

A STUDY OF THE PLAYS OF CHEN BAICHEN

By

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ABSTRACT

Chen Baichen 陳白塵 (1908 -) was one of the most prolific playwrights in China during the 1930s and 1940s, which was the golden age of modern Chinese drama. His plays range from the most serious and pathetic to the fantastic and farcical, drawing material from legends, historical events, current and contemporary issues. The object of this study is to investigate the range and quality of Chen's plays, and thence to identify those characteristics which he shared with other modern Chinese playwrights and those peculiar to him.

This thesis consists of six chapters. The first two are of introductory nature, giving an idea of the objective and methods used in the study, as well as some background information on Chen's life and his playwriting career. Chapters three to five carry the main emphasis of the thesis, dealing with Chen's plays written during different stages in his life. Each chapter is devoted to one period, and detailed analysis of Chen's plays is preceded by a general review of his plays written during the period. Nine plays, which are representative of Chen's development, are selected for detailed discussion. These plays reflect the wide range of Chen's works, which embraced the historical play, satirical comedy and serious drama. Heed is taken of the realistic aspects, as well as

the aesthetic values of the plays, but the playwright's power of dramatic expression is given the main attention in the analysis. In addition, comparisons between Chen's plays and other plays written during the same period are drawn wherever appropriate, so as to give a fairer assessment of Chen's plays.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 6, sums up the characteristics of Chen's plays and assesses Chen's place in the history of modern Chinese drama. Chen was unique in his creation of a wide range of high quality plays, especially during the 1930s and 1940s when he enjoyed most creative freedom. But like most of his fellows, Chen's prolific period was followed abruptly by long years of quiescence. Creative freedom was smothered by constraints (external and internal), and Chen's greatest success in playwriting still lies in his pre-1949 works.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Among contemporary Chinese playwrights, Chen Baichen is one who has gained little notice from scholars and critics in the east and west. Before the 1980s, apart from occasional mentions in those works of modern Chinese literary history and biographical dictionaries (1), there has been little account of the life and works of Chen Baichen, let alone detailed analysis. These accounts are invariably sketchy and incomplete, and serve only to give some superficial impressions of the features of Chen Baichen's plays. However, tribute has often been paid to the productiveness of Chen Baichen during the 1930s and 1940s, and to his talent and skill in writing satirical comedies, though no deep and thorough discussion has ever been attempted. Among these accounts, those written by biographers such as Su Hseuh-lin (Su Xuelin) 蘇雪林 and H.L. Boorman are more noteworthy. Chen Baichen is summed up as one who "excels in keeping strictly to his theme,

(1) These include Wang Yao 王瑤, Zhongguo xinwenxue shigao 中國新文學史稿 1951, vol.1, p.270, and vol.2, p.164; Liu Shousong 劉綬松 Zhongguo xinwenxue shi chugao 中國新文學史初稿, 1956, vol.2, pp.171-175; Ting Yi, A Short History of Modern Chinese Literature, 1959, pp.238-239; Sima Changfeng 司馬長風 Zhongguo xinwenxue shi 中國新文學史, 1978, vol.2, pp.280-281; Su Hseuh-lin, 'Present Day Fiction and Drama in China', in Jos Schyns et al., 1500 Modern Chinese Novels and Plays, 1948, p.L1; Howard L. Boorman, Biographical Dictionary of Republican China, 1967, pp.217-218; and Lin Manshu 林曼叔, Cheng Hai 程海 and Hai Feng 海楓, Zhongguo dangdai zuojia xiaozhuan 中國當代作家小傳, 1976, pp.76-77.

and amid much movement there is always order in his 'mise en scène'" (2); and who "was successful in combining convincing characterization with crisp dialogue, in organising a crowded stage, and in leading his audiences directly to the point. While there was always an obvious moral to his story, he retained a sense of humour." (3)

In contrast to the above, the accounts given by literary historians appear meagre and vague. The following comment of Ting Yi (Ding Yi) 丁巳 is typically dogmatic:

"..... show the playwright to be one who sees things through the eyes of the people and analyses and handles the characters and plots from a revolutionary viewpoint. His writings are fraught with healthy sentiments rather than melancholy and sentimentalism." (4)

Exceptions can nevertheless be found in the accounts given by Wang Yao and Sima Changfeng, who have respectively touched upon certain points of interest which may deserve further exploration. Chen Baichen is regarded as the "pioneer of satire and exposure", and his plays are described as "though written with the strong intent to satirize and expose, are well endowed with artistic

(2) Su Hseuh-lin, 'Present Day Fiction and Drama in China', p.L1.

(3) Boorman, Biographical Dictionary of Republican China, p.218.

(4) Ting Yi, A Short History of Modern Chinese Literature, p.238.

techniques, since they have to undergo the trial of being performed and facing the scrutiny of the audience" (5). The "highly flavoured dialogue, explicit themes, and educational function" of Chen's plays, as well as the playwright's "boldness to face up squarely to reality" (6) are also spotted. But the highest tribute has not come from such literary historians and biographers. It is found in D.E. Pollard's paper of 1974, in which Chen Baichen is referred to as "the man with the most extensive comic arsenal", and one of those playwrights who "can best represent the range and quality of modern China" (7). This indeed is a great recognition of Chen Baichen's achievement in modern Chinese theatre, and is the first of its kind pronounced. It also indicates some directions for further studies on Chen. However, despite such mentions, up to the end of the 1970s, no sign of a deeper study on the plays of Chen Baichen was seen.

It was not until recent years that the situation began to change, as exemplified by the publication of

(5) Sima Changfeng, Zhongguo xinwenxue shigao, p.164.

(6) Wang Yao, Zhongguo xinwenxue shigao, p.164.

(7) D. E. Pollard, 'Li Chien-wu 李健吾 and Modern Chinese Drama', Bulletin of The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1976, vol.39, part 2, p.387. The paper was first presented in a conference held in U.S.A. in 1974.

Twentieth-century Chinese Drama (8) in the West and a number of works on Chen Baichen published in The People's Republic of China. In the former, Chen Baichen's play of 1939, Luanshi nannu (Wartime Men and Women) 亂世男女 was translated and included. It is the first of Chen's plays translated into a Western language. The translator and editor of the anthology, E. M. Gunn, holds Chen Baichen in high regard. Chen is referred to as one whose works during the War of Resistance "include some of the liveliest social satire in Modern China." (9) His play, Luanshi nannu, "remains among the most memorable of the war period" (10). Furthermore, he points out some aspects of Chen Baichen's plays which invite appreciation: "Chen's masterful orchestration of manners and moods and his breaking away from static scenes to fluid, dynamic ones." (11) This reflects the growing interest in the plays of Chen Baichen in the West, though such interest remains rather limited.

In The People's Republic of China, following the

(8) An anthology edited by Edward M. Gunn, published in 1983. Sixteen plays from different Chinese writers are included.

(9) Introduction to Twentieth-century Chinese Drama, p.XIV.

(10) Ibid., p.XV.

(11) Ibid.

fall of the Gang of Four in 1976, a change of attitude towards studies and researches in the field of literature has become discernible. Attention is drawn not only to the classical literature, but to the contemporary as well, both before and after 1949. Chen Baichen, who was most prolific in the 1930s and 1940s, and has been very active after his rehabilitation in 1977 (12), has naturally become one of the subjects of study and research. Two major works emerged there: one serves as a comprehensive sourcebook for studies of Chen Baichen's life and works (13), the other a discussion of the creative life of Chen Baichen (14). The latter is worth our special attention, since it is the first attempt ever made to give a full account of the development of Chen Baichen's creative life, which includes Chen's writing of short stories, novels, plays, and film scripts. However, the work is more of descriptive nature than analytical; and to aim at 'completeness' the author has inevitably given the work little scope for depth. More importantly, it fails to

(12) Since Chen's rehabilitation in 1977, he has written two plays and a great number of articles. The Yunmeng duanyi 雲夢斷憶, which Chen wrote in 1982 during his short stay in America, has aroused particular attention. Though of advanced age, Chen continued to write until 1988. His great vigour in life and in writing during the 1980s made him stand out among his contemporaries.

(13) Chen Baichen zhuanji 陳白塵專集, edited by Bu Zhongkang 卜仲康 1983.

(14) Dong Jian 董健, Chen Baichen chuangzuo licheng lun 陳白塵創作歷程論, 1985.

escape from the influence of the Marxist doctrine in literary study. An approach is adopted in which arts and literature are regarded as a means to reflect a reality outside it and a tool to further genuine social progress. "A truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development" (15) is demanded of the artist; and the arts are held as a kind of knowledge which centres on "the truth in reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances." (16) The social function of Chen Baichen's works is given prime consideration, and a play's being realistic or non-realistic is taken as the basic value-judgement. Apart from the above works, there also appeared in literary and dramatic periodicals various articles on one or more plays of Chen Baichen (17), but very rarely do they give us a valuable insight into Chen Baichen's plays. Besides these hackneyed statements of whether and how reality is reflected in Chen Baichen's plays, and how Chen stands

 (15) Statement at the end of the First Congress of Soviet Writers, quoted by Henri Arvon in Marxist Esthetics, 1970, p.86.

(16) Marx and Engels 1956: 478-79. Quoted by David Forgacs in 'Marxist Literary Theories', Modern Literary Theory, 1982, p.141.

(17) Among them are Gan Jingcun 甘競存, 'Chen Baichen lishiju de yishu fengge' 陳白塵歷史劇的藝術風格, Zhongshan 鐘山 1979, no.4; Huai Lian 懷戀, 'Qiantan fengci xiju Shengguan Tu' 淺談諷刺喜劇《升官圖》, Fujian shida xuebao 福建師大學報, 1980, no.4; and Zhuang Haoran 莊浩然 'Baolu de jiqing -- Chen Baichen xiju yishu yanjiu zhiyi' 暴露的激情 -- 陳白塵喜劇藝術研究之一, Fujian shida xuebao, 1983, no.1, vol.2.

from a revolutionary viewpoint, nothing has ever appeared which may open up a wider view for the study of Chen Baichen's plays.

Considering the wide range and the quality of plays written by Chen Baichen (especially his satirical comedies, which are by far the best of his time), there is little doubt about Chen's talent as a playwright. Though he started his creative life writing short stories and novels, and had written some fine examples of them, his greatest success lies in his playwriting. His plays, which range from the most serious and pathetic to the fantastic and farcical, with subject matter taken from legends, historical events, current and contemporary issues, etc., reveal his skill in writing and his broad perspective on life and drama. His writing career as a playwright has been a long and enduring one, which few playwrights in modern China can compare to (18). While he shares with his contemporaries the strong attraction to

(18) Great dramatists like Lao She 老舍 and Tian Han 田漢 did not survive the Cultural Revolution and their writing careers were cut short when compared with that of Chen Baichen. Guo Moruo 郭沫若 led a long creative life but his main achievement did not lie in playwriting. For those who still survive, few continue to write plays. Yu Ling 于伶 and Xia Yan 夏衍 are examples. Wu Zuguang 吴祖光 and Cao Yu 曹禺 wrote Chuang jianghu 闯江湖 and Wang Zhaojun 王昭君 respectively in 1978, but they are not as prolific as Chen Baichen who since 1977 has written and published a great number of writings, including two plays.

social problems and in presenting various aspects of life on the stage, he stands out by virtue of his free use of imagination, and appears unique in the creation of a wide range of high quality plays. It seems proper to place Chen Baichen among those who laid the foundation of modern Chinese drama, enlarged the frontiers of drama in his time, and gave life to the theatre. Surely his plays deserve a deeper and more thorough study.

The object of the present study is to investigate the range and quality of Chen Baichen's plays, and from there try to trace out the similarities and uniqueness of Chen Baichen among modern Chinese playwrights. The main emphasis will be placed on his plays. It is noteworthy that Chen's creative life is a 'long and winding' one which stretches over half of a century. His plays, excluding those written in collaboration with other writers, amount to thirty-eight in number (19). It is striking that thirty-five of them were written in the 1930s and 1940s, and during the first thirty years of the Communist rule in China, only one play was published. This may be taken as the norm of modern Chinese playwrights who were once prolific in the 30s and 40s. But the most outstanding feature of Chen Baichen is that

(19) These are the published plays for stage performance. Plays which had not been published and film scripts are not included.

after 1977, he succeeded in resuming his writing career and turned his years of quiescence into liveliness again (20). Such a development is rare among Chen's contemporaries in China. Furthermore, it is also of importance to note that Chen joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1950, thus the bulk of his plays were written before he became a Communist and a devoted Communist cadre. These considerations, to certain extent, are of significance to the study of Chen Baichen's plays; but at the same time, lay constraint on the present study. While an exhaustive coverage of the whole career and development of Chen Baichen will inevitably lead to distraction and a lack of depth, concentration on a particular period may result in deficiencies as failing to present a comprehensive assessment of the playwright and his plays as well as to trace the similarities and uniqueness of Chen Baichen among Chinese playwrights during that period. To strike a balance between the two, in this study, limits on a chronological basis will not be set, so that a broader view can be engaged; but emphasis will naturally be put on his most prolific period, that is, on the plays written during the 1930s and 1940s, since it is through these plays that Chen's merit as a playwright can best be illustrated.

(20) q.v. (12).

Before the discussion of Chen's plays, a chapter (Chapter 2) will be dedicated to Chen's ideas and attitudes towards drama. As all literary works are the results of the working of the mind of writers, an understanding of the playwright's ideology is useful to the study of his plays. But since nobody is in a position to declare what is in a writer's mind, attention can only be turned to the words of the writer himself, that is, to what he has said about drama. Though in some cases, what a writer practises is different from what he proclaims, it is only after an understanding of both is reached that such a discrepancy can be disclosed. In the case of Chen Baichen, the inclusion of such a chapter will not only serve as background knowledge but will also throw light on his inheritance and development. Chen was no theorist, and he claimed himself no disciple of guiding principles; nevertheless, one can catch a glimpse of the ideas and attitudes that motivated him in his book on playwriting (21) and in articles written over the years of his career.

Three chapters (Chapters 3, 4, 5) will be devoted to discussion on Chen Baichen's plays. Instead of giving

(21) In 1940, Chen Baichen's Xiju chuanguo jianghua 戲劇創作講話 was published. It was one of the two books published in China on theory of playwriting during the war period. See Hong Shen 洪深, Kangzhan shinian lai Zhongguo de xiju yundong yu jiaoyu 抗戰十年來中國的戲劇運動與教育, 1948, p.99.

the plays classification and discussing them under different categories as comedy, tragedy, tragi-comedy, etc. (22), the plays are arranged and discussed in chronological order. Several considerations underlie this decision. Firstly, even though it has been generally accepted, since Aristotle's Poetics, that plays can be classified into two main types, namely tragedy and comedy, confusion arises concerning the definitions of different genres. It is obvious that there is "no sharp line of demarcation between tragedy and comedy" (23) and to determine definitely whether certain plays are to be included in the one category or the other is exceedingly difficult. The matter becomes more complicated as more genres besides tragedy and comedy appear. Martin Esslin puts this well in the following:

"The most frequently used term in the critical vocabulary of drama are those denoting the different genres -- above all the two basic genres: tragedy and comedy. An immense amount of speculation and philosophising exists on this subject And yet, most curiously, there is no consensus about it all, no generally accepted or acceptable definition of either tragedy or comedy, let alone of the many intermediate genres like comedy of manners, farce, tragi-comedy, burlesque, domestic comedy, domestic tragedy, melodrama and so on." (24)

(22) The classification method in drama criticism is popular in the West and among contemporary critics in the East. Chen Baichen classified his own plays into three types: satirical comedy, historical play, and serious drama (the types of plays based upon the theories of Diderot and his follower, Beaumarchais).

(23) Allardyce Nicoll, The Theory of Drama, 1931, p.186.

(24) Martin Esslin, An Anatomy of Drama, 1976, p.67.

Secondly, in China, there has never been a tradition of classifying plays strictly into types of tragedy, comedy, etc. In the history of Chinese drama, plays are usually categorized by their various forms and styles which denote different regional genres or species in different dynasties (25). As for 'huaju' (spoken drama), since it is an 'imported' genre from the West, its history has been a short one, and the concept of generic nomenclature of drama has never been influential. For most contemporary Chinese playwrights, the conventions of different kinds of drama are seldom observed seriously, and Chen Baichen is certainly no exception. Though in some of his plays Chen has given the labels of comedy, tragi-comedy, etc, these labels only convey some general impressions. They are crude labels and do not denote rigidly defined concepts. Just as "a play which has classical features can have romantic and realistic ones as well" (26), a number of Chen's plays embody within one single work both tragic, comic, and even farcical elements. Thus, to give Chen's plays the names of comedy, tragic-comedy, etc, and to discuss them in watertight compartments, is only to ignore their complexity. Such an approach will inevitably

(25) See Zhou Yibai 周贻白, Zhongguo xiqu fazhanshi gangyao 中國戲曲發展史綱要, 1979; and Zhang Geng 張庚, Guo Hancheng 郭漢城 Zhongguo xiqu tongshi 中國戲曲通史, 1980.

(26) Esslin, An Anatomy of Drama, 1976, p.56.

lead to over-simplification and distraction rather than clarification and understanding.

Thirdly, considering that a play exists in and for itself, it seems doubtful if the description of play by generic name will be of practical benefit for critical purposes. In the West, opposition to the use of classification in dramatic criticism has been voiced by critics like J. E. Spingarn and J. L. Styan. Spingarn argues that since literature is an expressive art, and because of the fact that each work of literature has to be considered in itself, the classification of literary kinds is wholly false (27). Styan is equally adamant in his refutation of classification. He writes:

"A classification of plays by types is today supremely unhelpful; to stamp a play as a tragedy or comedy, a melodrama or farce, is to bind it by rules external to itself and illegitimately borrowed."
(28)

Surely, it will be helpful if in the analysis of Chen's plays, certain qualities which correspond to the special features of different genres are discovered and discussed; but to give them labels and treat them merely as such will only end up in deficiency. To give Chen's plays a detailed analysis and fair judgement, the distinction of quality, not of kind, should be emphasized.

(27) See A. Nicoll, The Theatre and Dramatic Theory, 1962, p.37.

(28) J. L. Styan, The Element of Drama, 1969, p.254.

As it is impossible to include all of Chen's plays in the study, a selection is made for detailed analysis. Nine plays which cover a wide range and can best represent the plays of Chen written in different stages are selected. Chen's earliest play which can be seen nowadays, Fenhewan (Fen River Bend) 汾河灣 (29), is included in the selection to illustrate Chen's first notion of drama as well as help in tracing the early development of the playwright. Similarly, Dafeng ge (Hurricane Song) 大風歌 (1979) (30) is also included as it reveals the more recent development of Chen and is significant for an understanding of Chen's whole creative life. Other plays in the selection include Chen's most well known plays such as Suihan tu (Winter Scene) 歲寒圖 (1944) and Shengguan tu (The Plan of Official Promotion) 升官圖 (1945), and plays written in the 1930s and 1940s which led him gradually to his success.

(29) The play was written in 1930 and published in 1931. Chen referred to it as his first written play in 'Guanyu Taiping Tianguo de xiezuo -- xu Jintiancun' 關於太平天國的寫作——序《金田村》 (Wenxue 文學, 1937, vol.8, no.2) as well as in 'Cong wo zenyang kaishi xiexi shuoqi' 從我怎樣開始寫戲說起 (Xiao juban 小劇本, 1981, no.4). However, according to Bu Zhongkang and Dong Jian, there was another play written before Fenhewan. The play was published in 1929, titled Qiangtou ma shang (On Horseback outside the Garden Wall) 牆頭馬上, an adaptation of a Yuan zaju 元雜劇. Since the information was based on the recollection of Chen, and no sign of the play and related material can be traced, the authenticity lies in doubt.

(30) After Dafeng ge, Chen wrote A Quei zhengzhuan (The True Story of A Quei) 阿Q正傳, which is an adaptation of Lu Xun's story. Disregarding works of adaptation, Dafeng ge can be regarded as Chen's latest play to date.

In the discussion of Chen's plays, T. S. Eliot's dictum of 1928 that "when we are considering poetry we must consider it primarily as poetry and not another thing" (31) is adopted. Drama, like all kinds of literature, has its own value peculiar to itself; thus a play is to be taken as a play and nothing else. The distinctive feature of drama is, it is not only a literary art, but a performance art as well; and it is this particularity which distinguishes it from other kinds of literature. One cannot dispute J. B. Priestley's saying that "a dramatist writes for the theatre. A man who writes to be read and not to be performed is not a dramatist." (32) Similarly, one has to agree with S. W. Dawson that "a play unacted remains somehow incomplete." (33) It becomes clear that in the discussion of a play, both the literary and theatrical aspects should be included. The failure to consider both aspects will mean a failure to realize the true nature of drama. A. Nicoll writes:

"The drama may never be taken to exist as merely a written or a printed work of literature. If we are to appreciate it for what it is -- that is to say, as a drama -- we must first suppose that the author has both actors and audience in view when he was

(31) Quoted by M. H. Abrams in The Mirror and The Lamp, 1953, p.27.

(32) J. B. Priestley, The Art of the Dramatist, 1957, p.3.

(33) S. W. Dawson, Drama and the Dramatic, 1970, p.2.

penning his lines, and secondly, we must supply mentally for ourselves these two factors as we read any example of dramatic art." (34)

Thus, during the analytical process of plays in the present study, some visualization has to be employed when the plays are read. Since only the written texts of the plays are available, and materials on the performances at the time the plays first emerged are scanty and may not be reliable, I can only place my primary concern with dramatic literature as literature, but try to "combine a scrupulous critical concern with the text with as close a concern as possible with the necessities and potentialities of actual performance." (35) As to the latter, my own experience in the theatre as an amateur writer and director has been of benefit in the analysis of Chen's plays which, as I have emphasized, are to be taken not merely as written works but works written for the theatre.

Judgement is also passed on Chen's plays, but it is no easy task, since "value judgements in literature are 'not absolute and definite, but gradual and comparative'. There can be no absolute standard of expressive eloquence, of moral power, or of formal harmony." (36) In assessing

(34) A. Nicoll, The Theory of Drama, 1931, p.31.

(35) S. W. Dawson, Drama and the Dramatic, 1970, pp.6-7.

(36) Johnson, Preface to Shakespeare. Quoted by Graham Hough in An Essay on Criticism, 1966, p.91.

Chen's plays, focus is put on those intrinsic qualities rather than extrinsic ones; and comparisons are made with other playwrights' works, especially those of Chen's contemporaries, whenever relevant. To maintain consistency and unity in the evaluation, certain criteria are applied. Though dramatic criticism is a topic much talked about by theorists and critics, there exists no 'fast and tight' rule. Styan suggests that "the satisfaction of drama arises from no logical consistency in the events, nor from their magnitude. The power of the play comes of its consistency within itself, and its content achieves magnitude by the quality of its exploration, its width of view and its sense of proportion." (37) Hough sums up the general formal criteria in three single words: integrity, consonance, and radiance (38). And for Esslin, drama is "to a very considerable extent concerned with the recreation of human states of emotion" and "is as multifaceted in its images, as ambivalent in its meanings, as the world it mirrors. That is its main strength, its characteristic as a mode of expression -- and its greatness." (39) These may all be taken into account when Chen's plays are being evaluated. In short, the main consideration will be on the playwright's power of

(37) J. L. Styan, The Element of Drama, 1969, p.263.

(38) G. Hough, An Essay on Criticism, 1966, p.88.

(39) M. Esslin, An Anatomy of Drama, 1976, pp.117-118.

dramatic expression: how he created the action, situation and character; how he integrated the material and achieved the unity of the play; and how he succeeded in opening up unknown areas of emotional experience through poetic imagery.

Apart from those stated above, there are other criteria which have been widely used in dramatic criticism, but which are discarded in this study. Firstly, there is the method of judging a play by discovering the playwright's intention and his means of achieving it. This, however, is unreliable and does not form a good basis for judging a playwright's works. Disregarding the fact that an author seldom tells us his intentions, nobody is in a position to say what is in the playwright's mind, and to judge whether what he has said about his intentions is true or not. L. Abercrombie is right in saying that a work of art is "the only way in which its author could truly give us his intentions" (40). So, we had better neglect trying to find out what exactly is in the mind of the playwright and instead allow the play to make its effect on us as a whole and thus determine whether it is a good play or not.

Secondly, we come to the criterion of the permanence of literary works. This is exemplified by Johnson's

(40) L. Abercrombie, Principles of Literary Criticism, 1960, p.157.

suggestion that the only test to judge the value of literary works is "length of duration and continuance of esteem" (41). Such an opinion is regarded as mere prejudice by I. A. Richards, who holds the fact "that a work reflects, summarises and is penetrated by its age and period is not a ground for assigning it a low value" (42). This indeed is quite true, for the survival of a literary work is sometimes determined by circumstances which have nothing to do with its artistic value, and it is especially true in modern Chinese theatre.

Thirdly, there is the criterion of wide popular appeal. It has been generally assumed that a work of wide popular appeal must be a greater, more valuable work than one with special and limited appeal. But the validity of such an assumption is doubtful. Richards suggests that no one is in a position to judge whether a work of wide appeal must have touched something essential and fundamental in human nature. Thus, such a work is not necessarily of a higher value than a work of less broad appeal (43). Styan also declares that it is wrong to assume that range of appeal bears any relation to the value of the theme (44). Both have touched upon some

(41) Johnson, Preface to Shakespeare. Quoted by G. Hough in An Essay on Criticism, 1966, p.87.

(42) I. A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism, 1924, p.222.

(43) Ibid., p.212.

(44) J. L. Styan, The Elements of Drama, 1969, p.273.

truth: though in many cases, works of high value are accompanied by wide, popular appeal, yet the range of appeal cannot be taken as the yardstick by which to measure the merit of a literary work. Nevertheless, considering the peculiarity of drama, that a play has to be performed and has to make absolute and sustained demand on the audience, it seems certain that the play must have fairly widespread appeal in order to secure an audience large enough to be encouraging. In this respect, the strength of a play's appeal cannot be ignored totally when making a judgement as to its success or otherwise. To avoid confusion, it is better to put it the other way: that is while it may not always be true that a play of wide appeal must be a good play, on the other hand, a playwright's ability to seize and hold the audience's attention should be taken into consideration when the play is evaluated. But in this case, it is the playwright's power of dramatic expression rather than the range of appeal which is taken as the criterion.

It is hoped that through analysis and evaluation of the plays, the range and quality of Chen's plays will be clearly exposed and fully appreciated. It is further hoped that this study may throw some light on the development of modern Chinese drama.

Political and social situation

In the history of Chinese literature, huaju (spoken drama) 話劇 is a genre which did not make its appearance until the early twentieth century. It was initially named xinju (new drama) 新劇, or wenming xinxi (plays of Enlightenment) 文明新戲 (1), in contrast to the traditional Chinese drama. In 1927, Tian Han first suggested and introduced the term huaju (2).

As is well known, the emergence of huaju is not an isolated phenomenon independent of the social and political milieu of that time. Starting from the twentieth century onwards, China had experienced great changes. Externally, it suffered from the exploitation of the Great Powers in the West, which was well under way by the end of the nineteenth century; while internally, civil wars and political chicanery never ceased. In 1911, revolution broke out and the Qing dynasty was overthrown. However, the establishment of the Republic did not bring forth peace and unity. The country was split up by

(1) According to Ouyang Yuqian 歐陽予倩, wenming xinxi should be defined as the new and progressive plays. See 'Tan wenmingxi' 談文明戲, Zhongguo huaju yundong wushinian shiliao ji, 1985, vol.1, p.48.

(2) See Ouyang Yu-chien, 'The Modern Chinese Theatre and the Dramatic Tradition', Chinese Literature, 1959, no.11, pp.103-104.

warlords who competed vigorously for more power. People were impoverished, resulting in uprisings in various parts over the country. The whole country was in a state of chaos and darkness.

In 1919, inspired by the Russian October Revolution of 1917, the Chinese intelligentsia made their move and demanded modernization and reforms. The May Fourth Incident broke out. As Chow Tse-tsung (Zhou Cezong) 周策縱 said, the movement "marked an accelerated awakening of the Chinese intelligentsia to the ideas of individual human rights and national independence." (3) New intellectuals were convinced that vast and fundamental reforms were necessary to rejuvenate the old nation. As far as literature is concerned, the new literary movement which was first launched in 1916 started to spread to wider circles. Reforms in the medium as well as content of literature were advocated. As a result, the vernacular language was widely employed and all literary genres including drama took new directions. Literature was brought closer to the realities of life and society.

During the 1920s and 1930s, China continued to suffer continuous unrest and political confusion. The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 brought a drastic change

(3) Chow Tse-tsung, The May Fourth Movement, 1960, p.14.

to the country. Patriotic emotion was aroused among the nation, and saving China from Japanese aggression became the major issue. Literature and arts were devoted to arousing and sustaining the patriotic emotions of the common masses using the idioms they loved and understood. Huaju, as an effective mass medium among other literary genres, flourished particularly during the war years (4). As the long war years dragged on, writers were drawn more closely to the reflection of life through creative works.

The war with the Japanese ended in 1945, but again peace was far away from the Chinese people. In 1946, full-scale civil war broke out in China. By 1949, the Communists under Mao Zedong 毛澤東 succeeded in establishing the People's Republic of China, while Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) 蔣介石 and the Nationalists retreated to Taiwan. For all Chinese people, including the intellectuals, a new era began.

Undoubtedly, during the first half of the twentieth century, China had been in a state of continuous turmoil. The foreign aggression against China, and the

(4) According to Tian Jin 田進, 'Kangzhan banian lai de xiju chuangzuo' 抗戰八年來的戲劇創作 (Chongqing xinhua ribao 重慶新華日報, January 16, 1946), the number of full-length plays written during the war years (1937-1945) amounted to 120. See Hong Shen, Kangzhan shinian lai Zhongguo de xiju yundong yu jiaoyu, 1948, p.134.

internal conflicts, especially those between the Communists and Nationalists, inevitably found their reflections in the drama of the period. Huaju, the new genre which sprang up in the beginning of the century, had undergone considerable changes during these years; and without doubt, the course of its development is a reflection of the political and social evolution of the country.

Life of Chen Baichen

It was in such an age of chaos and turmoil that Chen Baichen was born and spent his early life. Born in 1908 in a small town in Huaiyin, Jiangsu 江蘇淮陰, Chen was the youngest son of a shopkeeper. His three brothers were much older than he, and his sister was born when he was six. Thus, as Chen himself avows, much of his childhood was spent in loneliness (5).

According to Chen, the financial situation of his family improved when he was about four years old, and his father managed to set up his own business. At six, Chen was sent to a sishu (traditional Chinese private tutorial school) 私塾. However, his real education did not start until he was twelve. At eighteen, after his graduation

(5) See Chen Baichen, Jimo de tongnian 寂寞的童年, 1985, p.22. 'Jimo de tongnian' was first published in Yuhua 雨花, 1984, nos.6-10.

from high school, he left his hometown and went to Shanghai.

Unlike other contemporary playwrights such as Cao Yu, Li Jianwu and Wu Zuguang, Chen did not have the opportunity to enter university and receive formal tertiary education. Neither did he have the chance to go abroad to pursue his study as Hong Shen, Ouyang Yuqian and Tian Han did. The only education he received after high school was meagre and incomplete. In 1926, when he first arrived in Shanghai, he entered the Shanghai wenke zhuanke xuexiao 上海文科專科學校 . The school closed down a year later, and Chen transferred to the Shanghai yishu daxue 上海藝術大學 , where Tian Han was chair of literature. In 1928, when Tian Han set up the Nanguo yishu xueyuan 南國藝術學院 , Chen followed him. However, the institute did not survive for long, and it was closed down in autumn in the same year. After that, Chen started to earn his own living.

The years after Chen left college were of hardship. He took up different jobs, moved from one place to another, but life was always difficult for him. In 1930, he went to Japan, planning to pursue his studies as well as work for his living. His plan failed, and he returned to China four months later. In the meantime, agitated by the increasing disturbance in the political and social situation of the country, Chen involved himself more and

more in the political activities of the time. In fact, as early as in 1926, he joined the Guomindang (Kuomintang) 國民黨, and took part in the student movement. In 1927, disillusioned by the massacre carried out by the Nationalists against the Communists, Chen left the Guomindang. Later in 1932, he joined the Chinese Communist Youth League, and participated actively in the underground work. In September 1932, he was arrested and put to jail by the Nationalists.

After his release from jail in 1935, Chen went to Shanghai and began his career as a professional writer. As is often the case in contemporary China, his imprisonment had not only deprived him of his freedom in jail but had also made him an object of suspicion and accusation after his release (6). The rumour was spread that he had betrayed his friends and had acted as a secret agent for the Guomindang. It was a hard time for Chen, and the matter was cleared up only after many complications.

When the Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937, Chen immediately plunged himself into action against Japanese

(6) The same case happened to quite a number of writers. Once they were kept imprisoned by the Nationalists, they were vulnerable to charges and accusation of betrayal from the Communists. Ding Ling 丁玲 and Hu Feng 胡風 are well known examples.

aggression. He was one of the sixteen dramatists who cooperated in writing the play Baowei Lugouqiao (To defend Marco Polo Bridge) 保衛蘆溝橋, which was based on the Lugouqiao Incident and was the first propaganda play written after the outbreak of the war. He then organized the Shanghai yingren jutuan 上海影人劇團 which toured west China giving performances designed to boost wartime morale. It was the first drama troupe which set its foot on Sichuan 四川 soil after the war broke out. During the eight years of the war, he travelled between Chongqing 重慶 and Chengdu 成都, and took up various jobs: as playwright, organizer and producer of drama troupes, lecturer of dramatic art, and editor. These years were his most prolific years and it was during this period that he fully established himself as a playwright.

After the war had ended, Chen stayed in Sichuan until 1946, then he went to Shanghai. When the Communists took the rule over China in 1949, Chen remained in Shanghai. In 1950, he joined the Chinese Communist Party and later became a party cadre.

Like many other Chinese contemporary playwrights, Chen was purged during the Cultural Revolution. In 1977, he was rehabilitated. At the age of sixty-nine, he once again engaged himself in writing plays as well as articles with full enthusiasm. Notwithstanding his old age, his writings reveal his extraordinary valour and vigour, and

among his contemporaries who survived the Cultural Revolution, Chen may be regarded as one of the most outstanding and prolific writers since the late 1970s.

Creative impulse of Chen Baichen

But Chen was not a born dramatist. Compared with playwrights like Ouyang Yuqian, Tian Han and Li Jianwu, Chen's interest in drama developed at a much later stage (7). As Chen confessed, as a child he never enjoyed going to the theatre, neither to see the Peking opera nor the wenmingxi of that time (8). He even developed a strong dislike and feeling of disgust towards it. In 1924, when he first tried his hand at creative writing, it was poems and short stories that he chose from among the literary genres. His first published work was a short story which he sent to Xiaoshuo shijie 小說世界 for competition organized by the literary magazine (9). It was only after he had

(7) For Ouyang Yuqian, Tian Han and Li Jianwu, their interests in drama sprang from early childhoods. See Ouyang Yuqian, Zi wo yanxi yilai 自我演戲以來, 1939, pp.2-7; Tian Han, 'Zai xiju shang wo de guoqu, xianzai ji weilai' 在戲劇上我的過去、現在及未來, Tian Han wenji 田漢文集, 1983, vol.1, pp.434-435; and Li Jianwu, 'Wusi qijian Beijing xuesheng huaju yundong yiban' 五四期間北京學生話劇運動一斑, Li Jianwu xiju pinglun xuan 李健吾戲劇評論選, 1982, pp.406-414.

(8) See Chen Baichen, Jimo de Tongnian, 1985, pp.121-132.

(9) The short story, entitled 'Ling yi shijie' 另一世界, was published in Xiaoshuo shijie, 1925, vol.9, no.2. Since it was one of the entries for competition, the name of the author was omitted while published. The results were published in Xiaoshuo shijie, 1925, vol.11, no.2.

written and published a total of more than fifteen novels and short stories that he first attempted playwriting.

