

culture. However, the cultures' attachment to a class does not mean they are not nationalist. All Marxist-Leninist parties have demanded that the arts remain 'patriotic' and build creatively on the traditions of their particular nation. In theoretical terms an important landmark in Asian Marxist-Leninist thinking on the arts was Mao Zedong's account put forward at a major forum held in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) headquarters in Yan'an in 1942. Mao's focus was on the propaganda and revolutionary functions of the arts and the creation of works which would appeal to the masses, not merely an educated élite. In October 1949 Mao and the CCP took power in China, founding the PRC. Although he immediately implemented his views on the arts, the period when they were interpreted most rigidly was during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). Despite emphasis on patriotism, the effect was to bring all but total destruction to China's arts, especially the traditional, and to make boring stereotypes of those that survived.

At the end of the Second World War, Korea was divided into a socialist north and capitalist south. It also experienced an extremely bitter war from 1950 to 1953, during which theatre was used by both sides, and especially by the left, for propaganda and nationalist causes.

China

In China the most important form of non-traditional theatre is termed 'spoken drama' (*huaju*) because dialogue is carried on more or less entirely through speech, with hardly any song or music. The earliest spoken drama in Chinese which was also performed and produced entirely by Chinese was staged not in China but in Japan. On 1 June 1907 Chinese actors put on in Tokyo a Chinese-language dramatization of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Called *The Black Slave's Cry to Heaven* (*Heinu yutian lu*), it was strongly hostile to slavery and to all forms of oppression.

The spoken drama has played a highly political role in China throughout the twentieth century. One authority aptly calls it 'the most assertive form of innovative literature in modern Chinese society', its writers mostly regarding it as 'an iconoclastic statement, designed to convey broader views for social reform and revolution'. China's most famous dramatist of the twentieth century, Cao Yu, wrote several very important plays during the 1930s and 1940s on progressive and nationalist themes. His most popular items are probably the tragedies *Thunderstorm* (*Leiyu*) and *Sunrise* (*Richu*), the former attacking the traditional family system in very strong terms, the latter urban corruption and misery in the 1930s.

At first, traditional drama was only marginally affected by the revolutionary tide sweeping China in the first half of this century. Many young people may have opposed such reactionary culture during the May Fourth Movement, but it nevertheless retained a substantial following. The most famous actor China has ever produced was Mei Lanfang (1894-1961), an exponent of *dan* roles in the Peking

Opera. He was not only wildly popular in his own country but travelled abroad several times to Japan, in 1919, 1924, and 1956, the United States, in 1930, and Europe, in 1935. It was during this tour to Moscow, London, Berlin, and Paris that Bertolt Brecht saw him act, and was enormously impressed.

Except during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, the PRC has generally patronized the performance of theatre, both traditional and modern, and encouraged the survival of folk troupes. However, it has also sought to control and reform the content of dramas, with a view to ensuring that no traditional items performed are 'against the people' or anti-socialist, and that all recently or newly written items are progressive or revolutionary.

One of the mechanisms in the CCP's style of government is to establish models. In the theatre this was done through major festivals showing representatives of specially approved dramas. In October and November 1952 the CCP's Ministry of Culture sponsored a Festival of Traditional Music-Drama, the first event of its kind ever held in China. There were about 1,800 participants, including Mei Lanfang, with eighty-two dramas being performed belonging to over twenty regional styles. About three-quarters of the items were traditional, but there were also eleven newly written historical dramas, and a few with modern themes. Two items given special praise by cultural commissar Zhou Yang in his speech at the end of the festival were the rearranged traditional love-stories *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* and *The White Snake (Baishe zhuan)*, his reason being that both dramatize strong opposition to the old custom of arranged marriages and show the women as strong and determined to stand up for their own and their lovers' rights. The Ministry of Culture also sponsored a Spoken Drama Festival in Beijing in March and April 1956, in which the themes of solidly modern plays promoted the revolutionary struggle against imperialism and functioned as propaganda for contemporary life in the factories and countryside under socialism. Cao Yu's *Thunderstorm* was among the few plays given by famous dramatists.

