

Wei Feng and Ye Pi

Antiquity to Modernity: Mei Lanfang's Preparatory and Presentational Strategies for his American and Soviet Visits

The Chinese actor Mei Lanfang and his retinue prepared several documents for his visits to the USA in 1930 and the USSR in 1935. Using these primary sources, this article explores the reasons why Mei presented traditional Chinese theatre differently in each context. One reason was winning popularity among specifically targeted audiences, as indicated by the carefully selected programmes, explanatory discourses, and illustrations from promotional materials. Through a comparative examination, this article argues that, for the American tour, Mei made traditional Chinese theatre an emblem of ancient Chinese art, while, for the Soviet tour, he endorsed the Soviet Union's social and artistic enterprises, labelling traditional Chinese theatre a modern art. Both images, one static and the other dynamic, were authentic representations of the multifaceted contemporary Chinese theatre as it underwent modernization. Wei Feng received his PhD in Theatre Studies from Trinity College Dublin and teaches in the School of Foreign Languages and Literature at Shandong University. He is the author of *Intercultural Aesthetics in Traditional Chinese Theatre: From 1978 to the Present* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). Ye Pi (corresponding author) teaches in the School of Foreign Languages and Literature at Shandong University, specializing in Russian literature.

Key terms: Mei Lanfang, Qi Rushan, Peng-Chun Chang, *xiqu*, modernization, celebrity, socialist realism.

THE CHINESE *xiqu* (traditional Chinese theatre) performer Mei Lanfang (1894–1961) has been remembered in western theatre largely because of his successful tours to the USA in 1930 and the USSR in 1935.¹ It is, however, necessary to note that his presentational strategies for these two countries, and hence how he was received in them, were markedly different. The writer Sergey Tretyakov (1892–1937), when discussing Mei's reception in the Soviet Union, observed:

If the bourgeois European and American spectator is accustomed to treating Chinese theatre as an exotic, primitive, and strange show, the Soviet spectator, raised in the spirit of the greatest attention to national creativity, will certainly give to this theatre and its best representative, the attention it deserves.²

While Tretyakov indicated that cultural and ideological factors were involved in how Mei Lanfang was viewed, he overlooked the fact that Mei had exhibited somewhat disparate

images of his art and himself to American and Soviet audiences. Nor was he fully aware that Mei did not operate as a single performer but rather commanded a network of literary scholars, financiers, and diplomats who provided creative and practical support while influencing his art and personal image. Many of them also orchestrated and facilitated his successful overseas tours.³ In this regard, Mei's popularity among the culturally distanced American and Soviet audiences cannot be simply attributed to the universal appeal of his great artistry. It depended as well on his practical strategies, together with his open-minded approach. Mei Lanfang, receptive to suggestions from his friends and audiences and responsive to his time, established himself as a multifaceted agent who never stopped changing his art across his career.

Mei's presentational strategies, although contingent upon foreign demands, were also a reaction to domestic concerns. At a time when perception of Chinese culture was

entangled in ever-changing military, diplomatic, and cultural encounters with non-Chinese nations, *xiqu* practitioners like Mei could not possibly adhere to a static, monolithic, and self-contained conception of Chinese theatre art. What further complicated the theatrical landscape in China were perceptions from both traditional and westernized non-professionals, who regarded *xiqu* as a major public platform and felt it imperative to express their opinions on the 'correct' path of its development. Mei Lanfang's international tours played a particularly important role in the various debates over *xiqu* modernization and its practice. Further, the dynamic of Mei's positioning of *xiqu* amid domestic and foreign complexities is vital for elucidating his ascent to the status of an icon in world theatre history.

To understand this dynamic, it is essential to consult the promotional materials – mainly introductory booklets written in English – that Mei's supporters prepared for the tours. Close reading of these under-used documents shows that, far from reproducing his art in China, Mei adjusted, of necessity, to different situations of reception. These documents suggest that he investigated the sociocultural and theatre situations in both the USA and the

USSR, gearing his presentations to what he thought might meet their expectations and correspond best to their interests. Such adjustments also played a decisive role in the refashioning of Mei, who would be further refashioned by those who saw his performances. The documents at issue and Mei's reception abroad not only complicated the trajectory of *xiqu* modernization in China during the early twentieth century but also influenced the evaluation and utilization of *xiqu* by posterity.

Mei's two tours strategically shifted between presenting *xiqu* as an ancient art to the Americans and a modern art to the Soviets. According to Joshua Goldstein's seminal research, the whole rationale of the American tour could be dubbed 'tactical Orientalism' because 'Mei tactically employed the western Orientalist gaze to help achieve this essentializing flip'.⁴ Mei's strategy for his Soviet tour was, by contrast, an attempt to make *xiqu* a useful reference for modern theatrical experiment as championed by practitioners such as Vsevolod Meyerhold and Sergey Eisenstein (Figure 1). This was not necessarily about universalizing *xiqu* but also an attempt to participate actively in the mutation of western theatre and have a transformative impact on



Figure 1. (Left to right) Sergey Eisenstein, Mei Lanfang, Sergey Tretyakov, Peng-Chun Chang, and Vsevolod Meyerhold (1935).

it. It was a response to the Soviet Union's practice at the time of 'cultural cosmopolitanism', as perceived by Katerina Clark.⁵ The complexities of the tours and Mei's strategies are embedded in the specific cultural and political contexts of the countries to which he travelled.

Contextualizing the Tours: Aims and Strategies

Despite Mei's consistent plan to disseminate Chinese theatre abroad, there were social, cultural, and ideological conditions in the USA and the USSR that determined the distinct incentives and motivation of the two tours. On the surface, the American tour originated partly from Mei's own desire to go abroad to uncover new tendencies of American theatre to be put in the service of Chinese theatre reform,⁶ and partly from the invitation and encouragement of the American cultural and diplomatic circle.⁷ Yet there was another motivation. The Chinese Exclusion Act had been established in the United States, and negative assumptions regarding Chinese people and culture were prevalent.⁸ Meng Chih, a chief member of the China Institute in America, which welcomed Mei's American tour, recollected that 'Americans in the 1930s had more good will than respect for [the] Chinese'.⁹ Mei Lanfang, as the foremost actor in Chinese theatre, a national icon, and a cultural ambassador, felt obliged to improve the international standing of China and to enhance Sino-American understanding.

