in the actor's mind and body, it may not agree completely with the content of the play; thus the actor must readjust to the situation specified in the play during rehearsal. During the rehearsal of *Dragon Beard Ditch*, therefore, Jiao Juyin divided the period into two parts: the first—the larger part—as the "continuation of experiencing life" and the second as the process of "entering" (*jìn rù*^{aa}) into the character. Special attention should be paid to this first technique of "continuation of experiencing life." As Jiao pointed out:

Before the rehearsal, the character in the actor's imagination exists in isolation and has no close relationship with the other characters and the situation in the play. The actor must readjust and redefine his role according to the situation specified in the play and through contacts with the other characters. The Russian directors and actors refer to rehearsal as "action" (*huodong* or *xingdong*^{ab}) but I call it "living" (*shenghuo*^{ac}). [Jiao 1979, 73–74]

The reason why Jiao Juyin referred to the first part of a dramatic rehearsal as a "continuation of experiencing life" was to prevent actors from thinking that because they had already formed "mental images" of their characters and transported the images to themselves through practice, they needed only to imitate these "mental images" during the rehearsal and forget the other key imperative "to live in the characters." Only by submitting their "mental images" in the situation of the play under the direction of the director and stage designer and through interaction with the other characters can actors determine whether these images are applicable to the dramatic situation of the play and proceed to develop them more fully. Only when "mental images" finally

merge with stage images can it be said that the actors have “entered” into the lives of their characters.

We have explained Jiao Juyin’s Theory of Mental Images in detail because performance is a complicated process and his theory constitutes a complete system of theory and practice. We believe that through its successful application in *Dragon Beard Ditch*, the Theory of Mental Images became an integral part of Jiao’s system of directing. It is different from the Stanislavsky system and other Western performance theories and embodies the spirit of our national aesthetic tradition.

The theoretical foundation of the Theory of Mental Images is its emphasis on art originating from life and on “starting from life” (*cong shenghuo chufa*^{ad}) as the core of performance. Jiao Juyin respected Stanislavsky’s theories on experience. But he believed that the object of “experiencing” should not be the actors’ own emotions, feelings, and memories but the lives of the characters in the play. One striking facet of the rehearsal of *Dragon Beard Ditch* was the fact that Jiao rarely mentioned the fundamental Stanislavskian concept of “starting from the actor himself,” especially when he noticed that many actors were unable to act because they were trapped in experiencing themselves. When he directed *The Lower Depths* and *Dragon Beard Ditch*, Jiao consciously pushed the actors to delve deeply into life and broaden their horizons through actual life so they could create lively images of their characters. “Starting from life” is a basic principle in Jiao Juyin’s dramatic theory, and from this principle emerged the basis of his Theory of Mental Images: experiencing life, developing “mental images,” and creating images of the characters that form the stage image as a whole.

We should also note that Jiao Juyin’s conscious or unconscious choice of the term “mental image” reflects the spirit of traditional Chinese aesthetics. Terms such as “mental image” or “imagery” have special meaning in Chinese literature and art; Jiao did not choose them haphazardly but based them on careful consideration. The Qing-dynasty painter Zheng Banqiao,^{ae} for example, known for his painting of bamboos, once said: “The bamboo in my mind is not the same as the bamboo in my eyes. . . . The bamboo in my hand is not the same as the bamboo in my mind.”⁵ This is a well-known saying in traditional Chinese painting. The aphorism suggests that regardless of whether the subject is a bamboo forest, bamboo grove, or just a few stalks of bamboo, it is only through observation that we come to appreciate the bamboo’s myriad forms and charms. This is the “bamboo in my eyes.” Chinese painting, however, is not a realistic sketch; the painter adds his own feelings and imagination to his observation of the object in order to produce “the bamboo in my mind.” Moreover, the “bamboo in my mind” is not merely a vague idea but a concrete image that can trigger

the painter's creative impulse. This image is no longer restricted by the original object but also includes the artist's aesthetic intent and exemplifies what Jiao Juyin referred to as "mental image."