'Newly arranged historical drama' is a form featured in the 1952 Festival and one much favoured by the CCP. The story is set in the dynastic past, with costumes and music being generally classical in style. However, in contrast to pure



Mei Lanfang, China's greatest actor (1894-1961). Here he plays the role of Yang Yuhuan in *Drunken Beauty (Guifei zuijiu)*, one of his best parts. The story concerns Yang Yuhuan, favourite concubine of the Emperor Minghuang (reigned 712-56). The lovers have a falling-out, and she drowns her sorrow in drink. Mei Lanfang arranged the drama to suit his particular skills.



'Model' drama *Red Lantern*. Most famous drama of China's Cultural Revolution (1966-76), it is set in China's north-east during the war against Japan and concerns three generations of revolutionaries, namely grandmother (right), son, and granddaughter (left). The revolutionaries suffer but win victory. Note the stereotyped poses and facial expressions.

traditional theatre, there is complex décor. The plot expresses conflict and tension, and rises to a denouement which should ideally show the wretched of the earth victorious over the rich and powerful among the feudal ruling classes, or Chinese patriotism winning out over treachery. Favoured themes include peasant rebellions of the past, lovers who overcome the feudal system of arranged marriages, women who stand up for their rights or make a public contribution to society, or patriotic wars against foreign aggressors.

Another drama festival of a kind very different from those of 1952 or 1956 took place in June and July 1964: the Festival of Peking Operas on Contemporary Themes. About thirty troupes from most parts of China participated, giving some thirty-seven pieces, all of them dealing with the revolutionary struggle. One of particular note was *The Red Lantern (Hongdeng ji)*, which tells the story of three generations of revolutionaries, two of them women, and their struggle against the Japanese. The wife of Mao Zedong, Jiang Qing, who had once been a minor film star and held strong views on the theatre, gave a speech called 'On the Revolution of the Peking Opera', which advocated the indefinite suspension of all traditional items, no matter whether newly written, reformed, or purely classical. The speech was suppressed at the time, due to the very strong resistance to such a radical view among other leaders, and was not published until 1967.

By that time, the Cultural Revolution was in full swing and she had succeeded

in gaining support for her experiments. She rearranged some of the pieces performed at the 1964 Festival into 'model' dramas, in which characterization must reflect the class struggle, with the proletarian characters being very good indeed, selfless and strong supporters of the CCP, but the bourgeois the epitome of evil. In Jiang Qing's 'models', Western musical instruments were added to the orchestra and the music made more staccato, on the grounds that it thus became more revolutionary and heroic; but some of the traditional melodies were retained. From early 1966 until the middle of 1977, no dramas on traditional themes were publicly performed, the stage being totally dominated by Jiang Qing's 'models'. Even an item such as *The Red Lantern* was not revolutionary enough for Jiang Qing, who had it revised and its characters reshaped to fit her desired paradigm more closely. In its 'model' form it was not published until May 1970. It was this writer's impression from seeing *The Red Lantern* several times in China that the item was initially quite popular, but it was repeated so often that, like the other 'models', it soon lost its appeal and became regarded as a monumental bore, especially since the number of 'models' was very small and the available dramatic diet at the time was thus narrow in the extreme.

Japan

In Japan in the early years after the Meiji Restoration of 1868 there was a move to reform the traditional kabuki theatre by modernizing it in line with Western practices. In 1872, the new Japanese Meiji government placed actors under the control of the Ministry of Religious Instruction in an attempt to use the theatre to improve public morals and in 1887 it even set up a committee to reform kabuki to make it acceptable to Western audiences by 'cleaning it up' to remove the eroticism and violence which had characterized it, and to reform it to suit nineteenth-century European realism. On the whole this was not a great success, the appurtenances of the modern world proving incompatible with the non-realistic movement and elocution of the kabuki. One feature of this new-style kabuki which did remain permanent was that literary figures outside the theatrical world, men such as the right-wing nationalist Mishima Yukio (1925-70), wrote new scripts for the kabuki, as well as for Noh. But even this has rarely inspired great enthusiasm among theatre-goers, and these newly written kabuki rarely run for very long.

Plays with political themes began to be seen in Japan in the late years of the nineteenth century. Termed *shinpa* (literally 'new school'), these plays won some popular favour because of their novelty and patriotic appeal. Actresses, who had been banned from the stage by the Tokugawa regime, reappeared on the 'new school' stage and were tolerated by the new government. In 1906 Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935) and others established the Literary Arts Society, launching a new form of Japanese literary drama known as *shingeki*, which means literally 'new