Mei's visit was anticipated with interest. The American people's appetite for *xiqu* had been whetted by the internationally known play *The Yellow Jacket* (1912), written by George C. Hazelton and J. Harry Benrimo. It was an exotic piece with 'eye-catching outer forms of Chinese theatre' and 'universal themes' which, echoing pervading Orientalist practice, 'betrays its lack of a deeper textual understanding and appreciation of Chinese theatre'.¹⁰

Cantonese theatres in Chinatowns across the country had received little attention from American critics, who, aesthetically prejudiced and unable to understand the texts,¹¹

thought that ordinary audiences should expect 'novel and exotic spectacles'.¹² Even so, theatre professionals gradually started to draw inspiration from Cantonese opera for non-realistic experiments inspired by avant-garde theatre: 'the realist prejudice against the Chinese theatre had been weakened and American critics began to appreciate its peculiarities'.¹³ A. E. Zucker, when comparing Mei and contemporary western theatre in 1924, commented that 'some of our theatres at present [had] an extreme reaction against pedantic imitations of the externalities of every-day life. The make-believe of the Chinese theatre is happily free from these devices that deaden the imagination'.¹⁴ There were, then, differing attitudes towards Chinese theatre prior to Mei's arrival. Regarding *xiqu* performances in the Chinatowns, some people did not bother to attend, others mocked its strangeness, and still others rejoiced over its non-realistic characteristics. All these impressions would ultimately converge and be projected on to Mei Lanfang.

Such complexities also beset the American tour with contingencies. Due to the cultural distances and insufficient governmental endorsement, Mei doubted whether he would be popular, or even make ends meet, especially when his plan evoked continuous scorn and dissuasion from radical, westernized intellectuals who believed that Mei would disgrace China.¹⁵ In tacit response, Mei sought public support by characterizing the tour as 'cultural exchange for the common good',¹⁶ which convinced some influential individuals and institutions. John Leighton Stuart (1876–1962), then President of Yenching University and an influential figure in Sino-American relations, as well as the China Institute in America, provided practical assistance as intermediaries.¹⁷ Together they facilitated financial support, press coverage, and performance space, among many other resources.

At the same time, although the American tour was not characterized as profit-driven, Mei paradoxically had to adopt the practices of commercial operations common to the entertainment business.¹⁸ After all, America was suffering from the Great Depression,

which was bad for the entertainment business.¹⁹ Unlike the Cantonese theatres in Chinatowns, which were seldom oriented towards American audiences, Mei had to play on the expectations and habits of American people in order to be successful. His supporters – chiefly Qi Rushan (1877–1962) – had anticipated the need for rigorous publicity and extensive promotion. In order to achieve international renown in the years before the tour, Mei had hosted thousands of visitors in Beijing during the 1920s, making it possible to study ‘the desires and aesthetic preferences of foreigners who had attended Peking opera performances (and Chinese culture in general)’ systematically.²⁰ Exotic spectacles were created through and in the American mass media to excite attention. Li Feishu (1909–1942), Mei’s secretary, wrote in his diary for the tour that ‘Americans are keen on novelty. Our theatre that we naturally deem as antique might strike them as being novel.’²¹ His words echoed the move to situate *xiqu* squarely under the Orientalist gaze. Not aiming for communicating value but for peddling superficial attractions, exoticism catered to the popular taste for strangeness.

The drive to ‘exhibit the art of China’s stage’ and culture to middle- and upper-class audiences meant that Mei’s cultural products had to be beautifully packaged for consumption.²² This again differentiated Mei from *xiqu* performers in Chinatowns. His team knew exactly what kind of American audiences they were dealing with: consumers of popular Orientalism, who fetishized antique Chinese products as opposed to anything with a hint of the modern. The stage set was duplicated from the Forbidden City; Chinese lanterns and flags were used as decoration outside theatres; ushers wore traditional Chinese costume – everything adopted a traditional Chinese style.²³

To prevent audiences leaving early because of complaints – common enough – regarding *xiqu*’s harsh music and unintelligible lines, Peng-Chun Chang (1892–1957, aka Zhang Pengchun), the director of Mei’s tour, tactically warned audiences beforehand that *jingju* (Peking opera) was the quintessence of classical theatre, so refined and complicated that

only people of intelligence and culture could appreciate it.²⁴ His exaggeration was effective in keeping audiences in their seats; after all, it might look unfashionable not to. Such ploys succeeded in convincing American Orientalists that Mei Lanfang represented a rare and real incarnation of their exotic obsessions.

However, the domestic side of the story of Mei’s overseas visits, as Guo Chao consistently maintains in his study, goes like this. Mei, as the epitome of a traditional culture perceived as ‘backward’ by westernized radical intellectuals, was anxious to justify and reaffirm the value of *xiqu*.²⁵ Against a background in which cultural inferiority to Japan and western countries haunted China, Mei appealed to the more ‘advanced’ America (as he had likewise appealed to Japan in 1919 and 1924) so as to make the American tour instrumental in handling domestic attacks.²⁶

In contrast to his tour to the USA, the Soviet visit was conducted on diplomatic terms, relieving Mei from many practical pressures. The Soviet government had taken the initiative of inviting him, knowing that Mei had always intended to visit Europe after his American tour. VOKS (The All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries), founded in 1925 to foster cultural exchange and disseminate Soviet materials abroad, was the main facilitating agent in the visit. It sent its early informal invitation to Mei through Ge Gongzhen (1890–1935), a Chinese correspondent in the USSR and a friend of Mei. As for their motive, Yan Huiqing (1877–1950), the Chinese ambassador to the USSR, confirmed to Mei that VOKS’s intention was a purely academic exchange by which ‘to see the genuine Chinese theatre’.²⁷ Mei felt overjoyed to be able to gather commentary from a ‘supermodern’ country with a different political system.²⁸

This tour explicitly resulted from some Soviet artists’ interest in Mei’s art, as indicated in Percy Chen’s report from Moscow before Mei’s visit. In January 1935, Chen visited and interviewed Meyerhold and Eisenstein on their opinions, and each expressed an interest in observing and learning from Chinese theatre so as to improve their own art.²⁹

Tretyakov, who wrote numerous reviews about Mei's performances, also functioned as 'a key connecting link in organizing Mei's Soviet tour'.³⁰ Along with Meyerhold and Eisenstein, he was probably one of the most enthusiastic theatrical champions of Mei's visit.

Previously aligned with the avant-garde LEF and now confronted with the escalating accusation of being 'formalist', these ardent individuals might have been using Mei to defend their artistic work. This hypothesis is not unfounded, for, in the early 1930s, Tretyakov, while working for VOKS, had tried to unite European, especially German, avant-gardists with domestic ones to reinforce local avant-garde practices.³¹ The tension between avant-gardists and proponents of socialist realism was also manifested in the famous discussion held for Mei on 14 April 1935, which Janne Risum has detailed.³²

Beneath the ostensible cultural exchange ran an implicit agenda: strengthen the previously severed Sino-Soviet diplomatic ties against their shared aggressive enemy, Japan.³³ In such circumstances, VOKS contrived to make this visit fruitful for both parties, covering most of the expenditure, reserving venues, arranging visits to museums, theatres, cinemas, and theatre institutions, and organizing exchange meetings. The Chinese government also actively collaborated so as to bring about a respectful and respectable diplomatic outcome. Even small government measures revealed the effort invested. Urged by the Chinese Embassy in the Soviet Union, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested the Central Publicity Committee to suppress criticism of Mei's Soviet tour in its newspaper lest 'the ardent supporters of this event in the friendly state [i.e. the USSR] feel embarrassed'.³⁴ Such state intervention was absent in the American tour.