When the artist begins the process of composing a painting based on his "mental image," ultimately, a new situation arises. The size of the painting, the quality of paper and ink, the painter's mood at the time, the unexpected results after he begins painting—all these specific factors cannot cohere perfectly to his original "mental image." It is necessary at this time for the painter to revise his composition and make impromptu changes in order to achieve the best results for his painting. This is what is meant by "the bamboo in my hand is not the same as the bamboo in my mind." What a dialectical discourse on painting! No wonder Zheng Banqiao asked rhetorically with obvious pride: "Is this true only for painting?" Indeed, this principle can also be applied to the performing arts. "The bamboo in my eyes" represents the actors' observations and experiences of real life; "the bamboo in my mind" stands for the "mental images" of the characters that the actors formed through experiencing life and their own imagination; "the bamboo in my hand" signifies the stage images created by the actors after rehearsing and fine-tuning the characters to suit the dramatic situations of the play. The basic principles of all art forms often display a strong commonality of understanding, and there are many similar sayings in Chinese writings on aesthetics—such as the Ming-dynasty poet/painter Wang Lü's^{af} statement that "my hand learns from my mind, my mind learns from my eyes, my eyes learn from Mount Tai" or the proverb "to learn from Nature externally, to follow the Mind internally." All these insightful comments reveal that the "mental image" is an indispensable link in the process of artistic creation. It connects "starting from life" and "completing the artistic image" and serves as a bridge between the two—ultimately giving full play to the artist's creativity and subjectivity in the process of artistic production.

"On Nationalizing Spoken Drama" and Its Aesthetic System

The outline of "On Nationalizing Spoken Drama" was found among the notes left by Jiao Juyin. Judging by the content of his notes, this outline was most likely written in March 1963 (no later than January 1964). At that time Jiao was planning to publish a book, *Essays on Drama*, that was to be composed of nine published essays and a final piece titled "On Nationalizing Spoken Drama," which was to be 30,000 to 50,000 words long. As the rein of leftist ideology became tighter and tighter, however, he was eventually forced to abandon his writing plans and the book was never published.⁶

For the reader to gain a complete understanding of Jiao's outline, the manner in which it was arranged, as well as his own train of thought, the entire outline is reproduced here:

“On Nationalizing Spoken Drama” (Outline)

1. The audience and the dramatists create jointly.
2. Arrive at spiritual essence through physical appearance, but the emphasis is on spiritual essence.
3. Let the audience experience the “spirit” through “appearance.” The crux of the matter is not appearance, but it must be achieved through appearance.
4. Achieve the most with the least. All the techniques of dramatic performance serve the purpose of portraying the characters. Actions that are not related to the characters' thought and inner conflict should be kept as brief as possible. Do not drag out the action. Do not chase after the so-called “truth.” Truth onstage is not identical with truth in life. This is especially the case in performance.
5. In contrast to point 4, pay great care to actions that are central to the portrayal of the characters and do not leave out any minute dramatic conflict. The performance must have feeling and a detailed process. The changes in a person's emotions take place in a twinkling in real life, but they can be highlighted on the stage over a longer period of time. This is what the audience expects to see. In this way, rise and fall in the plot, rhythm, and climax are produced.
6. Represent limitless space and time (life) in a limited space and time (the stage performance).
7. Everything must be subordinated to action. Relations between the characters, conflicts, personality clashes, drive the development of the plot. Action can also produce stillness.
8. Create a poetic feeling on the stage that is based on a solid foundation in life. Do not reveal or expose too much. Leave room for the audience's imagination and creativity. But the audience's ability to understand the performance is essential—just like looking at Qi Bai-shi's paintings of shrimp. Although there are only shrimp in the paintings, the viewer can “deduce” the presence of water. The same aesthetic principle also functions in *xiqu*, in which the audience's comprehension and appreciation are blended together and there is room for “deduction.”
9. Study the conventions and methods of *xiqu* seriously and pay attention to the audience's needs and habits. Making the audience like our performance does not mean catering to its taste. We should take the effects of theatre into consideration and strive to raise the audience's moral sensibilities while entertaining it with beautiful performances.

With concise language, Jiao Juyin wrote this outline to sum up his explorations of how to “nationalize” spoken drama, thereby providing us with critical evidence for the study of his aesthetics. The essay that Jiao originally planned to write based on this outline was to be the central part of his book; it would be a comprehensive summary of the theory that was produced during his period of artistic maturity. This brief outline, precisely formulated and constituting a system of aesthetics unto itself, is the cream of Jiao Juyin’s artistic thought. By examining each point of this outline in connection with Jiao’s creative works and his other essays, we will arrive at an understanding of his aesthetic system.