The person who first sowed the seed of modern drama in Chen was Tian Han. According to Chen, it was under the influence of Tian that he made his first acquaintance with huaju and got involved with it (10). Before Chen met Tian in 1927, his main literary interest was short stories. His impression of modern drama had never been good. As a child, he first encountered wenmingxi at the time when the genre was already degenerating. During the May Fourth Era, he had several chances of seeing performances of modern plays. Though changes were already perceptible on the modern Chinese stage, with one or two exception, such plays as he saw in that period left little impression on him (11). His years with Tian Han (i.e. 1927-1929), however, had changed his whole attitude towards modern drama. The years were of decisive significance in Chen's life. He took part in the performances organized by Tian Han (12),

(10) Personal interview with Chen Baichen in Nanjing, August 20, 1981.

(11) Chen Baichen, Jimo de Tongnian, 1985, pp.121-132.

(12) It was Chen's first direct involvement in modern drama. He started as an actor playing minor roles in two of the plays performed in the Yishu yulonghui 藝術長龍會. He admitted in later years that these experiences had helped him much in his training for the theatre. See Chen Baichen, 'Shanghai yida de "xiju xi"' 上海藝大的"戲劇系", Wushinian ji 五十年集, 1982, pp.92-98; and 'Cong wo zenyang kaishi xiexi shuoqi' 從我怎樣開始寫戲談起, Xiao juben 小劇本, 1981, no.4, pp.2-4.

and through this experience began to realize the impact and effect of this genre on the public. Above all, he began to develop an interest in trying to write in the huaju genre. Though he had not yet tried his hand at playwriting during this period, the seed was already sown.

When Chen wrote his first play Fenhewan in 1930, he had already left Nanguo yishu xueyuan. Nevertheless, the influence of his experience in Shanghai yishu daxue and Nanguo she 南國社 is discernible. According to Chen, Fenhewan was an 'imitation' of Ouyang Yuqian's Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮 (13). The latter was one of the highlights of the Yishu yulonghui 藝術魚龍會 held in Shanghai yishu daxue in 1927 (14). In contrast to traditional legends and dramas on Pan Jinlian, the protagonist in Ouyang Yuqian's Pan Jinlian was depicted as the victim of the feudal society. It was under the strong influence of the ideas advocated in the May Fourth Movement (the anti-feudalism, the emancipation of individual, and the break down of fetishes and superstitions) that Ouyang wrote his play (15). This

(13) See Chen Baichen, 'Cong wo zenyang kaishi xiexi shuoqi', Xiao juban, 1981, no.4, p.2.

(14) The Yishu yulonghui was a drama festival held under the direction of Tian Han. It ran for a whole week with fourteen performances. A total number of eight plays were staged. See Chen Baichen, 'Cong yulonghui dao Nanguo yishu xueyan' 從魚龍會到南國藝術學院, Zhongguo huaju yundong wushinian shiliao ji, 1985, vol.2, pp.11-20.

(15) See Ouyang Yuqian, 'Ouyang Yuqian xuanji qianyan' 歐陽予倩選集 前言, in Ouyang Yuqian yanjiu ziliao 歐陽予倩研究資料, 1989, p.182. The article was first published in 1959.

being the case, it is only natural that Chen was also preoccupied with these ideas in his creation of Fenhewan. The postscript which was published together with the play is very revealing (16). It suggests that the play was more a demonstration of Chen's disapproval of traditional drama and the ideas it embodied rather than a real theatrical piece.

Chen too, like Ouyang Yuguan, wanted to give traditional legend a new interpretation and to furnish old drama with new meaning and significance. His message in Fenhewan is clear: feudalism is the worst enemy of all. Under feudalism, men kill men, fathers kill sons. The ideas embodied in the play was not new to the literary works of that era, but it did mark a new departure for Chen from the works he had written before 1930. Indeed Fenhewan marked Chen's own denunciation of his previous works, those short stories and novels written in the late 1920s (17). In this respect, it can be said that at the outset Chen's impulse in writing plays was mainly connected with his strong belief in the effectiveness of conveying new ideas and thoughts through the means of drama.

(16) See Xiaoshuo yuebao, 1931, vol.22, no.4, p.524.

(17) In the postscript to Chen Baichen juzuo xuan 陳白塵劇作選 as well as 'Cong wo zenyang kaishi xiexi shuoqi', Chen uses the phrase "moaning and groaning for nothing" to describe his literary works written before 1930.

However, to a great extent, Fenhewan can only be considered as an impromptu piece of work. Practically, it had not opened up a new phase for Chen's creative career. After Fenhewan, Chen stopped writing for more than two years, and there was no sign of his taking up playwriting as his career.

It was only in 1933, when he was shut up in prison by the Guomindang, that Chen resumed his writing. It was the 'real beginning' of his creative life (18). The motivation was simple: since he was deprived of the liberty to join the revolutionary force outside the prison, he felt obliged to pick up his pen and to do what he could for the revolution (19). This, in fact, was typical of the thinking of Chinese intellectuals. In other words, it was the urge to be loyal to his country and to express his view on the political and social situation of that time that made Chen write again. During his two and a half years' imprisonment, the urge never subsided. His experience in jail further reinforced his beliefs, and as time went by, his social concern became more and more acute. Undoubtedly, prison provided him with the opportunity for literary creation. The conditions were

(18) Chen Baichen, 'Bianhou ji' 編後記, Chen Baichen juzuo xuan, 1981, p.555.

(19) Ibid.

bad, but he was 'forced' to write: it was the only thing that could occupy his time and give him a sense of fulfilment (20). He wrote short stories as well as plays. There was no conflict between the writing of the two genres, since they were written mainly for publication, and both served his purpose and fulfilled his urge to a certain extent.

If we agree with Chen that the years of imprisonment (1932-1935) marked the "real beginning" of his creative life, we have to agree as well that it was the performance of Taiping tianguo (The Heavenly Kingdom of Taiping) 太平天國 (21) that laid the foundation stone of Chen's playwriting career (22). The premiere was staged in June 1937 by the Shanghai yeyu shiyan jutuan 上海業餘實驗劇團 at the Carlton Theatre, Shanghai. For Chen, the significance of the performance lay not only in its being his first play

(20) When Chen was first sent to jail, he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment. This gave him greater determination to resume writing and "keep up with the revolution in the society." Personal interview with Chen Baichen, August 20, 1981.

(21) The play was entitled Jintiancun when it was first published in Wenxue in 1937. It was designed as the first part of a trilogy Taiping tianguo.

(22) On a number of occasions Chen admitted that the performance of Taiping tianguo was a turning point of his writing career. It was then that he made up his mind to pursue playwriting as his career. See Chen Baichen, 'Zizhuan' 自傳, Zhongguo dangdai zuojia zizhuan 中國當代作家自傳, 1979, vol.3, p.75; and 'Houji' 後記, Chen Baichen xiju xuanji 陳白塵戲劇選集, 1956, p.265.

on stage, but also in its success in arousing the audience's emotion in "demanding resistance against aggression" (23). It was his first taste of real success, and it fully manifested the effectiveness of drama as a means to provoke the emotion of the audience. Thus, when the war broke out, Chen did not hesitate to devote himself entirely to playwriting and the theatre.

Considering the time period between Chen's first published work and his final determination to take up playwriting as his career, it can be said that Chen's creative impulse to write plays was not a purely instinctive one. First of all, he was not born with a love for the theatre. Secondly, he did not seem to acquire the creative instinct for writing plays until after years of experience in writing of short stories and novels. Indeed his turning away from short story and novel writing to playwriting can be seen as a result of circumstances as of his growing interest in drama. Undoubtedly, the function of drama as an effective means to reach the general public (especially the illiterate), to arouse emotion among them, and to help social reform, had left a deep impression on him. Moreover, his strong sense of responsibility and obligation to his country (which is the

(23) Chen Baichen, 'Houji', Chen Baichen xiju xuanji, 1956, p.265.

marked characteristic of the intelligentsia in China) also drove him further on to the path of playwriting. As the Sino-Japanese War broke out, he responded to the call of the country and plunged himself into resistance work with the most effective weapon in his hands. Since his first involvement in drama in 1927, the urge within him to write plays had never been so keen. It was at this moment when both his interest for drama and his desire to serve the country coincided so well that he made up his mind to dedicate his whole life to playwriting.

The influence on Chen in the writing of plays

From what is known about Chen's life and his creative impulse for playwriting, it is apparent that he received no direct heritage from his family for his career. As his parents were just common folks from traditional Chinese families, they influenced Chen little as far as intellectual thinking was concerned. However, particularly as the youngest and favourite son of his parents, Chen must have been influenced by them in respect of character and attitude towards life, especially in his formative years. Though it is difficult to say to what extent his parents influenced him, it is one aspect which cannot be totally ignored in the tracing of the formation of Chen's playwriting career.

According to Chen, his father was an optimistic and humorous man; he was easy-going and never seemed to worry

much about things. He loved telling jokes, and enjoyed satirizing landlords and bureaucrats whenever he could (24). His mother, who was a typical traditional Chinese woman, was uneducated but of strong character. She was a moralist, keen to learn, and had a gift for witticism. The witty remarks which she poured out spontaneously about people and events still remained fresh in Chen's mind after years. At the age of five or six, Chen was used to his mother's story-telling. Most of the stories were taken from Chinese classics or great novels of the Ming and Qing dynasties, and, every time, the moral of the story was preached prior to the content (25).

It is possible that Chen inherited some qualities from his parents, which contributed much to his success in the writing of comedy (26). Furthermore, there is little doubt that he was indebted to his mother for his early interest and knowledge in literature. Under her influence, he started to read extensively as a young boy. This, to a certain extent, formed an important part of his

(24) See Chen Baichen, Jimo de tongnian, 1985, pp.21-30 and pp.133-143.

(25) These include Xiyou ji 西遊記, Shuihu zhuan 水滸傳, Sanguo yanyi 三國演義 and Hong Loumeng 紅樓夢. See Chen Baichen, Jimo de tongnian, 1985, p.23 and p.122.

(26) Though Chen has never made any direct acknowledgment to his parents for his writings, from Jimo de tongnian, it is clear that their influence on him is not to be neglected.

education.

As regards the influences on his writing, Chen himself has not been very forthcoming. In a few articles written in recent years, Chen confessed that he was first influenced by the Libailiu pai (Saturday Group) 禮拜六派 or Yuanyang hudie pai (Mandarin Duck and Butterfly Group) 鴛鴦蝴蝶派 in his teens, later attracted to xinwenxue (new literature) and the writings of Yu Dafu 郁達夫 in particular, then, during the 1930s, he became deeply influenced by the League of Chinese Leftwing Writers, whose views and principles he clung to as guidelines for his own writings (27). He never joined the League, but regarded himself a member "in spirit" (28). As for the two great events which had immense influence on twentieth century Chinese writers (the May Fourth Movement and the Yen'an Forum on Art and Literature), their impact on Chen was slight. The former broke out at the time when he was a boy of eleven studying in a sishu in his hometown, and he was too young to realize its significance and impact. As for the latter, the influence might have been more considerable if Chen had been living in Yen'an during

(27) See Chen Baichen, 'Zizhuan', Zhongguo dangdai zuojia zizhuan, 1979, vol.3, pp.74-75; 'Cong wo zenyang kaishi xiexi shuoqi', Xiao juban, 1981, no.4, p.2; and 'Huigu "Zuolian", zhanwang weilai' 回顧"左聯", 展望未來, Shanghai wenxue 上海文學, 1980, no.3, p.63.

(28) See Chen, 'Huigu "Zuolian", zhanwang weilai', p.63.

that time instead of in the interior. According to Chen, both events left little impression on him at the time at which they occurred (29).

Besides the very early influence, Chen has seldom mentioned other influential factors which might have affected his writings. In an interview held in 1983, Chen insisted that he was not a disciple of a particular dramatist, nor of guiding principles (30). Nonetheless, he could not deny the fact that he had received certain influence from the West, as had most of his contemporaries. In other words, the influence of the Western literary works and theories, as well as films, did to a certain extent, play a part in his playwriting career.

As is commonly known, during the 1920s and 1930s, a great number of Western realistic and naturalistic literary works and theories had been introduced into China through translation. According to Tian Qin 田鵬, more than 381 translations of plays were published during the period 1920-1938 (31). Plays of Western dramatists such as Ibsen, Shaw, Strindberg, Romain Rolland, Chekhov, and Oscar Wilde were brought to the Chinese stage. The effect

(29) Personal interview with Chen Baichen, July 5, 1983.

(30) Personal interview with Chen Baichen, November 12, 1983.

(31) See Tian Qin, Zhongguo xiju yundong 中國戲劇運動, 1946, pp.105-107.

of these Western works on the Chinese writers was easily perceptible. As Tai Yih-jian puts it, it was an "awakening" for the twentieth century Chinese writers, who "began to discover their subject matter in the immediacy of their own environment" (32).

Among Western dramatists, Chen was most indebted to Ibsen and Gogol. During his early playwriting career, the influence of Ibsen played a significant role. According to Chen, he had seen a number of productions of Ibsen's plays in Chinese translations, and had himself acted in some of them. He confessed that nearly all Chinese playwrights in the 1930s were influenced by Ibsen, and he was no exception (33). There is little doubt that it was the social themes and realistic approach of Ibsen's plays that attracted the young Chinese playwright most. When Chen resumed his writing in 1933, his attention was focused more on society and the people from the lower social strata. Though Chen's plays from this period appear premature and crude, they show Chen's tendency towards the creation of more realistic social plays, which were to a certain extent the result of the influence of Western realistic and naturalistic works (of Ibsen in particular) on Chen.

(32) Tai Yih-jian, The Contemporary Chinese Theatre and Soviet Influence 1919-1960, 1974, p.17.

(33) Personal interview with Chen Baichen, Nov. 12, 1983.

As for Gogol, Chen did not hesitate to pay him due tribute. In 1946, when Chen's masterpiece Shengguan tu emerged, the influence of the great Russian dramatist on Chen was only too evident. Undoubtedly, Shengguan tu was modelled on Gogol's The Government Inspector, as Chen was more than ready to admit. As he commented in 1952, the influence manifested not only in the plot of the play, but in its style as well (34). He described the influence of Gogol's play as "irresistible", and confessed that he was deeply indebted to Gogol (35).

While the plays of the Western dramatists were making their impact on Chen, literary theories from the West also exerted their influence. The main source of influence came from Soviet Russia, and it was of no less significance for Chen than the influence of dramatic works.

Since Lu Xun's conscientious introduction of the works of Soviet theoreticians at the end of the 1920s, and the establishment of the League of Chinese Leftwing Writers in 1930, the influence of the Soviet literary theories had become predominant on the Chinese literary scene. Russian realism and proletarian art were advocated

(34) See Chen Baichen, 'Xunan zai Zhongguo' <巡按>在中國, Renmin ribao 人民日報, March 4, 1952.

(35) Ibid.

by literary groups as well as individuals. As early as 1930, Chen had shown a tendency towards 'revolutionary literature' (36). He denounced his own works of the late 1920s, and wrote Fenhewan, which he regarded as a work marking the transition from escapism and artificiality to positivism and reality (37). In 1933, in an article on the prospect of popularizing drama, he rebuked those who held the view of 'art for art's sake', and advocated the concept of literature as a popular art form (38). In 1940, he published his Xiju chuanguo jianghua 戲劇創作講話, and the full extent of his absorption of Soviet literary theories was revealed.

The book was written during the period when Chen was lecturing in a drama troupe under the Political Board of the Military Commission. It was one of only two works on playwriting published during the war period, and was rated

 (36) Chen wrote in 'Huigu "Zuolian", zhangwang weilai': "In 1930, Zuolian was established. I then accepted its principles and read Wenxue yuebao, taking it as the model of revolutionary literature. It was also at that time that I denounced my own scribble written in the past completely." See Shanghai wenxue, 1980, no.3, p.63.

(37) See Chen, 'Cong wo zenyang kaishi xiexi shuoqi', Xiao juban, 1981, no.4, p.2.

(38) See Chen Baichen, 'Zhongguo minzhong xiju yundong zhi qianlu' 中國民眾戲劇運動之前路 Shandong minzhong jiaoyu yuekan 山東民眾教育月刊, 1933, vol.4, no.8, pp.11-19.

high in Hong Shen's estimation (39). As it is the only theoretical work of Chen, it contributes much to our knowledge of his views on playwriting as well as of the influences on him. The central idea of the book is clearly conveyed: all literature reflects life, and drama is no exception; writers are "engineers of the human souls" as Stalin stated (40), and thus should depict and reflect reality in their works, aiming at elevating the consciousness of the masses. Sources were drawn from works of writers of different countries. However, the bulk came from the Russians, including those of Gorky, Fadeyev, Serafimovich and Turgenev. It is apparent that Chen had read a number of Russian theoretical works and was much impressed by them. Moreover, the attraction towards Socialist realism shows its sign as well. Engels's famous statement of realism: "the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances" (41) was quoted, and much references were made on works of Gorky concerning the "reproduction of typical characters". In all, it can be affirmed that Chen was much under the influence of the Soviet in respect of theoretical principles of literature.

(39) See Hong Shen, Kanzhan shinian lai Zhongguo de xiju yundong yu jiaoyu, 1948, pp.99-101.

(40) The statement of Stalin is quoted with great emphasis in Chen's Xiju chuangzuo jianghua, 1940, p.8.

(41) See Chen Baichen, Xiju chuangzuo jianghua, 1940, p.15.

What is also noteworthy is the influence of American films on Chen during the 1920s and 1930s. Though their influence is not as significant as that of Western theatrical works, it helps to give a more complete picture of the formation of Chen's playwriting career. Of the American films, the comedies of Charles Chaplin probably had the most influence on Chen. According to Chen, he was a lover of Chaplin's works, and had seen most of the Chaplin films shown in China, including The Gold Rush, Modern Times and The Great Dictator (42). It is most likely that Chaplin's technique in handling comic situations and characters had given much inspiration to Chen, especially in the realm of comedy writing (43). Apart from it, films shot in the 1920s by the great American directors also made their impact on Chen. Among them, Griffith's Way Down East (1920) and Vidor's La Boheme (1926) made the deepest impression (44). Both were films filled with pathos; and while the former attracted Chen by its beautifully depicted scenes, the latter struck him and other members of Nanguo she as they saw the close similarity between

(42) Personal interview with Chen Baichen, November 12, 1983.

(43) The influence of Chaplin on Chen may not be one of the conscious assimilation kind; but subconsciously, Chen might have been affected by Chaplin's comedies in his own comedy writings. In a personal interview held in November 12, 1983, Chen did not deny such a possibility.

(44) Personal interview with Chen Baichen, November 12, 1983.

their own lives and the lives of the Bohemians depicted in the films (45). It becomes apparent that it was not only the technique of Western film making that impressed the young Chen, but also the life style and emotion portrayed through characters and situations in the films. But since Chen's main attention during the 1920s and 1930s was not on films, the influence of such films on him was only minimally significant. As far as Western influence is concerned, Chen was more affected by theatrical works, as well as literary theories which drew him nearer to the path of realism.

From the above, it can be seen that like most modern Chinese playwrights, Chen was inevitably subjected to the influence of the West during the 1920s and 1930s. However, compared with other playwrights like Hong Shen, Cao Yu and Ding Xilin 丁西林, the Western influence on Chen was only slight and somewhat superficial. This, to a great extent, is due to the different type of education that they received. Basically, Chen was brought up and educated much in the traditional Chinese way, and he did not have the opportunity to enter formal university or receive Western education. Apart from translations, he

(45) Chen saw the film in 1928, at that time, he was a member of Nanguo she and was deeply impressed by the film as well. See Chen, 'Cong yulonghui dao Nanguo yishu xueyuan', Zhongguo huaju yundong wushinian shiliao ji, 1985, vol.2, pp.17-18.



gained no access to Western literary works and theories. His 'roaming' life (46) since he left Nanguo she in 1929 added more difficulties to his acquiring deeper knowledge of Chinese literature, let alone of Western literature. Thus, Chen's saying that he was no disciple of a particular dramatist or guiding principles is justifiable. He learned the trade of playwriting not so much from academic studies as from long years of individual effort and experience in the theatre. The Western influence, no doubt, had acted upon him; but it had never taken up a predominant position. All the time, it worked and converged with other forces, and as a result, the works which emerged were more the products of several converging forces than of a single distinguishable factor.

The other influence which is also worth noting is that of the traditional force. It is an aspect easily overlooked by critics. To many, modern Chinese writers are often reckoned as advocates of new ideas, and they are ready to reject traditional values and thinkings. For Chen, though he regarded himself a "revolutionary" (47),

(46) Chen led an unsettled life of poverty and hardship after he left Nanguo she. He moved from one place to another, and even travelled as far as Japan. See Qu Shigong 瞿史公, 'Guhong changzheng shi liangban' 孤鴻長征 失良伴, Jutan waishi 劇壇外史, 1940, pp.47-50; and Chen Baichen, 'Piaobo niannian' 漂泊年年, Zhong shan 鍾山, 1988, nos.1-3.

(47) There are many instances in which Chen suggested that he demanded himself to live as a revolutionary. His denunciation of his own literary works in 1930 was considered by him as an act setting him on the path towards being a revolutionary.

he could not disregard the traditional force totally. First, there is the traditional literary theory of 'wen yi zaidao' 文以載道, that is, literature is meant to convey the 'dao', or "moral Way" as James Liu translated it (48). Second, there is the traditional Chinese drama which was deep-rooted and widely influential among the Chinese public.

As is commonly known, in traditional Chinese criticism, 'wen yi zaidao' has been the most influential theory among others. For centuries, it has been the orthodox literary theory and most Chinese intellectuals have been only too anxious to abide by it. Under this theory, literature is taken mainly as "a means to achieve political, social, moral or educational purpose" (49). Though many changes have been brought about since the May Fourth Era, this concept of literature has never wavered. On the contrary, the chaotic and unsteady political and social situations in China in the twentieth century have drawn more Chinese writers to the pragmatic theory of literature. In the case of Chen, the influence of this theory can be seen through his works as well as his attitude towards playwriting.

(48) James J. Y. Liu, Chinese Theories of Literature, 1975, p.16.

(49) Ibid., p.106.

The introduction of the traditional theory of 'wen yi zaidao' to Chen can be traced back to his childhood. As mentioned above, Chen's first acquaintance with Chinese literature was made through his mother who used to tell him stories taken from classical literature with a strong emphasis on their moral aspects. The actual effect of this kind of 'teaching' is hard to estimate, but there is little doubt that gave Chen early familiarity with the idea of literature serving moral or educational purpose.

From 1930 onwards, Chen's concern with the morals of his works has become visible through his plays. He rejected his early works which were written for pure amusement and set himself the task of creating works with moralistic and instructive intentions. This shift from the writing of short stories and novels to playwriting, in fact, can be considered as partly the result of his pragmatism. He realized how drama could be taken as a means to educate the masses, and he upheld the pragmatic function of drama. In other words, he saw it his responsibility as a playwright to create works which could achieve educational goals. In this respect, his thinking coincides with the traditional theory of 'wen yi zaidao'; though his "dao" differs from the "dao" recognized in traditional Chinese criticism, the basic attitudes are the same. It might be fair to say that Chen's attachment to the traditional theory was only a subconscious one, nevertheless, the

significance lay not in whether it was conscious or subconscious, but in the result it created. In later chapters, in the discussion of Chen's plays, we shall see how moral obligation has taken a part in Chen's playwriting.

A further point to be added in reference to the influence of the traditional on Chen is that of traditional drama. From what Chen has written on this subject, there is little evidence to indicate that the traditional genre was at all influential. According to Chen, as a child, he had resented the jingxi (Peking opera) 京戲 (50). Even after he had developed an interest in drama in the late 1920s, his resentment towards jingxi had not subsided. His early play, Fenhewan, though modelled on a jingxi of the same title, was in fact a result of his negative attitude towards the traditional form. It appears that during Chen's early creative life, the traditional drama had little impact on him.

But a change took place during the late 1930s. In 1940, in his book Xiju chuanguo jianghua, Chen first mentioned the sinification (zhongguohua) of the spoken drama. He wrote:

".....in your creation of plays, you have to

(50) See Chen Baichen, Jimo de tongnian, 1985, pp.121-126.

discard your prejudices, and be brave enough to invent a new form! -- But that form has to be a form bearing the characteristics of the Chinese style (zhongguofeng)." (51)

This was the first overt statement of Chen giving approval to traditional drama. Later in the same book, he suggested that playwrights should on the one hand accept the Western methods of playwriting which were applicable to the Chinese, while on the other hand inherit the essence of traditional drama. This shows that by 1940, Chen had adopted a different attitude towards the traditional genre. He had found in the old form an essence which was of great value to modern playwriting, and he had fallen in with others' views on the creation of new works through borrowing from tradition. During the 1950s, he published three articles on traditional drama (52). Of the three, one focusses on the reform of traditional drama, while the other two are reviews of local traditional forms. Though all three are short pieces, they reveal the basic attitude of Chen towards traditional drama: positive and affirmative. Chen admitted that his knowledge of traditional drama was meagre, but he was drawn to it through the performances, and he was convinced that traditional drama still had a

(51) Chen Baichen, Xiju chuanguo jianghua, 1940, p.62.

(52) The three articles are: 'Menwai tan xiqu' 門外談戲曲, Xiqu bao 戲曲報, 1950, vol.1, no.1, p.5; 'Chuanju zagan' 川劇雜感, Xiju bao 戲劇報, 1957, no.21, pp.42-43; and 'Huaju zatan' 淮劇雜談, Xiju bao, 1958, no.22.

role to play at that time.

It is inevitable that Chen's change of attitude towards traditional drama should have some effect on his own playwriting. In his plays written since the late 1930s, there were signs which suggested the influence of traditional drama. It is particularly notable in his portrayal of negative personages, which had much resemblance to the portrayal of choujiao (broad comedians) 丑角 in traditional drama. Besides, the influence of Chuanju (traditional drama of Sichuan) 川劇 is also noteworthy. As commonly known within China, Sichuan people are characterized by their great sense of humour, and Chuanju is best known for its comedy, which is considered as the most outstanding and successful among Chinese regional dramas (53). Though Chen had never mentioned his indebtedness to Chuanju, the fact that he had spent nearly nine years in Sichuan province during war years suggests the possibility of the influence of Chuanju on him. Moreover, he did admit that he was fascinated by Chuanju, particularly by the humour manifested through its comedies (54). It is very unlikely therefore, that the highly reputed comedy of Chuanju did not leave any marks on Chen's own comedies.

(53) See the editorial notes to Chuanju xiju ji 川劇喜劇集, 1962, p.1.

(54) See 'Chuanju zagan', Xiju bao, 1957, no.21, p.42.

To conclude, it is apparent that in the writing of plays, Chen has not followed definite trends or principles. In the course of his career, he has received influences from both tradition and the West, but neither of them has played the dominant part in his playwriting life. As he puts it, he learned his business mainly from the theatres (55). It was only after 1950, as a result of his joining the Chinese Communist Party, that Chen began to take a definite direction in his playwriting, and to adopt a firm attitude towards literary creation. Until then, notwithstanding his strong tendency towards realism and proletarian literature, he had never made himself the disciple of any one doctrine, and had successfully produced works which surpassed the monotonous plays of resistance and showed his originality.

Chen's views on playwriting

Concerning the art of playwriting, Chen did not mention much in his writings in the past. After his rehabilitation in the late 1970s, several articles of his which dealt mainly with this subject have been published (56). But since they were written in the 1970s and 1980s,

(55) Personal interview with Chen Baichen, November 12, 1983.

(56) These include 'Xiju kongtan' 戲劇空談, Qunzhong luncong 群眾論叢, 1979, no.1; 'Shehui xiaoguo yu zerengan ji qita' 社會效果與責任感及其他, Qingchun 青春, 1980, no.6; and 'Nanguan yu xiwang, chuangxin yu jicheng' 難關與希望, 創新與繼承, Juben, 1981, no.3, pp.2-8.

they might not reflect his views during his prolific years in the 1930s and 1940s. To ensure a more complete and faithful account of his views on playwriting during different stages of his creative life, attention has to be given to what he has said about this topic both in the distant past and in recent years.

The first article which Chen wrote on drama appeared in 1933, after he had written and published five one-act plays which were mainly of an experimental nature. The article was written in jail, and was titled Zhongguo minzhong xiju yundong zhi qianlu 中國民衆戲劇運動之前路 . As the title suggested, Chen's attention at that time was drawn to the popular drama, or the mass theatre. He saw drama as an art which "imitates life, and reflects life" (57), and assumed that the major task of playwrights was the reflection of the life of the masses. He wrote:

"Our dramatists of the people should write on behalf of the masses, and should extract from the life of the masses the materials for their plays. Only plays which portrayed our own life and discussed our own problems will be readily accepted by the public, and this is the type of plays which are most needed in the popular drama movement." (58)

(57) Chen Baichen, 'Zhongguo minzhong xiju yundong zhi qianlu', Shandong minzhong jiaoyu yuekan, 1933, vol.4, no.8, pp.11-19.

(58) Ibid.

In order to allow the general public to understand and accept the plays, as well as to be "educated" (59), Chen suggested that the artistic level of the plays performed should be lowered accordingly. Obviously, his approach at that time was basically audience oriented. He did not expand on the idea of how drama imitates and reflects life, but he showed no doubt of the concept that drama belongs to the people, and that playwrights are the spokesmen for the masses.

This view, in fact, was nothing new or original. If one considers the extensive debate about the popularization (dazhonghua) of the theatre in the 1930s, and the pervasive call for the emergence of plays which reflected the daily life and hopes of the masses, then Chen's article must be viewed more as an open declaration of his acceptance of the dominant views of that time than an expression of new ideas.

Up till the eve of the Sino-Japanese War, Chen wrote nothing more on the theory of drama. But his plays written during this period clearly show his growing tendency towards using drama as a means of social and political criticism. His attention shifted gradually from the 'theatre for the masses' to social consciousness

(59) Ibid. The word "educated" was used by Chen in the article and it was taken as one of the main functions of drama.

plays. Instead of confining his main attention to the lower social classes, he began to enlarge his scope and include intellectuals and bureaucrats in his portrayal of characters. The fact that there was always a moral in his plays suggested that he was more and more conscious of using drama as a means to reform society.

When war broke out in 1937, Chen, like most of his contemporaries, adopted a very pragmatic attitude towards playwriting and the theatre. Just as his playwriting technique was beginning to show maturity, his ideas of what playwriting should be about became more centred and definite too. Unlike his early period, he took more chances to express his ideas and thinkings, and his views on playwriting were best revealed in his book, Xiju chuangzuo jianghua, as well as in the prefaces to a few of his important plays written during war years (60).

Principally, Chen's ideas of playwriting during this period (war years and the years before the new regime of 1949) were evolved from his basic conviction that drama is a means, not an end, and its purpose is to achieve certain effects on an audience, enabling them to gain an understanding of life and to view life in a better perspective, as well as to help

(60) Examples are the prefaces to Luanshi nannu 亂世男女 (1939), Qiushou 秋收 (1941) and Dadi huichun 大地回春 (1941).

influence their behaviour. He felt the plight of his country, and he firmly believed that the theatre had to be channelled towards bettering the social and political structure. However, unlike some other playwrights, he had not plunged himself totally into the writing of war propaganda plays. To our relief, he did not understand 'resistance drama' in a narrowly literal sense: as mere propaganda for the cause of resistance; but realized that 'resistance drama' was "only a slogan, not a creative method in playwriting" (61). To him, drama cannot be void of artistic value, and it must be committed to life. He has discussed this latter point at length in his writings.

According to Chen, all arts are products of life. Through drama and other literature, life is reflected. But he believes that the reflection of life in art and literature is different from a mirror reflection, because it does not show every single triviality of life flatly and unmistakably. He wrote in 1940:

"In drama and other literature, we find the essence of life, life being refined. It does not depict every aspect of life phenomena, but concentrates on the revelation of the essence of life which has undergone the process of selection and excavation. In other words, it is the depiction of reality. Such depiction should not only reveal what life is ,

(61) Chen Baichen, Xiju chuangzuo jianghua, 1940, p.3.

but what life should be. The better a play or a literary work reveals the most important and essential aspect of life, the higher is its value."
(62)

So, the main concern for Chen in playwriting is the "depiction of reality". Accordingly, playwrights are no more just "spokesmen for the masses", but also bear the responsibility to "depict reality" and create works which "reveal what life is, and what life should be". To accomplish this task, Chen chose realism as his creative method and considered it the only possible way. As he commented in 1940:

"As far as creative method is concerned, we are realists consistently. Our task is to depict reality." (63)

Since the term 'realism' has always been ambivalent and widely disputed among critics, it is useful to give an idea of Chen's understanding of it. From what he has written on this subject, his basic concepts concerning realism can well be summarized below:

- (a) It is the portrayal of life with fidelity; it reflects life and gives a truthful representation of the essential features of reality;
- (b) Works of realism should stand on a higher plane, instruct and direct life;

(62) Chen Baichen, Xiju chuangzuo jianghua, 1940, pp.10-11.

(63) Ibid., p.3.

- (c) The subject matter should be contemporary, historical plays are to be written only with contemporary implications;
- (d) Only typical characters in typical circumstances should be portrayed;
- (e) Playwrights should adopt an impersonal and analytical attitude, and should rely on observation.

Apparently, Chen had never doubted the superiority of 'realism' among various creative methods. It fits in with his idea of using drama as a means to reform society, and with his own strong moral obligation as a playwright. As a consequence, in his discussions on playwriting, the contents of plays, and the realistic aspects in particular, are given priority.

Regarding Chen's views on playwriting during this period, there are two points which are also noteworthy. The first concerns the self-expression of writers through their works. In the preface to his play Dadi huichun (Spring Returns to the Land) 大地回春 (1941), Chen mentions this aspect which he seldom touched upon. The preface was written in the form of a reply letter to Ba Ren 巴人. In the preface, Chen pointed out that it is only in one's literary works that a writer's true feelings and thoughts are revealed. He believed that every literary work is a revelation and self-expression of the writer's mind; in other words, it is the mind and soul of

the writer which give life to the literary work. However, he also confessed that in practice he failed to be always true to his creative works, and that such failure had caused him much distress and pain. This confession is significant, as it throws more light on the study of Chen's views as well as his plays.

The other noteworthy point is the discussion of 'exposition literature'. The subject was raised by Chen first in the late 1930s after his satire Luanshi nannu (Wartime Men and Women) (1939) had evoked criticism for being pessimistic (64). The charge focused on his harsh exposure of the darkness in society, which, according to certain critics, led only to despondency among the nation, and especially among those supporters of the resistance against Japan. In reply to this, Chen put forward and expounded his ideas on the treatment of 'exposure' (baolu 暴露) in literature. "'Exposure'," he pointed out, "to a certain extent should not be criticized. To conceal a malady for fear of its treatment is not a national virtue; and a hyperbolical nation who is ignorant of its shortcomings will only perish!" (65) Thus he rejected the idea of covering up the flaws in society. On the contrary, he believed that literature should expose

(64) Chen had given a short account of the criticisms on Luanshi nannu in his preface to Qishou.

(65) Preface to Luanshi nannu, 1939, p.V.

the darker aspect of society, so as to let the masses learn the truth and to bring forth reforms. In this respect, a writer exposes darkness not out of pessimism, but out of the urge to reform, and the pursuit of brightness. Chen wrote: "Only those who are in keen pursuit of brightness will expose the darkness ruthlessly." (66) It is apparent that he denied the charge of pessimism because of 'exposure', and objected to ^{the} view that literature should only depict the bright side of society while the dark aspect should be concealed.

It should be noted that at the time Chen spoke up for exposure in literature, there was a growing pressure in the Nationalist held area against exposing darkness in literary works (67). Writers advocating 'exposure' were criticized for pessimism towards the resistance, creating split within the united front, and comforting defeatists and Japanese collaborators. Under such a situation, the voice out of Chen's views was not only an evidence of his adherence to the principle that literature should portray the truth in

(66) Preface to Luanshi nannu, 1939, p.V.