Seen from yet a broader view, Mei's visit coincided with the Soviet Union's objective in the 1920s and 1930s to promote its international influence. Clark argues that, as western capitalist countries became mired in economic depression, the Soviet Union, with its industrial and military might, aspired to

be 'an empire largely characterized by overwhelming economic, political, and cultural dominance rather than by territorial conquest or direct political rule'.³⁵ The internationalization and prosperity of domestic art and literature fuelled the cultural confidence championed by such world-class artists as Konstantin Stanislavsky, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Sergey Eisenstein, and Aleksandr Rodchenko, among others.³⁶

Clark further argues that, with the goal of making Moscow a cosmopolitan centre of international arts, and 'driven by a desire to interact with the cultures and intellectuals of the outside world', the Soviet Union played the part of an all-embracing host to world culture, world literature, and world theatre.³⁷ VOKS's efforts to sponsor the visits to the USSR of eminent intellectuals, writers, and artists, especially those who were 'progressive', was integral to the same scheme, for the myth that a new era had begun, and which such guests were to encourage and promote.³⁸ This move was also intended to overshadow 'rival states and rival world systems of Europe', such as Nazi Germany, Franco's Spain, and even Britain, 'for the right to be considered the true leader of the continent'.³⁹ In other words, the enrichment of Soviet culture was to contribute to its cultural pre-eminence⁴⁰ (although Clark's term, 'cosmopolitan', was rarely used in the Soviet Union in the 1930s for this aspiration, and, as she observes, it developed a pejorative sense in the 1940s).⁴¹

The open-minded and progressive image projected of the Soviet Union attracted numerous Chinese (leftist) intellectuals, when Chinese people increasingly embraced Communism as a means of dealing with national exigencies. Even Chang, Mei's leading director for his Soviet visit, started to read about Marxism in 1931 so as to understand his Communist students and their attack on him.⁴² Mei Lanfang would naturally take into account the perception of these individuals of Soviet affairs when he formulated his strategies of presentation for the USSR.

The tour did involve the 'academic' exchanges promised by VOKS insofar as Mei's

visit coincided with the Moscow Theatre Festival to which Bertolt Brecht and Edward Gordon Craig had been invited. A private demonstration for theatre practitioners at the Art Workers' Club, as well as a final meeting held by VOKS to discuss the tour were also held. Mei and his supporters took this opportunity to see *xiqu* through the eyes of fellow artists. After all, the Russian capital was a 'mecca of theatre art' of the time, as Tretyakov had proclaimed.⁴³ Mei's objective with his supporters was thus not so much to reaffirm the value of Chinese theatre by popular acclaim as to seek an in-depth exchange of views in which Mei's company could play its part within a modern world culture allegedly championed by the Soviet Union. Gone was the static and exotic stereotype of traditional Chinese theatre to which Mei had pandered in the United States – but where his ego had been bolstered, encouraging him to promote *xiqu* in Moscow. Aware of the differences between the recipient cultures, he tactically reshaped himself and Chinese theatre for distinct objectives.

Programme Selection: Entertaining Strangeness and Ideological Compliance

As the most direct manifestation of Mei's art, the programme selection indicated which facets Mei intended to show to targeted audiences. The plays and scenes he chose needed, first and foremost, to exhibit fully the hallmarks of Mei's supreme art: facial expression, dance, gesture, and other visual skills, which really meant that stories functioned as mere vehicles for his craft. Mei's initial selection for his American tour resembled the one he had adopted successfully for Japan. Many plays for the Japanese tours had featured refined dance and singing inspired by ancient Chinese painting, religious iconography, and folk art, while the loosely plotted stories mainly originated from familiar ancient Chinese mythology, poetry, novels, drama, and tales.⁴⁴ Several printed programmes indicated that exotic and visually appealing plays were initially intended to predominate in the American tour.⁴⁵

One of those plays turned out to be uninteresting or even unintelligible for American audiences. In a preview performance in Washington, DC, on 14 February for an audience of about six hundred people – mostly the political and diplomatic luminaries of various countries – Mei's performance of *Qianjin Yixiao* (*Beauty's Smile*), a scene adapted from the classic novel *Hongloumeng* (*A Dream of the Red Chambers*), received a cold response. The audiences had little knowledge of the cultural and literary importance of the short piece.⁴⁶ The original plan did not work. Luckily, Peng-Chun Chang, who sat in the auditorium as a guest professor in the USA, approached Mei and offered prompt suggestions for adjusting the programme as well as new strategies of performance and promotion.⁴⁷

Chang received his doctorate in education from Columbia University under the supervision of John Dewey. Besides being a professor and a diplomat, he is also remembered in China as a great advocate of modern Chinese theatre. Compared with Qi Rushan, who had travelled in Europe in his youth, Chang was better informed regarding Broadway, including its audiences' likes and dislikes. He accepted Mei's offer to become the director of the troupe and save it from further failure. Chang's first move was to substitute several, somewhat plotless, dance-plays with more exciting ones. Then he shortened lengthy arias and omitted repeated scenes in order not to bore audiences. He also had full-length dance-plays reshaped into brief scenes to be performed during the interval. The Mei troupe usually staged three standard plays plus one scene per night, with a total duration of two hours. In this way, the aural dimension and the full expression of emotion surrendered to visual pleasure and an entertaining plot.

Melodramatic elements were emphasized, as the titles suggested (*The Suspected Slipper*, for example, instead of the original *By the Fen River Bend*), falling in line with the American entertainment industry. To make works 'friendlier' to audiences, an American-born Chinese woman Soo Yong (1903–1984) introduced the main features of Chinese theatre and a given plot before performances, based

on drafts by Qi Rushan. Yong translated these, and Chang edited and approved them.⁴⁸ Thus the new strategy reinforced the melodrama supported by the entertainment business, while inserting a few exotic and visually appealing scenes.