The first point of the outline raises the question of joint creation between the audience and dramatists (playwright, director, actors, stage designers, and so forth). Because of his profound understanding of traditional Chinese theatre, Jiao was able to grasp this key question in dramatic theory in his explorations of nationalizing spoken drama—a question of utmost significance in the formation of a Chinese system of aesthetics. Moreover, this concept of “joint creation” reflects Jiao’s unique understanding of the nature of drama, as he placed all dramatic conflicts under the rubric of the relationship between audience and dramatists. With this idea as a critical basis, Jiao compared Chinese and Western dramatic traditions and pointed out important differences in their aesthetic principles.

Point 1: Chinese and Western drama aesthetics differ completely regarding the existence of the audience and the place it occupies. The Stanislavsky system stresses separation from the audience. This is the “fourth wall” concept, which assumes that the audience does not exist and the performance is carried out in isolation from it. Brecht acknowledges the existence of the audience for the purpose of educating its members, and his drama is known as “educational drama.” Chinese *xiqu* not only emphasizes that theatre exists for the audience and performance is for the audience to watch; it also includes the audience as cocreator in the process of artistic creation and appreciation.

Point 2: Many artistic methods of *xiqu* derive from the aesthetic principle of “joint creation with the audience,” with the spectators actively supplementing and enriching the action onstage with their own imagination. During the entire process of the performance, the actors and audience not only have spiritual rapport but also direct exchange, which enable them to create a stage experience together. The realistic Stanislavsky system aims at creating an illusion of life and making the audience a captive of the life depicted on the stage; Brecht “alienates” the audience from the life onstage with his rational narra-

tive and didactic lectures. Whether being “captives” or being “alienated,” the audience is excluded from joint creation.

Point 3: Chinese dramatists not only acknowledge their own concept of the objective world but also the audience’s. While expressing their views to the audience they also respect the audience’s ability to form its own views, and on the basis of mutual understanding they explore life together. It is only when what is enacted on the stage expresses what the audience feels that the performance can strike a sympathetic chord in its members. Western dramatic schools tend to stress the dramatist’s ideas about reality and to instill these ideas in the audience to make it accept the dramatist’s viewpoint and attitude toward life. Through this comparison, Jiao Juyin made “joint creation with the audience” the cornerstone of Chinese traditional aesthetics and a guiding principle for the interpretation and solution of other dramatic conflicts.

The second and third points raise the question of “spiritual essence” versus “physical appearance.” This question deals with the internal and external truthfulness of stage images. Truthfulness is the soul of realistic literature and art, but different aesthetic traditions have vastly different understandings of truthfulness and thus lead to different artistic practices. Western aesthetics originated in Aristotle’s theory of mimesis, which calls for true-to-life portrayal and representation of the objective world. Chinese literature and art were deeply influenced by the Confucian aesthetic concept of “communion with the external world,” which maintains that feelings are stirred up by the external world; the emphasis is on expressing inner feelings, however, not external images. Jiao Juyin understood the difference between these two aesthetic traditions. From the perspective of Chinese aesthetics he raised the question of capturing the appearance or capturing the spirit in his quest to nationalize spoken drama. He also recognized the dialectic relationship between “appearance” and “spirit” and proposed to “express the spirit through the appearance” and to achieve this goal through “joint creation with the audience.”

With regard to stage performance, Jiao recognized that “there are two methods to reflect the truth of life. One is to present the essential truth of life through lifelike external images—this is the basic artistic method of spoken drama. Another way is to present the essential truth of life through approximate external images—this is the basic artistic method of *xiqu*” (Jiao 1979, 389). The Stanislavsky system, as an important dramatic school, strives to create “lifelike external images”; modern Chinese spoken drama has basically followed this method in its creation and performance. Jiao’s emphasis on “spiritual

essence” and “expression of the spirit” represented a conscious effort to learn from *xiqu* in the process of “nationalizing” the spoken drama.