(67) Since the emergence of Zhang Tianyi's 張天翼 Huawei xiansheng 華威先生 in 1938, there was an anti-exposure tendency in the Nationalist held area. Writers who wrote literature of exposure were criticized for being pessimistic and encouraging the enemies. See Wang Yao, Zhongguo xinwenxue shigao, 1951, vol.2, p.31; and Su Guangwen 蘇光文, 'Baolu yu fengci rengjiu xuyao' 暴露與諷刺仍舊需要, Guotonggu kangzhan wenyi yanjiu lunwen ji 國統區抗戰文藝研究論文集, 1984, pp.271-280.

reality and should bring about reforms in society, but also a revelation of his determination to refuse to write in compliance with a dominant doctrine which he did not believe in.

Since the setting up of the new regime in 1949 and Chen's joining the Communist Party in the subsequent year, a new phase started in Chen's creative life. During the first seventeen years of the Communist rule, Chen wrote a relatively large number of articles, but few were of real significance, except that they plainly reflected his adoption of Communist literary doctrines. Literature became an instrument for the furtherance of revolution. Political demands were to prevail over artistic ones, and writers had to abide by the principles of socialist realism, party spirit and the typical. However, since most of these articles were short pieces which appeared to be written in compliance with party demands, they fail to present a full picture of Chen's ideology during this period. Furthermore, the fact that he had almost given up his playwriting under the new regime inevitably invites our suspicion over the extent of his conviction to Communist literary doctrines. It seems that his role as a Communist had come into conflict with his role as a playwright, and concerning the art of playwriting, his attitude wavered, and he had never succeeded in finding for himself 'the doctrine of the

mean'.

Little comment can be made for the period between 1966 and 1977 since Chen was persecuted and stripped off the right to write. The eleven years left a big gap in Chen's creative life. In 1978, Chen resumed his writings and took opportunities to express his views and thoughts. When compared with his writings written in earlier stages, Chen's writings after his rehabilitation showed less constraint and greater depth.

Generally speaking, Chen's attitude towards drama and playwriting after 1977 was still pragmatic in nature. He still adhered to the principles of socialist realism, and considered moral obligations towards the country and fellowmen the sacred mission of a writer. However, on matters concerning the entertainment element of drama, 'exposure' in literature and the social effects of literary works, Chen's emphasis shifted slightly, and it is therefore particularly noteworthy.

In the history of Chinese traditional drama, as in the West, the entertainment aspect had always held an important position. The Chinese word for 'drama', xiju 戲劇, denotes something entertaining and fun, and it bears the same character as the word 'play', youxi (playing games) 遊戲. It is a common phenomenon therefore, to find in Chinese traditional drama highly amusing or

entertaining elements. However, since the beginning of the twentieth century, the attention of the intelligentsia had shifted to the educational aspects of literature, and 'to instruct' had been given much higher priority to 'to delight'. Chen, ever since the publication of his first article on drama in 1933, had shown himself deeply devoted to the idea of writing plays for instructive and moralistic purposes. There had never been any mention of the entertainment aspect of drama in his writings for decades. Yet in 1979, in a talk on playwriting to university students, Chen touched on the subject and gave it great emphasis. He pointed out: "Audience who pay money, queue for tickets, or sometimes even get involved in 'back door dealings' to obtain tickets, come to the theatre for amusement." (68) For the first time, Chen had placed great importance to the element of entertainment in drama. Though he did not give it a lengthy discussion, his view was clear; and notwithstanding his remark "I do not object to the educational function of drama", his rejection of the purely instructive and political plays was by no means obscure. When concluding the discussion on the subject, Chen emphatically commented:

(68) Chen Baichen, 'Xiju kongtan', in Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1983, p.108. The article was first published in Qunzhong luncong, 1979, vol.1.

"From the point of view of the audience, he comes to the theatre for entertainment. Therefore, a writer -- a true writer of the people, should first take the demands of the audience into account, and consider if his play can entertain the audience. No play can be educational if the audience are not amused by it in the first place." (69)

When compared this with Chen's views expressed in earlier years, the difference is easily discernible. However, it should be noted that Chen's mention of the entertaining aspect of drama was not necessarily a result of his change of attitude towards playwriting. Though Chen had never emphasized the entertainment aspect before 1979, there was no evidence that he rejected the entertainment element in drama. Instead, from his plays written during the 1930s and 1940s, we can always find signs showing his attempt to strike the balance between the two functions of drama -- to delight and to instruct. This can be seen in the discussions in later chapters. Nevertheless, Chen's mention of the entertainment aspect of drama in 1979 is significant. It indicates that Chen was aware of the fault in the dogma governing playwriting, and he felt the urgency to raise the issue while the atmosphere in society was more open and free.

While Chen had shown a more open attitude on the function of drama in the late 1970s and 80s, his views

(69) Chen Baichen, 'Xiju kongtan', in Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1983, p.109.

towards 'exposure' in drama and the social effects of literature seemed less 'liberalized'. Since the fall of the 'Gang of Four', the issues of 'exposure' in drama and the social effects of literature had been widely and heatedly discussed among party intellectuals and literary critics. In Chen's writings since the late 1970s, much attention was also given to the discussion of these issues. As both issues are closely related to the central question of 'what should be written and what composed a good play', Chen's views on them are, to a great extent, reflections of his value judgements of plays.

As a matter of fact, 'exposure' in drama has long been a subject of dispute among modern playwrights and critics in China. As mentioned above, during the late 1930s, Chen had been actively involved in the discussion of it, and had in practice written plays which aimed at satirizing and exposing the dark aspects of society. His attitude towards 'exposure' in drama, then, was firm and positive. But since 1949, he seemed to adopt a different attitude. In a talk held in 1962 on the writing of comedy, he openly declared that the situation in society had changed, and during a new era, a new kind of satirical comedy should appear (70). Playwrights should be cautious

(70) See Chen Baichen, 'Xiju zatan' 喜劇雜談, Juben, 1962, no.5, pp.23-29.

that the targets of their satire should be the enemies of the country, that is, the enemies of the socialist state. Conflicts and contradictions among the people within the country are only to be viewed as matters which can be solved internally through mild means. The people are not to be satirized, and their faults are not to be 'exposed', but reflected in a gentle way with a tone of understanding. This is based on the good will of the playwright to protect the people and to educate them. Thus, instead of giving an enthusiastic support to the writing of satire and exposure, he advocated the idea of using literature only as a means to attack the 'enemies' and to educate the masses. However, due to various reasons, the issue was not pursued by Chen in subsequent years, and it was only until the late 1970s that the subject reappeared in his talks and writings.

From what he wrote in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it is evident that his attitude towards 'exposure' had undergone more changes since 1962. In 1979, he made his first comment after his rehabilitation on the subject of 'exposure' (71). The comment is not particularly enlightening, as there is still a sense of caution and reserve in it. Yet the change is already

(71) See Chen Baichen, 'Xiju kongtan', in Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1985, pp.110-112.

visible. It appears that he had adopted a more moderate attitude towards 'exposure' in literature, an attitude which is not as positive as the one he took in the 1930s and 1940s, but not as 'conservative' as that expressed after 1949 and before the Cultural Revolution. On the one hand, he adhered to the principle that drama should reflect the reality and thus 'exposure' is essential. But on the other hand, he upheld the viewpoint that all literature under the era of socialism should aim at protecting the socialist structure, and should never, in under any circumstances, attack society without due consideration of the possible harm it might cause. To balance the two, he suggested that drama should not only expose the darkness in society, but should eulogize its bright aspects too. He stated:

"Only a true revolutionary artist can handle appropriately the elements of eulogy and exposure in literature. The fundamental duty of a revolutionary artist is: to expose all those ill forces which are harmful to the people and to eulogize the revolutionary struggle of the people." (72)

It is plain that though Chen has moderated his views concerning 'exposure' in literature, there is still a strong influence of dogma in his viewpoint. 'Exposure' is to be approved only when it is contained within revolutionary context and, even then, only when it appears alongside

(72) Chen Baichen, 'Xiju kongtan', in Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1985, p.110.

eulogy. Thus Chen further commented that in a play the elements of 'exposure' and eulogy are always so closely interwoven that they cannot be dealt with separately. In this respect, it can be seen that Chen's attention is no longer focused on the literature of 'exposure' but rather on so called revolutionary literature which rates the "eulogizing of the struggle between brightness and darkness" as of primary importance (73). According to this viewpoint, the task of playwrights is not only to reflect the conflicts and contradictions in reality, but more importantly, to show where it is moving. It must be moving towards the victory of the good forces, so that the struggle between brightness and darkness will finally end up in the defeat of the latter. This, in fact, is the standard Chinese Communist Party line.

Inevitably, Chen's belief in revolutionary literature led him also to the concept of the social effects of literature. In 1979, in the congratulatory address made by Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 the Fourth Congress of the Chinese Literary and Artistic Workers, Deng mentioned the social effects of literature (74).

 (73) See Chen Baichen, 'Xiju kongtan', in Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1985, pp.110-112.

(74) Deng pointed out that writers should be responsible to the people and should seriously consider the social effects of their works. See Zhongguo wenxue yishu gongzuozhe disici daibiao dahui wenji 中國文學藝術工作者第四次代表大會文集, 1980, p.5.

Since then, the issue has become a frequent topic of discussions. It is significant that the concept was received with much enthusiasm by Chen, who, though basically audience-oriented, had never been so conscientious about the particular effects of literary works on society before the 1950s. The phenomenon may be taken as a sign which reveals the keynote of Chen's ideas of drama since 1949.

Chen's theory of the social effects is based on the assumption that the writer must be responsible to his country and fellowmen, and that their duty is to elevate the mind of the people, not to lead them to despair and pessimism. Under such an assumption, in the writing of plays, the playwright should act as the "spokesmen for the people, as well as spokesmen for the Party" (75). Though the phrase "spokesmen for the people" is placed before "spokesmen for the Party", there is no indication that the interests of the people should be given priority, as it is again taken for granted that the Party stands for the interests of the people. It is apparent that even after his persecution during the Cultural Revolution, Chen had not forsaken faith in the socialist literature credo which requires that literature promote the cause of a socialist society and looks upon the writer as a kind of servant of

(75) Chen Baichen, 'Xiju kongtan', in Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1985, p.112.

the state.

Chen's faith in socialist literature, undoubtedly, has been responsible for his firm concept of the social effects of literature in the 1980s. Though he rebukes the practice of inflicting pressure or constraint on writers whose works may produce bad influences on society, he advocates the idea of judging the value of a literary work by its social effects. To justify this, he points out that the criteria for assessing the value of a literary work are the ideological content and artistic intensity. Since, he argues, works which richly embody the above qualities are always accompanied by good social effects, this implies that a literary work of high value cannot do without the latter. In other words, literary works which do not contribute to the bettering of society or the promotion of the people's aspirations could never be highly rated. This explains why he put so much emphasis on the social effects of literature and expound on this belief in statements such as "it is entirely essential to hope for the emergence of literary works which have good social effects and thus exert better influence on the state and country." (76)

Notwithstanding the controversy over the issue of social effects of literary works within and outside China, Chen's view towards the issue appears resolute. It is

(76) Chen Baichen, 'Nanguan yu xiwang, chuangxin yu jicheng', Juben, 1981, no.3, p.3.

noteworthy that the concept exerted a strong influence on Chen, and that, at the same time, it created certain constraints on him. Since 1980, on a number of occasions, Chen has expressed his fear of the harmful effects of satirical writings which were written without careful consideration. In an article published in 1980, Chen made an analogy between a writer who writes satires and a physician (77). By use of this analogy, Chen made clear his view that a writer should consider the social effects of his satire before engaging in writing it, just as a physician has to be cautious before he writes out a prescriptions. On another occasion, Chen made an analogy between the state of the country and a sinking ship (78). The ship has to be repaired so as to enable it to sail safely across the rough and stormy sea. Similarly, the country needs 'repairing' too. Every measure taken should be aimed at saving the country. Obviously, both analogies are elaborations of the same idea that a playwright should restrain himself from attacking society or the state.

It is not difficult to discern that during the late 1970s and early 1980s Chen adopted a more moderate and cautious attitude in matters concerning 'exposure' and

(77) See Chen Baichen, "'Huiji jiyi" yu jiangjiu "liao Xiao", "諷刺忌醫"與講究"療效", Wenyi yanjiu 文藝研究, 1980, no.2, pp.19-21.

(78) See Chen, 'Nanguan yu xiwang, chuangxin yu jicheng', Juben, 1981, no.3, p.6.

social effects. This attitude, however, is to be differentiated from that which he adopted in the 1950s and 1960s. Though in both cases, the constraint is apparent; yet, while the constraint during the 1950s and 1960s came mainly from the Party and government, the constraint in the late 1970s and 1980s was to a great extent self-imposed. It is understandable that as Chen advances more towards old age, his urge to see the state in peace and stability increases; and as it is a social structure which he has helped to create, he feels a responsibility to protect it. This of course, is again consistent with strong sense of moral obligation which has never forsaken him.

To summarize, throughout Chen's creative life, he has adhered strictly to the principle that drama is a means to achieve moral, social, political, or educational purposes, and it has to belong to the people. Though his emphasis has shifted slightly during the years, the keynote is the same. To him, drama is never an art which is written for art's sake, nor can it be an expression of purely individual sentiments. As a playwright, he sees it as his responsibility to act as a spokesman for the people, and to serve his country with great faith. This is the force which attracted him to the creative path, and is also the force under which the majority of modern Chinese playwrights emerged.

CHAPTER 3: PLAYS WRITTEN BEFORE THE OUTBREAK OF
THE SINO-JAPANESE WAR (1930-1937)

Introduction

As an amateur, Chen wrote his first play in 1930, at the age of twenty-two. The play, titled Fenhewan, was based on a well-known Chinese folk-tale, and was adapted from a Peking opera of the same title. It was published in the following year in Xiaoshuo yuebao, a leading periodical in the 1920s and 1930s headed by Mao Dun 茅盾.

Chen's creativity in drama first became apparent during his prison years. His imprisonment from 1932 to 1935 deprived him of only his physical freedom, but not his spiritual freedom. During his imprisonment, Chen remained an amateur in playwriting and became more productive. In less than two years, he wrote seven plays which included Chuxi (New Year Eve) 除夕 (1934), his first full-length play. He began to make his own stories and showed more creativity in his plays. By the time he left prison, he was able to make his living by turning himself into a 'garreteer' in the foreign settlement in Shanghai. By the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, he had written another eight plays, and so his plays at that time amounted to sixteen in total.

Of the sixteen plays written during this period

(1930-1937), it is significant that only four were full-length plays, and that all four of these, with the exception of Chuxi, were all written towards the end of this period. This can be easily explained as this period was only the embryonic stage of Chen's playwriting career, during which he was very much engaged in the learning of the trade through imitation and experimentation. As Chen confessed in 1981, he did not attempt full-length plays at the outset of his career. He believed that it was essential for a beginner to learn the skills through practising writing one-act plays (1). Besides, the fact that Chen wrote more for publication than for performance during this period was most probably another explanation for his preference in writing one-act play. Practically speaking, the chance of a one-act play getting published was always greater than a full-length play, especially if one is considering periodicals. In fact, we find that it was after having written seven one-act plays that Chen made his move towards writing full-length plays.

Like most playwrights in their embryonic stage, Chen could not resist the influence of other established writers, especially those whom he was acquainted with. In his plays written during this period, the traces of

(1) See Chen Baichen, 'Cong wo zenyang kaishi xiexi shuoqi', Xiao juban, 1981, no.4, p.3.

certain writers' works are easily discernible. One earliest example was Fenhewan, which Chen openly admitted as an imitated work of Ouyang Yuqian's Pan Jinlian. Others such as Chuxi and Fuzi xiongdi (Father and Sons) 父子兄弟 (1935) also revealed some affinity with the works of Mao Dun and Tian Han respectively. In the former, notwithstanding Chen's insistence of its originality in his postscript (2), there is a close resemblance between it and Mao Dun's novelette, Linjia puzi 林家鋪子 (1932). As for the latter, it suggested a correspondence with Tian Han's play, Jiangcun xiaojing 江村小景 (1927) (3). These earlier plays of Chen, to a various degree, revealed the influences Chen was under during this period, particularly in respect of choice and treatment of subject matter. There was already, at this early stage, a tendency to present social issues and to portray the ordinary and the oppressed in plays set in times of chaos and turmoil.

But Chen did not confined himself to the influence of one dramatist or doctrine; on the contrary, he allowed himself much room for experimentation during the early

(2) See Wenxue, 1934, vol.3, no.1, p.266.

(3) Chen openly admitted that Fuzi xiongdi was an imitation of Tian Han's Jiangcun xiaojing. See Chen Baichen, 'Tianlao yishi sanze' 田老軼事三則, in Tian Han 田漢, 1985, pp.58-59.

years of his playwriting career. It is to be noted that the sixteen plays written by Chen during this period were diverse in style and content. There were plays adapted from traditional Chinese drama, like Fenhewan; plays set in historical background and dealing with historical events, like Shi Dakai de molu (Shi Dakai's Road to Ruin) 石達開的末路 and Jintiancun (The Jintian Village) 金田村; serious dramas like Guizi hao (The 'Gui' Cell) 癸字號, Dafengyu zhi xi (Stormy Night) 大風雨之夜, Jietou yejing (Street Scene at Night) 街頭夜景; and comedies like Zhenghun (Wife Wanted) 徵婚, Erlou shang (On the First Floor) 二樓上, Gongxi facai (Congratulation upon Making a Fortune) 恭喜發財. The wide range of plays he wrote in this period suggest that Chen had not set his mind on a particular type of play. Furthermore, he was deliberately trying his hand at various types to allow him the freedom to explore and experiment. Similarly, he also tried his hand at portraying various types of characters, from prisoners, the sick, and the poor, to petit bourgeois characters, intellectuals, and even national heroes.

It can also be deduced that during this period Chen had experienced little or no constraints in playwriting. He more or less adopted a trial and error attitude, and attempted a wide variety of plays as well as revealing a great diversity of approach. Even during his prison years, he managed to gain substantial freedom to write by

bribing the jailer (4). The prison walls had shut him off from the outside world, but at the same time they enabled him to concentrate fully on his creative writing.

In general, Chen's plays of this stage have not received much acclaim from critics and literary historians. When compared to his plays written during the Resistance War, his plays of this stage lie in the shadow. It has been generally agreed among critics and literary historians that his plays gained maturity only after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. Prior to the war period, his plays remained mainly attempts to hone his playwriting skills and were more of an experimental nature, aiming at publication rather than performance. Comparatively speaking, his plays written during this period were not outstanding, and contrast with his short stories and novels of the same period which were more successful. Wang Yao, a well-known literary historian, writes of Chen's achievement from 1928 to 1937:

"As for his achievement during this period, his historical plays were more well written His plays gained tremendous success during the war period, but he was not very prolific in the writing of plays during this period, and instead, his novels had enjoyed more success." (5)

While Wang Yao briefly assessed the achievement of Chen's

(4) Personal interview with Chen Baichen on August 20, 1981

(5) Wang Yao, Zhongguo xinwenxue shigao, 1951, vol.2, p.164.

plays written prior to the war period, other literary historians and critics have simply ignored Chen's plays of this stage and placed their emphasis wholly on his works during the war period. It was not until the mid 1980s when Dong Jian, a colleague of Chen in Nanjing University in the 1980s, published his research on Chen's works that a more detailed evaluation of Chen's early works was first made available. Indeed Dong Jian gave a notably high assessment of these early plays.

In Dong Jian's Chen Baichen chuangzuo licheng lun, Dong devoted more than half a chapter, out of a total of eight, on the early plays of Chen. He believed that the period prior to the Sino-Japanese War was of major importance, since it paved the way for Chen's later success. According to Dong, without such a period of hard work and experimentation, the later golden age would never have occurred (6). Dong was impressed by the wide range of plays (both as regards subject matter and form) written by Chen at such an early stage. He pointed out that they were works which closely correlated to the pulse of that era, voicing the people's cry of protest (7). Since Dong believed that "the historical significance of these plays exceeds their own ideological and artistic

(6) See Dong Jian, Chen Baichen chuangzuo licheng lun, 1985, p.84.

(7) Ibid., pp.83-84.

values" (8), he was willing to overlook the defects and problems of these plays, and to concentrate instead on their merits and how they contributed to Chen's later success. Thus, it is more appropriate to say that what Dong offers us is an appreciation of Chen's works, rather than a critical evaluation.

It is therefore necessary to probe into the individual plays so as to give a fair evaluation of Chen's plays written during this period. Four plays have been selected for detailed discussion as they are of great significance to the development of Chen's playwriting career, and are to a certain extent representative of his early plays.

(8) Dong Jian, Chen Baichen chuanguo licheng lun, 1985, p.85.

Fenhewan (Fen River Bend) 汾河灣 (1931)

Written in 1930 and published in 1931, Fenhewan was Chen's first dramatic work. The play bears the same title as a classic of Peking opera, which was based on the legend of Xue Rengui's 薛仁貴 homecoming and the killing of his own son. In the Peking opera, Xue Rengui returns home after spending eighteen years in the army, fighting for the Tang 唐 dynasty. On his way home, he meets a youth and is impressed by his skill in archery. A tiger appears. Intending to save the youth's life, Xue Rengui aims at the tiger and shoots his arrow. However, he is tricked by the ghost of one of his enemies whom he has killed in battlefield. The ghost takes his revenge and blocks his vision. So, as a result, he shoots the youth instead. It is only when he returns home that he realizes that the youth was his own son.

Chen's story was adapted from the Peking opera: the characters are the same, but the plot differs slightly. There is no ghost and no tiger in the play. Xue Rengui returns home after an uneventful journey. After a reunion with his long-parted wife, Xue is left alone in his cave-dwelling while his wife goes out to buy food and drinks. Being a suspicious man, Xue looks around the cave-dwelling and finds some mens clothing. He is furious and jumps to the conclusion that his wife has been unfaithful to him. Just at that moment his son returns home from hunting. Standing

face to face with Xue Rengui, Xue's son claims that he is the master of the house. Xue does not hesitate to draw out his sword and end the young man's life. The play ends with the return of Xue's wife, and Xue realizes the real identity of the youth whom he just killed. Here, in Chen's story, though there is the element of misunderstanding, the father is to be blamed for the death of his son, and it has nothing to do with ghost or any supernatural element.

Apart from the characters and the basic plot, Chen's Fenhewan can be regarded as a different play from the original Peking opera. The greatest difference lies in the theme. It is obvious that Chen wrote the play with a clear message: there is always a conflict between the two generations, the youngers are being ignored and oppressed by the elders, and a fight is inevitable. Furthermore, the younger generation always suffers because of the ignorance and blindness of the older generation. In the play, Chen delivers this message through the mouth of the son, Xue Dingshan 薛丁山, and it is verified through his death. Early in the play, Dingshan tells his mother, "Our generation has to fight against the older generation, it is always like that: all younger generation fights against the older generation!" He further explains, "The fault lies not with the younger generation, but with the older generation. The elders ignore the younger generation's words, do not believe in

their new ideas, and oppress them. Therefore the younger generation cannot bear it, and have to fight back." (9)

The truth of Dingshan's words is later proved through his own death. But the irony is, as Dingshan's mother puts it:

"Oh Dingshan! Just then didn't you say that the younger generation has to fight against the older generation..... But your father killed you instead!" (10) Dingshan is the victim of his father's ignorance and blindness. By having Dingshan

die at the end as a result of the misunderstanding and jealousy of his father, Chen emphasizes the theme of the suffering of the younger generation under the oppression of the older generation. In this respect, Chen's play is totally different from the traditional Peking opera.

Obviously, Fenhewan is a play more of ideas than of drama. The whole play is coloured with political theories manifesting a strong resentment of the ruling class. It emphasizes the inevitability of the fight between the and the older generations. Xue Dingshan is portrayed as the victim of the conflict between the two generations, but more importantly, he is the mouthpiece of Chen's ideas about feudalism and imperialism. Early in the play,

(9) Chen Baichen, 'Fenhewan', in Xiaoshuo yuebao, 1931, vol.22, no.4, p.518.

(10) Ibid., p.524.

Dingshan tells his mother, "So, the emperor is such a thing? Sending others to risk their lives, while he sits back and enjoys life!" (11) He further expands, "Those who fight for him are too ignorant! What is the point to risk ones own life? Fighting against those who are not the enemies of us the common people! The emperors have nothing to do after enjoying their sumptuous meals, so they seek pleasure in battles and send others to battlefields to meet their deaths!" (12) Undoubtedly, these are more the ideas and words of Chen than of the character Xue Dingshan. Later in the play, political ideas are expressed even more explicitly, again through the mouth of Xue Dingshan: "In the future, we will fight for ourselves, the common people! Fighting against those enemies who cheat us, oppress us, exploit us and slaughter us! that is, the emperors and those who do evil deeds as the emperors!" (13) These words can be taken as a declaration against feudalism and imperialism, and surely they can only be the words of Chen in the early 1930s instead of Xue Dingshan in the Tang dynasty of the seventh century

There are abundant instances of the expression of such antifeudal and anti-imperialist sentiments in the play. Not only

(11) Chen Baichen, 'Fenhewan', p.517.

(12) Ibid.

(13) Ibid., p.518.

is Xue Dingshan portrayed as one of the new generation who in his naivety already recognizes the wickedness of the ruling class, Xue Rengui's wife, Liu Yingchun 柳迎春 is also portrayed as a progressive woman who is aware of the inequality and inequity society. In the play, Liu Yingchun serves as a foil to Xue Rengui. She questions the meaning of all the internecine strife amongst the Chinese, upholds the idea that every human being has his right man and woman alike, and regards riches and fame as nothing. However, unlike Dingshan, Yingchun dares not hope to rebel. Being a woman born and raised in a feudal society, she can only lament her fate and hide her true feeling from her husband. Even so, the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist spirit in her character is not hard to discern, and there is no doubt that Chen shows sympathy towards her and the female gender in China as a whole.

When Fenhewan was first published in 1931, Chen wrote in the postscript to the play:

"It has been a long time since I last saw a performance of the 'dying' Peking opera. The day before yesterday, I was dragged by a friend to the theatre. Among the programmes, there was Fenhewan. The performance made me furious, though I had to admit that the death of Xue Dingshan gave me satisfaction. (Of course, personally I bear Xue Dingshan no grudge.) Therefore, I wrote this play in protest to the play I had recently seen." (14)

(14) Chen Baichen, postscript to Fenhewan, in Xiaoshuo yuebao, 1931, vol.22, no.4, p.524.

As it was a play written out of protest against the original Peking opera, it is no surprise that it bears a great dissimilarity to the original. Chen did not state what in the performance made him furious, but from the differences between the two plays, it is obvious that the crux lies in the subjects of feudalism and superstition. Chen's claim that the play was written under the influence of Ouyang Yuqian's Pan Jinlian and that it marked his change from escapism and artificiality to positivism and reality (15) are further proofs of his rejection of the elements of feudalism and superstition in the original Peking opera. Thus, we find in Chen's Fenhewan a new version of the traditional legend of Xue Rengui's homecoming, and as Chen confessed in 1943, it was one of the examples of the 'fanan' (reversing the verdict) 翻案 plays which were popular in the late 1920s (16).

Chen was so earnest in his desire to give the old legend new meaning and significance that he went so far as to express his own political ideas through the mouths of the play's characters. As a result, we find Xue Dingshan and Liu Yingchun speaking in a language which is completely

 (15) See Chen Baichen, 'Cong wo zenyang kaishi xiexi shuoqi', Xiao juban, 1981, no.4, p.2.

(16) See Chen, 'Lishi yu xianshi -- shiju Shi Dakai daixu' 歷史與現實——史劇《石蓮閣》代序, in Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1983, p.215. The article was first published in Xiju yuebao, 1943, no.4.

alien to the vernacular of that era. Although Chen stressed that what he wrote had nothing to do with history or legend (17), yet, since the play is ostensibly set in the Tang dynasty, the modern language used by the characters can only appear to be inconsistent and awkward, and it further reduces the persuasiveness of the play. More importantly, instead of being embodied in characters the meaning and moral of the play growing out of the life of the action, Chen reduced his characters and their actions to mere tools for the conveyance of his own ideas. Thus, the play remains unconvincing dramatically, while the characters appear lifeless and unreal.

Indeed, Chen was not the first or the only playwright who used his characters as mouthpieces. In the early 20th century, wenmingxi was already famous for this (18). Ren Tianzhi 任天知, Wang Zhongsheng 王鐘聲, Liu Yizhou 劉藝舟 and others were well known for their readiness to make use of their characters to preach ideas of their own. One of the most typical examples was Huangjin chixue 黃金赤血 which emerged in 1911. Even after wenmingxi had died

(17) See Chen, postscript to Fenhewan, in Xiaoshuo yuebao, 1931, vol.22, no.4, p.524.

(18) See Ouyang Yuqian, 'Tan wenmingxi' 談文明戲, Zhongguo huaju yundong wushinian shiliao ji, 1985, vol.1, pp.47-106; and Wang Weimin 王衛民, Preface to Zhongguo zaoqi huaju xuan 中國早期話劇選, 1987, pp.1-12.

down, the practice of using the characters as mouthpieces was still prevalent. In the early plays of Guo Morou, Tian Han, Ouyang Yuqian and others, there were abundant examples of the playwrights' using their characters as mouthpieces (19). In the case of historical drama, the device was especially distinctive, as the characters frequently went beyond their historical boundaries and spoke the same language of their playwrights. The following is a good example:

"Guard D: We were all born the same, as human beings. Why is it that they, the kings and ministers, do not have to do any work and still eat better and wear better clothes? We, the common folks, do not have good food or nice clothing, though we have worked hard for the whole of our life. They take away the harvests from us, and store it in their own barns. We plough the fields which become their fields; we earn the money which becomes their money. What's more, our bodies and lives become theirs as well. We live only if they want us to live, and if they want us to die, we have no choice but to die. It is because of them that there are so many wars, this year we fight the Qi 齊 for them, next year we are going to fight the Chu 楚 for them. There is no end to the fighting, and no matter whether we win or lose, they are always the ones who enjoy the good-life, and we, the common folks, are always the ones who suffer. Let us think more carefully, are not those people from the Qi and Chu our own brothers? What is the point to differentiate ourselves from the Qi and Chu? It is all because of the kings and ministers,

 (19) Some examples are: Guo Morou's Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君 (1923), Wang Zhaojun 王昭君 (1923), and Nie Yin 聶隱 (1925); Tian Han's Meiyu 梅雨 (1931) and Luanzhong 亂鐘 (1932); Ouyang Yuqian's Xiaoying guniang 小英雄 (1929) and Tongzhede sanjiaren 同住的三家人 (1932).

because they are enjoying the good-life and do not want to let go of it." (20)

If we compare the above with Xue Dingshan's protest against the ruling class in Fenhenwan, it is clear that there are great similarities between the two. It is obvious that Chen's Fenhewan was only one of numerous works of similar intent which gained popularity during the early period of modern Chinese drama, and the play was written under the influence of Chen's contemporaries.

As a dramatic work, Fenhewan is a failure. Chen himself realized this and admitted in 1943 that it was but a "furious" work which served only to relieve his personal discontent, and which could not leave any impression on the readers (21). However, as it represents Chen's earliest attempt at playwriting, Fenhewan allows us to probe into the state of mind of Chen at that stage, especially as regards his motivation for writing plays. The play marked the beginning of Chen's adoption of a 'positive' attitude towards literary writing, of his aim to use literary forms to express his views on society, and in particular on the contemporary political situation. But Fenhewan did not mark

(20) Guo Moruo, 'Nie Yin', in Guo Moruo juzuo quanji 郭沫若劇作全集, 1982, vol.1, p.171.

(21) See Chen Baichen, 'Lishi yu xianshi -- shiju Shi Dakai daixu', in Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1983, pp.215-216.

the beginning of Chen's playwriting career. As mentioned above, the play was written spontaneously, out of haphazard circumstances, and mainly as a protest against traditional opera. It was an ad hoc product rather than one written with deliberation. After Fenhewan, for more than two years, Chen did not make a second attempt at playwriting. It was only after he was locked up in prison that he started to write plays again.

Guizi hao (The 'Gui' Cell) 癸字號 (1933) and

Dafengyu zhi xi (Stormy Night) 大風雨之夜 (1934)

Guizi hao and Dafengyu zhi xi are two early prison works of Chen written while he was in jail in Zhenjiang 鎮江. Though they are not the earliest plays written in jail, they represent Chen's first attempt to choose contemporary issues for his subject matter and to move away from the adaptation of legends and traditional Chinese drama. Since both were written around the same time and share great similarities, it seems appropriate to discuss them together.

Before going into a detailed analysis of the plays, one point has to be noted. When Dafengyu zhi xi was first published in 1934, it was recorded at the end of the play by the playwright that the play was completed on "December 14, 1931 in Peiping (Peking) 北平" (22). The truth of the date is disputed by Dong Jian (23). Chen himself also admitted that it was a camouflage (24). Though Chen did not remember exactly when the play was written, there is little doubt that the play was one of his prison works and

(22) See Chen Baichen, 'Dafengyu zhi xi', in Wenxue, 1934, vol.2, no.2, p.270.

(23) See Dong Jian, Chen Baichen chuangzuo licheng lun, 1985, pp.102-103.

(24) Personal correspondence, October 17, 1985.

was written after the completion of Guizi hao, in view of its subject matter and the playwright's use of dramatic techniques. Since Guizi hao was published in October 1933 and Dafengyu zhi xi in February 1934, the latter might well have been written around the end of 1933. Chen's suggestion that the play was most probably written in December 1933 (25) is therefore acceptable.

Written in the early 1930s, Guizi hao and Dafengyu zhi xi were the only two among Chen's plays which focus on prison life. Since his imprisonment in September 1932, Chen had started writing again and prison life had become a recurring theme in his works (short stories and plays). Guizi hao and Dafengyu zhi xi share similarities with his short stories on prison life, in which the darkness of jail and society is the main concern, and the poor and oppressed classes are the main focus of attention. Both are one-act plays, set in the dark and filthy cells in prison where all sorts of prisoners huddled and lay in pain and distress. In Guizi hao, the whole dramatic action takes place in a cell numbered 'Gui' (one of the ten Heavenly stems 天干, used as serial numbers in China), where all the sick prisoners are locked. As 'gui' 癸 in Chinese sounds the same as 'gui' 鬼

(25) Personal correspondence, October 17, 1985.

(ghost), 'guizi hao' (the 'Gui' cell) is in fact a pun on 'guizi hao' (the cell of the ghosts). Since only the sick and poor are kept in this cell, it is the worst cell in the prison, and the life of the prisoners held here is compared to the life of ghosts. In one of his short stories, Guimen guan 鬼門關, we find the following depiction:

"Between No.5 cell and a stinking toilet, there was a cell for the sick called 'Guizi hao' 鬼字號 (the 'Gui' cell). Here, it was dark and smelly. In ordinary time, nobody dared to go in. But once you fell sick, you would be carried into this cell. Of those who went in, nine out of ten failed to return. Hence, everybody called it 'guizi hao' 鬼字號 (the cell of the ghosts)." (26)

Similarly, in Guizi hao such references to the horrible conditions in the cell are found:

"Worker: The sick people turn to ghosts once they come here! How many did you see who managed to walk out of this cell alive? This really is the cell of the ghosts! Those who come in are doomed to die!" (27)

Throughout the play, the metaphors of the grave (prison) and ghosts (prisoners) are consistently used. In one instance, Chen even explicates these metaphors into a simile, spoken through the blind man's mouth: "I think this cell is just like a grave, and we are the living corpses buried inside it." (28) Thus in Guizi hao we find a whole collection of people from

(26) Chen Baichen, 'Guimen guan', in Xiaowei de jiangshan 小魏的江山, 1937, p.55.

(27) Chen, 'Guizi hao', in Zhonghua yuebao 中華月報, 1933, vol.1, no.8, p.c3.

(28) Ibid., p.c6.

the lower social stratum, leading the lives of dogs.