Because of his crucial aid, Chang became the leading director of the Soviet tour five years later, at Mei's request. Again, the programme was carefully devised, and the principle of visual priority over aural rendition persisted.⁴⁹ Being a genuine representative of the Chinese nation, culture, and theatre, Mei consciously de-emphasized any plays that were distanced from reality, particularly the mythological plays tailor-made for him, in favour of traditional plays from the repertoire of *jingju* and *kunju* (Kun opera).⁵⁰ He consulted many experts about the choice of plays, reasoning that 'the Soviet Union is a socialist country, not only different from Euro-American capitalist countries, but also from China'.⁵¹

Mei's supporters were equally prudent about Soviet ideology, especially when many domestic critics of Mei personally or his art were proclaimed 'socialist'. Tailoring of the programme seemed to be underpinned by an awareness of what might be viewed favourably as progressive content. The plays were plot-driven, as usual, yet foregrounded class awareness and revolutionary themes. Chang even consulted Tian Han (1898–1968) about the selection of plays.⁵² The latter was a Communist playwright who attacked Mei in 1934 for performing 'feudal' plays written by his supporters.⁵³ Most plays told a story of oppressed individuals – an image of 'China . . . [as] an oppressed people in the figure of a powerless yet strong female'⁵⁴ – thought to be appropriate for the class-struggle content propagated by the USSR. Thus *Cihu* (*Fei Chen-o and the 'Tiger' General*) depicts a valiant woman's vengeance against a rebel; *Yuzhou-feng* (*Madness by Pretence*) shows a young woman who, rejecting her father's arranged marriage to an unscrupulous despot, pretends to be mad; *Dayushajia* (*Revenge of the Oppressed*) narrates how a fisherman and his daughter counter the oppression of a local magistrate.

Through depicting courageous Chinese individuals who combat social evil, these thematically progressive plays seemed to echo the Marxist-Leninist doctrine that 'art must fulfil a specific social function' and 'further the interests of the masses'.⁵⁵ Even the short accompanying dance scenes, extracted from full-length plays such as *Mu-Lan Congjun* (*Mu-Lan in the Army*) and *Kangjinbing* (*Liang Hung-Yu's Victory over the Invaders*), supplied an immediate realistic allusion. By enacting ancient stories of Chinese people fighting against enemies and invaders, such pieces seemed to express contemporary Chinese people's determination to battle against the Japanese invaders. By addressing ideologized subjects, they intended to give socialist realism a cosmopolitan overtone: 'the art of one people may become part of the heritage of others, who therefore become aware of the universal significance of the most advanced ideals for the whole of mankind'.⁵⁶ This might not have been stated overtly but, in the Soviet tour, art was generally linked with human progress and revolution.⁵⁷

Mei, then, responded quickly to the respective American and Soviet mainstream ideological and aesthetic attitudes. The programme for the American tour catered to audience taste for entertaining stories and exotic dances, while not seeking deeper understanding of aesthetics and culture. The programme for the Soviet tour responded to socialist realism by opting for 'progressive' content and human struggle to imply that China and the USSR shared concerns about Japan.

From Ancient to Modern Art

Because of *xiqu*'s stark difference from contemporary western realistic theatre and the subsequent misunderstanding and devaluation of *xiqu* by westerners and westernized Chinese intellectuals, *xiqu* professionals felt obliged to take a defensive position through explanation and justification. This move extended the polemics over *xiqu* and against the nascent Chinese (semi)-realistic theatre of the early twentieth century.⁵⁸ As China's foremost *xiqu* actor, Mei was naturally a focus of

such debates. Knowing that his critics came from different camps that subscribed to the allegedly economically and artistically advanced Japan, America, and the Soviet Union, he defended himself by touring those countries for recognition.

Qi Rushan devoted decades to the study of *xiqu* and played a major role in writing explanatory and theoretical works about Mei Lanfang and Chinese theatre. Another important but lesser known figure was George Kin Leung (c. 1887–1977), a Chinese scholar born and raised in the USA but who taught in China for many years. A few years before 1930, Leung had published numerous English articles about Chinese theatre and Mei, and in 1929 he compiled *Mei Lan-Fang: Foremost Actor of China*, which included his articles and his translations of articles by Qi Rushan, Huang Qiuyue (1891–1937), and others. Leung played a major role in translating Chinese accounts of Mei Lanfang and *xiqu* into English, as well as in adapting and overseeing them; and he prepared the English programme for Mei's tour, writing introductions to the plays to be performed.

The notion of *xiqu* as an ancient art underwrote all discourse for the American tour. This idea manifested itself in the first article of the brochure *The First American Tour of Mei Lan-Fang*.⁵⁹ Written by Hu Shi (1891–1962), a Chinese scholar known as 'Father of the Chinese Renaissance' in contemporary America and, previously, a fervent abolitionist regarding *xiqu*,⁶⁰ this article reiterated Hu Shi's view of ideas of literary evolution that had labelled Chinese theatre as 'primitive'.⁶¹ Yet Hu Shi's view came to endorse the ongoing discourse in western modernism that fetishized primitive and exotic Oriental culture, arguably because western modernists yearned for a lost authentic Greek and Roman culture and Elizabethan theatre: archaic Oriental culture was a substitute, projecting their fetishized desire. And this explained the consistent comparisons, in the explanatory documents, between Chinese theatre and Ancient Greek, Elizabethan, or classical French theatre.⁶² The American critic Stark Young (1881–1963) similarly restated in his reviews how Mei's art was comparable with these theatrical traditions, as

with Byzantine painting and the classical splendour of Botticelli, Mino da Fiesole, Desiderio da Settignano, Rosellino, and Duccio.⁶³

But the modernity of *xiqu* and the influence modern theatre had had on it were neglected, while Mei's revival of the declining *kunju*, a refined theatre genre dating back to the fourteenth century, was emphasized. Mei's study and assimilation of *kunju* characteristics became highlights of the repertoire. Besides *kunju*, Mei and his supporters' inspirations from ancient Chinese art and literature also highlighted Mei's lineage in ancient Chinese culture. *Xiqu's* difference from modern western theatre was also foregrounded, without the slightest mention of Mei's early westernized plays or the fact that his supporters had studied abroad and seen western theatre widely.⁶⁴

Another issue of significance was *nandan* (the female impersonator), particular to traditional Chinese theatre. Discussion of *nandan* prevailed in all the documents, which derived from both anxiety and pride. Mei's supporters hailed him for his art of portraying women, but hesitated over foreigners' reactions to Mei's gender switch and what this might say about China, which he represented. The anxiety partly stemmed from the perceived emasculation of Chinese men in nineteenth-century America through the practice of *nandan* in Chinatown theatre, and partly from the feminization of the Chinese nation by the 'masculine' imperial powers. Given how gender was negatively intermeshed with ethnicity, numerous radical Chinese intellectuals attacked *nandan* as well as Mei Lanfang.⁶⁵

Leung, by contrast, justified *nandan* by citing Elizabethan boy actors – an accepted practice – and by arguing that Mei impersonated an idealized and aestheticized image of woman. He also gave the emergence of *nandan* a historical context.⁶⁶ By placing *nandan* in both the Chinese and western tradition, he intended to forestall any possible criticism of Mei's cross-dressing. As Mark Cosdon has noted: 'Writers saw little impropriety in the fact that Mei Lanfang was a man playing women's roles.'⁶⁷ Although effective, Leung's defence could not destroy the traps of Orientalism.