The combination of “appearance” and “spirit” in *xiqu* represents a unity between truthfulness of details and truthfulness of essence. For the sake of presenting essential truth, *xiqu* does not rigidly adhere to all the realistic details but strives for an “approximation of reality” by employing external images that can achieve the artistic effect of “expressing the spirit.” The conventions of *xiqu* originated in life but they are removed from the verisimilitude of everyday life. After a long period of “joint creation with the audience,” they have become a “sign” in stage art and a “common language” between the audience and the dramatists for the exploration of life. Take, for example, the routine called “*qiba*”³⁸—a series of actions representing a military general putting on a helmet, armor, buckler, and boots before going into battle—which has evolved into a rhythmic and dancelike movement far removed from their original models in life and become a stage convention for depicting the warrior’s bravery and heroic character. From the artistic principles underlying the formation of stage conventions, Jiao Juyin recognized that the Chinese concept of “truthfulness on the stage” based on joint creation and mutual understanding with the audience is unique in the world. This concept has much in common with Chinese theories on painting—such as “to express the spirit through the appearance” and “to achieve a likeness of the object apart from its appearance.” All these doctrines reflect the Chinese emphasis on the viewer’s imagination and the artist’s joint creation with the audience. In stage performance, without the audience’s active participation, the acting conventions would lose their relevance to life. Because of the audience’s understanding and appreciation, these conventions have gradually developed into artistic techniques of great beauty and aesthetic appeal.

Points 4–7: The fourth through seventh points in Jiao’s outline analyze the artistic methods employed by *xiqu* to achieve a unity between content and form. The laws of Chinese stage art—many versus few, “real” versus “imaginary,” action versus stillness, infinite time and space versus finite time and space—are all produced under the guiding principle of embodying both the appearance and the essence while giving primacy to expressing the spirit. These laws are the essence of traditional Chinese aesthetics. In poetry there is a saying that “poetry has borrowed colors but no true colors”; in painting there are the techniques of “cut off,” “blank space,” and “imaginary scenery.” Similarly, in stage performance there are the methods of imaginary scene, expressing the spirit, interaction between the real and the imaginary, linking multiplicity with simplicity, setting off action against stillness, and so

on. All these form a continuous line of Chinese artistic methodology. Jiao Juyin's employment of these techniques thus gave his theatre art a strong national character.

Among these artistic methods, Jiao grasped a central idea for the stage: to make the portrayal of the characters the core of performance. He pointed out: "All the dramatic techniques serve the purpose of portraying the characters. A major difference between Chinese *xiqu* and Western drama is that we elevate performance to the highest level" (Jiao 1979, 147). He further stated: "An important characteristic of Chinese theatre art is its focus on the characters. There is no scenery, props, or other paraphernalia to clutter the stage; it all depends on the actors' performance" (Jiao 1979, 226). Therefore, the techniques of multiplicity versus simplicity, the real versus the imaginary, action versus stillness, and the manipulation of time and space should all be directed toward the central goal of characterization. Because of this emphasis, Jiao felt there was a paucity of performance techniques in *huaju* for the portrayal of characters. To portray the characters, emphasis should be on the inner and fundamental truth. Such being the case, details of daily life may be omitted but the characters' inner feelings must be given full expression. Therefore: "The performance should be both concise and exaggerated, highlighting the characters' mental attitude. As life becomes more condensed, the external appearance of life will appear paler" (Jiao 1979, 200). In this way, the characters' "spirit" is made prominent and a dialectical relationship between "appearance" and "essence" as well as between truth of life and artistic truth is established.

Point 8: Here Jiao puts forward the concept of "creating a poetic feeling on the stage based on a solid foundation in life." A poetic world based on real life was what Jiao considered to be the highest form of truth on the stage.⁷ He listed "poetic feeling—poetic world" as one of the three basic elements of performance.⁸ A poetic world composed of a fusion of emotion and scene is a key concept in Chinese aesthetic theories. Expressions such as "blending of emotion and scene," "words cannot adequately express the meaning," "similar yet not similar," "ending without end," "image beyond image," and "capturing the spirit without using a single word"—all reflect this aesthetic spirit. This spirit is a product of joint creation between the audience and the artists as well as the mutual understanding that grows out of their cooperation. Jiao Juyin inherited and carried on this spirit in his experiments to nationalize the spoken drama and in his belief that stage performance should not spell out everything for audiences but leave room for their imagination and creativity. This creative method represents Jiao's attempt to combine realism and romanticism on the foundation of realism.⁹

Point 9: Jiao further places the concept of joint creation in the Chinese theatrical tradition and examines its efficacy from the perspective of social effects of literature and art. By concluding his essay on the same point that he raised at the beginning, Jiao reiterates the importance of this idea. From Jiao Juyin's outline "On Nationalizing Spoken Drama," we can see that his aesthetic ideas have developed into a complete system formed through a process of practice, examination, further practice, and reexamination.