The central figure of Guizi hao is a poet, who is a new comer to the 'Gui' cell. He is put in jail just because he has said something to the effect that a "certain class of people should not oppress other classes of people" (29), and is thus accused of conducting propaganda among his students. When the curtain rises, it is just before dawn. The poet cannot sleep, and the moaning and groaning of the sick prisoners bitterly distress him. Apart from the sick prisoners, the cell also houses a worker, a deserter, a blind man with his child, and a political prisoner who is going to be executed at daybreak. The play develops as conversations start among the prisoners. More and more the poet becomes aware of the suffering of the prisoners through their different backgrounds and stories. And through the guidance of the political prisoner, the poet and the other prisoners come to realize that they are being oppressed by a whole social class, not by individuals. The play ends when twilight comes, and the political consciousness of the prisoners is aroused by the death of the political prisoner.

The message of the play is clear: inequality and inequity exist in society; the poor and the sick

(29) Chen Baichen, Guizi hao, p.c2.

are being oppressed by the rich and powerful.

Towards the end of the play, the political prisoner shakes hands with everyone, and says, "Friends! Know clearly who our enemies are!" (30) This, no doubt, is also the message which the playwright wanted to convey to the readers. And with the ending:

"(The door of the jail opens, twilight enters through the opening. The whole place is lit)
Condemned Prisoner: Good! Brightness has come!
Friends! Goodbye! (He waves his hand, then walks proudly towards the light)" (31)

the notion is clear that Chen held an optimistic view, and believed that brightness will come and defeat the darkness.

To convey the above message, Chen made use of his characters. Firstly, he created a wide range of people who all came from the lower social classes: the sick, the epileptic, the opium addict, the blind man, the crippled worker, the deserter and so on. He did not give them names, but characterized them by their different positions in society. It seems that Chen deliberately gave them different and discrete identities so as to let them represent a wide range of people in society. By presenting them on stage, and allowing a chosen few (the blind man, the crippled worker and the deserter) to tell

(30) Chen Baichen, Guizi hao, p.c9.

(31) Ibid.

their stories, Chen revealed to us the misery and suffering that is the lot of the poor. However, one drawback of this technique is, that because Chen was more concerned with their representation than with their characterization, the characters appear to spring from concepts rather than from any real understanding of and sympathy for the 'real life' experiences they had lived through. Thus, apart from their different stories of how they were exploited and oppressed by the upper class, we know little of their own characters as individuals.

Secondly, Chen created the poet as the central figure to link up the whole play and to act as a medium to bring forth the stories of the other prisoners. As an intellectual, the poet is differentiated from the other inmates from the very beginning, both in his outward appearance and in his way of talking and thinking. As the deserter says, "You look at his hair, his clothing -- though they are ragged, one look at them will tell that he is a 'great master'" (32), the poet stands out distinctly among the inmates even by virtue of his physical appearance. And as he speaks with the others, his innocence and naivety are exposed, throwing the contrast between him and the other inmates into further relief. Thus the blind man says to him,

"You talk like a child -- in fact it is the talk of a 'human being', it is only that we haven't heard the

(32) Chen Baichen, Guizi hao, p.c2.

voice of a 'human being' for a long time. We are animals, our talk is the howling of animals, it is no longer like the talk of a 'human being'!" (33)

The political prisoner later on further elaborates this and points out more acutely:

"This gent here, as Blind Man said, is a child who has never seen the reality of the world. Although it is said that he is a poet, a well learned man, yet all along he has been living in a fancy labyrinth, and has never seen the tragedies of the human world." (34)

Thus he tells the Poet,

"Sir, you have been living in a world different from ours. In your world, there is the elegant quality of men, the stories are all beautiful, even if it is a tragedy, it is still full of romantic mood. But here, in our world, it is all different: our stories are full of ugliness, wickedness, pain, sadness, and they make men feel unhappy!" (35)

As a newcomer to the cell, and by virtue of not being typical of the inmates in prison, the poet is empowered to ask questions and ponder on the fate of his companions. Thus Chen allows the other inmates to disclose their stories to him, and to explain the various phenomena in the cell. Through these disclosures, the misery of the poor and the problems in society are exposed. The poet is astounded upon hearing their tragic stories and he exclaims, "Oh! Heaven! What kind of world

(33) Chen Baichen, Guizi hao, p.c4.

(34) Ibid., p.c5.

(35) Ibid.

is this! Poverty! Illness! Death!" (36) Chen makes use of the poet's typical naivety, thus as an innocent and unworldly person, the poet is made to follow the instructions of the political prisoner. Step by step the political prisoner leads the poet to a realization of what the world is really like. He makes the poet understand that "the stories of the poor are all full of ugliness and wickedness; but these are the stories of the majority in the world, these are the stories of the modern man!" (37) Towards the end of the play, the poet comes to a full realization.

"Condemned Prisoner (To the Poet): Sir, now you see clearly of this world!

Poet (Awaken from his pain): Old Huang, I see it clearly now! Too bad that I didn't meet you earlier!

Condemned Prisoner: Not at all! Not at all! My friend, I have a word to you!

Poet: What is it? Please speak! (Holds tight the hand of the Condemned Prisoner)

Condemned Prisoner: You are innocent, right?

Poet (Nods): Yes.

Condemned Prisoner: If you take me for your friend, then don't let yourself be innocent any more!

Poet (Excited): I will not let myself be innocent any more! My friend! (Holds tight his hands)" (38)

By creating the character of the poet, Chen succeeds in linking up the whole play and making his message clear.

(36) Chen Baichen, Guizi hao, p.c4.

(37) Ibid., p.c5.

(38) Ibid., p.c8.

Furthermore, as Chen himself was locked up in jail while he wrote this play, it is likely that he identified himself with the poet. This identification of himself with his personae is not uncommon in his other works. In two of his short stories of prison life (39), Chen uses first person narratives through which he depicts his own experiences, reveals his own feeling and sentiments. In Zuihou de wancan 最後的晚餐, he even records arrest, questioning, gaoling, etc. in the form of a diary, the dates of which correspond exactly with his own experiences. Just as the poet in Guizi hao comes to realize what the world is really like, Chen came across new acquaintances and broadened his view during imprisonment. This experience in turn affected his attitude towards dramatic writing. His attention turned to the masses, the voiceless majority, and he aimed at vocalising their grievances through his works. As he wrote in 1933, Chen was aware of the necessity of keeping in touch with the masses (40). He had lived among the poor and the wretched in prison, had heard their stories and had seen their sufferings, thus he considered it his duty to reveal the life of the masses in his work and to

(39) The two short stories were both published in 1936, entitled Daba 打靶 and Zuihou de wancan 最後的晚餐.

(40) See Chen Baichen, 'Zhongguo minzhong xiju yundong zhi qianlu', Shangdong minzhong jiaoyu yuekan, 1933, vol.4, no.8, pp.11-19.

become a dramatist for the masses. Thus, we see in the poet the image of Chen as well: an intellectual who came to a realization after having been locked up in jail.

Written shortly after Guizi hao, Dafengyu zhi xi picked up the same subject matter and explored it further. The setting is basically the same, but this time it is given greater importance and it even contributes a development to the play. It is an old, worn-out cell, in disrepair and on the verge of collapse. Locked up in the same cell are two main groups of prisoners: one consists of political prisoners, and the other of non-political prisoners including robbers, opium addicts, smugglers and so on. At the outset, the two groups are in conflict due to their different backgrounds and the prejudices they hold against each other. As the play goes on, the weather becomes worse and worse, and the condition of the cell becomes more and more the central issue. As a result, the conflict between the prisoners begins to dissolve as they share this common concern and become aware that they are all in the same situation. Under the guidance of a political prisoner, the prisoners come to a realization of their common plight and unite together to fight against unjust treatment. At the end of the play, the storm is raging, the cell is beginning to collapse. The prisoners join forces and despite the efforts of the gaolers to stop them, succeed in breaking through the bars of the jail, with the cell falling into pieces

behind their backs.

Obviously, in Dafengyu zhi xi, Chen put the emphasis on the reconciliation and unity of the prisoners. The incident of the cell collapsing under the storm is only used as a means to create the basis for the prisoners' unity. Being in the same cell, they become aware that they are in the same boat and that they must unite together if they want to become powerful. Their lives are endangered, and they have to fight for survival. The whole situation is highly symbolic. Chen is hinting at the unity of the masses is needed to fight for their own freedom and liberation. They are under the same roof, the cell where they are imprisoned in the structure of the old institution and society which is on the brink of destruction. There are people who want to maintain the status quo to gain more from the oppression of the masses. To save their lives, to gain freedom and liberation, the masses have to depend on their own efforts, their united force. Fighting for the same goal, they have to forget their differences and conflicts and to fight against their common enemies. To a certain extent, the collapsing cell is similar to the sinking boat described in the prologue to Liu E's Laocan youji 老殘遊記. In Laocan youji, the sinking boat is broken and full of holes, with water rushing in. The sailors, in the meantime, are searching the people for food and stripping them of clothes. They are those who try to gain benefits from the masses, while the latter (the people in the

sinking boat) know nothing of their own fate. Under Chen's depiction, the prisoners in the collapsing cell differ from the people in the sinking boat in that they are no longer ignorant of their fate, but they are standing up to fight against their enemies.

From Guizi hao to Dafengyu zhi xi, a development in Chen's central idea is discernible. In the former, there is the revelation of the suffering of the poor and oppressed, with the masses' realization of the injustice and unfairness in society at the end. In the latter, the play does not end just with the realization of the masses, but develops further with the masses launching into action. The message, therefore, is not just "to know clearly who our enemies are", but "to unite and fight against our enemies". It has shifted from the level of rational knowledge to the level of action. In other words, it has progressed from mere realization to realization followed by actual practice.

As regards theme, Dafengyu zhi xi parallels other plays being written at the same time. In Ouyang Yuqian's Tongzhude sanjiaren (1932), there are the three families who lived under the same roof, facing the same difficulties in life. They are all law-abiding people. They work hard, but only to find out that the authorities have printed new money, and the old money they saved from their

hard work has greatly depreciated. The play ends with the realization of Wang Suwei 王素微, the only intellectual in the play:

"Wang Suwei: A Ming is right in saying that we can't sit and wait for the new world to come, we have to fight for it. We will never let the rich people fool and dupe us. I understand it completely now. From now on I will work hard with the others to fight for a way out, our siege has to be broken through by ourselves after all!" (41)

When compared with Dafengyu zhi xi, the ending of Tongzhude sanjiaren is a static one. However, the idea of being under the same roof and the urgency to unite and fight against oppression is the same in both plays. Similarly, such theme can also be found in Tian Han's Meiyu 梅雨 (1931) and Yueguangu 月光曲 (1932). In the former, A Qiao 阿巧 and her boyfriend A Mao 阿毛 are both unemployed after their injuries during work. While A Mao believes in the personal struggle against adversity and ends up in prison, A Qiao joins her mother and other factory workers to fight against their bosses. In the play, through A Qiao's mouth, Tian Han tells how the factory workers are oppressed and exploited by their bosses, and how they begin to realize that "now is not the time to keep the lives of one or two, we must unite together tightly in order to survive." (42) To put this

(41) Ouyang Yuqian, 'Tongzhude sanjiaren', Ouyang Yuqian wenji, 1980, vol.1, p.134.

(42) Tian Han, 'Meiyu', Tian Han juzuo xuan, 1981, p.195.

into action, the workers stage a strike and start negotiating with the bosses over the rights of the workers. Thus, though the play ends with the suicide of A Qiao's father, the tone is an optimistic one. "Just then the rain stopped suddenly, a beam of red light shone through the window, as if fortelling the coming of a sunny day." (43) It is evident that Tian Han, in his play, places the stress on the united effort of the workers. In Yueguangqu, Tian Han further develops this theme. The play is about a Workers' Strike of a bus company in Shanghai. Wang Maolin 王茂林, one of the organizers of the strike, lives with his family in poverty. There is not much action in the play, except the visits of his friends and brother-in-law, and the sudden arrival of the police. However, through their conversations, it is revealed that the strike is gaining more and more support from the workers, and that the solidarity of the workers becomes strengthened. As one critic says, "In the history of modern Chinese drama this is one of the first plays entirely dedicated to the problems of the workers, with the author taking a position on the side of the working class." (44) Here, again, the play shares with Dafengyu zhi xi the theme of the unity of the masses against exploitation and oppression.

(43) Tian Han, 'Meiyu', Tian Han juzuo xuan, 1981, p.204.

(44) Dana Kalvodova, 'Tian Han: Yueguan', A Selected Guide to Chinese Literature 1900-1949, 1990, vol.4, p.238.

But, the realization and the unity of the masses are only made possible through some guiding force. Here, as in Guizi Hao, the political prisoner is given the role of the guiding star. Political Prisoner C, a middle-aged worker (45), is given the leading role in the struggle against oppression. He is portrayed as one who is clear-minded, aware of the situation and the problems facing the prisoners, and looking forward to brightness and freedom. He knows that they should unite together, thus he stops his fellow political prisoners from arguing with the other inmates, and tells them,

"Basically they are our friends, why set ourselves in conflict with them? We should unite together!"
(46)

Hence, it is not surprising that at the end of the play Political Prisoner C stands up among the prisoners and incites them to take action.

"All: The cell has collapsed! Open the gate!
Someone has been killed!
Political Prisoner C: Someone has been killed and you are still not going to open the gate?
Political Prisoner A: If you still won't open up, we'll force our way out!
Jailer (Looks inside again): Oh! Officer, let's open it, the cell really has collapsed!

(45) There is some confusion in the age of the Political Prisoner C. In the cast of characters before the play, he is introduced as someone in his twenties. But in the play, when he first speaks up, a direction is given by the playwright saying that he is a middle-aged man. From the way he speaks and the role he plays, it would be more consistent to take him as a middle-aged man.

(46) Chen Baichen, Dafengyu zhi xi, p.263.

Officer (Stands at the gateway, looks inside with his torch): Don't panic! What are we going to do if the gate is opened? Let's wait till the policemen arrive! What happens if we let them out and they run away? You and I will both be sacked!

All (Grasping the bars, shouting): Help! Open the gate!

Political Prisoner C (Stands behind the gate):
Fellows! What are we waiting for in here?
Waiting for it to collapse completely and all be killed? Break through it!" (47)

In effect, Political Prisoner C is the leader of the prisoners. He is the one with a clear mind and sound judgement, and he discovers the root of the problems that plague their daily lives. He helps the other inmates to understand their fate, to realize how they are being exploited by the powerful. In the course of the struggle against the jailers and officers, he unifies the political prisoners and the non-political prisoners, and leads them towards liberation. Though he might not be taken as the central figure of the play, that his is a major role is not to be disputed. In fact, in Chen's works of prison life (plays and short stories), the political prisoners always take a key position in the development of events. They are always the ones who are depicted in a good light, always the lodestar for the masses. Furthermore, in many cases, the workers among the political prisoners are depicted as the ones who

(47) Chen Baichen, Dafengyu zhi xi, p.269.

possess the highest political consciousness. From Chen's treatment of the political prisoners, we can get a glimpse of his view and attitude towards the revolution. There are strong hints to suggest that he was already very much on the side with the revolutionary forces, and that he saw the ruling class as the oppressors and exploiters.

Unlike Guizi hao, Dafengyu zhi xi does not have a central figure to link up the whole play. In fact, it does not need a central figure to make such a linkage. In Guizi hao, words play a more important role than that of action; but for Dafengyu zhi xi, the reverse is true. In the latter, throughout the play, the changes of weather and the condition of the cell have enough impetus to drive the play forward. They are the central issues of the play, upon which the fate of all the prisoners rests. Thus, as the storm and the condition of the cell worsen, the action of the play becomes more vigorous and the atmosphere becomes more tense. Here, Chen makes good use of natural phenomena. As the action of the play takes place on one stormy night, rain, wind, lightning and thunder are all employed. Chen deftly integrates these elements into his play, and lets them help in the creation of atmosphere as well as in the development of the plot. In fact, they become a part of the play itself. Throughout the play, there is always a juxtaposition of external and internal elements. On the one hand, there are all sorts of natural phenomena

taking place outside the jail, whilst inside the jail there are the rows, conflicts, and strife among the prisoners and officers. There is instability, both inside and outside the jail. As the external phenomena become more violent and vigorous, the internal situation likewise becomes more chaotic and unstable. This juxtaposition of the outward and inward situations works well throughout the play, and towards the end, the two elements fuse together in such a manner that they appear part of a single entity. The stage is filled with the human cries, the gun shots, flashes from torches, thunder and lightning. All of a sudden, it seems that both earth and heaven are exploding into chaos. The air is full of the smell of gunpowder. The tension is high. The effects are strong. And just as it comes to its climax, the curtain falls down abruptly, giving the play a heavy and forceful end. A look at the text will give us a better understanding.

"Political Prisoner C: Are we willing to die inside here?

Political Prisoner A: Let's break through the gate!

Robber A: Forward!

All: Forward!

Jailer (Flashes his torch at the gate): Anyone who dares to come out will be shot!

Political Prisoner C: Forward!

(Under the leadership of Political Prisoner C, with a loud noise, the gate is broken open. People rush out like a tidal wave, cries ring through the sky. At first, flashing dances here and there, gun shots fill the air. But all of a sudden, the flashing disappears, and there are no more gunshots. Only the shouts and cries of the people are heard, together with the clinking made by the chains of the prisoners. Suddenly, the cell falls, with a noise that pierces

the sky. The smuggler and the barber are trapped under the fallen cell, moaning with pain. The gates of the other cells are broken open one after the other, people rush out into the courtyard. Lightning continues, revealing a courtyard full of people. They are shouting, rejoicing, dancing, and like the tide at sea they advance towards the main gate) Voices of people: Forward! (Voices of people, clinking of chains, sound of rain and thunder fuse together into roars. Lightning is seen flashing across the sky. The curtain quickly falls)" (48)

Undoubtedly, Chen's employment of the natural phenomena in this play is a success. Indeed, it is not a new technique. In plays of the East and West throughout history, there are abundant examples of playwrights using the weather conditions (especially storms) to lend atmosphere to plays. Cao Yu's Leiyu 雷雨 (1934) is the best known example in modern China. In Leiyu, the thunderstorm is decisive in creating atmosphere as well as in developing the plot. When the play opens at Act I, the threat of thunderstorm is already in the air. The threat intensifies as the play goes on, and at the point when Zhou Ping 周萍 and Sifeng 四凤 discover their real identities, it breaks out and as a result takes the life of Sifeng and Zhou Zhong 周冲. Here, in Dafengyu zhi xi, Chen also allows the storm to play a predominant role. Not only does he use the storm to create atmosphere, but

(48) Chen Baichen, Dafengyu zhi xi, pp.269-270.

he lets it play an active part in the action, precipitating the collapse of the cell, thus adding more complexity and impact to the play. Furthermore, in his description of the natural phenomena, Chen also shows his precision and meticulousness. The timing is well set in order to bring out the maximum dramatic effect. Stage directions are given, clearly denoting the changes of weather conditions which correspond to the action of the play.

Apart from the use of natural phenomena, another feature which is noteworthy is the depiction of the crowd scenes. In Guizi hao, as the emphasis is on the poet's realization of what the world is really like, the crowd is mainly in the background. However, here, in Dafengyu zhi xi, since the central idea is that of the poor and oppressed rising up in revolt, the crowd is given a more important role to play. It is here that Chen first showed his potential in the manipulation of the crowd scenes. First of all, inside the fully packed cell, he carefully divides the prisoners into political, and non-political prisoners. Within each group, he again differentiates individuals. Thus, there are times when the prisoners form into two groups and set themselves into conflict, while at other times they split and argue among themselves. And of course, towards the end of the play, they dismiss their differences and join as one to fight against

their common enemies. Chen allows his crowd to change and develop along with the progression of the play. Secondly, Chen puts the crowd at the centre of the action, it is to be directly involved in all of the play's main action. Then, with the help of the weather conditions and the leaking cell, Chen injects much vitality into the crowd scenes, which turn out to be dynamic and fluid. The crowd scenes surge forward wave upon wave, and they culminate in the tidal-like final breakout at the end of the play.

In fact, during the 1930s, there were quite a number of plays written on the theme of the poor and oppressed rising up in revolt, and crowd scenes were common in them. There are the more static ones with implicit messages such as A Zhen 阿珍 (written by Feng Naichao 馮乃超 and Gong Binglu 龔冰廬) (1930), in which the people in the crowd remain bystanders, and the oppressed coolie breaks out at the end, "Can we allow them to continue to do as they like? If we are afraid of being shot dead, we will starve to death in the end!" (49) There are also others which explicitly depict the crowd rising up in revolt, like the last scene in Nianguan douzheng 年關鬥爭 (a collaborative work) (1930), in which the poor farmers are seen carrying arms and fighting

(49) Feng Naichai and Gong Binglu, 'A Zhen', in Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi 中國新文學大系, 1985, vol.15, p.162. The play was first published in Dazhong wenyi 大眾文藝, 1930, vol.2, no.4.

against the local despots and evil gentry (土豪劣绅). But in both cases, the crowd scenes take place towards the end of the plays, and before that, their role in the plays is insignificant. Hong Shen's Wukuigiao 五奎橋 (1933) differs from the above and shows a closer affinity to Dafengyu zhi xi in that the crowd scenes are given much more importance and are depicted in greater length.

Half way through the play, farmers begin to gather on stage, fully equipped, ready to pull down the bridge, a symbol of the old and oppressive feudal system. The crowd scene runs on for half of the play, and it ends with the sky filled with the sound of gongs. Farmers are coming from every corner to join in the pulling down of the bridge, and a youth says, "Now countrymen can survive!" (50) Both Hong and Chen have given the masses an active role to play, and allowed them to be directly involved in the action. In both cases, the masses are faced with a life-and-death situation, and both playwrights suggest that their lives are in their own hands, only through unifying and joining forces can they defeat their enemies and save their lives. But in Dafengyu zhi xi, since the life threatening situation is more direct and overt visually, and its intensity changes every moment with the

(50) Hong Shen, 'Wukuigiao', in Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi, 1985, vol.15, p.468. The play was first published in 1933 as a separate volume.

worsening of the weather conditions, the urgency is more deeply felt, and thus the dramatic impact is greater.

Among the plays written in the 1930s on social issues, Guizi hao and Dafengyu zhi xi stand out by virtue of their choice of subject matter. During the 1930s, prison life was a topic which rarely appeared in any kind of literary works. Chen set his pen on it and chose the prisoners as his protagonists. Undoubtedly, his own experiences in prison had lent him first hand material, especially in the depiction of characters and the creation of atmosphere. His familiarity with the setting, the language of the prisoners, and the different methods of punishment, gave him an advantage in his early playwriting. From these two plays, one can see his readiness to explore new subject matter, as well as to try his best to reproduce the lively speech of the lower class people and the vividness of prison scenes. When compared with his contemporaries, Chen was always more ready to use slang and curses, and the language of his lower class people was always coarse and vulgar. This reveals his and his attempt to put real life into his plays.

To conclude, Guizi hao and Dafengyu zhi xi mark the beginning of Chen's concern with social issues and of his identification of and interest in the situation of the lower classes. As these were but his early attempts, they showed signs of

experimentation and a certain degree of crudeness. Both plays are marked by the explicitness of messages, conventional plot construction, plain and simple style, as well as generalization of characters. Nevertheless, as plays written on prison life, they succeed in giving us a glimpse of the darkness in jail, and in urging us to hear glimpse of the appalling conditions that exist in jail, and in urging us to hear the lament of the poor and oppressed. In an article published in 1935, one critic gave the following comments

"All in all, it is a very good play, of extremely high quality. As does Guizi hao, which he published in the previous year in Zhonghua yuebao, this play depicts the darkness in jail, with the same penetration, realism and vividness. It is significant that this play has developed from the passive exposition of darkness and peaceful yearning for brightness and freedom in Guizi hao to active attack and revolt, as well as fighting for direct action. The story and action develop along with the heavy, gloomy and sad atmosphere in the jail, together with the external stimuli of the severe storm, culminating in a forceful and successful ending." (51)

This comment may be a little over-enthusiastic in its praise, considering as it does that the play is "a very good play, of extremely high quality." However, it has pinpointed the major development from Guizi hao to Dafengyu zhixi, and its significance in the evaluation of the two plays. Undoubtedly, there is a clear line of development from Guizi hao to Dafengyu zhi xi, both in thematic treatment and in the development of

(51) Xi Chen 西沈, 'Luelun yijiusansi nian suojian yu Zhongguo jutan de xinjuben' 略論一九三四年所見于中國劇壇的新劇本 Zhonghua ribao "xi" zhoukan 中華日報〈戲〉周刊, 1935, no.26.

theatrical devices. Written in the embryonic stage of Chen's playwriting life, these two plays formed a good basis for his future pursuit of the writing of plays with political and social themes.

Jintiancun (The Jintian Village) 金田村 (1937)

Jintiancun, also named Taiping tianguo (Taiping Heavenly Kingdom) 太平天國 (52), was the first of Chen's plays to be staged, and his last play written before the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. Chen started writing the play in 1936, and designed it as the first play of a trilogy on the rise and fall of Taiping tianguo. As he mentioned in the preface to the play, he divided the history of Taiping tianguo into three periods (the rise, the internal strife, and the fall), and intended to write a historical play on each period (53). The play was completed in early 1937, and was first performed in June of the same year by Shanghai yeyu shiyan jutuan 上海業餘實驗劇壇 at the Carlton Theatre 卡爾登劇院, Shanghai, directed by He Mengfu 賀孟斧. However, the second and third parts of the trilogy were never written.

According to Chen, the performance in 1937 was a success, and it led to his determination to take up

(52) The play first appeared in Wenxue, 1937, vol.8, no.3-5, under the title Jintiancun. Two months later, Chen completed the revision of the play, and it was published as a separate volume, with the title changed to Taiping tianguo. The performance in June, 1937 was based on this new version.

(53) See Chen Baichen, 'Guanyu Taiping tianguo de xiezuo' 關於太平天國的寫作 Wenxue, 1937, vol.8, no.2, p.440.

playwriting as his career (54). Before Jintiancun, Chen had written fifteen plays, but they remained as plays to be read only and none of them had had the chance of appearing on stage. The staging of Jintiancun marked a new phase in Chen's playwriting career and established Chen's position in theatrical circles. Dong Jian called this work "the first milestone of Chen's playwriting career" (55), and said that it gave Chen a place in the history of Chinese drama and modern literature.

In the history of China, Taiping tianguo was one of the greatest events during the rule of the Qing dynasty. The kingdom of Taiping tianguo was established in 1851, and lasted for fourteen years. Its importance and significance to Chinese history has been a topic of discussion among scholars and historians ever since. In theatrical circle during the war period (1937-1945), Taiping tianguo was also a

(54) Chen wrote in 1955 in the postscript to Chen Baichen xiju xuanji 陳白塵戲劇選集 : "Jintiancun was one of my early historical plays, it was my first full-length play ever put on stage. The director of the play was He Mengfu. Because of his direction, the performance was surprisingly successful. It was the eve of the 'July 7' Resistance War. Through the curtain of history, the audience in the auditorium echoed the sentiments of the actors on stage and felt the same strong urge for the Resistance. The scene is always vivid in my mind. This performance gave me encouragement and led to my determination to dedicate myself to playwriting." (p.265)

(55) Dong Jian, Chen Baichen chuanguo licheng lun, 1985, p.116.

common subject in historical plays. Playwrights such as Yang Hansheng 楊翰笙, A Ying 阿英 and Ouyang Yuqian 歐陽禺倩 all wrote plays based on the history of Taiping tianguo (56). The reasons for its popularity are understandable. First of all, the events of Taiping tianguo are, in themselves, dramatic enough. Second, at the time when China was engaged in the Resistance War, nationalism was at its height. The history of Taiping tianguo is full of material which could be used by playwrights to expound their views on the contemporary political and social realities to audiences. Chen Baichen, however, was the first among his contemporaries who used Taiping tianguo as the subject matter for a historical plays.

According to Chen, his interest in the history of Taiping tianguo started in 1935 (57). While still in jail, in the spring of 1935, he came across an inmate (58)

(56) Plays using Taiping tianguo as subject matter include Li Xiucheng zhi si 李秀成之死 and Tianquo chungui 天國春秋 (written by Yang Hansheng in 1937 and 1941 respectively); Hong Xuanjiao 洪宣嬌 (written by A Ying in 1941) and Zhongwang Li Xiucheng 忠王李秀成 (written by Ouyang Yuqian in 1942).

(57) See Chen Baichen, 'Guanyu Taiping tianguo de xiezuo', Wenxue, 1937, vol.8, no.2, p.438.

(58) Kang Aming 匡亞明 was the inmate. In 1978, as principal of Nanjing University, Kang invited Chen Baichen to take up a teaching post in the University. See the preface to Dong Jian's Chen Baichen chuanguo licheng lun, 1985, pp.1-6; and Chen Baichen's 'Lishi yu xianshi -- shiju Shi Dakai daixu', in Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1983, p.220.

who was deeply interested: the character of Shi Dakai 石達開, one of the leaders in Taiping tianguo. From him, Chen heard a lot about the love story between Shi Dakai and Han Baoying 韓寶英, and he was fascinated by it. He promised to write a historical play about it after he had left prison. In the winter of the same year, he spent two months writing Shi Dakai de molu 石達開的末路, his first full-length historical play. The play was published in June 1936, but was never performed. However, Chen himself was not satisfied with the play. He realized that his negligence in the research and study of historical facts had resulted in certain defects in the play. Thus he made up his mind to delve into the history of Taiping tianguo and to write another historical play about it. Jintiancun was the product of such effort.

But to be sure, Chen's intention in writing Jintiancun was not merely to make up for the failure of Shi Dakai de molu, but more to try to reflect the present by looking into the past. There is no doubt that Chen found a close resemblance between the situations of Taiping tianguo and the contemporary situation, and that he was aware of the usefulness of relating the past to the present. In his preface to the play, he noted that there were three aspects which were of great significance to the contemporary situation. First, the united force of the leaders of Taiping tianguo which resulted in the setting

up of its capital at Nanjing held a lesson of great relevance for the united front policy of the Resistance War in the 1930s. Second, after the occupation of Nanjing, the internal strife which led to the fall of the kingdom served as a warning to the united front in the contemporary period and helped to prepare for the future. Third, the resistance led by Li Xiucheng 李秀成 after the decline of the kingdom offered telling image that could serve as a guide for the political situation of the contemporary period. Since Jintiancun dealt with the rise of Taiping tianguo, only the first aspect was stressed.

Jintiancun is divided into seven acts, set in the years 1849-1852. It depicts the foundation and early development of Taiping tianguo. The events are recorded in chronological order. It starts with the spreading of 'gospels' of Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 and Feng Yunshan 冯云山, followed by the uprising in Jintian, then the establishment of Taiping tianguo. After that, the emphasis of the play is put on the internal dissension that arises in the group and their resolution. Crisis arises when two of the leaders die, and there is resentment among the soldiers and the common folks. However, the dissension and resentment are calmed down as they rally to their common aim. The play ends with the victory of the Taiping troops in occupying Wuchang 武昌, and with the leaders resolving to unite and take revenge on the Manchu Government.

In the prefatory statement, Chen claims that he had

spent over nine months in researching sources, and had read a great deal of reference material on the subject (up to fifty separate pieces). He even lists some main references which include official and unofficial historical records, documents written at the time of Taiping tianguo and in later years, analytical writings, notes and novels on Taiping tianguo. Indeed, writing about Taiping tianguo has never been an easy task. Though the Kingdom itself lasted for only fourteen years, the events and characters connected to it were complicated and numerous, and they have evoked much controversy even among historians themselves. Chen wrote of his research work:

"The first step was to do some remedy and rectification work to the incomplete records, in order to sort out a more complete picture of Taiping tianguo which had never been done by the historians. The second step was to compare the materials in the official history with the unofficial one, so as to obtain a more trustworthy record on the military movements of Taiping tianguo. The third step was to confirm the class status and history of each leader in Taiping tianguo, as well as their inter-relationship. The fourth step was to find out the atmosphere of that era from the life, beliefs, customs, language, costumes, etc. of the Taiping troops, as an aid to the playwriting." (59)

Since so much attention was given to the research work, it is clear that Chen intended the piece to be historically accurate. He admitted that he did not want to "invent any romance or well-made story to add flavour to

(59) Chen Baichen, 'Guanyu Taiping tianguo de xiezuo', Wenxue, 1937, vol.8, no.2, pp.440-441.

the play" (60), but to depict honestly "several moving scenes of Taiping tianguo, so as to extract the essence of that inspiring and tempestuous era, as well as to create a memorial for those who stand at the front of the national revolution at the present." (61)

In fact, Chen's attitude towards the writing of historical plays had undergone several changes before the writing of Jintiancun. Here, we use the broad definition of the genre, i.e., historical drama as a type of drama that is based upon historical or legendary events. Chen's first attempt at this genre started early in 1930, when he wrote Fenhewan. It was a 'fanan' work, in which the legendary characters and events were revised for the sake of preaching the playwright's ideologies. As mentioned above, the play was a failure as a dramatic work. Three years later, he took another turn and decided to use the historical form as a vehicle to convey contemporary ideas. He completed Yuji 亂世, which turned out to be a play full of incongruities, with its historical setting and modern language. He then discarded both methods and wrote Shi Dakai de molu, aiming at offering history as itself, and re-creating an event which was dramatic in itself.

(60) Chen Baichen, 'Guanyu Taiping tianguo de xiezuo', Wenxue, 1937, vol.8, no.2, p.441.

(61) Ibid.

However, when the play was completed, Chen was not satisfied with it. He realized that there was considerable discrepancy between his original idea and the end product. To him, Shi Dakai de molu was a failure due to his negligence of the historical facts and his allowing his personal feeling to gain too much access into the composition of the play. It is clear that by that time he held the view that historical drama should be faithfully historical, and took factual accuracy as the first criterion, followed by dramatic artistry. This view can be seen in the articles he wrote in later years (62). Thus, by the time he wrote Jintiancun, he was all too anxious to pay special attention to historical facts and to give his play historical authenticity.

However, absolute faithfulness to the historical sources does not necessarily lead to the success of historical drama. Historical plays are not history. They must be based on historical material, but more importantly, it is only through the theatrical conventions that they are presented to us. Theatrical conventions are the means which give them their essential form. Coleridge's definition of historical drama is a brief and

(62) See Chen Baichen, 'Guanyu Taiping tianguo de xiezuo', Wenxue, 1937, vol.8, no.2, pp.438-441; and Chen, 'Lishi yu xianshi -- shiju Shi Dakai daixu', Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1985, pp.214-225.

precise one:

"An historic drama is a collection of events borrowed from history, but connected together in respect of cause and time, poetically and by dramatic fiction." (63)

To give historical drama the simplest definition, one can say that it is the dramatization of history, a re-creation of history in dramatic form. After all, the writing of drama is an art which involves the dramatist's imagination, and an historical play is to be judged on its own merits as drama, not as history. Today, Aristotle's statement still remains valid.

".....it is not the province of a poet to relate things which have happened, but such as might have happened, and such things as are possible according to probability, or which would necessarily have happened. poetry is more philosophic, and more deserving of attention, than history. For poetry speaks more of universals, but history of particulars." (64)

In China, the definition of historical drama has always aroused much discussion. How closely or strictly should a historical play adhere to its historical sources? How is it possible to justify a historical play which employs much imaginary elements? These are some of the questions which have been most controversial among critics and playwrights

(63) S. T. Coleridge, 'Shakespeare's English Historical Plays', in Barret H. Clark (ed.), European Theories of The Drama, 1938, p.433.

(64) Aristotle, 'The Poetic', in Barret H. Clark (ed.), European Theories of The Drama, 1938, p.12.

in China. Guo Moruo in 1946 made a classification of historical drama. He divided historical drama into two main types: the first type consists of those plays that are concerned mainly with historical facts and the second type of those concerned more with the passion and feeling which the historical events have aroused in the playwrights (65). For the former, the target is to present directly and faithfully historical events and characters, to place upon the stage the picture of an era, so as to help the audience understand better the as they happened in the past and are happening at present. As for the latter, the target is to direct the imagination of the audience, so as to arouse stronger sentiment or feeling among them, especially towards events in the present. According to Guo, these two types of historical drama are only results of different methods in the treatment of historical sources. Undoubtedly, Guo himself is a representative of the latter and his Tangdi zhi hua 棠棣之花, Qu Yuan 屈原, and Hu fu 虎符 are the best examples of this genre. Chen Baichen, however, ever since his writing of Shi Dakai de moli, had been more ready to adopt the former approach.