The documents prepared for the Soviet tour are a meticulous revision of those for the American one, foregrounding the shift of focus and reconstruction of *xiqu*, while retaining many of Leung's words. Thus, while *Mei Lan-Fang: Foremost Actor of China* was simply ignored, *Special Plays and Scenes to Be Presented by Mei Lan-fang on his American Tour* was rewritten as *Performances of Mei Lan-Fang in Soviet Russia*; and a new volume, *Mei Lan-Fang in America: Reviews and Criticisms*, was compiled and edited by Chang. Based on *The First American Tour of Mei Lan-Fang*, the updated introductory booklet titled *Mei Lan-Fang and Chinese Theatre* replaced Hu Shi's and Leung's articles with a review by Stark Young, as well as Chang's essay 'Some Aspect of Chinese Theatrical Art', to explicate the art of Mei Lanfang and the principles of *xiqu*. Qi Rushan's contributions remained, with only minor changes. To investigate the shifts of discourse, one needs to scrutinize elisions, additions, and replacements in different editions of the texts.

Gone were the words about Mei's revival of *kunju*, as well as paragraphs comparing Chinese and European theatre. Marked differences that would encourage exoticism were carefully elided. The abridged translation of Qi Rushan's important explanatory text *Zhongguoju zhi zuzhi* (literally, *Institutions of Chinese Theatre*) acquired different titles in the documents. Hence the following articles:

- 'Characteristics of the Chinese Drama', in *Mei Lan-Fang: Foremost Actor of China* (1929).⁶⁸
- 'A Brief Consideration of the Outstanding Peculiarities of the Old Chinese Drama', in *The First American Tour of Mei Lan-Fang* (1930).⁶⁹
- 'Some Outstanding Characteristics and Conventions of the Chinese Theatre', in *Mei Lan-Fang and Chinese Theatre* (1935).⁷⁰

Leung's original translation in 1929 seemed accurate and plain, but note that in the second item above, in *The First American Tour of Mei Lan-Fang*, which was the official brochure for the general American audience, the altered title drew attention to the 'peculiarities' of the 'old' drama so as to inspire notions of

archaism and exoticism. The Soviet edition in 1935 dispensed with the underlying Orientalist evocations by neutralizing the characteristics and conventions of Chinese theatre, while suggesting its uniqueness by describing it as 'outstanding'. These deliberate changes indicated varying orientations in keeping with the presumed expectations of audiences.

Mei and his supporters thus sent a message to Soviet audiences that *xiqu* was a modern art, which was also implied in their description of Mei's revival of ancient dance, especially in contrast with the words for the same phenomenon in the American publications. For the American tour, Hu Shi observed that 'the newer plays of Mr Mei Lan-Fang's are reservoirs in which many of the older dramatic techniques and motifs are adapted and preserved'.⁷¹ The Soviet brochure, by contrast, supplied: 'For the last twenty years, Mr Mei has personally arranged and directed a number of modernized classical pieces in which he has introduced more than twenty forms of ancient dance.'⁷² In other words, the Soviet tour stressed the modernization of the classical tradition. The American tour, on the same topic, emphasized the preservation of the tradition, which was 'finished' and 'static'.⁷³

By stressing the 'modern', Mei's supporters also indicated his intention of following the contemporary route of theatrical experimentalism. Chang aimed to build a connection between anti-naturalistic theatre and *xiqu* by subscribing to the ideas of Meyerhold, whom he visited in 1931. He strategically promoted traditional Chinese theatre so as to oblige it to reform by having it take an active role on the world stage.⁷⁴ In his words: 'To find its place in the world, Chinese theatre has to attend to the needs of the world, rather than enclose itself and be self-satisfied.'⁷⁵ Further, aware of experimental theatre's assault on photographic realism, Chang pointed out the advances to be made:

The consummate art of the actor may contain elements, both suggestive and instructive, not only for the emerging new theatre in China, but also for modern experimentation in other parts of the world. Is not the modern theatre everywhere reacting against the photographic realism

predominating a generation ago? And are not modern experiments in theatrical art being directed toward simplification, suggestiveness, and synthetization?⁷⁶

In his final speech at the VOKS occasion held for Mei on 14 April, Chang made similar observations, retold by the note-taking secretary of the organization as follows:

About twenty years ago, the Chinese theatre was met with an exotic interest. It was shown such an interest in America, as well as in Japan. Professor Zhang says that he has fought all his life against occurrences interconnected with such an exotic approach. Now, we have reached the point when we have already left the fragmentary and the exotic interests far behind. He thinks that now the foundation is being laid for a new creative interest in the Chinese theatre.⁷⁷

The new creative interest was to 'join elements of the performance traditions' of Chinese theatre and western dramatic art.⁷⁸ Despite his cosmopolitan good intentions, Chang seemed to lose sight of the shifting official discourse concerning art in the Soviet Union. Together with such supporters as Meyerhold, *xiqu* would be fiercely attacked in the coming years, when the more conservative socialist realism launched a campaign against avant-garde or 'formalist' arts and artists.⁷⁹

Finally, explanations of *nandan* completely disappeared from the documents for the Soviet tour. Since justification of its validity appeared feudal, the best strategy was avoidance. Even when the issue of female impersonation became unavoidable for discussions of certain role types, it was downplayed. For instance, the entry 'The Tan or Female Impersonator' in the American brochure⁸⁰ became 'The Tan or Female Character' in its Soviet counterpart.⁸¹ 'Female impersonator' in sentences was generally replaced. This probably also arose from the Soviet Union's ban on homosexuality in 1934.⁸² As Suk-Young Kim observes, cultural conservatism prevailed in the Soviet Union around 1935, and so 'there was no room for the Soviets openly to express their fascination with Mei's ambiguous sexuality, if such fascination ever existed'.⁸³ Since Mei Lanfang's image as a woman might have

been disturbing, both the Chinese and the Soviets bypassed this subject.

The language used for the two tours demonstrated two different yet authentic images of Chinese theatre. The American tour presented *xiqu* as an exotic art, which could be aligned with ancient European theatre traditions. The Soviet tour highlighted *xiqu*'s contemporary concerns and its potential contribution to the experimental theatre's search for new styles of performance to combat realism. *Xiqu*, then, was never shown in either case in its entirety.

From Glamorous Celebrity to People's Artist

For decades, Mei had been taking advantage of contemporary technology and mass media to boost his fame and popularity. He made films and audios, and, most importantly, he took thousands of photographs for publicity. Catherine Yeh argues that 'actors who made it into stardom made ample use of photography to highlight their "female" seductive looks', and that the 'development of photography . . . had a direct impact on the rise of the *dan* in [so far as] the camera favours a particular look, highlights particular features, and helps foster particular tastes among the viewers'.⁸⁴ Pictures 'helped to create a particular kind of image-recognition that evoked a sense of desirability among the broader public'.⁸⁵ Mei's photographs and pictures showed either a charming star or a modern artist.