NOTES

1. See Tian Benxiang, "Yi shi jiangou Beijing Renyi de yishu diantang: Jiao Juyin—Beijing Renyi yanju xuepai chutan" [Building the Artistic Palace of Beijing People's Art Theatre with Poetry: A Preliminary Inquiry into the School of Performance of Jiao Juyin and Beijing People's Art Theatre] (Yu et al. 1995, 279).

2. This play tells the story of how the newly established Communist government cleans up a stinking ditch in a Beijing slum. It premiered in 1951.

3. This campaign followed right after the Hundred Flowers campaign of 1956. Those who criticized the party during the earlier "blooming and contending" period were labeled as "rightists" and sent to reeducation camps.

4. The authors cite the Moscow Art Theatre's performance of *Julius Caesar* described in Danchenko's book as an example of Jiao's use of the term "mental images."

5. This statement originally appeared in Zheng's comment on one of his paintings.

6. A volume of Jiao's *Essays on Drama* was published posthumously in 1979 without the essay "On Nationalizing Spoken Drama."

7. I am following James J. Y. Liu's example in translating the Chinese term "jingjie"^{ah} as "world." *Jingjie*, sometimes used interchangeably with *yijing*,^{ai} is an important concept in Chinese poetry. The noted scholar and literary critic Wang Guowei^{aj} (1877–1927) described it as a fusion of emotion and scene: "The 'world' does not refer to scenes and objects only; joy, anger, sadness, and happiness also form a world in the human heart. Therefore poetry that can describe true scenes and true emotions may be said to 'have world'; otherwise it may be said 'not to have world'" (Liu 1962, 84).

8. The other two elements are stage image and action. Jiao Juyin explained what he meant by "poetry in drama" in another essay:

In classical Western literature, drama belongs to the category of poetry. Chinese opera, both classical and modern, is also considered poetry. Spoken drama is usually written in prose and we should not force it to include poetry. While it does not have a poetic form, it should not be without poetic feeling. A performance should definitely

not be deficient in poetry and let the audience take in everything at one glance.

Poetry does not depend on flowery language and beautiful forms, even less on rhyme and versification. When the artist has deep feelings about an object, his portrayal of it will come from his heart and be full of passion; then poetry will be naturally revealed in his work. If a writer writes with his intellect alone, he can only produce academic papers and theoretical works. The writer must first be moved by the play he is writing; then he can move his readers. The director must first be moved by the play he is directing; then he can use the stage as canvas to paint the most memorable characters. This is poetry. [Jiao 1988, 4:129]

9. In 1958, in the midst of the Great Leap Forward campaign, Mao Zedong announced the policy of integrating revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism in literature and arts. Henceforth this principle was enshrined in dramatic creation as well. Jiao had to comply with Mao's directive even though his idea of creating a poetic feeling on the stage differed significantly from Mao's brand of romanticism. The little people who populated the plays Jiao directed, such as *Dragon Beard Ditch* and *Teahouse*, are a far cry from the larger-than-life heroic characters Mao wanted writers to create. For a detailed explanation of this policy see the speech by Zhou Yang, Mao's literary czar, titled "The Path of Socialist Literature and Art in China," delivered to the Third Congress of Chinese Literary and Art Workers on July 22, 1960 (Hsu 1980, 444–446).

GLOSSARY

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|----|----------|-----|----------|
| a. | 焦菊隐 | s. | 实 |
| b. | 话剧 | t. | 虚 |
| c. | 黄佐临 | u. | 论焦菊隐导演学派 |
| d. | 戏曲 | v. | 意象 |
| e. | 北京人民艺术剧院 | w. | 郑君里 |
| f. | 老舍 | x. | 章泯 |
| g. | 龙须沟 | y. | 于是之 |
| h. | 茶馆 | z. | 容剑成 |
| i. | 郭沫若 | aa. | 进入 |
| j. | 心象学 | ab. | 活动, 行动 |
| k. | 亮相 | ac. | 生活 |
| l. | 蔡文姬 | ad. | 从生活出发 |
| m. | 龙套 | ae. | 郑板桥 |
| n. | 民族形式 | af. | 王履 |
| o. | 话剧民族化 | ag. | 起霸 |
| p. | 论话剧民族化 | ah. | 境界 |
| q. | 神 | ai. | 意境 |
| r. | 形 | aj. | 王国维 |

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