As Chen said in the preface to Jintiancun, he was still a beginner in the writing of historical plays, groping his way along the road. Thus Jintiancun was but a

(65) See Guo Moruo, 'Tan lishiju' 談歷史劇, Wenhui bao, June 26, 1946.

result of trial and error. Indeed, when compared with attempts in historical drama, Jintiancun shows that Chen had made a marked improvement in the mastering of the genre. There is no more twisting of the facts to suit a particular political purpose, nor forcing contemporary ideas into the historical framework. However, in the balance between factual believability and artistic integrity, Jintiancun shows an obvious ^{dis}parity. Chen was so anxious to stick close to the historical facts, and so eager to try to place upon the stage the total picture of an era, that he poured all his material into the play, weighing down the events and characters with minutiae, and at the same time neglecting the unity and artistic integrity of the play.

When Jintiancun first appeared in Wenxue in 1937, it was a play which was quite impossible to be put on stage. With seven acts and a cast of over a hundred characters, it would require a performance time longer than any audience's attention span, and the finance and manpower such a production would involve were surely beyond the capability of any theatrical group at that time. Apart from the technical problems, the whole play is too loosely constructed. The action of the play takes place in a short span of four years, but the events depicted are numerous. Within every act, the emphasis of the playwright is quite clearly discernible. The main emphases are respectively: the

spreading of the 'gospels' of the God Worshipping Society; the preparation for the uprising in Jintian; Uprising in Jintian; the coronations of Kings and Lords among the leaders; the death of Feng Yunshan and the beginning of the internal dissension; the compromises among the leaders and the victory of the Taipings. Throughout the play, all events share more or less equal importance and are given more or less attention, while the leaders of Taiping tianguo (seven in number including Hong Xuanjiao 洪宣娇) all at one time or another take the leading role. But as far as the whole play is concerned, there is not one event or character acting as the linking force behind the whole play. It is a full array of events leading to the rise of Taiping tianguo, with a whole range of characters taking part in it; but the whole play lacks unity, as well as the vitality and impact which are so essential to historical drama.

As mentioned above, the period of Taiping tianguo is one of the most complicated and controversial in the history of China, involving, as it does, numerous characters and events in a short period. Chen was ambitious to try to depict the whole era on stage, but he failed to realize that such an attempt would fail without dramatic artistry. The absence of a central figure or event to act as a linking force within a play of such magnitude turns out to be a major defect. If we compare Chen's treatment of the historical material of Taiping tianguo with Yang Hansheng's and A Ying's, we can see that Chen had chosen a

bold but disadvantageous task. Both Yang and A Ying had taken Taiping tianguo as subject matter in their plays in the 1930s and 1940s, but unlike Chen, they did not attempt at giving a panoramic view. In Yang Hansheng's Tianguo chungiu, the playwright set himself the task of depicting events which took place within a period of 18 months in the sixth year of Taiping tianguo. The time span is short, and moreover, the central emphasis of the whole play is placed on the death of Yang Xiuqing 楊秀清 which leads to the fall of Taiping tianguo. As for the characters, Yang Xiuqing, Hong Xuanjiao and Fu Shanxiang 傅善祥 are given major roles, and the relationship between them is given particular attention. While in A Ying's Hong Xuanjiao, obviously the central figure is Hong Xuanjiao, after whom the play is named. The play starts with the establishment of Taiping tianguo, and ends with its fall, over a period of fourteen years. The time span is much longer than Chen's and Yang's plays, but since there is a central figure, the playwright managed to connect the events together and give it artistic unity.

Not long after the first publication of Jintiancun, Chen made a revision of it upon the request of Shanghai yeyu shiyan jutuan, and the revised version was staged and published as a separate volume in June 1937. The revision turned out to be one of considerable extent. The play was shortened in length by a cut of more than ten thousand

words, and quite a number of characters were cut, too. Moreover, in the revised version, Chen had focused more on the role of the crowd, and stressed the relationship between the multitude and the leaders. This tightened the plot a bit, and added more dramatic tension to the play. However, on the whole, the play still suffered from being overloaded with facts and other historical baggage to the extent that the dramatist's voice was largely masked. Chen realized the problem and admitted it in 1943. He wrote,

"After I had seen its performance I had such a feeling: the history itself was revived, but the whole play was like a man who was dressed up too clumsily, so much so that he lost his shape as a human being. Though he was dressed in historical clothing, yet in order to be complete and true to life, he was given all the clothing of the four seasons to put on. What we aim at is historical truth, it differs from the truth depicted by the naturalists who give every minute detail to everything. Historical truth has to be found in a 'historical play', and it differs from what we find in a 'history book'. The function of a 'historical play' should not exceed its load and capacity, or else it would burst through its historical form, and at the same time the history itself would be shrivelled." (66)

Chen realized that his using the naturalistic approach towards historical material had caused defects in his play, but he failed to recognize that the problem lay in his failure to tackle the confrontation between

(66) Chen Baichen, 'Lishi yu xianshi -- shiju Shi Dakai daixu', Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1983, p.219.

historical fidelity and dramatic effectiveness. He had made every effort to be true to the facts, but failed to assert his integrity as an artist at the same time. Instead, Chen attributed the failure of the play to the discrepancy between the subject matter and his intended theme. He believed that the history of the rise of Taiping tianguo told involved many more issues than just that of his intended theme of uniting and fighting against aggression", and it was quite impossible to manifest such a theme in his chosen subject matter (67). To a certain extent it is true, but even so, it does not necessarily bring about the failure of the play, since the success of a play lies in its dramatic qualities and not in the intention of the playwright.

As regards the intention of the playwright, one ~~farther~~ point to be noted is that as a historical dramatist, Chen has always held high the idea of drawing close analogy between the present and the past in high regard. He believed that "the object of history is the present", and that the history in historical drama should be "related to present day matters" (68). Furthermore, historical drama should "help the readers and audience to understand the present", and

(67) Chen Baichen, 'Lishi yu xianshi -- shiju Shi Dakai daixu', Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1983, pp.219-220.

(68) See Chen Baichen, 'Guanyu Taiping tianguo de xiezuo', Wenxue, 1937, vol.8, no.2, p.439.

should "direct the present" (69). On the very next day after he had finished the revision of Jintiancun, Chen wrote:

"Historical drama at present should have a special mission. On the one hand it must find a way to endow itself with meaning relevant to the present but which are not to be presented overtly; on the other hand it must find ways to win the audience over." (70)

To Chen, historical drama is only a means to express his present concerns, one, among many dramatic tactics to be used in dramatic creativity. To a great extent, his view echoes Lion Feuchtwanger's that "that portrayal of times past was never the point and purpose but always only a means or vehicle for expressing their (the creative writers') own experience of their time" (71) and Eric Bentley's that "the force of any type of historical drama resides in its topicality; it must quiver with the life not of the era depicted but of the period of the performance." (72)

However, in the writing of Jintiancun, Chen had in mind the contradictory aim of creating a play that was historically authentic in every detail. On the one hand, he wished to relate the past to the present; but on the other, he

(69) See Chen Baichen, 'Guanyu Taiping tianquo de xiezuo', Wenxue, 1937, vol.8, no.2, p.439.

(70) Chen, 'Mantan lishiju' 漫談歷史劇, in Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1983, p.145. The article was first published in Xin yanju 新演劇, 1937, no.1.

(71) Lion Feuchtwanger, The Laurels and Limitations of Historical Fiction, 1963, pp.129-130.

(72) Eric Bentley, Theatre of War, 1972, p.368.

wanted his play to be as historically accurate as possible. The two can hardly be reconciled if a strict or total adherence to all the facts is adopted in the latter. Having learned the lesson from his previous historical plays, at the time Chen wrote Jintiancun, he was only too eager to stick closely to the historical facts. But in order to relate the past to the present, a playwright is bound to make some variations or modification of history in his work. Obviously, Chen did not realize this contradiction, and when Jintiancun emerged, it was easily discernible that the first intention of relating the past to the present had been sacrificed to historical authenticity. It is not at all a bad thing, it saves the playwright from being too didactically propagandistic and the play from having an obtrusive theme incompletely realized in the action of the play.

From the aesthetic point of view, Jintiancun cannot be considered to be a great success. On the whole, the play lacks the unity and refinement which is usually found in great historical plays. But even so, the play is of utmost significance in the study of Chen's playwriting career, not only because it was the first staged play of Chen thus signifying a new phase in his career, but also because it revealed Chen's great potential as a playwright. In respect of the handling of crowd scenes and the use of dialogue, Jintiancun showed Chen's talent and his mastery of dramatic skill which was

gradually gaining maturity.

Even before Jintiancun, crowd scenes had always been a noteworthy feature in Chen's plays. However, it is in Jintiancun that his skill with crowd scenes is most fully manifested. Here, especially in the revised version of the play, the role of the crowd is given the utmost importance. It contrasts greatly with the small and relatively insignificant role the crowd plays in Yang Hansheng's and A Ying's plays on Taiping tianguo. In fact, it is true to say that in most plays, the crowd is treated as of little importance and is given only a limited dramatic role. Usually the crowd is used only at the outset to provide 'exposition', or to help build up the hero in the eyes of the readers and audience. Of course, there are also exceptions in which the crowd is treated differently. In the West, Shakespeare, for example, is well known for utilizing the crowd's immaturity and fickleness to provide insights into the nature of politics. However, in his treatment of the crowd, Chen Baichen differs from all of the above.

In Jintiancun, though the crowd is also used at the outset to provide exposition, as they do so in the beginning of nearly every act, their main role does not lie in this. Throughout the play, the crowd has a main part to play. In every act, there is always a balance between the roles played by the main characters

and those of the crowd. It is basically an anonymous crowd, but Chen still picked out from amongst the crowd certain characters for personalization, and allowed them to play a leading role within the crowd. There are Li Yiwen 李以文 (the famous Li Xiucheng 李秀成 in later years), Yu Tingzhang 余廷璋 (the merchant who is good at story telling), Huang Yukkun 黃玉昆 (the fortune teller before joining the Taipings), Zeng Tianyang 曾添養 (the charcoal burner who loves gambling), Wei Chaocheng 魏超成 (the charcoal burner who loves drinking), Yang Ergu 楊二姑 (the frank and unrestrained woman who has joined the Taipings) and others. They form a part of the crowd, and at the same time, stand out among them. Under the depiction of Chen, the crowd is not just an anonymous and static whole, but a volatile group of people with different characteristics. They do not just help in providing exposition in the beginning of the acts, or in creating atmosphere within the scenes, but more importantly, they are an integral and essential part of the play, and they help in the moving the development of the play forward. : In Act VI, when the whole army is trapped outside the city wall of Changsha 長沙, where the people are suffering from starvation and death, it is the crowd who takes the initiative to approach Yang Xiuqing and demand urgent action. This in effect solves the conflict between the leaders and saves the army from further decimation. Undoubtedly, Chen has portrayed the crowd as the basis of Taiping

tianguo, the main force of the Taipings. Chen sets them side by side with the main characters (the leaders of Taiping tianguo). There are times when this great force is led by the main characters, but there are also times when the crowd takes the leading role and forces the main characters to submit to their wish.

Chen's emphasis on the function of the crowd in the play is understandable. The play was written on the eve of the Sino-Japanese War, during which patriotic feelings among the Chinese people and their united efforts to resist Japanese aggression were held in the highest regard in Chinese intellectuals. Chen's emphasis on the role of the crowd was in fact a manifestation of his intention to relate the past to the present. He endeavoured to show in his play the function of the masses, especially their revolutionary function, and furthermore, to kindle patriotic feelings among the audience. According to Chen, the performance of the play in Shanghai in 1937 was a success in this respect (73).

Since the crowd has such an important role within the play, it is inevitable that there are quite a number of crowd scenes in the work. First of all, there are battle scenes. Chen himself admitted that during the 1930s, he had seen a

(73) See Chen Baichen, 'Houji', Chen Baichen xiju xuanji, 1956, p.265.

great number of American films, and was impressed by some of the battle scenes. These inevitably influenced his treatment of the battle scenes in the play (74).

Secondly, he was convinced that in a historical play like Jintiancun, battle scenes and other crowd scenes were necessary to convey the revolutionary spirit of the era. Besides the ideas he garnered from Western films, his experience in playwriting and in the theatre before the writing of Jintiancun also helped him in the handling of crowd scenes. He is good at grasping the characteristics of individuals, and by an economical use of dialogue, can reveal the relationship between characters and the general situation, and at the same time create the appropriate atmosphere and mood, giving strong dramatic flavour to the scene. The following scene is a good example of his handling of crowd scenes.

"(Yu Tingzhang enters, panting)

Yu: Brothers! Mr. Hong has been crowned King!

(Suddenly, everyone turns silent)

Yang Ergu (Impetuously): What? What about Mr. Feng?

Yu (Comes to the centre of the crowd): Be patient, listen to me! Mr. Hong himself is our Heavenly King, who is the supreme one, similar to the Emperor in old days. Under the Heavenly King, there are five kings: the Eastern King, the Western King, the Southern King, the Northern King and the Assistant King.

Yang Ergu: Be quick! What King is Mr. Feng?

Yu: Be patient! It is not story telling, you have to let me think!

(74) Personal interview with Chen Baichen on November 12, 1983.

Zeng Tianyang: Speak up! Speak up! What King is Mr. Feng?

Yu: The first one is Eastern King, it has been conferred on --

Ji Wenyuan: Mr. Feng?

Yu: It has been conferred on Brother Yang. The second one is Western King, conferred on Brother Xiao. The third is Southern King, that is Mr. Feng. (Everyone gazes at each other in surprise) The fourth is Northern King, conferred on Brother Wei. The fifth is Assistant King, conferred on Brother Shi. Besides, Brother Qin is the Minister of Heaven; Brother Hu is the Minister of Earth; Brother Lin is Oh! I can't remember them all! There are also commanders, generals lots of them! Uncountable! All in all, everyone holds titles! Go yourselves for a clearer look! Moreover, all these ministers and officers, including Western King, Southern King, Northern King, Assistant King and whatever, should obey the Eastern King! The Eastern King is extremely powerful, just a little inferior to the Heavenly King.

Yang Ergu: How come? Mr. Feng is under Mr. Hong, even under Brother Yang?
(All is staring hard)

Yu: Right! I don't understand either. Mr. Feng is a great commander as Zhuge Liang. Who can be greater than he?
(Feng Yunshan enters. Seeing such a scene, he stops and listens)

Zeng: What sort of a bastard trick is this? It's unfair!

Yang Ergu: Mr. Feng has been with us for so many years in Zijing Shan!

Wei Chaocheng: When Mr. Feng was with us together in the mountain, not to mention Brother Yang, even Mr. Hong was a nobody!

Ji: As for ability, isn't Mr. Feng the top?
(Erects his thumb) How come? Why should he obey Brother Yang? Mr. Feng agrees to it, I don't!

Yu: It's too unfair!

Li Yiwen (Meditating): It's just absurd! Whose idea is this?
(The soldiers are full of indignation, talking among themselves)

Yu (Angrily): Let's talk no more, we've to go and ask Mr. Hong!

All: Right! Let's go and ask! Go! Ask for the reason!
(Feng hurriedly steps forward. At the same time, Huang Zaixing rushes in, jumps onto the

platform for an announcement. All turns back.
Feng retreats)

Huang: Order from the Eastern King: -- Starting from tomorrow, nobody in the army should address others as 'Brother', since there is only one 'Brother' in the world, that is our Heavenly Brother, Jesus. It is against the law to call oneself 'Brother'. One should address Mr. Hong as Heavenly King, Brother Yang as Eastern King, Brother Xiao as Western King, Mr. Feng as Southern King, Brother Wei as Northern King, Brother Shi as Assistant King. Secondly, from tomorrow onwards, men and women should have separate camps! Brothers belong to the men camp, sisters belong to the women camp! Those who enter the opposite camp privately without the order of the Eastern King will be beheaded!

Yang Ergu (Stunned): What?

(Feng is surprised too)

Huang: Even husbands and wives are not allowed to live together in ordinary days! Those who violate the law will be beheaded! Those in the know but ~~who fail~~ to inform will be beheaded too! Take good notice of it, everyone of you!
(Exits)"

(Act IV, pp.163-166) (75)

The above is the scene in which the news of the coronation of Kings is broken to the Taiping soldiers. They are trying the captives when news comes that their leaders are crowned Kings. It is not a long scene, with the captives ~~standing~~ in the background, and the key persons in the Taiping soldiers take the leading role. In this scene, Feng Yunshan's position in the masses' hearts is cleverly revealed. Suspense is created at first as Yu Tingzhang tries to remember what post Feng holds, giving

(75) The version used here is the first revised version published in June, 1937, under the title Taiping tianguo. This was also the version used in the first performance of the play in 1937.

the soldiers full opportunity to express their deep feeling for Feng. As they find out more, the soldiers' reaction changes from disappointment to puzzlement, then finally indignation. The atmosphere changes together with the different moods of the crowd. Chen is clever to use such a situation for disclosing the coronation of Kings among the leaders. The event (the coronation of Kings) itself, being a historical fact which readers and audience know about quite well in advance, is not of great dramatic interest. By disclosing the event through such a situation, the playwright shifts the emphasis to other aspects which are of greater dramatic interest. The soldiers' response becomes the focus of attention, and through it one is aware of the difference in prestige of the various leaders. The scene discloses the discontent of the soldiers, and at the same time, hints at the crisis which is going to befall on Taiping tianguo in the future. The immediacy of the announcement of the order from Yang Xiuqing is a clever endeavour of the playwright too. It adds to the discontent of the soldiers, and further agitates them. It lays down a hint of the conflict between the masses and Yang Xiuqing which is to develop later in the play. Moreover, it adds more dramatic effect to the scene, and pushes the atmosphere to a height where everyone expects an outburst in the end. However, the scene is followed by the appearance of Feng, and his pacification of the crowd. Their anger is

subdued, and the bond which links the crowd with Feng becomes even stronger.

In contrast to the above scene which shows a dynamic and volatile crowd, Chen also shows his crowd in its static state. In the scene when news of Feng Yunshan's death arrives, the crowd is given little to say but contributes greatly to the atmosphere and mood of the scene. A look at the text will reveal this.

"(Huang Zaixing rushes in, kneels down right in front of Hong Xiuquan. Everyone is stunned. Silence. Only the sound of gongs can be heard in the distance)

Huang (Sobbing): Report to Heavenly King

Hong (Exclaiming): What?

Huang: Southern King has died at Suoyidu!

Hong (Even louder): What?

All (Simultaneously): What?

Huang: The Southern King is dead!

Hong (Stares straight in front of him, blankly): The Southern King is dead! (Suddenly realizes, exclaims) Oh! (Kneels down straightly on the ground)

(Everyone kneels down at the same time. The old woman carrying a child kneels down too.

At this time, soldiers A, B, C and D lead soldiers E, F, G, the parents of Xiao Chaogui and Li Yiwen in. Seeing the scene, they kneel down in silence one by one by the hut on the right. Silence prevails on the stage)"

(Act V, pp.185-186)

It is a moving scene. The sight of everyone kneeling down on the stage and the deathly silence create an atmosphere which is heart rending and solemn. Chen is careful in using his crowd to create the maximum dramatic effect. The scene quoted above is inserted between scenes full of action and violence. Immediately prior to it, the

air has been full of the sounds of trumpets and gongs as soldiers hurry to get ready, and people run to board the boats. A row between Xiao Chaogui and Yang Xiuqing is just about to explode when the news of Feng's death arrives. The deathly silence which follows the news is in sharp contrast to the chaos and cacophony which have preceded it. However, after the deathly silence, an even greater outburst takes place. The crowd, led by Xiao Chaogui and against the expressed orders of Yang Xiuqing, are calling for revenge. The stage is again turned into a place of utmost disorder and chaos. But when an attack is launched by the enemy, the soldiers and crowd retreating on the order of Yang Xiuqing. Xiao, however, insists on attacking the enemy. Just at this moment, soldiers bring forth his parents who have violated the law. In great anguish, Xiao kills his parents. At once, the tumult and confusion is replaced by an atmosphere of sadness and grief. Here, it can be seen that Chen is good at manoeuvring the characters and events in a crowd scene to achieve a highly dramatizing effect. Everything is well planned, with good timing and pacing. Although the stage is crowded with characters, and the atmosphere is one of disorder and chaos, there is always a clear focus of attention. There is order amidst the disorder; and the chaos and disorder on stage are only the result of the careful contrivance of the playwright.

Apart from the treatment of the crowd, Chen's use of

dialogue is another noteworthy feature in this play. In contrast to his previous historical plays, Chen pays more attention to using language authentic to the period in this play. Chen wrote on this subject in an article published in 1937.

"Since I have tried my best to make the content of Taiping tianguo faithful to the historical spirit, as well as to the 'reality of that time', I have to aim at its consistency in respect of movement, language, custom and habit etc. But the practical question arises: What is 'historical language'? What was it like at the time of Taiping tianguo? -- God knows! Since nobody has formulated historical language for us, I have to probe my own way! (But I am not a linguist!) Therefore, I can only use a passive way to substitute creation. I use the language of the backward peasants as the basis, get rid of the modern elements, and then add to it the religious phrases, riddles, conventional expressions, etc. which I have found in the history books on Taiping tianguo." (76)

Indeed, nobody can tell what the language of Taiping tianguo was like. In fact, there is very little documented dialogue that has been handed down from the past; and as drama is largely dialogue, in presenting historical events, one is bound to invent words for the tongues of historical characters. As the Taiping Rebellion was in itself a peasant revolt, with its leaders and supporters mostly peasants and craftsmen, Chen uses plain, coarse language instead of the grand and bombastic

(76) Chen Baichen, 'Lishiju de yuyan wenti' 歷史劇的語言問題, Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1983, pp.146-147. The article was first published in Yuwen 語文, 1937, vol.2, no.2.

language which one regularly encounters in historical plays. But Shi Dakai proves to be an exception. Since Shi was the most well educated and literary among the Taipings, Chen makes his language the most articulate and polished. This shows that Chen was careful in giving his characters speak in a register consistent with their social class and background, and appropriate to their personalities. Whether the character is an intellectual, or a base-born peasant, Chen is always able to cope with the linguistic challenge with ease. In portraying lower class people, he is always ready to use slang and swear-words in order to give vividness to the characters concerned. Though on the whole, there is certain crudeness in the language of Jintiancun, yet this cannot obscure the vividness of his characters. It is this free use of language that helped Chen to achieve greater success in later years.

One last point to be noted is that in 1955 Chen made a second revision of the play, which was then compiled in his Chen Baichen xiju xuanji. In this version, the first act of the play was deleted, and the sixth and seventh acts were combined into one, thus making it into a five-act play. Apart from these alterations, Yang Xiuqing's characterization also underwent some revisions. Aesthetically, this revision brought little improvement on the play. However, Chen's selection of this play for inclusion in his Chen Baichen

xiju xuanji and Chen Baichen juzuo xuan (77), clearly indicates the favour in which he held this early work as well as its great significance on his later playwriting career.

(77) Chen Baichen juzuo xuan, which consists of five plays selected by Chen himself in 1980, was published in 1981.

CHAPTER 4: PLAYS WRITTEN AFTER THE OUTBREAK OF THE
SINO-JAPANESE WAR (1937-1949)

Introduction

On July 7, 1937, the Japanese launched a sudden attack at Lugouqiao 盧溝橋 near Beijing, arousing the indignation of the Chinese people and thus unveiling the prologue to the War of Resistance. The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War opened up a new era in China, and at the same time brought about a golden age of modern Chinese drama. Chinese writers and artists were awakened to the seriousness of the national crisis, and more and more of them devoted their talent to the popular art form easily understood by the mostly illiterate masses, aiming at arousing the morale of the people in their fight against the foreign invader. Chen Baichen, who was in the prime of his life at that time, joined the movement at the outset of the War, and became one of the most active and prolific playwrights during the war period.

Chen's first play after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War was a three-act play Lugouqiao zhi zhan (The Battle of Lugouqiao) 盧溝橋之戰, a propaganda play and a hasty work (1). The play originated from Baowei Lugouqiao

(1) See Chen Baichen, 'Hanjian tiji' 漢奸題記, Wushinian ji, 1982, p.389. The article was first published as the preface to Hanjian 漢奸, a drama anthology published in 1938.

保衛盧溝橋 , a collaborative work of twenty-one playwrights (among them Chen was one), and the first play written in response to the "July 7 Incident". After Lugouqiao zhi zhan, Chen continued to write plays for the cause of national salvation. Before the Southern Anhui Incident 皖南事變 in 1941, Chen wrote another thirteen plays, including five full-length plays, five one-act plays, one mime and two "living newspaper" plays.

With the outbreak of the Southern Anhui Incident, the writers cast away their illusions about the Guomindang. In the Guomindang-controlled areas, strict censorship was applied to all manuscripts and publications, scores of progressive newspapers and magazines were banned, and many bookstores were closed down. While many progressive writers and artists sought refuge in Hong Kong, or in the Communist-controlled liberated areas, Chen remained in the Guomindang-controlled area and took up the leadership of Zhonghua juyi she 中華劇藝社 . From then until the set up of the People's Republic of China, Chen wrote another five plays (all full-length plays). The plays were all staged by renowned drama troupes during that period.

When compared with his pre-war period works, the plays Chen wrote during this period excelled both in quantity and quality. During this period, Chen wrote a total of

nineteen plays, of which eleven were full-length plays. In respect of quantity, it is the increase of full-length plays which is especially noteworthy. Moreover, while in the pre-war period, only one out of his four full-length plays was staged; during this period, all his eleven full-length plays were staged not long after their emergence. It is obvious that Chen had gone through a period of experimentation and moved into a period of growth and maturity, and had shifted from writing for publication to writing for performance. It was during this period that he discarded novel and short-story writing and devoted himself wholeheartedly to playwriting. Chen explained in later years:

"At the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, because of the needs of the revolution, I joined the drama troupes. Since then, I have seldom written novels, but have devoted myself to playwriting. And because of the needs of the drama troupe, I wrote mainly full-length plays." (2)

Undoubtedly, following the outbreak of large-scale hostilities after July 7, 1937, drama at once became an important medium of popular education and propaganda in the mobilization of the people for resistance. Chen was only one among the many writers who pledged their talents to the defence of China. However, Chen's attachment to the drama troupes, together with his involvement in the teaching of

(2) Chen Baichen, 'Cong wo zenyang kaishi xiexi shuoqi', Xiao juban, 1981, no.4, p.3.

drama (3), widened his scope and helped in the maturation of his plays. Among critics and literary historians who wrote on Chen, no one had ever disputed his success during this period (4). It was generally agreed that Chen reached the height of his reputation during the Sino-Japanese War, and according to Cheng Jihua 程季華 et al. and Pan Fushuo 潘梓年 et al., his wide range of plays (satirical comedies, historical plays, tragedies, etc.) were very well received by the audiences and critics when they were performed in the rear during that time (5).

For Chen, the war period was the most successful period in his playwriting career, both in respect of productiveness and artistic attainment. But Chen's success did not come overnight. The war period lasted for a total of twelve years (from the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War to the establishment of the People's Republic of China). Within these twelve years, Chen went through

(3) During the war years, Chen had taught at Chongqing guoli xiju zhuanmen xuexiao 重慶國立戲劇專門學校, Jiaodao jutuan 教導劇團 and Sichuan xiju yinyue xuexiao 四川戲劇音樂學校 at different times.

(4) These include Ding Yi, Wang Yao, Liu Shousong, Sima Changfeng, Su Xuelin, Cheng Jihua et al., H. L. Boorman, and Zhao Cong.

(5) See Cheng Jihua et al., Zhongguo dianying fazhanshi 中國電影發展史, 1961, vol.2, p.245; and Pan Fushuo et al., Shanghai shiren zhi 上海時人誌, 1948, p.128.

many experiences and these in turn influenced his works. This was his period of success, but also his period of growth. In fact, Chen's growth and maturity was closely related to China's situation at that time. The relationship between literature and society in China in the war years has been observed by most critics and literary historians. As D. L. Phelps writes:

"In the early years of the struggle with Japan, the people's day-to-day literature was characterized by romantic glorification of heroism and a tremendous sense of release. The nation's future rose before all eyes. In later years military setbacks, political chicanery, social evils, and human suffering, attended by weariness and loss of faith, drove writers to more objective, penetrating insights." (6)

Dong Jian also divided the development of resistance drama into two stages, the first being characterized by hasty works of propagandistic nature, and the later by works which showed more depth in ideological and aesthetic aspects (7). In general, Chen's plays written during this period can be divided into two stages as well. Ting Yi (Ding Yi) commented as follows:

"If we compare Chen Pai-chen's (Chen Baichen) writings in the early period of the war with those of the later period, we will see the development of his work as a literary realist the playwright underwent the difficulties of wartime life. It was an ordeal for him, but one which he faced

(6) D. L. Phelps, 'Letters and Arts in The War Years', in Harley Farnsworth MacNair (ed.), China, 1946, p.412.

(7) See Dong Jian, Chen Baichen chuanguo licheng lun, 1985, p.179.

courageously, and in the doing, steeled himself in the struggle. He became increasingly mature in outlook and, with a growing store of experience in life, turned out two excellent and realistic plays -- Winter Scene and The Picture of Promotion in Officialdom." (8)

The question of whether or not Chen was a literary realist will become clear after scrutinizing into his plays.

Undoubtedly, Chen's plays in the later period of the war did show more maturity than those in the early period, and the Southern Anhui Incident in 1941 may be seen as the watershed between the two stages.

Before the Southern Anhui Incident, Chen shared with the people the high militant spirit against Japanese aggression, and was eager to use drama as an instrument to propagandize the war effort. The plays he produced during this stage were mostly didactic, with the Anti-Japanese War as the central theme. Apart from "living newspaper" plays and street skits, some typical examples of his anti-Japanese plays are: Lugouqiao zhi zhan, Hanjian (Traitors) 漢奸 Luo Guofu (Luo Guofu) 羅國富, Fengsuoxian shang (Along the Line of Blockade) 封鎖線上 and Huoyan (Flames) 火燄. Others like Moku (Devils' Cave) 魔窟, Luanshi nannu (Wartime Men and Women) 亂世男女, Qiushou (Harvest) 秋收 and Dadi huichun (Spring Returns to the Land) 大地回春

(8) Ting Yi, A Short History of Modern Chinese Literature, 1959, pp.238-239.

which though not so much designed as propaganda, were still highly patriotic and with strong emphasis on the Resistance War.

The Southern Anhui Incident changed Chen's perception of the contemporary political situation, and following the tightening of policy on cultural activities in the Guomindang-controlled areas, Chen took a new direction in his playwriting. His plays were no longer so directly concerned with the immediacy of the stagnating war. Instead, he took up themes which were on a more general plane, concerned more with internal Chinese social issues, or with theories of patriotism and of family and personal relationships. His Jiehun jinxingqu (Wedding March) 结婚进行曲, Suihan tu (Winter Scene) 岁寒图 and Shengguan tu (The Plan of Official Promotion) 升官图 were written during this stage. The latter two had received the highest acclaim from critics who unanimously recognized them as the peak of Chen's creativity.

To sum up, throughout the war period, Chen experienced a growth and maturity both in life and in his playwriting career. Like most of his contemporaries, he had pledged his talent to the defence of China; but as Dong Jian points out, he was among the first who overstepped the scope of the early wartime drama which was characterized by its narrowness in

vision and formularization in content (9). His success in this period lies in his satirical comedies and serious dramas, while his historical plays remain much in obscurity. Throughout the whole period, he wrote only one historical play, Daduhe (River Dadu) 大渡河, but in any case, this was a revision of his Shi Dakai de molu of 1936, and was written during a time when censorship in the Guomindang-controlled areas had made nothing but historical plays possible. Undoubtedly, Chen was nurtured by the war. By the end of the war, Chen, after a long period of experimentation, had evolved his own clear style and form.

(9) See Dong Jian, Chen Baichen chuanguozuo licheng lun, 1985, p.136.

Luanshi nannu, subtitled "A light comedy in a great era", is an outstanding work that Chen wrote in the early years of war. It was first published in 1939, a year after Zhang Tianyi 張天翼 published his famous satirical short story Huawei xiansheng 華威先生, and shortly before Lao She's Canwu 殘霧. It was not the first satirical piece he wrote during the war; before this, he had written Moku, a four-act satirical comedy. But it was Luanshi nannu that drew the attention of critics and aroused much discussion at that time. According to Lin Manshu et al., Luanshi nannu was amongst the more successful plays of the war period (10). While writers like Wang Yao, Liu Shousong, Feng Xuefeng 馮雪峯 and Zhao Cong 趙聰, may not share the same high opinion of the play, they have nonetheless unanimously picked out this play from among Chen's work as one worthy of mention. (11). In the early 1980s, Edward Gunn showed a great interest in this play and translated it into English in his volume of Chinese drama (12). In fact, it was the

(10) Lin Manshu et al., Zhongguo dangdai zuojia xiaozhuan 中國當代作家小傳, 1976, p.76.

(11) See Wang Yao, Zhongguo xinwenxue shigao, 1954, vol.2, pp.162-163; Liu Shousong, Zhongguo xinwenxue shi chugao, 1956, vol.2, pp.171-172; Feng Xuefeng, 'Lun dianxing de chuangzao' 論典型的創造, in Guolai de shidai 過來的時代, 1946, pp.92-95; and Zhao Cong, Xiandai Zhongguo zuojia liezhuan, 1975, p.334.

(12) See Edward M. Gunn (ed.), Twentieth-Century Chinese Drama (An Anthology), 1983, pp.126-173. The translation covers Acts I and III, while Act II is deleted and replaced by a summary.

first, and the only one so far, of Chen's plays to be translated into the English language.

Luanshi nannu was important to Chen in that it marked a change in his playwriting as also in his life. Just before he wrote the play, Chen had experienced an incident which lay him open to attack and put him under great pressure. At that time, Chen was in Chongqing, the seat of the Guomindang government. He was involved in a dispute over romance which resulted in his being shot with six bullets and lying seriously wounded in hospital. According to Ba Ren 巴人 who wrote an article on Chen after the incident (13), and Dong Jian (14), the incident had caused Chen severe suffering both physically and mentally. The man who shot Chen was a government official whose wife was a great friend of Chen. She had made Chen agree to help her run away from her tyrannical and oppressive husband. However, the plan was found out, and Chen was revenged and his life threatened. The incident had shocked the public in Chongqing, and it made the newspapers' headlines;

some newspaper men even launched a general attack on Chen. In the preface to the play, Chen's mention of those

(13) See Ba Ren 巴人, 'Huai Baichen' 懷白塵, Shenghuo, sisuo yu xuixi 生活、思索與學習, 1940, vol.1, pp.27-32.

(14) Personal interview with Dong Jian on November 7, 1983.

newspaper men who use all means to serve their personal aims is a clear reference to those who 'persecuted' him at that time (15).

As Ba Ren asserts, the incident was a severe blow to Chen, and his reputation was badly smeared (16). Chen wrote two years later:

"Starting from the year before last, the utmost shame has fallen onto me, and I have endured it silently For two years I have never disclosed the whole truth to anyone. I just planned for myself how to live on. My life is my writing, only through writing can one reveal one's real self." (17)

Luanshi nannu was the first play that Chen wrote after the incident. Not surprisingly, his life experiences had found their way into the play. To Chen, the writing of this play was not just another creation of a new work, but signified the 'revival' of his life. In the preface to the play, Chen writes:

"Nonetheless, the creation of this play is still a great enchantment to me. I wrote it at a time when my life was undergoing great changes. Before its completion, there were still traces of 'romanticism' in my life

(15) See Chen Baichen, 'Wo de huanxi -- Luanshi nannu zixu' 我的歡喜 -- <亂世男女> 自序, in Wushinian ji, 1982, p.391. The article was first published in the first edition of Luanshi nannu, 1939.

(16) See Ba Ren, 'Huai Baichen', Shenghuo, sisuo yu xuixi, 1940, vol.1, p.30.