The American tour presented Mei as a celebrity. According to Pramod K. Nayar, 'celebrityhood depends on media spectacle', which relies on the body's visual presence and the exposure of private lives.⁸⁶ Moreover, celebrities always represented 'something other than and more than themselves'.⁸⁷ Early in the 1920s, Qi Rushan expressly sent many photographs showing Mei's beauty to the American press for circulation. During Mei's American tours, pictures of or about Mei were included in all biographic materials. All testified that 'celebrity is embodied'.⁸⁸

In *Mei Lan-Fang: Foremost Actor of China*, Leung included many photographs of Mei as a scholarly figure in a 'carefully constructed

“ultra-Chinese environment” displaying traditional Chinese costume, garden, library, painting, and collections.⁸⁹ Visions of his private life lent Mei glamour, changing him from a mere *xiqu* actor to an icon of historical Chinese culture (Figure 2). Such a persona had been performed to foreign tourists and visitors for many years, as was evident in the huge group photographs of Mei and his foreign friends, dozens of them in Leung’s book (Figure 3). These spectacular photographs played on the Orientalist curiosity of potential audiences.

Chief among pictorial representations were Mei’s photographs showcasing the ideal beautiful women he portrayed. Few were stage photographs; they were shot in a studio with decorative backgrounds relevant to the themes or setting of plays. Such backdrops had nothing to do with live performances but, rather, with foregrounding Mei Lanfang as a brilliant star. Aided by the new printing technology, such photographs constructed

Mei’s celebrity status for mass consumption and the entertainment industry. This strategy whetted people’s appetite for spectacle and exotic beauty, and exoticism coalesced with business. Versed in commercial operations of this kind, Mei’s Chinese supporters made the most of media attention to garner capital for his image.

By contrast, pictures for the Soviet tour played down Mei’s celebrity. Most pictures of his private life and artistic lineage disappeared, along with Leung’s book, possibly because they linked Mei to feudal Chinese culture and highlighted Mei’s aristocratic demeanour, thus isolating him from the peasants and the industrial proletariat, which ran counter to socialist realism.

Moreover, all the pictures in the brochure *Mei Lan-Fang and the Chinese Theatre* prepared by VOKS were stage photographs of the main pieces Mei was going to perform in the USSR. Mei Lanfang was thus portrayed as a great



Figure 2. (Left to right) Mei Lanfang, Qi Rushan, and Luo Yinggong, in Mei’s study, known as the ‘Hall of Carved Jade’ (*Zhuiyu xuan*), c. 1922.



Figure 3. Mei Lanfang (sixth from left), with some foreign visitors, in Mei's garden, 1927.

artist, though in collaboration with other artists (whereas the American images had spotlighted Mei without mentioning other actors).⁹⁰ The Soviet image of him was also that of a people's artist: 'For more than a decade Mr Mei has been the president of the Peiping Dramatic Association, in which capacity he has invariably taken a leading part in all benefit performances for the relief of sufferers from natural calamities.'⁹¹ This resonated with the words of A. Arosev, Chairman of VOKS, that the theatre of 'the great artist of the Chinese people, Mei Lan-Fang', was popular among 'the millions of the Chinese people'.⁹² After all, a people's artist was supposed to join the masses for their common good.

Coda

An analysis of how and why Mei Lanfang achieved prestige among American and Soviet audiences involves an elucidation of the strategical presentation of *xiqu* he made in order to meet different expectations.

Xiqu's unwelcome aspects were concealed to ensure smooth intercultural exchange. Despite Mei's success in both countries, the six-month American tour left a far less tangible legacy to world theatre than the four-week Soviet visit. The presence of world-class artists in the Soviet auditorium accounted for this difference. Orientalist exoticism, as Jiang Ji maintains, obstructed the audiences' appreciation of *xiqu* in depth, leaving them simply to marvel at objects; and it also perpetuated the colonial separation between primitive China and the modern West.⁹³ Peng-Chun Chang had placed *xiqu* in the process of modernization, stressing that 'we feel dissatisfied with cultural products on account of current need. . . . All cultural products, at home or abroad, are resources for new creation.'⁹⁴ He had looked far ahead, for world theatre is still benefiting from those artists with whom Mei Lanfang had contact in 1935; and those artists have played an active part in the critical discourse and artistic practice of Chinese theatre, whether traditional or modern.

By addressing the challenges that the new times posed to traditional Chinese theatre, Mei Lanfang's tours abroad had helped to identify the pros and cons of *xiqu* through the eyes of the western Other. His presentation of *xiqu* re-emerged in the words of the Other to increase his cultural capital. Yet behind the tours lay the struggle of *xiqu* professionals for space in the public sphere against radical, westernized intellectuals in China. Paradoxically, Mei's success owed much to the westernized intellectuals of another group represented by Peng-Chun Chang and George Kin Leung, who foregrounded the appealing dimensions of his art. Their efforts to further an intercultural view of *xiqu*'s modernization also furthered Mei's legacy to world theatre.

Notes and References

1. This article was supported by the Youth Project of the Chinese National Social Sciences Fund for the Arts under Grant number 20CB166.
2. Sergey Tretyakov, 'Mei Lan-Fang, Our Guest', *Pravda*, 12 March 1935.
3. 'Mei Lanfang' was a company consisting of many actors and supporters so, when referring to Mei in this article, we sometimes mean his company, which was a dynamic entity, influencing the actor Mei's shifting strategies.
4. Joshua Goldstein, 'Mei Lanfang and the Nationalization of the Peking Opera, 1912–1930', *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, VII, No. 2 (1999), p. 377–420 (p. 415).
5. Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931–1941* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 31.
6. Feishu Li, 'Mei Lanfang Youmei Riji' ['Mei Lanfang's Diary for his American Tour'], in *Mei Lanfang Quanji* [Complete Works of Mei Lanfang], Vol. 7 (Beijing: China Theatre Press, 2016), p. 456.
7. Rushan Qi, *Mei Lanfang Youmei Ji* [Mei Lanfang's Tour to the United States] (Changsha: Yuelu Press, 1985), p. 2.
8. Goldstein, 'Mei Lanfang and the Nationalization of the Peking Opera', p. 378.
9. Chih Meng, *Chinese American Understanding: A Sixty-Year Search* (New York: China Institute in America, 1981), p. 150.
10. Dongshin Chang, *Representing China on the Historical London Stage: From Orientalism to Intercultural Performance* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 152–3.
11. Daphne Pi-Wei Lei, *Operatic China: Staging Chinese Identity across the Pacific* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 45–6.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
13. Min Tian, *Mei Lanfang and the Twentieth-Century International Stage: Chinese Theatre Placed and Displaced* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 62.

14. A. E. Zucker, 'China's "Leading Lady"', *Asia: Journal of the American Asiatic Association*, XXIV, No. 8 (August 1924), p. 600–4, 646–7 (p. 600).
15. Chao Guo, 'Cultural Anxiety and the Reconstruction of the *Xiqu* Tradition through Mei Lanfang's Overseas Performances, 1919–1930', *Asian Theatre Journal*, XXXVII, No. 2 (2020), p. 533–48 (p. 538–9).
16. Qi, *Mei Lanfang Youmei Ji*, p. 11.
17. See Meng, *Chinese American Understanding*, p. 150–4.
18. At first, Mei intended that profits be used for founding a *xiqu* institute. See Peng-Chun Chang, *Zhang Pengchun Riji* [Diaries of Peng-Chun Chang], 1924–1929, 1931, 18 June 1929, Nanjing Library GJ/EB/352105. My special thanks go to Dr Zhang Shiyang, who drew my attention to the existence of these diaries.
19. A. C. Scott, *Mei Lan-Fang: The Life and Times of a Peking Actor* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1959), p. 107–8.
20. Nancy Guy, 'Brokering Glory for the Chinese Nation: Peking Opera's 1930 American Tour', *Comparative Drama*, XXXV, Nos. 3/4 (2001–2), p. 377–92 (p. 378).
21. Li, 'Mei Lanfang Youmei Riji', p. 377–8.
22. Ernest K. Moy, *The First American Tour of Mei Lan-Fang* (New York: China Institute in America, 1930), p. 2.
23. Qi, *Mei Lanfang Youmei Ji*, p. 37.
24. Dianqi Huang, 'Zhang Pengchun Tong Mei Lanfang Fumei Fangsu Yanchu de Shengkuang' ['The Grand Occasions of Mei Lanfang's Tours to America and the Soviet Union with Zhang Pengchun'], in *Huaju Zai Beifang de Dianjiren Zhiyi – Zhang Pengchun* [Zhang Pengchun: A Founder of Spoken Drama in North China] (Beijing: China Theatre Book Press, 1995), p. 272.
25. Guo, 'Cultural Anxiety', p. 539.
26. Peng-Chun Chang reiterated in his diary that his personal agenda for helping Mei was to boost his confidence and fame, and that this would benefit his fundraising for Nankai University in the USA (Chang, *Zhang Pengchun Riji*, 12 August 1929).
27. Lanfang Mei, 'Mei Lanfang Youe Ji' ['Mei Lanfang's Tour to Russia'], in Historical Materials Committee of the Beijing Committee, Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, eds., *Wenshi Ziliao Xuanbian* [Collection of Historical and Literary Materials], vol. 27 (Beijing: Beijing Press, 1986), p. 96.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
29. See Percy Chen, 'Su'e Xijujie Qidai Mei Lanfang Fu'e, Dui Zhongguo Xiju Biaoshi Yangmu' ['The Soviet Theatre Circle Looks Forward to Mei Lanfang's Visit, and Expresses Admiration for Chinese Theatre'], *Ta Kung Pao*, 22 February 1935; Percy Chen, 'Su'e Xijujie Qidai Mei Lanfang Fu'e, Dui Zhongguo Xiju Biaoshi Yangmu (Xu)' ['The Soviet Theatre Circle Looks Forward to Mei Lanfang's Visit, and Expresses Admiration for Chinese Theatre, Continued'], *Ta Kung Pao*, 23 February 1935.
30. Janne Risum, 'Minutes of "Evening to Sum Up the Conclusions from the Stay of the Theatre of Mei Lanfang in the Soviet Union" at The All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) on Sunday 14 April 1935', *Asian Theatre Journal*, XXXVII, No. 2 (2020), p. 328–75 (p. 331).
31. Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome*, p. 62–7.
32. Risum, 'Minutes of "Evening to Sum Up the Conclusions"'
33. Janne Risum, 'The Foreign-Policy Aspect of Mei Lanfang's Soviet Tour in 1935', *Nordic Theatre Studies*, XXXI, No. 2 (2020), p. 89–101.