(17) Chen Baichen, 'Daixu -- gei Ba Ren' 代序 -- 給巴人, Dadi huichun, 1948, p.5. The article was first published in the first edition of Dadi huichun, 1941.

and works, though I had tried hard to get rid of these traces. But after the play's completion, the cruelty and the compassion of mankind made my hatred and love for mankind even more distinct from each other. On the one hand there was blasphemy, accusation, insult, menace and murder. On the other hand there was the most profound friendliness: warm consolation, deep concern, and even the sacrificing of one's own blood! If I had been dead because of hatred, now I am revived in the midst of 'friendliness'." (18)

Undoubtedly, in the writing of this play, Chen had planned to reveal himself. He had come to some sort of realization about his life through the incident, and this in turn influenced his playwriting, especially his treatment of the characters within this play.

The play is composed of three acts, set in the early years of the Resistance War. The background is the cities of China in the KMT held area. It depicts the activities of a group of wartime men and women who take refuge in the interior. Focus is put on a group of intellectuals who include a chief editor of magazine (Wu Qiuping 吳秋萍), a poetess (Violet Wave 紫波), a writer (Wang Haoran 王浩然), a translator (Miao Yiou 苗猷歐) and an au-courant youth (Pu Shijin 蒲是今). The curtain opens with a passenger train fully-packed with refugees departing Nanjing before its fall to the Japanese army in late 1937. Amidst the noise and chaos, this group of intellectuals come across each

(18) Chen Baichen, 'Wo de huanxi -- Luanshi nannu zixu', Wushinian ji, 1982, p.393.

other. They talk about poetry, about the Resistance War against Japan; they drink wine, lamenting on the loss of blood of soldiers on the frontier. However, when confronted with hunger and danger, they do not hesitate to profit at the expense of others. The play develops through following this group of intellectuals, from Nanjing to Hankou and further into the interior. There is no central story, but characters are linked together by their behaviour and actions which reveal them as being typical of a certain sort of hypocritical intellectual prevalent during the war. As the play develops, the real nature of these characters is exposed in more and more distinct light. The climax is reached when this group of people gather together to plan for a fund-raising drama production for the Resistance, only to find out that they themselves have been characterised in the play that they had intended to stage, and indeed have been set up as targets for ridicule.

Apart from the above characters, Chen also creates an important official and businessman (Xu Shaoqing 徐紹卿), and his wife Fan Meihua 方美華. Fan is portrayed as an unhappy wife who leads the life of a 'prisoner'. On meeting with her former lover Qin Fan 秦凡, who is a member of the Resistance, she urges Qin to help her run away from her husband in search for a new life. The story between Fan and Qin forms a subplot of the play. At the end of the play, Fan returns to her husband, and succumbs to the temptation of the life of comfort and ease which

she once led. The curtain falls with Qin's words:

"If you want to join the Resistance, then practice what you preach. Empty rhetoric is useless. If you want to fight, you can join up anywhere. It doesn't have to be North China! Any unit will do. It doesn't have to be guerrilla unit. Look! Aren't those recruits marching out -- they are going to fight!" (19)

These lines are addressed to Pu Shijin, but in fact, they form the moral of the play.

Chen's intention in writing the play was clear, he wanted to satirize the men and women in wild times. The object of his attack was the hypocrisy of those opportunists in the interior area during the war. They paid lip-service to the Resistance, portraying themselves as patriotic figures showing great concern for the country and society. But in fact, it was their own self-seeking ends that they were pursuing. When the play was first published in 1939, Chen prefaced the play with a quotation from Lu Xun ^{鲁迅} _{Lu Xun}. The general sense of the quotation is: in the midst of national chaos, the dregs of society will take the chance to emerge from the depths to which they have fallen, and show themselves; however, as they are still dregs, their final fate is still the same -- they will again sink

(19) Chen Baichen, Luanshi nannu, 1948 (3rd edition), p.168. In translating the quotations from this play, I have greatly benefited from the translation of Edward Gunn in Twentieth-Century Chinese Drama published in 1983.

(20) See Chen Baichen, 'Wo de huanxi -- Luanshi nannu zixu', Wushinian ji, 1982, p.390.

Chen had drawn a parallel between the opportunists and the 'dregs', and his emphasis was on the activities of the 'dregs' and the final exposition of their real nature.

Chen was not the first writer who satirized the behaviour of the intellectuals during wartime. Before him, Zhang Tianyi had had a great success with his Huawei xiansheng. In this short story, Mr. Huawei is portrayed as someone who claims himself to be a Resistance fighter, spending every minute on the work of the Resistance. He attends meeting after meeting, but is always late and never bothers to sit through the whole meeting since he is always too busy and has another meeting to attend. He assumes himself to be a leading figure in Resistance work, guiding the youths from going astray. In Luanshi nannu, what Chen portrays is a group of Mr. Huaweis. Though they differ in speech and behaviour, their basic nature is the same: they preach one thing and practise another. They include men and women, some of them spout platitudes and jargon, doing nothing but mingling with famous people, others wear evening clothes and go around mouthing off about the Resistance, but spend all day chasing women, or never stop talking about work, shouting everyday about 'Meetings! Meetings!' and claiming that they are impossibly busy. These are the central figures of Chen's satire. As Luanshi nannu is a three-act play, it gives Chen much more room to launch his attack and give more elaboration to his characters.

As Chen's main aim was to expose the follies and vices of his characters, especially of the various bourgeois and petit-bourgeois characters, he took special care in his portrayal of characters. As Potts writes:

"The pattern we want in comedy is of a different kind: a grouping of characters rather than a march of events. In comedy it is in the contrast and balance of characters that probability is concentrated and the imagination and originality of the writer is displayed." (21)

Here, in Luanshi nannu, what is important is not the arrangement of the events (in fact, not much happens in the play), but the portrayal of characters, the way the playwright delineates his characters increasingly clearly, both in their relationship with each other and as representatives of human nature.

As the play was meant to be a satirical work, the central figures are all negative characters. The way the characters are introduced on their first appearance is the first thing that is worth noticing. Instead of giving a short account of each character at the beginning of the play, Chen just gives a list of the characters and introduces them only when they step on the stage, with greater details than he does with characters in his other plays. First there is Xu Shaoqing -- "manager of a certain factory for a certain large business and also

(21) L. J. Potts, Comedy, 1949, p.118.

committee member of some official commission or other". He is described as "slightly plump, but not like the image of the capitalist as usually portrayed with an obligatory outsized stomach. He has a pale complexion, with rosy cheeks, quite unlike the other refugees. Like a large beast he crawls in through the window and ploughs through people, addressing them loudly but without actual courtesy" (22). Then there is Pu Shijin, "one of the oft-seen au-courant youth, looking like one of the current crop of university students, also like a movie actor, and also like a writer. Then, too, he looks a bit like a journalist. But he is none of the above" (23). As the play goes on, one by one the characters appear, each with his or her own individuality and characteristics. Thus, Violet Wave is introduced as "a poetess, amateur actress, women's liberation activist, and sometimes participant in film production. Her expression is filled with sympathy; her body melting with feeling. Although she is wearing work clothes, the material is fine serge. At first glance her face is very pretty. Upon closer inspection she appears unhappy and her face seems to show the traces of human endeavour" (24). As for Miao

(22) Chen Baichen, Luanshi nannu, 1948 (3rd edition), p.4.

(23) Ibid., p.5.

(24) Ibid., p.11.

Yiou and Wang Haoran, they are given a short yet concise introduction. Miao is depicted as "neatly dressed in a Western suit, with shiny bright shoes, hair shiny with pomade, and the face of a handsome barracuda" (25). While Wang, in contrast to Miao, is depicted as one whose "clothing is rumpled", yet "he looks distinguished; his manner is graceful and refined" (26).

By the way these characters are introduced, it is obvious that Chen intends to caricature them, making them appear distinguished and ridiculous at the same time. The characters are described with distinctness and vividness, but at the same time with contradictions. Thus Xu Shaoqing is a capitalist without the usual image of the capitalist; Pu Shijin takes the look of one engaged in intellectual work but is not in practice; Violet Wave wears work clothes but the material is fine serge; and Wang Haoran dresses in a mess but has a graceful and refined manner. Such contradictions invite the smiles of the readers, and more importantly, they are consistent with the targets of attack in the play. It is the contradiction between speech and action, appearance and essence that Chen is attacking. It is the

(25) Chen Baichen, Luanshi nannu, p.15.

(26) Ibid., pp.15-16.

hypocrisy of these people that Chen is holding up to sharp ridicule.

By introducing the characters when they first appear, instead of giving a short account of them all at the beginning of the play, immediacy is added to their portrayal. The moment the character is introduced, the audience directly has access to his action and speech. The introduction and the activity of the character complement each other, thus giving a more complete sketch of the character.

In order to expose their hypocrisy to the full, Chen deliberately allows his characters to disclose themselves unconsciously by traits which involuntarily escape from them. There are not many events in the play, but Chen is good at grasping situations and unmasking the characters in a few lines. Step by step he strips his characters to their nakedness, making them look a laughable lot before us. Take the instance when a bottle of wine is produced and circulated among them in the train full of refugees in Act I Scene 2:

"Wang (Taking out a bottle of wine): Here's some wine! Miss Violet Wave, wine is something even more precious than bread! (He drinks thirstily) This is the best of French wine! Take its colour-- just like your name. It's a bottle of Violet Wave! (He passes the bottle)
Violet: Thank you. That is wonderful! I believe that wine can make people forget everything. (Drinks) Good wine! Still, when I drink this wine (Sanctimoniously) I can't help thinking of our fighting men at the front, and of the comrades suffering in the war zones!

(Tearfully) And the red wine like this especially calls to mind the blood they've shed! However hungry we may be here whatever small injustices we suffer here, we still can have a drink of Mr. Wang's good wine, while for them it's probably hard to get so much as a glass of water, no?

Miao (Drinking): But that doesn't mean this bottle is being wasted on us! One may say that we here are all pillars in the work of the Resistance! And as much strength as this wine gives us, so it gives that much strength to the War of Resistance!

Wu (With deep emotion): How right you are! Think of this red wine not as the fruit of the vine, but as the blood of the Japs! We must gorge ourselves on the blood of the Japs! (Drinks)"
(Act I, pp.35-36)

In fact, each one of them is starving hungry and thirsty at that moment, the offer of the drink is a welcome chance to quench their thirst. But, since they are the 'patriotic' lot, they have to turn everything into a 'patriotic' act. Even at the drinking of the wine, they do not forget the War of Resistance, the soldiers fighting at the front, the blood of the Japanese and so on. Here, Chen allows each one of them to express in their individual ways their 'patriotism', which, as the play develops, arrive at the same end -- the revelation of their hypocrisy.

A sharp contrast to the above bombast is the scenes of the air-raid when they all scramble for their lives and have their real nature unveiled. In both Acts I and III, there is an air-raid scene; but it is the scene in Act III which is more elaborate and further reveals the weaknesses of the characters.

"(Suddenly the sound of aircraft is heard, startling everyone)
 Pu: Aiya! Enemy planes!
 Madame (A cry of panic): Aiya! (She scurries madly for cover)
 (Wang Haoran, Pu Shijin, and Miao Yiou dash onto the terrace to get a look. Xu Shaoqing scrambles to hide behind a chair. Wu Qiuping burrows under the bed. Violet Wave wraps herself in the cotton quilt. Li Manshu, on the other hand, burrows under the desk. Mrs. Xu freezes. Finally Madame Bureau Chief also settles on a spot beneath the bed. Now several bombs whistle down and as they explode antiaircraft machine guns open fire. The people in the room all burrow into their chosen spots. Madame Bureau Chief's rear end protrudes outside the bed, while Violet Wave has buried her head in the quilt. Those on the terrace pour back in panic. Miao drops down and crawls along the floor. Pu had flattened out on the terrace with only the upper half of his body inside the room. Only Wang still stands there gazing out)
 Wang: Not to worry. It's nothing serious. Don't panic.
 (Planes again roar overhead, their sound gradually fading)
 Wu (Poking his head out from beneath the bed): Have they have they gone?
 Xu (Poking his head out above the back of the chair): Did they.....did they.....bomb us?
 Mrs Xu (Woodenly): They bombed.
 Li: Were we.....were we bombed?
 Pu (Shrieking about nothing): Ah, ah! What is this! (Each person's head retract into hiding)
 I'm on fire!
 Wang: Where are you on fire?
 Pu: My ass is hot! I'm on fire for sure! Don't just stand there! Help me put it out!
 Wang: What are you raving about? Your ass got baked from being in the sun!
 Pu: Oh! Oh. (He rolls over and stands up, rubbing his rear end) Oh -- it's nothing.
 (Everyone gradually crawls out and gets up. Xu Shaoqing sags exhausted into the chair. Others look timidly out on the terrace)"
 (Act III, pp.159-60)

It is a short incident, but it is full of action. Words are not the most important element in this scene, but the behaviour of the people. Their pathetic eagerness to save

their own skins reveals these characters as hypocrites. In the face of danger, each of them looks out for themselves desperately trying to find the safest place of all.

But the most laughable person in the above scene is Pu Shijin. His screaming that his ass is on fire is a marvellous touch, poking fun at Pu and making him a laughing-stock. Throughout the play, Pu is characterized by his usage of 'heroic' language and terms in his speech. He likes most to talk about the 'coincidences' that happened to him during air-raids, creating for himself a 'heroic' role in these incidents. These stories are topics of his daily conversation, and he exaggerates them and presents them in rich embellished form. Thus in Act I he talks of the bomb bursting three feet away from him, and when he retells the same 'experience' in Act II, it becomes 'one foot'. Furthermore, he takes up Miao's story of a woman's leg with money stuck inside the stocking blown off by the bomb, and turns it into his own 'experience'. In fact, the latter story also appears in Lao She's Canwu, but with a little variation. In both cases, the emphasis is on the 'War of Resistance Windfall'; but in Canwu the situation is even more absurd since the windfall falls on one who carries on playing mah-jong in spite of the air-raid. However, while in Canwu the story is passed over as a joke which is never picked up again, in Luanshi nannu it is

told twice with great seriousness and it marks a trait in the character of Pu.

The extent of the characters' hypocrisy is fully revealed when they discover that they are satirized in the play which they are going to produce, and they start ridiculing each other (Act III, pp.143-145). One by one they identify each other with the characters in the play, cursing and denouncing the playwright Tang 蔣 who stays behind the scene from beginning to end. This scene draws together all the traits of the characters, pinpointing the targets of attack, and above all, reveals their reactions towards ridicule. The insertion of this play-within-a play, which is also entitled Luanshi nannu, is a clever device bringing the characters face to face with their own follies. As Northrop Frye says, comedy is "designed, not to condemn evil, but to ridicule a lack of self-knowledge" (27). What Chen is ridiculing throughout the play is the lack of self-knowledge manifested by this group of intellectuals, who on first reading of the script, refuse to draw any analogy between themselves and the characters in the play. When it becomes clear that they are the objects of ridicule, they resolve the charges by saying that the play "doesn't

(27) Northrop Frye, 'The Argument of Comedy', English Institute Essays, 1948. Quoted by Eric Bentley in The Life of Drama, 1965, p.309.

amount to anything. It simply isn't a play." They come down to the conclusion that there is some "friction" between Tang and them; and that the play is "sheer, deliberate libel". These denials simply expose the characters to greater ridicule, and add an ironic touch to the whole situation.

Apart from the negative characters, Chen also creates a few positive characters in this play, but they are far less important. These positive figures include Qin Fan (a member of the Resistance), Wang Yinfeng 王銀鳳 (a nightclub entertainer), and the little girl who has lost her parents during the war. To a great extent, their importance to the play lies mainly as foils to the negative figures. They do not talk much, but their deeds reflect their good nature and virtues. Chen is clever in making a juxtaposition of good and evil, virtue and vice. Thus, Wang Yinfeng's generosity in sharing food with the others, the little girl's ardour for volunteer work, etc., contrast sharply with the pretension and selfishness of those hypocrites. But above all, the most important role is given to Qin Fan. He is a representative of the positive force, bearing all the goodness of the patriotic, selfless youths. His relationship with Fan Meihua makes him indispensable to the plot of the play; furthermore, he is picked out by the playwright to deliver the moral of the play. The concluding lines "If you want to join the Resistance, then

practise what you preach. Empty shouting is useless
....." may seem obtrusive to devotees of satire; but as
Edward Gunn points out, "the purer forms of satire have
never been appreciated by the Chinese Communist Party or
middlebrow critics, and positive characters and gestures
have always been considered appropriate by them." (28)
When compared with plays written by others during the
early years of the Resistance War, the positive message in
Luanshi nannu is far from obtrusive.

According to Chen, when the play first emerged, he
came under all sorts of attack (29). One of the charges
was that he had identified himself with Qin Fan, thus
using the play to attack others and boost himself. Such
accusation is ungrounded, though the story between Qin Fan
and Fan Meihua does bear some resemblance to the
happenings between Chen and his lady friend in Chongqing.
In fact, as far as characterization is concerned, Chen never
denied that certain characters in this play were in fact
modelled on actual persons; but he insisted that there was
no characterization that could be identified with any one
specific individual. In the preface to the play,
Chen talks about the portrayal of Wang Haoran,
Wu Qiuping, Pu Shijin and Fan Meihua. He admits

(28) Edward M. Gunn, Twentieth-Century Drama, pp.xiv-xv.

(29) See Chen Baichen, 'Zixu' 自序, Qiu shou, 1944 (2nd
edition), pp.2-3.

that he had come across such characters in real life, but because of certain 'scruples', he fails to portray them without restraint. This, he says, gives him a sense of regret and dissatisfaction.

It is to be noted that while characteristics drawn from actual persons contributed to the moulding of characters in the play, they were also a hindrance to it. Chen was too familiar with the people who became the basis for the characters in the play, and this close connection with them barred him from gaining a deeper and more objective understanding of them in his dramatic portrayal. Besides, the immediacy of transposing real-life events and observations into dramatic form, also prevented him from giving his play a wider perspective. The incident in Chongqing left a deep wound in Chen's heart, and time was needed for the wound to heal, and for Chen to come to a deeper understanding and acceptance of what had happened.

Chen's confession in his preface to the play that he had experienced great hatred and agony in the creation of certain characters is an indication of his obsession (30). However, Chen charged the failure of adopting an audacious attitude and exposing the reality ruthlessly to "fear" (31). He did not state clearly what his "fear" was, but from Feng Xuefeng's article in 1940 it can be seen that it

(30) See Chen Baichen, 'Wo de huanxi -- Luanshi nannu zixu', Wushinian ji, 1982, p.392.

(31) Ibid., p.391.

originated from the interference of a section of people who were afraid to face the hard truth (32). Since the emergence of Zhang Tianyi's Huawei xiansheng in April 1938, there was strong objection to literature of exposure in society (33). As Luanshi nannu was written in the following year, there is little doubt that Chen faced criticism from the same quarters. But the pressure of these criticisms is only part of the reasons of his failure to give a more ruthless exposure and deeper analysis of his characters.

In regard to the characterization of this play, Feng Xuefeng gives the following comment:

"In Luanshi nannu, the 'dregs' which have been stirred up to the surface are only superficially contrasted and exhibited; these dregs, unluckily (or luckily), are taken by the writer and made known to the public, however, they are also luckily (or unluckily) taken as dregs which come to the surface, and are being set free, just as they are being set free as dregs in usual days. At the same time, the real fighter, once he is put under such superficial contrasts, surely cannot display his real countenance and soul." (34)

This comment is to the point. Chen has ranged before us a group of hypocrites whose follies and vices invite our laughter and scorn; however, due to the above

(32) Feng Xuefeng, 'Lun dianxing de chuangzao', Guolai de shidai, 1946, p.93.

(33) q.v. Chapter 2, footnote (67), p.64.

(34) Feng Xuefeng, 'Lun dianxing de chuangzao', Guolai de shidai, 1946, p.93.

mentioned reasons, Chen fails to penetrate deeply into the souls of them and to probe into the relationship between their existence and society. As freedom of speech is an essential condition of great satire, the "fear" Chen felt when creating these characters undoubtedly got in the way of him achieving a more complete portrait.

Nonetheless, Chen's courage in attacking the hypocrisy and pretensions of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois is not to be overlooked. The play was written in 1939, less than two years after the outbreak of the War of Resistance, and during a time when the united front policy ('united and fight against the Japanese for national salvation') was the main concern of the nation. There was a general objection towards literature of exposure in society, with the argument that the exposure of the shortcomings of society would bring about pessimism and despair, which were harmful to the Resistance War. From the writings of Wang Yao, Liu Shousong and Chen himself, we can see that the emergence of the play did arouse criticisms from "intellectuals" in the Guomindang-controlled areas (35). The charge was that the exposure was too harsh, spreading pessimism and discouraging

(35) See Wang Yao, Zhongguo xinwenxue shigao, 1951, p.162; Liu Shousong, Zhongguo xinwenxue shi chugao, 1956, p. 171; and Chen Baichen, 'Zixu', Qiushou, 1944, pp.1-2.

supporters of the resistance to Japan. However, Chen denied such charge and claimed that it was only because of his optimism that he set his target on the exposure of the darkness. "Only those who incline fervently towards brightness, will set their relentless attacks on darkness", he commented (36). Furthermore, he warned that "to conceal an illness out of fear of its treatment is not a national virtue; and a nation who vaunts its merits and is ignorant of its shortcomings will only perish." (37) Here, it can be seen that though "fear" had hindered him from probing deeper into the disease of society, Chen was determined to go against the current and expose the illness to all. Such boldness is unquestionable. Thus, notwithstanding the flaw mentioned above, Feng Xuefeng recognized the courage of Chen in setting his pen on the conflicts of society and recommended it to fall under the list of good works (38).

Indeed, Luanshi nannu was not the only satirical play which made its appearance during the early years of the Resistance War. Shortly after the emergence of Luanshi nannu, Lao She published his first play Canwu, a

(36) Chen, 'Wo de huanxi -- Luanshi nannu zixu', Wushinian ji, 1982, p.392.

(37) Ibid.

(38) See Feng Xuefeng, 'Lun dianxing de chuangzao', Guolai de shidai, 1946, p.92.

four-act satirical work. Of these two plays, Su Hsueh-lin (Su Xuelin) points out that they had "many points of similarity", and that "they are both about the disorderly conditions in the interior during the war" (39). In the former, there are the "dregs" which take the chances the chaotic situation provides and come up to the surface; while in the latter there is the "mist" which lingers on and refuses to disperse. In both cases, they have to be cleared away so that brightness can prevail. However, as one was the work of a playwright who was coming into maturity, and the other was the first trial of a writer who was inexperienced in playwriting, the differences between the two are more distinct than the similarities. Being an experienced playwright, Chen showed his masterly skills in making his play a single whole, in the absence of a central story and central figure. The cast is large and varied, but Chen succeeds in giving individuality to his characters, particularly the negative characters, who are richly endowed with dialogue and mannerisms that effectively caricature them. By comparison, Canwu appears crude and didactic. As Lao She confessed, the play was written as an assignment and it took him only half a month to complete it (40). The play focuses on the activities

 (39) Su Hsueh-lin, 'Present Day Fiction and Drama in China', in Jos Schyns et al., 1500 Modern Chinese Novels and Plays, 1948, p.L1.

(40) See Lao She, 'Jixie Canwu 記寫《殘霧》', Lao She juzuo guanji 老舍劇作全集, 1982, vol.1, pp.114-115.

of the bureaucrats and their lackeys, with the Bureau Chief as the central figure. There is a central story running through the whole play, and it is mainly through the events that take place that the characters are exposed. As a satire, Chen's play is more harsh and relentless in its attack with deeper and closer observation of the real world. As a dramatic work, Chen's play excels in its use of dramatic techniques, creating an effect which is forceful and impressive. While Lao She was groping his way on the path of playwriting, Chen was fully equipped with the necessary dramatic tools and confident in his use of them. Thus, in Canwu, we find that the characters spout forth long speeches with little or no accompanying action loosely affixed to the plot of the play, striving to manifest the theme but lacking enough dramatic force. In contrast, in Luanshi nannu, Chen shows his gift by creating vivid characters with distinct traits, placing them in masterly orchestrated large scenes but at the same time allowing their individual characteristics to stand out. Long speeches are rare, and it is through the characters' own speech and action that Chen displays before us the true nature of his characters. Everything is well orchestrated to give the maximum dramatic effect, but without signs of manipulation.

A last word has to be added in regard to the handling of crowd scenes. Early in Chen's playwriting career, Chen had shown an interest in presenting crowd

scenes in his plays. As he gathered more and more experience in playwriting, his treatment of crowd scenes matured accordingly. Here, in Luanshi nannu, once again Chen's crowd scenes stand out as one of the special features of the play. As the play is set in the early years of the Resistance War, the background is one of chaos and disorder. With a large and varied cast, Chen succeeds in giving the play the necessary atmosphere and mood. But at the same time, he manages to take care of every corner on the stage, and to let the right person speak or act at the appropriate moment, thus allowing the major characters to stand out among the crowd. Take the example of Act I Scene 1, which is set in a train full of refugees. Chen organizes his characters in different areas: the central figures in the middle; the crowd around them inside the train; the refugees on the roofs of the train coaches; the crowd on the platform All of them are presented on the stage at more or less the same time, but different groups have the leading role at different times. Events spring up in different corners, intercrossing each other, and they integrate together as a whole. The following is a very good illustration.

"Crowd (In a chorus of welcome): Good, good! The train is pulling out! We're leaving Nanking right away! Damn, we've been waiting for this all day! Amida Buddha, at last!
(Outside the window a cluster of people surge forward, clamouring to enter through the coach window)

Crowd (Alarmed): You can't! You can't! No, no, you can't get on! Over that way! Get over to

the third class.

Madame (Screamed): Oh! You can't come in! You can't come in! So filthy! These people! Oh!

Xu (In an angry, commanding voice): Don't you get on, you bastards! Close the windows!

Crowd: Right, right! Close the windows! Close the windows!

Madame: That's it! Close the windows! Don't let them get on! Ah, oh! They scare me to death!

(The people at the window succeed in shutting it completely while the people outside yell curses and pound the window with their fists. But before long the commotion subsides, and they hurry to take their places in "fifth class")

Violet (Stands up, intending to say something, but seeing the window has been closed, sighs): Ah, those poor people. Where will they go?

Miao (Gently seating her): Violet Wave, don't be downcast! The War of Resistance is a hard and bitter struggle!

Wu: They shouldn't be running away to the KMT held area! Why aren't they out there defending their land? (There is a burst of raucous laughter at one end of the coach, with everyone joining in a barrage of commentary)

Crowd (Question-and-answer style): What happened? -- A woman just gave birth! -- Wow, how did it happen? Gave birth? -- The kid's already born! -- Where did she have it? -- In the WC! -- Oh, ah. How vile! -- Listen! (Everyone smiles at the strong wail of the baby)

Miao: Listen! A newborn protagonist for China has entered the world! They are the new army of resistance!

Wu: We must fight for our sons and grandsons! (So many refugees have climbed onto the roof that it is overcrowded, and arguments break out)

Woman A: Aiya! It's too crowded to fit anybody else on! There are too many people! Aiya, don't crowd my child!

Woman B: Why is everybody crowding around up here? This is really dangerous! Isn't there any space left in the coaches?

Refugees: No more people! Nobody else come up! (Just as they are arguing, the steam whistle screams savagely and the coaches give a jolt. Everyone on the roof quiets down again)

Crowd (Cheers go up inside the coach): The train is pulling out! Here we go! -- Good! Good! -- Let the alerts keep coming! Who cares? We're really leaving Nanking!"

(Act I, pp.21-23)

This is a very lively and dynamic scene. Events spring up

as if they are spontaneous, but on further investigation one can observe the careful orchestration of the playwright. Every small piece is carefully timed and paced, and these pieces fit together and give a whole picture. Similar examples can be found in other parts of the play.

To conclude, Luanshi nannu was one of Chen's most significant works during the early years of the Resistance War. Though it is not the best of his satirical comedies, it does however reveal Chen's potential as a satirist. He impresses us by his determination in the face of criticism and social pressure and his adherence to the truth. His argument on the relationship between "exposure" and "pessimism" is striking and enlightening even to this day. The play marked a change in Chen's playwriting; and together with Zhang Tianyi's Huawei xiansheng, it marked a milestone in the development of the literature of exposure in China. As a playwright, Chen's skilful handling of characters and scenes in the play has gained him greater recognition amongst playwrights and critics. Thus Edward Gunn gives the play high acclaim and comments that "this play remains among the most memorable of the war period" (41).

(41) Edward M. Gunn, Twentieth-Century Chinese Drama, 1983, p.xv.

Dadi huichun (Spring Returns to The Land) 大地回春 (1941)

On July 1941, Chen published Dadi huichun, the seventh full-length play he had written since the start of the War of Resistance. By that time, the war had entered its second phase, there was no sign of a let up in hostility, earlier enthusiasm was sapped and there was an atmosphere of dreariness. The change in the political situation had its immediate effect on wartime literature; however, it left no mark on Dadi huichun. Though published in 1941, Dadi huichun had its seed sown in early 1940, thus it was more a work of the first half of the war than of the second half.

According to Chen, among the works he wrote concerning the Resistance, Dadi huichun could be considered as a major work, and it reflected his sentiments towards the war before 1941 (42). The idea of the play originated in the spring of 1940, at a time when the political situation of China appeared relatively and the hope for peace remained high in the hearts of many. But as Chen was planning for the writing of Qiushou at that time, he put aside the idea and allowed it to ferment. He picked up the idea again in the early winter of that year, and by the time the play was completed, the political situation had already changed and peace seemed far away. Chen confessed that he was troubled by the change in the political situation, and "had

(42) Personal interview with Chen Baichen on July 6, 1983.

hesitated, and several times stopped writing the play" (43). However, as the play did ~~serve to~~ reveal his feelings and sentiments, and as he was confident that brightness would come sooner or later, he stuck to the play and finished it in July 1941.

For the idea of the play, Chen was indebted to his present wife, Jin Ling 金玲 (44). In his preface to the play, Chen admitted that the original idea of the play came from a person who had given him much support both in his writings and in life (45). The character Feng Lan 冯兰 in the play was modelled on Jin Ling, while the story itself originated in the real life of Jin Ling and her family. It is noteworthy that it has been Chen's common practice to write on things which he is familiar with; but to allow the idea to ferment and develop for months is quite unusual in Chen's playwriting. The lag between meditation and actual writing allowed the play to gain more maturity, as well as changing the course of the playwright in regard of the theme of the play.

Originally, Chen was struck by the character of Feng

(43) Chen Baichen, 'Daixu -- gei Ba Ren', Dadi huichun, 1948, p.7.

(44) Personal interview with Chen on November 12, 1983.

(45) See Chen, 'Daixu -- gei Ba Ren', Dadi huichun, 1948, pp.6-7.

Lan and had the intention to reveal the fine qualities of the Chinese women, who had struggled strenuously against feudalism and patriarchy, and had exerted themselves to the cause of national liberation (46). But by the time the play emerged, the vision of the playwright had turned towards a wider scope, and he focused his attention on the strength of will of all patriots, males and females alike. It is not just the story of Feng Lan, but the story of her family headed by Huang Yizai 黃毅哉. Huang becomes the central figure of the play, and through his struggles for national industry one sees the patriotic resolution and nobleness of mind of the Chinese people.

The play is divided into five acts. It is set in the KMT-held area of China during the early years of the Resistance War (1937-1940). The whole action centres around Huang Yizai, a manufacturer who at great personal cost moves his factory inland to continue wartime production. There are times when his factory is bombed and he is downcast and in despair, but his patriotism and strength of will enable him to stand up again and face adversity squarely. Around Huang Yizai, there are his family members who are characterized by their different traits and greatly varied

(46) See Chen Baichen, 'Guanyu Dadi huichun' 關於大地回春, in Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1983, p.197. The article was first published in Wenhui bao, May 21, 1946.

attitudes towards the war. The play focuses on the impact of the War of Resistance on the nation and on individuals, and displays before us the birth of a new China and the deterioration of the old society. Chen's main concern is on the development of characters, more than on the plot and the language. Characters are put alongside the great events of the country, which inevitably cause them to change their outlook on life. As Feng Lan says in the play, "the War of Resistance is a flame, we'll all be burned and have our outlooks changed" (47).

Unlike his other plays, Chen gives a relatively detailed introduction of the characters before the play starts. His exactitude as to the age and personality of the characters shows his anxiousness to give his audience a clear notion of them. Such attention to the characters is unusual in his other plays, and it suggests that Chen is going to give his characters much more emphasis than before. This is understandable since the whole idea of the play started from a character whom Chen had been most familiar with in life, and it was her tenacious attitude towards life that first struck him and encouraged him to write the play. Moreover, with the period of 'fermentation', Chen was able to brood over his characters and explore their acts and

(47) Chen Baichen, Dadi huichun, 1948, p.36.

thoughts more deeply. After all, it is the growth and deterioration of these characters during the war period that capture the interest of Chen.

The two major characters of the play are Huang Yizai and Feng Lan, both representing the positive force. As head of the family, Huang takes a dominant role and becomes the centre of attention. He is described as "smart, decisive, of a proud and lonely disposition, upright and strong-willed" (48), possessing all the qualities of a good man. Of the portrayal of Huang, Chen writes:

"I have added much colour of illusion to my portrayal of Huang Yizai I intentionally idealized him. (Of course, such ideal is rooted in reality.) I attempted to make him act as a directing force for certain people." (49)

The intention is clear, thus Huang is given the function of showing optimism about the fate of the country. When, time-after-time his factory is threatened by the Japanese, he does not hesitate to move inland to continue wartime production; or even to destroy the factory to prevent the enemies from gaining benefits from it. From beginning to end, he never forsakes his country. He sticks firmly to his belief that national

(48) Chen Baichen, Dadi huichun, 1948, p.2.

(49) Chen, 'daixu -- gei Ba Ren', Dadi huichun, 1948, p.6.

industry must be built through national struggle. Facing all sorts of hardships, he pulls himself through and is most determined to overcome all difficulties. Though the death of his wife and unending warfare had once made him feel depressed and pessimistic about the future, the victory of the battle of Taierzhuang 台兒莊 have given him hope and confidence again. He sees in the victory the will to win, and it is this that inspires him to carry on. Chen has erected Huang Yizai as a monument to the strength of will in which lies the future of the country.

But Huang Yizai is not the only one who is characterized by his strength of will. Feng Lan, the niece and daughter-in-law of Huang, is also depicted as a strong-willed person. As mentioned above, it is she who sowed the germ of the play, who first struck Chen by her tenacious attitude towards life. In the preface to the play, Chen admits that the creation of Feng Lan had given him great delight, for in her he found the hope in life, and the strength to face life (50). Unlike Huang, who is seen as a most determined man as soon as the curtain rises, Feng's strength of will takes time to develop and it is towards the end of the play that she completes her

(50) See Chen Baichen, 'Daixu -- gei Ba Ren', Dadi huichun, 1948, p.6.

'growth'. As Dong Jian says, "she is not a canary who knows not how to survive after fleeing the cage, she is a phoenix who rises from the ashes young again; she is not a Nora who leaves home, but is a new woman who stands up firmly to the call of the sacred Resistance War" (51). It is on the rebirth of Feng Lan that Chen lays his emphasis.

As a positive character, Feng Lan's role in the play becomes more and more important as the play goes on. In Acts I and II, she is basically a member of the Huang's household, under the constraint of feudalism and patriarchy. Like Nora in Ibsen's A Doll's House, she yearns for a new life: "I need freedom -- I have to live as a 'human being' again" (52). Yet, at this stage, her yearning remains mainly in her heart, and she takes little positive action to realize her aims. It is only from Act III onwards that she takes a more active approach towards her liberation. However, unlike Nora, Feng Lan faces not only the liberation of her own self, but also that of the whole nation. Chen merges the individual's liberation into the nation's liberation, and this gives the play as well as the character Feng Lan a new dimension. Feng understands that only when the nation is free can individuals be

(51) Dong Jian, Chen Baichen chuangzuo licheng lun, 1985, p.184.