34. Qingbin Ji, ed., 'Mei Lanfang Fangsu Dang'an Shiliao (Er)' ['Historical Materials about Mei Lanfang's Soviet Tour, Continued'], *Minguo Dang'an [Republican Archives]*, IV (2001), p. 9–23 (p. 10–12).
35. Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome*, p. 12.
36. Ludmila Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920–40: From Red Square to the Left Bank* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 12–15.
37. Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome*, p. 5.
38. Stern, *Western Intellectuals*, p. 98–9.
39. Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome*, p. 11.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
42. Chang, *Zhang Pengchun Riji*, 26 July 1931, 29 July 1931, and 3 August 1931.
43. Tretyakov, 'Mei Lan-Fang, Our Guest'.
44. Mei's supporters created these plays inspired by European plays drawing on mythology, which, according to Catherine Yeh, were attempts to modernize *jingju*. See Catherine Yeh, 'Mei Lanfang and Modern Dance: Trans-cultural Innovation in Peking Opera, 1910s–1920s', in Katherine Mezur and Emily Wilcox, eds., *Corporeal Politics: Dancing East Asia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020), p. 44. Mei's supporters strategically concealed this fact by simply relating these plays to antiquity instead of modernity.
45. See George Kin Leung, *Special Plays and Scenes to Be Presented by Mei Lan-Fang on his American Tour* (Peking, 1929); see also Moy, *The First American Tour*, p. 24–38.
46. Huang, 'Zhang Pengchun Tong', p. 268.
47. Chang's diary indicates that Mei and his friends approached him in 1929 to advise on the tour. He offered and suggested plays, translated and drafted speeches, and took charge of promotion, fundraising, and the itinerary. See Chang, *Zhang Pengchun Riji*, 9 June and 15 June 1929.
48. Qi, *Mei Lanfang Youmei Ji*, p. 58.
49. Almost nobody talked about Mei's singing or Chinese music in the discussion held on 14 April 1935 at VOKS.
50. Mei, 'Mei Lanfang Youe Ji', p. 112.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Jie Hou and Fang Qin, *Zhang Boling, Zhang Peng-chun, Zhang Xilu [Zhang Boling, Zhang Peng-chun, and Zhang Xilu]* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Education Press, 2004), p. 233.
53. See Han Tian, 'Zhongguo Jiuxi Yu Mei Lanfang de Zai Pipan – Mei Lanfang Fue Yanju Wenti de Kaocha Zhiyi' ['A Second Attack on Chinese Old Theatre and Mei Lanfang: An Investigation of Mei Lanfang's Guest Performance in Russia'], in *Tian Han Quanji [Complete Works of Tian Han]*, Vol. 17 (Shijiazhuang: Huashan Art and Literature Press, 2000), p. 12–13.
54. Catherine Yeh, 'Refined Beauty, New Woman, Dynamic Heroine or Fighter for the Nation?: Perceptions of China in the Programme Selection for Mei Lanfang's Performances in Japan (1919), the United States (1930), and the Soviet Union (1935)', *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, VI, No. 1 (2007), p. 75–102 (p. 97).
55. C. Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 13.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
57. Despite Mei's efforts, Soviet voices also suggested that what Mei presented was feudal and inadequately progressive. Thus Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko remarked that *xiqu* needed to embrace 'the dream of a better life, the longing for a better life, the struggle for a better life'. See Risum, 'Minutes of "Evening to Sum Up the Conclusions"', p. 370.
58. In the early 1900s, *xinju* (new drama), which imitated Japanese *shinpa*, became popular across China, and *huaju* (spoken drama), which was more realistic in its content and form, emerged in the 1920s. Both compelled Chinese scholars to redefine *xiqu*, often in contrast with these new forms.
59. The brochure has several similar editions, including *Mei Lan-Fang: Chinese Drama; The First American Tour of Mei Lan-Fang*; and *The Pacific Coast Tour of Mei Lan-Fang*, which had major changes in the section on 'Repertoire'. In this article we mainly refer to *The First American Tour of Mei Lan-Fang* since the sections concerned are all identical in these editions.
60. According to Fu Lisong, Hu Shi changed his mind regarding the abolition of *xiqu* in the late 1920s. See Fu Lisong, 'Xinwenhua Shishang de Jiujue Gaige Yu Mei Lanfang Pipan' ['Theatre Reform in the History of the New Culture Movement and Critique of Mei Lanfang'], *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yanjiu Congkan [Modern Chinese Literature Studies]*, XI (2019), p. 181–99.
61. Moy, *The First American Tour*, p. 1.
62. See, for example, George Kin Leung, *Mei Lan-Fang, Foremost Actor of China* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1929), p. 6–7.
63. Stark Young, 'Mei Lan-Fang', *Theatre Arts Monthly*, XIV, No. 4 (1930), p. 295–308 (p. 301).
64. Guo, 'Cultural Anxiety', p. 539–40.
65. Guanda Wu, 'Should Nandan Be Abolished?: The Debate over Female Impersonation in Early Republican China and Its Underlying Cultural Logic', *Asian Theatre Journal*, XXX, No. 1 (Spring 2013), p. 189–206 (p. 191–4).
66. Leung, *Mei Lan-Fang, Foremost Actor*, p. 17–23.
67. Mark Cosdon, "'Introducing Occidentals to an Exotic Art": Mei Lanfang in New York', *Asian Theatre Journal*, XII, No. 1 (1995), p. 175–89 (p. 184).
68. Leung, *Mei Lan-Fang, Foremost Actor*, p. 88.
69. Moy, *The First American Tour*, p. 11.
70. Peng-Chun Chang, Stark Young, and Rushan Qi, *Mei Lan-Fang and Chinese Theatre*, 1935, p. 13.
71. Moy, *The First American Tour*, p. 1.
72. Chang, Young, and Qi, *Mei Lan-Fang and Chinese Theatre*, p. 1.
73. Ji Jiang, *Chuanguo 'Julong Zhiyan': Kuawenhua Duihua Zhong de Xiqu Yishu, 1919–1937 [Through the Dragon's Eye: The Art of Chinese Opera in Intercultural Dialogue, 1919–1937]* (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2015), p. 318–23.
74. Jichuan Xu, *Xu Jichuan Yitan Manlu [Xu Jichuan's Memoir of the Art World]* (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1994), p. 166.
75. Ming Ma, 'Zhang Pengchun Yu Zhongguo Xiandai Huaju' ['Zhang Pengchun and Modern Chinese Spoken Drama'], in Jiashan Xia, Guoliang Cui, and Lizhong Li, eds., *Nankai Huaju Yundong Shiliao [Sources of Spoken Drama Movement in Nankai University], 1909–1922* (Tianjin: Nankai University Press, 1984), p. 94.
76. Chang, Young, and Qi, *Mei Lan-Fang and Chinese Theatre*, p. 5. It is difficult to say whether Chang's categorization of *xiqu* as a source for western modernist art had anything to do with American critics' embrace of *xiqu* as being modernist. For details see Tian, *Mei Lanfang and the Twentieth-Century International Stage*, p. 86–9.
77. Risum, 'Minutes of "Evening to Sum Up the Conclusions"', p. 367.

78. Ibid., p. 369.
79. Haun Saussy, 'Mei Lanfang in Moscow, 1935: Familiar, Unfamiliar, Defamiliar', *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, XVIII, No. 1 (Spring 2006), p. 8–29 (p. 12).
80. Moy, *The First American Tour*, p. 10.
81. Chang, Young, and Qi, *Mei Lan-Fang and Chinese Theatre*, p. 11.
82. Janne Risum, 'Press Reviews of Mei Lanfang in the Soviet Union, 1935, by Female Writers: Neher Versus Shaginyan', *CHINOPEARL: Journal of Chinese Oral and Performing Literature*, XXXV, No. 2 (2016), p. 114–33 (p. 115).
83. Suk-Young Kim, 'From Imperial Concubine to Model Maoist: The Photographic Metamorphosis of Mei Lanfang', *Theatre Research International*, XXXI, No. 1 (2006), p. 37–53 (p. 44).
84. Yeh, 'Refined Beauty', p. 77.
85. Ibid.
86. 'Celebrity', in Meiling Cheng and Gabrielle H. Cody, eds., *Reading Contemporary Performance: Theatricality across Genres* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 110.
87. Ibid.
88. Pramod K. Nayar, *Seeing Stars: Spectacle, Society and Celebrity Culture* (New Delhi and Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2009), p. 62.
89. Guy, 'Brokering Glory', p. 384.
90. John Mason Brown, among others, observed that 'Mei Lan-Fang is a "star"'. . . Indeed, he is such a star that no other member of his company is even mentioned on his program': 'The Play', *New York Evening Post*, 17 February 1930.
91. Chang, Young, and Qi, *Mei Lan-Fang and Chinese Theatre*, p. 1.
92. A. Arosev, 'Welcome to the Great Artist', in *Mei Lan-Fang and the Chinese Theatre: On the Occasion of His Appearance in the USSR*, ed. All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (Moscow and Leningrad, 1935), p. 7.
93. Jiang, *Chuanguo 'Julong Zhiyan'*, p. 228–9.
94. Guoliang Cui and Hong Cui, eds., *Zhang Pengchun Lun Jiaoyu Yu Xijuyishu [Zhang Pengchun on Education and Theatre]*, trans. Xiuhua Dong (Tianjin: Nankai University Press, 2003), p. 590.