(52) Chen Baichen, Dadi huichun, 1948, p.38.

free. As she says, "Only through the Resistance can we obtain our freedom" (53). Thus, she joins the Women Working Team, offering help to the resistance work in the Kuai-held areas; and at the end of the play, she is determined to join the Resistance at the front. It is not difficult to perceive that Chen has given a touch of admiration in the portrayal of Feng Lan. She is the one who gains her growth and rebirth through the war, who takes part in the emancipation of her country so as to emancipate herself as well. Feng Lan, together with Huang Yizai, form the two great pillars which manifest fully the theme of strength of will, and on which the future of the country lies.

Apart from Huang Yizai and Feng Lan, there are two other characters who belong to the camp of the positive force worth mentioning: Hong Chunfeng 洪春峰 (alias Hong Tao 洪涛), the former lover of Feng Lan; and Huang Shuqiang 黄树强, the younger son of Huang Yizai. Chen's treatment of these two characters is quite different. Hong Chunfeng appears more as one who springs from a concept than a real person. He is perfect and flawless. As leader of a guerrilla force, he represents the selfless, patriotic fighters who dedicate themselves to the Resistance War, fighting for the freedom of their

(53) Chen Baichen, Dadi huichun, 1948, p.265.

country. He only appears a few times in the course of the play, but every time he steps on stage he brings about some enlightenment. He serves as the guiding light for Feng Lan and Huang Yizai, who find in him the force to go on with their struggles. He is set up as a model, more ideal than real. On the other hand, Huang Shuqiang is presented to us on a much more 'human' level. When the curtain rises, he is just an ordinary boy like any youngster of fifteen who loves fun and eating. However, war makes him grow and turns him into a responsible and patriotic young man. This is in direct contrast to his brother Shujian 樹堅, who takes advantage of the war and turns into a profiteer. As the youngest member of the Huang's family, Shuqiang represents the young generation whose characters matured during the war years. At the end of Act I, Shuqiang tells his father, "I'm going to school. We, the students are going to organise a guerrilla force!" (54) To this, Huang Yizai only smiles and says, "Nonsense, it's really a joke! Don't talk any more nonsense! Who needs you kids to organise some

guerrilla force! Even if there really exists any guerrilla force in the world, they won't need such a useless fellow as you who knows only eating and drinking!" (55) This reveals what an immature kid Shuqiang is, at least in the eyes of his father. But as the play goes on,

(54) Chen Baichen, Dadi huichun, 1948, p.45.

(55) Ibid., p.46.

Yizai's views on Shuqiang changes as the latter shows more and more maturity and determination. At the end of the play, Shuqiang's telegram which reads "Keep guard on land, can't return, vow to take revenge on father's enemies" (56) gives a sharp contrast to the gluttonous boy at the beginning; and to this Yizai gives his wholehearted approval which also contrasts sharply with his comments on Shuqiang's organising a guerrilla force in Act I. Just as in the case of Feng Lan, it is Shuqiang's increased maturity as a result of his experiences in the war that Chen lays emphasis on. But while Feng Lan gains her 'rebirth' through war, Shuqiang gains his 'birth'. It is in the war that Shuqiang first starts his real life. As a character, the role of Shuqiang is not as important as Yizai or Feng Lan, but he represents the new generation which gives hope to the country.

In contrast to the positive characters, there are Huang Shujian 黃樹堅 and Qian Shaohua 錢少華, the elder son and son-in-law of Huang Yizai respectively. They are typical examples of the profiteers during wartime, standing in a diametrically opposite position to Huang Yizai and Hong Chunfeng. As Feng Lan says, everyone is bound to change through the war; Shujian and Shaohua are

(56) Chen Baichen, Dadi huichun, 1948, p.265.

no exceptions, only that their changes take the direction of self-destruction. As the war drags on, they indulge more and more in their selfish deeds, taking greater and greater advantage of the war. At the end of the play, Feng Lan discloses that Shujian has turned traitor, thus revealing to us the final degeneration of Shujian. Throughout the play, Shujian and Shaohua are put in a negative light, representing those who seek personal gain at the expense of others. As individuals, they contrast sharply with Yizai and Chunfeng; but it is their relationships with their wives that are of more importance to the revelation of the theme of the play.

In the play, Chen portrays two married couples and two pairs of lovers. On the one hand, there are the unhappy couples: Shujian and Feng Lan, Shaohua and Shuhui 梅惠 (the daughter of Huang Yizai). On the other hand, there are the lovers: Chunfeng and Feng Lan, Li Yingbo 李映波 and Shuhui. While the two married couples bear many points of similarities, the two pairs of lovers contrast sharply with each other. Chen presents before us two couples who joined hands together in compliance with the wishes of the parents, and who suffer under the bond of marriage without any love and understanding. As cousins and sisters-in-law, Feng Lan and Shuhui pity each other and share a common aspiration for freedom. Early in Act I, Feng Lan and Shuhui have a little talk with each other.

"Lan: In a family such as ours, the future is full of restrictions and difficulties! Sis, do you have the courage to overcome them?

Shuhui (Passionately): Sis, I'm willing to endure any difficulty and hardship for my freedom!

.....

Lan: I need freedom -- I have to live as a 'human being' again!

Shuhui: 'Human being'?

Lan (Sighs): Sis, I'm your sister-in-law, the young mistress of your family, but I'm no longer a 'human being'. Do you remember five years ago?

Shuhui: The 21st year of the Republic?

Lan: The year when 'January 28 Incident' took place. I was then eighteen. Though I lived in your house, I was not yet married to your brother. Only that one year, I felt I lived for some time as a 'human being'! Later

Shuhui (Sympathetically): Later, Hong Tao left, right?

Lan (With a forced smile): Not because of his leaving. Later, I got married, then, Mother died, and after that, I gave birth to Xiaolan. I became the young mistress of the Huang's family. It has been a whole four years! (Sighs)

Shuhui (Shows fellow feeling): Sis, I'm just the same as you"

(Act I, pp.36-39)

Here are two young women who are barred from their true love and are forced to marry against their will. They are bound by their families, in other words, thwarted by feudalism and patriarchy. Both of them yearn for a new life, free from the custody of the old system. However, while Feng Lan succeeds in her struggle for freedom through her strength of will, Shuhui fails and submits in the end due to her weakness. Undoubtedly, Shuhui is created as a foil to Feng Lan; and through these two characters Chen lets us see how strength of will is vital for one's struggle for freedom.

While Feng Lan's married life bears a strong

resemblance to Shuhui's, her perception of love during wartime differs greatly from that of Shuhui. In the play, the two pairs of lovers contrast sharply with one another. On the one hand, there is Feng Lan and Chunfeng, who place the interests of their country in precedence over their personal love. On the other hand, there is Shuhui and Li Yingbo, who give first priority to their love, but who lack the courage to tackle the difficulties they need to overcome if they are to pursue it. Chen is careful in his treatment of these two pairs. While Feng Lan and Chunfeng are portrayed as lovers who have a high sense of reason and noble aspiration, Shuhui and Yingbo are presented as superficial, weak in mind and irresolute. In the play, Feng Lan and Chunfeng only encounter each other twice, and both encounters are brief. Though brief, the encounters reveal how this pair of lovers treat their 'love affair', which is subordinated to the interests of the country during wartime. Moreover, in the relationship between Feng Lan and Chunfeng, Chen is anxious to let Chunfeng act as a guiding force for Feng Lan, helping her to realize the necessity of liberating oneself through the liberation of the nation. On his first encounter with Feng Lan after five years of separation, Chunfeng hints to Feng Lan,

"The War of Resistance is not just a critical moment of our country in the struggle against oppression, it is also a critical moment of our national industry in the struggle against oppression. At the same time, it is also a critical moment of an individual in the struggle against oppression! -- It is only through the War of Resistance that we can obtain our freedom! "

(Act II, p.94)

And on the second encounter, which is set several months after the first, Chunfeng speaks more directly,

"He hopes to see his girlfriend succeeding in fighting for her freedom and liberation! Therefore he does not want to allow personal sentiments to interfere with her struggle for freedom!"

(Act III, p.146)

It is on Chunfeng that Feng Lan finds her direction and target of life. The encounters are short, but they reinforce her determination to fight for her own liberation and that of the nation. It is through this pair of lovers that we see the virtues of the young patriots, whose patriotic resolution is the key to the liberation of the country.

In contrast, Shuhui and Li Yingbo are typical examples of those who are weak in mind and irresolute in character. Starting from Act I onwards, they are presented as a pair of passionate lovers, vacillating between hope and fear. They are deeply in love with each other, longing to break loose from all restraint; but on the other hand they lack the courage and will to fight for their freedom and happiness. Thus, when they are confronted with Shaohua, who threatens them with a gun in hand, they have to give in. Unlike Feng Lan and Chunfeng, they see only their love, and even then, they waver and succumb to pressure once they are being challenged. Chen stresses their narrow-mindedness as well as the irresoluteness of their characters. When they are compared to

Feng Lan and Chunfeng, they appear small and petty. In the case of Shuhui, the contrast with Feng Lan is especially more striking. In Shuhui, we find the image of Fan Meihua, the wife of the important official in Luanshi nannu. But here, Chen takes more trouble in digging into the personality trait of Shuhui, and unveils the essence of her character. Thus, we are convinced that she is doomed to failure in the struggle for liberation, and further realize the impossibility of gaining one's freedom in the absence of strength of will. It is Shuhui herself who brings about her own tragedy, her weak-minded character is central to her failure.

Structurally, the married couples and the pairs of lovers only take up a minor role in the play; however, they are essential to the play in that they further manifest the theme of strength of will. Through their interrelationship their conflicts and compromises, and realize more fully how precious strength of will is to an individual and a nation. Unlike Huang Yizai who is battles with himself, the married couples and the pairs of lovers play off against each other. Thus, the battles that Feng Lan and Shuhui are having are not so much inward ones, but outward ones. While Feng Lan wins her battle against Shujian, Shuhui loses hers against Shaohua, and the key is strength of will. Furthermore, patriotic resolution brings Feng Lan and Chunfeng closer to one another, but for Shuhui and Yingbo, self-absorption

and irresolution draws them farther apart.

Dadi huichun was written at a time when China was suffering from the conflagration of war and social chaos. As the title suggests, the playwright has taken an optimistic approach towards the situation of China. In this respect, the play shares some similarities with Tuibian 改變, written by Cao Yu around the same period. Both plays are about 'new life' taking the place of old ones, i.e., the casting off of the old and degenerated, and the emergence of the new and progressive. Both stories are set in the early years of the War of Resistance, but in Tuibian the setting is a hospital. Like Huang Yizai in Dadi huichun, Dr. Ding 丁大夫 in Tuibian is a highly patriotic and strong-willed person. She devotes herself wholly to the hospital, saving the lives of those who fight fearlessly for their country. Both Cao Yu and Chen Baichen are eulogizing the strength of will of those patriots, who spare no efforts in the building up of a new China. However, though both playwrights have adopted an optimistic attitude towards China's situation, and have attempted to express a common theme of the new replacing the old, their emphases in the plays differ slightly. In Tuibian, Cao Yu is more concerned with the exposure of the old, and presents us with a whole bunch of corrupted, old bureaucrats. In Dadi huichun, however, Chen puts his emphasis more on the

'new' than on the 'old', and allows his positive characters to dominate the whole play. Furthermore, in the respect of the emergence of the new, Tuibian and Dadi huichun show their differences too. In the former, it is obvious that hope lies in Commissioner Liang 梁專員, an old, righteous official with true determination to reform. But in the latter, hope lies more on the new generation, represented by Hong Chunfeng and Feng Lan. Thus, though both playwrights have chosen basically the same theme and adopted an optimistic attitude, their approaches are different. On comparing the two plays, Dong Jian points out that they suffer from different defects. While Cao Yu's eulogizing of the new appears fictitious and unreal, Chen's exposure of the old turns out to be not forceful enough (57). This in fact is partly due to the different emphases and approaches taken by the playwrights.

But Tuibian is not the only one of Cao Yu's plays which shows some similarities with Dadi huichun. Another of Cao Yu's plays, Qiao 橋, published in 1945, shows an even closer affinity to Dadi huichun. The two plays tackle the same subject, both dealing with the problems facing industry in the KMT-held area, and both call for self-reliance. Shen Zhefu 沈鰲夫, a manufacturer in the KMT-held area shares the same

(57) See Dong Jian, Chen Baichen chuanguo licheng lun, 1985, p.188.

aspirations as Huang Yizai for industrialization in China. His son, Chengcan 承燦, represents the hopeful new generation, and thus is parallel to the role of Feng Lan in Dadi huichun. Surrounded by opportunists, Shen Zhefu and Chengcan stick to their principle and persist in manufacturing products through their own efforts. Their persistency and strength of will are the central theme of the play, which relates closely to that of Dadi huichun. Thus, while Dadi huichun ends with the factory being restored and the machines begin to rumble again, Qiao ends with the success of the manufacture of steel. In both cases, brightness prevails over darkness in the end, and strength of will is once more emphasized.

In respect of subject matter and theme, Qiao and Dadi huichun are quite similar to one another. However, the two plays show marked differences in treatment. In Dadi huichun, it is obvious that Chen intends to link the growth of characters to the important political and social developments of the period. Thus, the War of Resistance becomes a main line of the play, with the development of characters going alongside. A critic wrote in 1942, "Dadi huichun can be regarded as an epic on the Resistance." (58) Indeed, in giving a full

 (58) Lee Tianji 李天濟, 'Lun Dadi huichun de zhuti' 論《大地回春》的主題, Xiju gangwei 戲劇崗位, 1942, vol.3, nos.5 & 6, p.6.

account of the development of characters during the early war years, the play also displays before us the various aspects of the changing times. Chen is conscious of the influence of the times on the development of character, and so he pays much attention to the events which took place in society. His characters are not just roles, they are presented with distinct personality traits. Chen is concerned with the inner conflicts of his characters, especially those between duties to the family and country, and between the desire for freedom. However, as he is too anxious to give a 'complete' account of the development of the characters, he fails to strike a good balance between dramatic function and personal colouring. As a result, characters stand out amongst all other things in the play, and even at the expense of dramatic tension as a whole. Quite the opposite is true of Qiao. Cao Yu's interest in Qiao is not so much in the development of characters as in the dramatic action. Cao gives the play a well-made plot, with the manufacture of steel against all difficulties as the main issue. The story is set in a big city in the KMT-held area during the war years. As the events it narrates take place over the space of two days, the characters cannot be expected to be very fully developed, and the War of Resistance can only serve a general background with little direct impact on them. Basically, Cao's characters in Qiao are roles, they act out of their allotted parts more than being featured for their inherent interest. As a play, Qiao is more intact,

with its well-made plot and vivid characterization. However, in Dadi huichun, we see the ambition of a playwright who aims at portraying a full picture of the growth of characters in the progress of times.

Among Chen's plays written with anti-Japanese theme, Dadi huichun is a significant piece. In fact, it was also his last play written with anti-Japanese theme. As Chen confessed to Ba Ren in the preface to Dadi huichun, the play was one of his endeavours to approach closer to the road of realism (59). Starting from Luanshi nannu, Chen had been most conscientious to abandon romantic individualism for realism. In Dadi huichun, he saluted the patriotic love of one's country, and advocated the idea of putting the needs of the country before personal love. It is a play of the patriotic versus the unpatriotic, and of the strong-minded versus the weak. The Huang family is a reflection of society at that time, and though the family is broken at the end, the tone remains optimistic. Like all Chen's anti-Japanese plays, the play ends with a bright ending, only that in this case it is more subtle and impressive. The stage directions at the end of the play are noteworthy, from which we can see that Chen is meticulous in creating the image of a heroic figure amidst a hopeful picture.

(59) See Chen Baichen, 'Daixu -- gei Ba Ren', Dadi huichun, 1948, p.5.

"(The sun shines brightly, flags are seen flying on the roof of the factory, the bell tolls heavily)

Yizai: Oh! ---- (Pushes away the quilt, jumps out of bed)

Zhang (Alarmed): Brother! Brother!

Lan (Rushes forward): Uncle! (Supports him)

Yizai (Already out of bed, supports himself with the cane against the bedside, leans against the window and looks out of it): I want to have a look of my factory! ---- Oh!

Zhang (Supports him): Brother! Your leg!

Yizai (Laughs): I know I'm standing on one leg! But Shiru, our cotton-mill is standing on two healthy legs!

(The wind blows in gently, causing Yizai's pyjamas to flutter)

Zhang (Ecstatic): Brother, you take care!

Yizai (Adjusts his clothes): Oh! I'm so happy! Though my family is ruined and its members are dead or scattered, yet Lan and Shuqiang have become new persons completely! My old cotton-mill was destroyed, but our cotton-mill of New China has opened! Though the enemies never cease bombing Chongqing, a new Chongqing is being established! The country is ruined, but our New China is already taking form!

(The wind blows, his hair is flying)"

(Act V, pp.266-267)

Such stage directions are uncommon in Chen's plays. In most cases, Chen makes use of lighting or sound effects to create the atmosphere; but here he employs other stage techniques as well so as to give a more impressive ending. Throughout the play, Chen has used the metaphor of a cripple to reveal the condition of the national industry, which also reflects the situation of the country itself. Through Huang Yizai, Chen conveys the idea that national industry cannot be established independent of the freedom of the country. Towards the end of the play, just before the opening of Huang's new cotton-mill, Huang gets a wound

in his leg during an air-raid. When the time comes for the opening of the new cotton-mill, Huang forgets his pain and jumps out of bed. The standing up of Huang serves very well as a symbol of the standing up of the national industry, as well as the standing up of the country. It is on Huang's injured leg that Chen hints at the fate of the country. Undoubtedly, the tone is optimistic, and the play reflects Chen's strong conviction that peace is at hand. It was only after the outbreak of the Southern Anhui Incident that Chen realized his over-confidence. By the time the play was staged, Chen felt a bit uneasy, since the political situation had already changed (60). Nevertheless, the play does reveal Chen's sentiments before 1941, and more importantly, the play makes its success with its vivid characterization and explicit theme. Even as an anti-Japanese play, it departs from the usual formula and is rid of slogans which are so common in most anti-Japanese plays. Above all, it also marked the end of Chen's anti-Japanese plays; after this, Chen paid more attention on the internal Chinese social issues, and dedicated himself to the writing of plays with deeper understanding of society and with wider perspective.

(60) Personal interview with Chen Baichen on July 6, 1983.

Suihan tu (The Winter Scene) 歲寒圖 (1944)

As the Resistance War was approaching to its end, Chen set his pen to plays which reflect society in debris and gained much fame from them. In spring 1944, Chen completed the first draft of Suihan tu, which turned out to be his last play written before the close of the War. The play became one of his favourites. In 1955, when Chen compiled his first collection of full-length plays, Suihan tu was one amongst the three plays chosen. In the postscript to the collection, Chen writes,

".....as one always values one's old broom, I always have a partiality for this play." (61)

In 1980, when Chen reviewed his plays written during the past fifty years, again Suihan tu was chosen as one among the five which constituted his new collection of plays (62). There is no doubt that Chen considered Suihan tu as one of his satisfying pieces of work. Though the scant secondary material available indicates that the play had not been widely performed during the 1940s, it had never escaped the attention of critics and literary historians. In chapters discussing drama during the late years of the Resistance War, Suihan tu is always one among those mentioned. It is generally agreed that Suihan tu was

(61) Chen Baichen, 'Houji' 後記, Chen Baichen xiju xuanji, 1956, p.266.

(62) This new collection of plays was published in 1981 by Sichuan renmin chubanche 四川人民出版社, titled Chen Baichen juzuo xuan.

one of Chen's major works during the 1940s, and the play reveals the maturity of Chen's serious drama.

Chen mentioned the background of the writing of Suihan tu in a number of articles (63). According to Chen, the urge to write such a play first came from his dissatisfaction with the situation within the theatrical circle. To quote Chen's own words:

"These performances gave birth to a lot of upstarts, and even profiteers who abandoned their duties. They in return organized and produced those profit-making performances. Therefore the whole theatrical world turned into chaos. Those virtuous and persevering characters were of course being hemmed in, close to desperation; while those who set the traps laughed grimly. Such a phenomenon would surely provoke the indignation of a literary worker and incite him to reflect it." (64)

Originally, Chen's intention was to lash out against those opportunists and corrupted lots. However, he turned its course before he set his pen on it. Instead of attacking the opportunists within the theatrical circle, Chen put his focus on the virtuous and lofty characters in the medical profession. In an article written before the first performance of the play, Chen explained that the

(63) See Chen Baichen, 'Suihan huai Zhu Fan -- Suihan tu daixu' 歲寒懷朱凡 -- <歲寒圖> 代序, Huaxi ribao 華西日報, December 3, 1944; and Chen, 'Suihan xuyu -- wei Suihan tu yanchu zuo' 歲寒絮語 -- 為<歲寒圖>演出作, Yanju: Suihan tu gongyan teji 演劇: <歲寒圖>公演特輯, January 11, 1946.

(64) Chen, 'Suihan xuyu -- wei Suihan tu yanchu zuo', Yanju: Suihan tu gongyan teji, January 11, 1946.

change of subject matter was due to three factors (65). First, there was the emergence of Xiju chungiu 戲劇春秋 (66). Chen believed that there was prejudice against the theatrical circles in society and thought it unwise to write another play which took theatrical people as its subject. Second, Chen came across a medical doctor and was inspired by him to change the focus and setting of his play (67). Third, there was the hope that a panegyrical piece would stand a better chance of escaping the authorities' censorship than a work of exposure. However, in later years, Chen added a fourth factor to the above three. In the postscript to Chen Baichen juzuo xuan, Chen attributed the change to the leadership of Zhou Enlai, who suggested that corruption within the theatrical circle should be differentiated from the corruption within the Guomindang, and the good side of the people should not be overlooked (68). To us, what made Chen change his mind is not of major importance. It is his widening of the scope in the

(65) See Chen Baichen, 'Suihan xuyu -- wei Suihan tu yanchu zuo', Yanju: Suihan tu gongyan teji, January 11, 1946.

(66) A five-act play on the lives of a group of theatre artists, published in 1943. A collaborated work of Xia Yan 夏衍, Yu Ling 于伶 and Song Zhidi 宋之的.

(67) In a personal interview made on November 12, 1983, Chen disclosed that the doctor was the one who treated his wife and saved her life from tuberculosis at that time.

(68) See Chen, 'Bianhou ji' 編後記, Chen Baichen juzuo xuan, p.556.

choice of subject matter and his shift from the exposure-oriented to the panegyric-oriented approach that are of significance.

Suihan tu is a three-act play, set in a city in the KMT-held area. As the title suggests, it is a play set in winter scene. In Lunyu (The Analects of Confucius) 論語, there is a saying: "Only in cold weather one can find the worthiness of the pine and cypress which stand unfaded all the year round." In Suihan tu, Chen's main concern is with the pine and cypress, and the cold weather is emphasized to reinforce the worthiness of those unfading sorts. Li Zhusun 黎竹蓀, a specialist in tuberculosis, is chosen by Chen as the protagonist in the play. The curtain rises onto a scene set in the winter of 1942. It was the year when China was deeply involved in the War. In the cities in KMT held areas, there was huge over-population, environmental conditons were poor, people suffered from poverty and starvation, and tuberculosis was widespread. Having once suffered from tuberculosis, Li Zhusun sets tuberculosis as his target of attack, and is determined to fight this enemy to the end. He draws up a plan, "within three years, the tuberculosis bacillus in this city will vanish completely, and within ten years, the tuberculosis bacillus will be eradicated from the whole country." (69)

(69) Chen Baichen, Suihan tu, in Chen Baichen xiju xuanji, 1956, p.17.

However, he has failed to put his plan into action. Four times Li has submitted his plan to the local authorities for approval, and four times they have rejected it. While others turn to the pursuit of wealth and comfort, Li sticks to his principles and stands firm. When the curtain falls, it is the deep winter of the following year, and Li is left alone and disillusioned. Ironically enough, his only child is found to have caught tuberculosis.

Undoubtedly, it is the story of a man of loyalty and steadfastness. The play tells the story of a man who stands firm in the face of adversity. Contrary to Chen's original idea, the play turns out to be a panegyric to virtuous people, instead of an unveiling of the evil. But in order to allow the virtuousness of the positive characters to stand out more prominently, Chen also emphasised the exposure of vices as well. Thus, we find the lofty characters, represented by Li Shusun, contrasted with the profiteers such as Hu Zhihao 胡志豪. Though the play has shifted from the exposure-oriented approach to the panegyric-oriented approach, still we find that Chen has not neglected the dark side of society; after all, it is in the midst of darkness that the worthiness of the good is best revealed. In this respect, we can say that Chen has succeeded in striking a balance between the glorification of the good and the exposure of the evil in

this play. He presents before us the visage of a cold, deep winter, and shows how the evergreens stand firm and unfaded, and as a result brings forth the message that evergreens survive winter best. Chen wrote in an article in late 1944:

"..... I know that the winter nights are long, we still have to endure them in hardship and patience. And here at the present moment, as a last support to the Resistance, to call for qualities of perserverance and endurance is our greatest well as the minimum demand on every single person in the Resistance movement." (70)

Here it is shown that Chen bases his optimism for the future on a realization and acceptance of the hard facts of life. eyes set on the praising of the virtuous, Chen also keeps watch over the "virus of profiteering that spread widely across the sky in the rear" (71). It is in this striking of balance between the two that Chen adds more complexity as well as maturity to this play.

Basically, Suihantu is the story of Li Zhusun, the story of how he struggles to work out his plan and to pursue his ideal. To a great extent, it is also the tragedy of a loyal man who fights against a corrupt system and society. The play tells the events which take place between two consecutive winters; though the time span is relatively short, it encompasses quite a number of happenings, and the accumulative effect renders the defeat of Li a convincing

(70) Chen Baichen, 'Suihan huai Zhu Fan -- Suihan tu daixu', Huaxi ribao, December 3, 1944.

(71) Ibid.

one. As regards the plot, Chen has woven a number of sub-plots around the main plot, adding much drama as well as complexity to the play. On one plane, there is the "triangular love affair" between two men Li Zhisun, Hu Zhihao 胡志豪 and a woman Jian Shuxian 江淑娴 . Jiang and Hu are both colleagues of Li, but while Jiang shares Li's aspiration to eradicate tuberculosis, Hu betrays Li and craves for personal gains. In the play, the nature of the love each of the men has for Jiang is sharply contrasted: Li's love is lofty and subtle, while Hu's love appears worldly and temporal. Similarly, Li's ignorance of Jiang's love for him is also juxtaposed with Hu's beguilement of Jiang into marrying him, thus adding much dramatic tension to the play. When at last Jiang decides to leave Li and marry Hu, it becomes apparent that Li is doomed to fail in his struggle. As Li says, "She is my best student, and the last one All the doctors who were my students have left! This last one, has finally been grabbed away from my side as well!" (72) Thus, the relationship between Li, Jiang and Hu is not only one of passion, but also of the conflict between perseverance and philistinism.

Another subplot of the play is the treatment of Shen

(72) Chen Baichen, Suihan tu, in Chen Baichen xiju xuanji, 1956, p.77.

Yong's 沈庸 and his daughter's illness. In the play, Li makes his acquaintance with Shen Yong when Shen accompanies his daughter, Ruolan 若蘭 to seek Li's medical help. However, at the same time, Li notices that Shen himself is affected by tuberculosis. In the process of treating the Shens, Li and Shen have become good friends. In this subplot, it is the relationship between Li and Shen that is most important to the development of the play. Here, Shen Yong is not only the patient and good friend of Li, he is also the one who helps Li in his realization of the problems in society. While Li is the doctor treating Shen's physical illness, Shen is at the same time serving as a doctor treating Li's spiritual illness. Moreover, by adding Shen's daughter to the play, Chen also presents to us the father and daughter relationship which is of significance to the play. Between Shen Yong and Ruolan, as between Li and his daughter Li Juan 黎娟, there is a deep love and tenderness which engender a strong sense of warmth in the midst of hardship and difficulties. By the introduction of the father and daughter relationship, Chen allows us to see Li in another aspect, as the father of a family. In both cases, the daughters are sacrificed to their fathers' struggles, adding a tragic element to the play.

As a play, Suihan tu does not have a complicated plot and a large cast. Taking Li Zhusun as the central

character and his struggle as the main plot, Chen creates a small group of characters and allows the subplots to interweave with the main one. Here, Chen shows his skill in the orchestration of events, fitting all the bits into a unified whole. Take Act II Scene 2 as an example. First, Chen creates a situation when Shen Yong is in danger and waiting for a blood transfusion. In the meantime, several events come up. Hu Zhihao pops up and presses Jiang to consent to leave after two days. Then, Li learns of Jiang's decision to leave, and as he is feeling disappointed and sad, news comes that the blood donor cannot turn up. What is more, Li also receives a rejection letter from the authorities, turning down his proposal. At that point, Shen Yong's condition forces Li to put aside all his anger and depression, and he decides that he will donate his own blood to him. After the blood transfusion, Li struggles to sort everything out, and arranges for his daughter to be sent away to school. Before the curtain falls at the end of Act II, Jiang makes up her mind not to leave, but to help Li to work on his plan. It is to be noticed that Chen has not dealt lengthily with any of these events, but he succeeds in making the events interlock and interact with one another, and allowing the theme to manifest itself through the series of events.

Indeed, Chen is good at manipulating events. Even in scenes which are less eventful, Chen always manages to

grasp hold of the situation and create the necessary effect. Suihan tu tells the tragic story of a persevering doctor, but Chen's aim is not to explicitly portray a pathetic figure who excites the sympathy and pity of the audience. Rather, Chen lets the situation speak for itself, allowing his protagonist to be gradually revealed through events, and in this way, at the same time, he succeeds in exposing the dark side of society. The opening scene is in itself a good example. It is set in an outpatient clinic of a hospital; and through the coming and going of the patients, Chen gives us an impression of the seriousness of tuberculosis in society and the poor conditions in the hospital. But more importantly, Chen makes use of this situation to build up an image of Li Zhusun, who does not appear until page 6 of the play. In the absence of Li, Li's name is always on the lips of the patients; and Li's first appearance on stage is immediately preceded by a chorus of "Dr. Li! Dr. Li!" off stage, signifying Li's popularity among the patients. Furthermore, by juxtaposing Hu Zhihao's and Jiang Shuxian's examinations of patients, the contrast between the two is clearly shown: while Jiang shows similarity to Li in her attitude towards work, Hu behaves very different. With the appearance of Li on stage, the scene develops further, and more and more we become aware of the contrast between Li, Jiang and Hu, as well as the relationships between them. Throughout Act I Scene 1, tuberculosis remains the main issue of the scene, and through

this issue characters representing people from all walks of life are developed. The scene serves very well as an exposition, and amidst the hustle and bustle, Li's image stands out by itself, bearing no signs of contrivance. At the same time, Chen also gives hints of the existing darkness in society: the forces which oppose the 'brightness' of Li's goal.

As mentioned above, Suihan tu does not have a complicated plot, nor are there any grand and sensational happenings to arouse the interest and emotion of the audience. It is obvious that Chen has put much emphasis on characterization throughout the play. The central figure, Li Zhusun is portrayed as a tragic hero.

Chen wrote in an article on Suihan tu in 1944,

"In the tempestuous era of combat, these personages may not be of great service to the country, but in the work of the founding of a nation, they are the cornerstones. Today while facing the hard task of supporting the Resistance strenuously and wholeheartedly, these silent personages are the really great heroes. They are the ones who truly protect the Resistance, who preserve some righteousness in this world of turmoil, who help the masses to judge between right and wrong, good and evil, who set the true moral standard of today."
(73)

To Chen, Li is a hero to be praised. While most people are seeking personal gains, Li fights strenuously and selflessly against tuberculosis for the welfare of the

(73) Chen Baichen, 'Suihan huai Zhu Fan -- Suihan tu daixu', Huaxi ribao, December 3, 1944.

people. In his portrayal of Li, Chen uses the metaphor of the pine and cypress. Like the pine and cypress who stand firm and unfaded in cold winter, Li never deserts his duty under adversity, and clings to the hope that his ideal will come true. In fact, the name Li Zhusun itself is explanatory. Literally, 'Zhu' 竹 stands for bamboo in Chinese, and 'sun' 蓀 means fragrant plants, both denote the qualities of uprightness and virtuousness. As an intellectual who lives during the war years, Li's heroism lies in his perseverance and loyalty to duty. In this respect, there is a certain similarity between Li Zhusun and Lin Tong 林桐, the hero in Yuan Jun's 袁俊 Wanshi shibiao 萬世師表 (74). Lin Tong says,

"One must know: one more profiteer will cause to the country to lose more spirit; one more loyalist will bring to the country to gain more strength. For more than thirty years, this country has never been rid of calamities; like a congenitally weak baby, that must experience a lot of pain before it can grow up, become mature, robust and strong. But that day will come soon. Only, we must stick to our posts, bear our responsibilities, every one of us; and not add more pain to this country, not to let ourselves become its sores and excrescences." (75)

Thus, Lin Tong sticks close to his teaching work, and even when confronted with poverty and misfortunes, he stands firm and refuses to turn to speculative enterprises. His teacher's saying: "To be a hero for a time is easy, but

(74) The play was completed in the autumn of 1944 and first published in 1946.

(75) Yuan Jun, Wanshi shibiao, 1946, p.277.

to persevere at it is really hard" (76) becomes his credo for living. However, while in Wanshi shibiao we see the growth of Lin Tong through a span of twenty-five years, in Suihan tu, the development of Li Zhusun is confined to two consecutive winters. Such a concentrated time span allows a deeper penetration into the character's personality, and at the same time adds profundity to the thematic matter of the play.

As the central figure, Li Zhusun plays a pivotal role in the play. Throughout the three acts, Li is the one who makes the most frequent appearances on stage. The play is set in two places: the outpatient clinic where Li works, and Li's home. Undoubtedly, the play is focused on Li, and the story evolves around him, taking his work and family life as its main concerns. It is noteworthy that in his portrayal of Li, Chen has not painted an overly idealistic portrait of him, as he did with Huang Yizai in Dadi huichun. Here, Li is shown in different situations, which reveal different aspects of his character, and thus enable one to build up the impression of a complex whole. In the play, we find that Li does not just play the role of a medical doctor, but also of a father, a friend and a master. Thus, what attracts us in the play

(76) Yuan Jun, Wanshi shibiao, 1946, p.135.

is not so much the happenings or events, but more the relationships between the characters. Li's relationships with Jiang Shuxian and Shen Yong are no doubt of great importance to the play. Even the description of minor characters, such as Li Juan and Huang Ma 黄妈 (the housemaid of Li), relationships with Li, also serve to add complexity and roundness to the portrayal of Li. Thus, while at work Li is the respectable teacher and colleague of Jiang, the kind-hearted doctor and friend of Shen; at home he is the benevolent father of Li Juan, as well as the good-tempered master of Huang Ma. By placing Li in the midst of his work and family, Chen allows us to see Li's tough side as well as his soft side. When confronted with hardship in work and life, Li is a tough guy. But while he is in the company of his daughter and servant, he becomes a mild and easy-going man. Nevertheless, when work and family into conflict, Li does not hesitate to make work his first priority, thus fully revealing the selflessness which is the basis of his dedication to serving the masses.

Certainly, Li is not a man of complete virtue. Like all tragic heroes, he has his own flaws. Though warned by others that his proposal is not likely to get approval from the authorities, Li refuses to acknowledge this fact and stays with his ideal. As he says, "Of course they will approve! It's a shame if such a proposal is not

approved." (77) Li thus shows an over-confident approach towards the outcome of his approval, and can even go so far as to say he displays hubris.

"Li (Opens the letter. There is a document inside. He reads the letter first): The result of my proposal is out! Dr. Jiang, look, the Director's letter.

Roulan (Stops at the door): Dr. Li, is it approved?

Li (Opens the document ecstatically): Rejoice!

Yours and your father's illnesses will be cured!

Dr. Jiang, you have to stay then!

Jiang (Glances at the Director's letter, stares ecstatically at Li): Is it really approved?

(Li reads the document, no response)

Roulan (Comes back): Dr. Li, when

(Li changes colour suddenly, and throws down the document angrily)

Roulan (Alarmed): Dr. Li, what is it?

Li (Walks away in anger, then turns back abruptly, exclaims): How absurd! How absurd!

(Jiang puts down her head, sighs)

Li (Argumentative): You tell me, is my proposal still too vague? Is my proposal still not practical? You tell me, isn't my proposal an important issue that concerns the national economy and the livelihood of the masses during the War of Resistance? This is a health problem which concerns the whole country, the whole nation!"

(Act II Scene 2, p.61)

It is Li's over-confidence, or hubris that leads to his downfall. In fact, throughout the play, there is the conflict between Li's ideal and the realities of the day. To Li, his proposal is his world. He devotes all his time to the fighting of tuberculosis, and hankers after the realization of his ideal. He never notices Jiang's affection towards him, never realizes how Jiang and his own daughter suffer in the face of cruel reality.

(77) Chen Baichen, Suihan tu, in Chen Baichen xiju xuanji, 1956, p.48.

When at last he is forced to be brought back to reality, everything is too late. Jiang has to leave him and marry Hu Zhihao, and Li Juan is found to be suffering from tuberculosis. Undoubtedly, Li's ignorance of reality springs from his being too idealistic, which is the main flaw in his characters and leads to his disillusion and disappointment in the end. Of course, one may say that it is his ideal that keeps him stand firm and steadfast in face of difficulties; nevertheless, there is little doubt that it is his failure to solve the conflict between an ideal situation and the actual situation that makes his story a tragedy.

Apart from Li Zhusun, certain lesser characters who act more as roles in the play are noteworthy. First of all, there is Shen Yong, the cultural worker.

Chen wrote in 1944:

"But why didn't I let that cultural worker take an important role? I can only tell you this: those cultural workers mostly belong to the raging group. I've said before, in this era we have no right to rage, the dramatis personae are no exceptions." (78)

Thus we see it is Chen's intention not to give Shen Yong a too important role to play, as well as not to use him as a weapon to attack society. In the play, Shen Yong is portrayed as a calm, sensible man, full of deep insight. From the very start, he realizes that the true implication of

(78) Chen Baichen, 'Suihan huai Zhu Fan -- Suihan tu daixu', Huaxi ribao, December 3, 1944.

tuberculosis "is not a medical problem, but a social problem" (79). In the play, Shen Yong first appears as Li's patient, then his close friend. As a patient, Shen places his life in Li's hands, and allows us to see Li's dedication to the medical profession. As Li's friend, Shen helps Li to realise that the source of the problem of tuberculosis lies in society, not just in the medical field. He supports Li when the latter is let down by others, and points him the right direction. Being a lesser character, Shen's appearances on stage are few and brief, especially when compared with those of Li. Nevertheless, the function of Shen Yong in the play is clear enough. His major role is to draw attention to the broad social dimension. Without him, it would be hard for Li to come to the realization that it is the whole society that needs treatment. To a great extent, Shen is Li's counsellor, leading Li to find his way to serve the masses. Shen's last appearance is a very illustrative example.

"Li: This half year, you have taught me a lot of things, I believe you are stronger than I Frankly speaking, in my whole life, I have never felt such emptiness, loneliness! Oh, please forgive me, I shouldn't bother you with these things today.

Shen (Pause slightly): I've heard that Dr. Jiang has left, is it true?

Li: She is getting married so she'll be able to have a livelihood

Shen: Hmm.

(79) Chen, Suihan tu, in Chen Baichen xiju xuanji, 1956, p.18.

Li: You know, she is my best student, and the last one of the doctors left.

Shen: The last one?

Li: All the doctors who were my students have left! This last one, has finally been grabbed away from my side as well!

Shen: Who grabbed her away?

Li (Indignant): It is the so called 'livelihood'! For livelihood, doctors change their occupations! For livelihood, all go after profiteering! For livelihood, anything can be done!

Shen (Shakes his head): No, there is something at the back of livelihood.

Li (Disagrees): I don't care what it is, but what happens to the medical people? (Angry) All have taken up private practice, changed their occupations, gone after profiteering! What about the patients who are left behind? The tuberculosis victims increase day by day, the bacteria spread everywhere, how can a doctor ignore the life and death of the patients and turn his back on them? That's the same as murdering patients! It's a criminal act!

Shen: It's not wholly the responsibility of the doctor.

Li: No! It's the most basic responsibility of a doctor!

Shen: Alright, let's not talk about the medical circle. You said all change their occupations for profiteering, but this is not just the case of the medical circle. You look at the whole of the KMT-held area, no matter you look at civil servants, common folks, university professors, primary school teachers, or even housewives, they are all changing their occupations, going after profiteering! And there is one sort of people -- you can't tell what profession he is in, his profession is to make use of his own or his relatives' and friends' power and position, to undertake speculative enterprises, to make a great fortune out of the war! Everybody is making money from the war, the whole KMT-held area has become a speculative market!

Li: Right! That's the case of the medical circle! But

Shen: It's not the problem of the medical circle, the problem is -- the whole society is deteriorating! You are a doctor, you won't take a symptom for the cause. Changing occupation, speculating, are not just for livelihood, there is a cause behind this!"

(Act III, pp.77-78)

It has to be noticed that though Shen Yong has been given the role of a counsellor to Li Zhusun, Chen is careful not to make Shen appear didactic and intrusive. Being Li's patient, Shen's appearances are always carefully planned by the playwright and they appear natural in the development of the play. Furthermore, the introduction of Shen Yong's daughter to the play also adds more complexity to the relationship between Shen Yong and Li, and it makes Shen Yong's role as Li's counsellor appear natural and believable.

Of the lesser characters, two more figures are worth our notice: Hu Zhihao and Jiang Shuxian. On one plane, Hu and Jiang are students and Li's colleagues and he depends very much on their support for his tuberculosis project. On another plane, Hu, Jiang and Li form a triangular relationship, which inevitably creates tension and conflict between them, making Li's struggle a more difficult one. Like Shen Yong, both Hu and Jiang have clear roles to play in the play. In the case of Hu Zhihao, the importance of his role lies in the sharp contrast he with Li. A philistine and a practical man, Hu is the opposite of Li in every aspect. Early in the play, we find Hu being very impatient towards the patients, shouting at them and treating them like dirt. While Li "treats the tuberculosis bacillus as enemies, and has been fighting

them for twenty years" (80), Hu is dissatisfied with his work after spending four years in the hospital, and determines to develop his own business, establish a position for himself, and earn more money. For him, "when everybody has turned into a philistine, what is the use of your standing firm and being loyal?" (81) Hu's function in the play is that of serving as a foil to Li, with his selfishness and philistinism contrasting sharply with Li's selflessness and loftiness. Furthermore, by portraying Hu as a smart and crafty fellow, Chen makes use of Hu and through his mouth exposes the hard facts in real life. When Hu was asking to be allowed to resign, he challenges Li:

"Dr. Li, you are a famous professor, a renowned specialist in tuberculosis in the country, a real scholar! But how much is your monthly salary? Is it enough to take care of your day-to-day needs? Dr. Jiang's salary is above average for the hospital, but her mother and a widowed sister-in-law are starving, and she is unable to help! The prices of goods continue to rise, the living standard is getting lower and lower so that one can't live on! How many intellectuals die in poverty and illness, how many employees turn to doing business, how many professors change their occupations! But on the other hand, aren't those corrupt officials and profiteers enjoying wealth and honour, leading a life of luxury and debauchery?" (82)

Hu sees the injustice and inequity in society much more clearly than Li, however, Hu, despite the clarity of his perception

(80) Chen Baichen, Suihan tu, in Chen Baichen xiju xuanji, 1956, p.16.

(81) Ibid., p.22.

(82) Ibid., p.32.

philistinism, and decides to follow the herd. When placed side by side with Hu, Li appears all the more unique and commendable.

Unlike Hu Zhihao, Jiang Shuxian is portrayed in a good light. Among the lesser characters, Jiang is the one who makes the most frequent appearances. At work, she is the dutiful student and colleague of Li; in private life, she admires Li and is secretly in love with him. But life is hard, in order to support her mother and sister-in-law, she has to give up her ideal and love, and choose to marry Hu Zhihao. Throughout the play, Jiang is torn between her ideals and reality; and though she struggles hard, she fails to overcome the hard facts of her life. It is obvious that Chen intends to present before us an example of the victims of life, and through such example exposes the cruelties of the real world. Unlike Hu Zhihao, Jiang does not belong to the philistine group. She dedicates herself to her work, shares Li's aspiration of saving people's lives, and yearns for the love of the one whom she most admires. Jiang's experiences speak of the helplessness and powerlessness of the intellectuals in the face of the heavy burdens in life. To live, one has to sacrifice one's ideals and love. In the portrayal of Jiang, Chen succeeds in creating a figure who is convincing and filled with much life. Though of a lesser character, Jiang's role in the play is no less important.

She represents the group of conscientious intellectuals who are forced to give up their ideals due to the pressures of their material lives. As the pivotal figure in the triangular relationship, she helps to draw closer attention to the differences in Li's and Hu's characters. In Li's struggle to realize his project, Jiang also plays an important role. She is a key person in Li's work and life, and as the other doctors leave Li one by one, Jiang becomes the last and only hope of Li. Thus her decision to leave or stay becomes a vital part of the play. It is her leave at the end that foretells Li's defeat, and more importantly, it hastens and intensifies his realization of his true situation. To a great extent, the play is also the story of Jiang's tragedy. While there is profound admiration shown in the playwright's portrayal of Li, we can find touches of sympathy in the tone adopted in the description of Jiang. It is obvious that Chen does not condemn Jiang for her submission to the realistic world, he only sympathizes with her and shares with her a strong sense of helplessness.

When Suihan tu was first performed in 1946, there was some discussion about the ending of the play. He Qifang 何其芳, a well-known critic of the time, gave his comment:

"The ending is relatively vague and weak As a matter of fact, the playwright did allow Li Zhusun to come to a final realization, but the defect is: the realization is not definitive or not forceful enough. It would have been possible for the playwright to give Li Zhusun and Shen Yong better consciousness. At the end Li Zhusun should realize that personal

perseverance and loyalty is without force and is of no help to the matter, thus he should revise his excessive attack on those private practitioners, definitively announce that from then on he will not only treat the tuberculosis bacillus in human bodies as enemies, but also take the tuberculosis bacillus in the old society as enemies, and join hands with the millions of soldiers to fight against them."
(83)

It is clear that He Qifang feels that the play should have a more positive ending. In other words, the play should have a 'bright tail'. This criticism, in fact, is a dogmatic one, which is shared by some critics and literary historians in new China (84). In response to such criticism, Chen revised the play in 1955 when he compiled his first selected collection of plays, and gave it a brighter ending. The revision was a "difficult task" (85). In 1980, when Chen compiled his second selected collection of plays, he showed some regret over his revision in 1955. In the postscript to the new collection Chen writes:

"In 1956 when I selected this (Suihan tu) for edition, I gave certain revisions to the original

(83) He Qifang, 'Ping Suihan tu' 評《歲寒圖》, in Guanyu xianshi zhuyi 關於現實主義, 1962, pp.201-203. The article was first published in Xinhua ribao 新華日報, January 30, 1946.

(84) Similar criticism can be found in Ding Yi, Zhongguo xiandai wenxue shilue 中國現代文學史略, 1955, p.383; Nanjing daxue 南京大學, et al. (ed.), Zhongguo xiandai wenxueshi 中國現代文學史, 1979, p.530; and Shandong shiyuan zhongwen xi 山東師院中文系, 'Chen Baichen lun 陳白塵論', in Bu Zhongkang (ed.), Chen Baichen xiju xuanji, 1983, pp.280-281.

(85) Chen Baichen, 'Houji', Chen Baichen xiju xuanji, 1956, p.267.

script. That was the fashion of that time. In editing old works, many seniors and contemporary writers used to make tremendous revisions to the originals, in order to show the spirit of self-criticism after the liberation. But in this way the readers are unable to recognize the original outlook of the writers, and this is not recommendable." (86)

Chen's confession reveals the reason behind his revision in 1955. Whether Chen did really regret it or not, there is no doubt that the revision does not add merit to the play, but instead adds only didacticism and formalism. It is a play about the struggle of Li Zhusun. The impact of the play lies not in the ending, but in the tragedy of Li itself, of how he stands firm against all obstacles and fails to have his hope realized. Dong Jian is right in saying that it is not necessary for the protagonist to regain strength in order to give the ending impact; the play gains its impact through the protagonist's strong urge to gain strength and his wrath and frustration over his failure (87). He Qifang's criticism, as Dong Jian says, is basically politically oriented, and it fails to realize fully the individualism of Li Zhusun (88).

One last point which must be remarked on is that while there is nothing quite similar to compare with

(86) Chen Baichen, 'Bianhou ji', Chen Baichen juzuo xuan, 1981, p.560.

(87) Dong Jian, Chen Baichen chuangzuo licheng lun, 1985, p.217.

(88) Ibid.

Suihan tu in China, the play has some obvious affinities with Ibsen's An Enemy of the People. Written in 1882, An Enemy of the People tells the story of Doctor Stockmann, medical officer at the Baths, and his indomitable struggle to uphold the truth. Learning that the baths are infected, Dr. Stockmann decides to disclose the facts and correct this error. However, he is faced with the angry authorities and ignorant masses, who are anxious to keep the reputation of the baths so as to make money out of it. At last, Dr. Stockmann finds himself standing alone; he is dismissed from his post, his house is stoned and he is ordered to leave his house, and even his daughter loses her job. Clearly enough, in Suihan tu and An Enemy of the People, both playwrights have dealt with the theme of self assertion and defiance in the face of public opinion. But the similarities between the two lie not only in this respect. D. E. Pollard's analysis is most enlightening:

"The coincidence in profession between Li and Stockmann, the threat or fact of epidemic, the initial confident optimism, then the refusal of funds and the dwindling of support until the doctor is left alone, all these are parallels that suggest the Chinese playwright's debt to Ibsen. But the most convincing evidence is the switch of attention from medical pathology to the pathology of society, whereby the disease is recognized as symbolic of general ills. This takes the resemblance to An Enemy of the People beyond the realm of mere chance." (89)

(89) D. E. Pollard, 'Ibsenism in China', Edda, 1987, vol.4, p.341.

In fact, D. E. Pollard is the first one to have pointed out the strong resemblance between the two plays, and he is justified in concluding that the resemblance is not one out of mere chance. Though Chen has never acknowledged the influence of Ibsen over the writing of Suihan tu, he did not rule out the possibility of such an influence. Chen wrote in reply to the suggestion of the relationship between the two plays:

"Professor Pollard thought that my play Suihan tu was written under the influence of Ibsen's An Enemy of the People, it might be so in objective reality, but the play never occurred to me during my writing. It is the realization of the objective surrounding that first brings about the emergence of a work. I would not have written Suihan tu if the society under the Guomindang government at that time was not so corrupt. Whether it was under the influence of other works during its writing, it is difficult to say." (90)

Indeed, intentionally, Chen might not have designed Suihan tu as a parallel to An Enemy of the People, but it is very likely that Suihan tu might have been inspired by Ibsen's play, as the close resemblance between the two plays itself suggests.

To conclude, Suihan tu is a memorable piece of writing. As the last of Chen's plays to be written during the War of Resistance, the play shows the playwright's growing concern with the problems of society, with the war theme relegated to the background. Though there is still a moral in the play,

(90) Personal correspondence, February 20, 1991.

the whole piece is less instructive and moralistic when compared with his previous works. Characterization, instead of plot, is the main concern in this play. Here, Chen shows his maturity in the treatment of characters, which are put into different situations which bring forth facets of their make-up, thus allowing us to form an impression of a complex whole of their characters. However, while Chen successfully presents before us an upright figure who attracts our admiration and sympathy, he also skilfully unveils the darkness of society at that time. Undoubtedly, Chen has struck a good balance in this play between the glorification of the good and the exposure of the evil. Moreover, unlike Cao Yu's Tuibian, Chen does not rely on a saviour to help the protagonist to fulfill himself, instead, he allows his protagonist to end up in failure. Through the tragedy of an individual in society, Chen delves more deeply into the disease of the society and the value of individual effort. As concerns style, it is noteworthy that some of Chen's characteristic features such as large crowd scenes and bombastic languages are not found here. Instead, the play strikes us by its relatively plain and unadorned style. Two critics who wrote on the premiere of the play gave this plain style high praise (91). Suihan tu is considered to be

 (91) See Ding Zan 丁贊, 'Du Suihan tu juban yihou' 讀《歲寒圖》劇本之後 and Ming Yi 銘彙, 'Yonghu doushi' 擁護鬥士, in Yanju: Suihan tu gongyan teji, January 11, 1946.

"the most honest and sincere piece" (92) of Chen's plays in respect of style. There is "no unusual exaggeration, no showing off of techniques" (93), "no unnatural and obtrusive slogans" (94). It is simplicity and sincerity that win merits, and with the strong human touches shown in the relationships between family members, friends, and lovers, the play stands out prominently among the numerous works written during the war period.

(92) Ming Yi, 'Yonghu doushi', Yanju: Suihan tu gongyan teji, January 11, 1946.

(93) Ibid.

(94) Ding Zan, 'Du Suihan tu juben yihou', Yanju: Suihan tu gongyan teji, January 11, 1946.

Shengguan tu (The Plan of Official Promotion) 升官圖 (1945)

In November 1945, Shengguan tu first made its appearance in the literary supplement of a newspaper in Chengdu 成都 (95). In the following year, the play was staged by different drama troupes in various cities around China such as Chongqing, Shanghai, Beijing and Yanan. From the secondary sources available, there are indications that the play was very well received by the public, and that it turned out to be one of the most popular plays in China during the 1940s (96). The play was hailed by critics and literary historians too, who quite unanimously regarded it play as one of the masterpieces of the time. It is beyond doubt that the play marked the height of Chen's playwriting career.

Literally, 'shengguan tu' 升官圖 means the chart or plan of official promotion. In fact, it was one of the gambling implements commonly found in the old days of China.

(95) The play was published in the form of a serial play on Huaxi wanbao 華西晚報 .

(96) See Zhou Xiao 鄒曉 , 'Guan de chouju' 官的醜劇 , Shanghai wenhua 上海文化 , 1946, no.7, pp.46-47; Lan Ma 藍馬 , 'Hu Feng jituan shi zenyang wumie Shengguan tu de' 胡風集團是怎樣污蔑〈升官圖〉的 , Xiju bao, 1955, no.8, pp.42-43; Feng Mu 馮牧 , 'Guanyu Shengguan tu' 談〈升官圖〉 , in Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1983, pp.353-355; Da Ming 達明 , 'Cong taishang naodao taixia de Shengguan tu' 從台上鬧到台下的〈升官圖〉 , Wenhui bao 文匯報 , May 7, 1981; Qu Chu 屈楚 , Zhou Tesheng 周特生 , 'Cong xiandai xiju xuehui dao Chongqing xinzhongguo jushe' 從現代戲劇學會到重慶新中國劇社 , Xiju bao, 1983, no.10, pp.46-47; and Lin Jian 林間 , 'Shengguan tu de daoyan' 〈升官圖〉的導演 , Jiefang ribao 解放日報 , August 18, 1946.

It takes the form of a chart, the size and shape of a square table. On the chart, over a hundred government posts of different ranks are listed, which are divided into three main streams. By throwing a specially designed die which shows four options (virtue, talent, merit, and corruption), participants follow the routes and either get a promotion or a demotion. The first one who gets to the top wins the game. According to Chen, he used to play this game when he was young, and as he grew older, he came to realize the 'truth' in this game (97). Though there are promotions as well as demotions, the corrupt officials never get sacked or beheaded. Furthermore, with a bit of luck, corrupt officials can get promotions notwithstanding their bad records. It was the memory of this childhood game that Chen's play on officialdom in 1945 got its title (98).

However, Chen's motive for writing such a play came not from his distant childhood memories, but as a response to topical affairs. Chen wrote in 1946:

"Surely the motive for writing this play started earlier, that was before we won the war. There was a time when we seemed to see the signs of the dawn of a new day coming to the political scene of our country, we felt a bit excited and started to plan ahead what we would do next. I didn't doubt

(97) See Chen Baichen, Jimo de tongnian, 1985, pp.82-83.

(98) Ibid., p.84.

the coming of peace, democracy and unity; but I also realized that there existed many stumbling blocks in the creation of this new China, and among them there was one of medium size -- bureaucracy, which must be cleared away. Based on this, I drew up a little plan." (99)

Further to this, Chen came across a number of zhuzhici (occasional poems written in the classical style devoted to local topics) 竹枝詞 which exposed the corruption and hypocrisy of a group of officials in a certain district in Sichuan. The poems aroused Chen's interest as well as providing material for his new play (100). Thus, even though the play was written after the War of Resistance had ended, the original idea came before the close of the war. And according to Chen, the writing took him just three weeks, an experience totally new to him (101). The speedy completion of the play may be taken as a sign of the maturity of the idea in its development, as well as the proficiency of the playwright in handling satirical comedy.

Shengguan tu is a satirical comedy in three acts, with a prelude and an epilogue. The play tells the story of two thieves who break into a big old house to seek

(99) Chen Baichen, 'Xu Shengguan tu de yanchu' 序<升官圖>的演出, Xinmin bao wankan <新日報>晚刊, February 28, 1946.

(100) Ibid. Also see Chen, 'Ji Huaxi wanbao de fukan' 記<華西晚報>的副刊, Zhandi 戰地, 1980, no.6, p.41.

(101) See Chen, 'Xu Shengguan tu de yanchu'.

refuge from their pursuers there. While sleeping in the house, the thieves have a dream about official promotion. In the dream, they wake up and find themselves in a yamen (government office), with an angry mob approaching to hunt down the County Magistrate 知縣 and his Secretary General 秘書長. They hide themselves and witness the two officials being beaten up by the mob. After the mob has left, the two thieves search the victims for valuables and find nothing. One of them (Intruder B) takes the gown of the County Magistrate and dresses himself up in it, and to the astonishment of his partner, he looks just the same as the County Magistrate. At that time, policemen arrive and Intruder B is mistaken for the County Magistrate. Other officials arrive, and they are all taken in by Intruder B. Having no way out, the two thieves have to stick

to the roles of the County Magistrate and his old friend. To cover up his real identity, Intruder A claims that he is a hero who fought off the attackers and saved the life of the County Magistrate. Furthermore, by making a deal with the wife of the County Magistrate, Intruder A succeeds in taking the post of Secretary General as the original one has been killed by the mob. Then news comes that the Governor of the Province is going to visit the county. Anxious to please the Governor, the officials try every means to cover up their ill deeds and the chaotic situation of the county only to find out that the Governor is as corrupt and unscrupulous as they are. Towards the end of the play, a double ceremony for

the wedding of the Governor to the County Magistrate's wife and the impersonator to the sister of the Chief of Police takes place. At the same time, the Governor announces the promotions of the impersonator and the Head of Finance Bureau, the latter of whom has had an affair with the County Magistrate's wife. In the midst of the celebration, the crowd rise up in arms. They drag the officials out one by one to put them on trial before the people. The impersonator is frightened to death, and shouts that he is not the County Magistrate. At that point, the two thieves awake, and realize that they have had a dream; moreover, the pursuers are at the door, and they have no way out but surrender.

The plot of Shengguan tu is a well-constructed one, almost classical in its concentration of space and time and its unity of action. The play deals with two worlds of the thieves: the real world and the imaginary one. While Acts I to III unveil the thieves' fantasy world, the prelude and epilogue deal with their real situation and serve as links between the two worlds. Indeed, the main emphasis is on the dream. By the employment of the dream device, the fantasticality and absurdity of the events in the play become more credible. It is noteworthy that the three acts which describe the dream stand by themselves, and even within the dream the plot is a tight one. The dream begins with the common people rushing into the government office, cursing and beating up the officials; and ends

again with the uprising of the common people against the officials. Such a treatment gives great coherence and unity to the dream. Apart from the beginning and the ending, events within the dream go rolling by, one succeeding the other with almost bewildering rapidity, as happens in most farces. Since it is their dream, the two thieves are placed in the centre of action. Starting from the moment they break in to the government office, they are dragged into situations which step by step push them to a point of no return. Grotesque and absurd as some of these situations may seem, they fit in coherently to the overall action. There is little doubt that the development of the dream follows a well-contrived plot, but the remarkable thing is that there is strong feeling of spontaneity in the events, so much so that we get the impression that once the trigger has been pulled, a whole chain-reaction is set up.

Indeed, the thieves' dream is in itself complete; even without the prelude and epilogue, it still suffices for the needs of a play. However, if the play consisted only of the dream sequence, its action would be wholly confined to the imaginary world. It is important to note that by inserting the prelude and epilogue, Chen opens up another dimension to the play. In reality as in dreamland, the two thieves crave for wealth and power, but end up in getting nothing. By introducing the real-life section, Chen makes us realize the striking resemblances between the real and the imaginary world. We

may laugh at the absurdities in the dream, but at the same time we are shocked to find out how much resemblance they bear on happenings in our real world. As Dong Jian says, "dream" is the means, and "awake" is the aim. It is through laughing at the follies and vices exhibited in the dream that we can view our own reality with greater clarity (102). Furthermore, it is always difficult to draw a hard and distinct line between fantasy and reality. It is not uncommon to find real things seeming dreamlike and dreams having the appearance of reality. Thus, by putting both elements into the play, Chen adds more complexity and profundity to the play.

As a satirist, Chen is explicit in his social criticism. In Shengguan tu, Chen presents us with a whole series of Government officials, who collect high taxes, hoard goods, embezzle public money, collude with gangsters, smuggle and cheat As is the case in most satires, here the personages are stripped down to the bare essential of their characters, so that we are confronted with their follies and vices. Chen is clever in employing the device of using the rogues to expose worse rogues. The two thieves are rogues, the Government officials are worse, and the highest of them all -- the Governor of the Province, is the worst. It is a rotten government, and Chen's main target of attack is

(102) See Dong Jian, Chen Baichen chuanguo licheng lun, 1985, p.247.

the bureaucracy which builds itself up on power and money. By stressing the contradictions and incongruities between appearance and reality, between what things are and what they ought to be, Chen unveils to us the portraits of the hypocritical ruling class. It is a play about the corruption and hypocrisy of officialdom, designed to expose, censure and ridicule the follies and vices of individuals who serve to represent the general corruption within society. But as Dryden says, "the true end of satire is the amendment of vices" (103); Chen does not aim at destruction alone. While he pinpoints, ridicules and censures human vices and social abuses, at the same time he also urges for reform. Chen wrote in the foreword to the Chongqing performance of the play in 1946:

"Of course satire is something negative, but negative is relative to positive; if there is nothing positive acting as standard, how can satires exist? Thus the function of satire is to repudiate what is unreasonable, and its positive significance remains in its affirmation of what is reasonable. It is true that Shengguan tu does satirize a small part of bureaucrats, but what it positively urges for is a reasonable, democratic government."
(104)

Two months later, on another occasion, Chen again wrote:

"I know Shengguan tu is going to hurt a certain minority, but it is a reality generally existing, those who deny it are just concealing a malady for fear of treatment. Only those who admit the reality

(103) Dryden, 'Discourse Concerning Satire'. Quoted by Arthur Pollard in Satire, 1985, p.2.

(104) Chen Baichen, 'Xu Shengguan tu de yanchu', Xinmin bao wankan, February 28, 1946.

will have the courage to improve it. Isn't now just the time for reform?" (105)

The above quotations show that Chen, as do most satirists justifies his attacks by claiming that satire is therapeutic. He is a hopeful satirist, aiming at construction through destruction. Shengguan tu is a satirical comedy, aiming to hurt and to heal. Beneath the lash, there is a hope that social conditions will be improved as a result of clearer insight. It is the belief in the reformatory nature of satire that lends Chen a free hand in his attacks.

To bring out the theme of the corruption and hypocrisy of officialdom, Chen is ruthless with his characters. As in most satires, the major characters in Shengguan tu are negative, and they display no positive characteristics. In the portrayal of characters, Chen shows more concern with external features and little interest in their inner life. They are drawn in rough outlines, with the gusto and verve which are the characteristics of Chen in his satirical comedies. As soon as they first step on stage, Chen gives them an economical yet striking introduction; and with the use of caricature, presents them as objects of ridicule. Thus

(105) Chen Baichen, 'Wei Shengguan tu yanchu zuo' 为《升官图》演出作, in Wushinian ji, 1982, p.425. The article was written in April, 1946, before the performance of the play.

the Chief of Police (Ma 馬局長) is depicted as "a man of unusually short physique, who always likes to dress in full uniform and put on airs" (106); the Head of Education Bureau (Qi 齊局長) is "about forty, gloomy; yawns all day, and with a long white, jade tipped, smoking pipe in his mouth" (107); the Head of Public Works Bureau (Xiao 蕭局長) is "dressed in tidy western suit, pomaded hair and powdered face, self-admired, with a big leather bag under his arm" (108); and the Head of Finance Bureau (Ai 艾局長) is "in his thirties, round and plump, running to fat" (109). . . . These are a peculiar lot. Even without any psychological analysis, the many contradictions in their outward appearances already give them much absurdity and ridiculousness. On the whole, they do not fit in with the generally held image of what such personalities are like. And as the play goes on, the contradictions extend to those that exist between their words and deeds, thus wholly revealing their hypocritical characters.

However, there is one exception. With the Governor of the Province, Chen employs a slightly different method. Instead of ridiculing him and making a caricature of him on

(106) Chen Baichen, Shengguan tu, 1948, p.26.

(107) Ibid., p.32.

(108) Ibid.

(109) Ibid., p.37.

his first appearance, Chen puts him in a good light and creates an image of a honest, incorruptible official. He is depicted as "about fifty, with handsome looks, upright and dignified" (110). But this fine image is shortlived. Chen does not waste much time before he plunges straight into the heart of his personality and exposes his real self to us. He talks copiously of the virtue of being an honest official but acts in a way completely at odds with his fine word and thus becomes another object of ridicule. He is the most distinguished in appearance, and the most corrupt at heart too. His first encounter with the officials is a remarkable illustration of Chen's economy and efficiency in treatment of character.

"County Magistrate (Intruder B): This is your official residence, Your Honour.

Governor (Stands still, looks around the room, frowns): Hm, it's too extravagant!

Secretary General (Intruder A): Your Honour will have to receive guests here. There might be some distinguished guests, and it should be more elegantly decorated.

Governor: We, the government officials, should practise frugality and simplicity in everything. For example, this carpet, very expensive, right?

County Magistrate: Yes, very expensive, very expensive! It just arrived yesterday by plane, a genuine American carpet, it costs 580,000!

Governor (Astounded): 580,000! Too expensive! Too expensive! Too expensive indeed! County Magistrate, do you know how much I spend as Governor each month? My salary and allowances add up to only 3,200! How many years have to take before I can afford such a carpet?

Secretary General: Your Honour, you're mistaken! Just then the Magistrate said 58 dollars, not

(110) Chen Baichen, Shengguan tu, 1948, p.90.

580,000. -- Our County Magistrate didn't enunciate clearly.
 Governor: Oh! Your Magistrate didn't enunciate clearly? (To the others) Is that so?
 All: Yes!
 Governor: Then it's very cheap! 58 dollars, even I can afford it. It's really worths the money! Magistrate, please buy one for me.
 County Magistrate (Scared): Oh!
 Secretary General: If only Your Honour likes it, this carpet --
 Governor (Severely): No, no! I never accept gifts! I am most particular about probity, and hate corruption most! You wish to give me this carpet as a gift, are you asking me to accept a bribe?
 Secretary General: I wouldn't dare! I didn't mean it [like that!]
 Governor (To his attendant): Attendant!
 Attendant: Yes!
 Governor: Give the Magistrate 58 dollars for my carpet! Make sure you pay full!
 Attendant: Yes!"

(Act II, pp.91-92)

Chen does not attempt to give his characters any psychological depth nor is he concerned about the development of his characters. In this play, it is the contradiction between the appearance and reality that really matters. It is through such contradiction that the hypocrisy of the characters is exposed, and the satiric effect is obtained. There are two ways by which the contradictions and satiric meanings emerge. First, Chen lets his characters disclose themselves through their own words and acts. Second, he makes use of the conflicts between them and allows them to attack each other and expose each others defects. There are numerous incidences of the former technique in the play, but the most remarkable one lies in the farewell speech made by the Head of Finance Bureau (Ai) towards the end of the play.

"Ai: On behalf of all the countrymen, I'd like to deliver this farewell speech: -- (Reads) 'Your Honour the Governor, Your Honour the County Magistrate, you are the great saviours of the people!'
 (Xiao leads the crowd to applaud)
 Ai: 'You save the lives of the people!'
 (Xiao leads the applause)
 Ai: 'Ever since the Governor and the County Magistrate came into office, we the people have been living in paradise' (To Xiao) Applaud!
 (Xiao leads the applause again)
 Ai: 'We all live in villas, we own cars, we have big meals. We are really well-dressed and well-fed, living in prosperity and contentment!'
 (Xiao leads a warm applause)
 Ai: 'We thank you two, Your Honours. We've never been exploited by heavy taxation, we've never been oppressed by local bullies and bad gentry, we've never had money extorted from us by corrupt officials, we've never faced the threat of secret agents and concentration camps. We all have freedom of our human bodies, freedom of speech, and freedom in everything! These are all due to your good administration! We are grateful to you, Your honours'
 (Xiao leads the crowd to applaud most enthusiastically)"

(Act III, pp.161-2)

This indeed, is a most ironic speech. The picture portrayed in the speech is something which sharply contradicts what the audience knows to be the reality. What the Head of Finance Bureau is saying is the complete reverse of the actual facts. Here, what is most important is not the real situation of the people, but the hypocrisy of the officials who claim to be the spokesmen for the people. Chen's targets are the officials; he allows them to put on their airs and graces and by their own behaviour to expose the extent of their hypocrisy, and in this way he lays them open to the ridicule of the audience.

As members of the bureaucratic class, the officials

share common interests. However, they are not depicted as a homogenous and undifferentiated group. They are individuals and as such they also have interests which conflict with the common interests they share. At times when their self-interest is under threat or their reputations are being challenged, they will fight against each other. Chen makes good use of this behaviour to expose his characters' vices, and from this obtains much satiric effect as well as gives more completeness to the portraits of the officials. Throughout the play, whenever the officials are put together in a situation, there are always disputes among them which end up in their attacking one another and exposing the defects of the others. Thus in Act I Scene 1, when the Head of Public Works Bureau and the Head of Education Bureau first appear, they are already labelled by the Chief of Police as "the most skilful womanizer" and "the most persistent fighter when it comes to gambling" (111) respectively. On the other hand, the Chief of Police is also criticized by the others for being obsequious to his superior. When the play comes to Act I Scene 2, in the meeting of the officials on the issue of the actions taken against the rioters, the method of setting one official off against another is further exploited. As a result of the friction and arguments between the officials, we are shown a full display of human vices such as hypocrisy and avarice.

(111) Chen Baichen, Shengguan tu, 1948, p.33.

Apart from the officials, the two thieves (Intruders A and B) are worth our special notice. They serve to link the whole play, and are the central figures around whom the whole play revolves. Moreover, they are a comic pair, adding a welcome comic element to the play. On their first appearances on stage, Chen does not tell us anything about their age or physical appearances, except the way they are dressed. Nevertheless, this is enough to give us a notion of the contrast between them. While one wears a long gown with snow-white undershirt, the other wears shorts and a ragged felt hat. As the play goes on, the contrast becomes more evident, not just in outward appearance, but also in behaviour and character. While Intruder A appears to be quick witted, experienced in the ways of the world, Intruder B is ignorant and empty-headed. When placed among the government officials, Intruder A knows just how to behave and is well versed in the rules of the survival of the fittest; however, as for Intruder B, he just cares about women and riches. As thieves, Intruder A is the one who carries the pistol and gives the commands, while Intruder B follows and listens to every instruction. As government officials, Intruder A is inferior in rank but in fact wields more power, with Intruder B acting as the figurehead and A himself the brain of the whole mechanism. Undoubtedly, between the two, in all circumstances, Intruder A is always the master and Intruder B the follower.

As in many comedies, the wise guy and the fool always form a nice pair, such is the case with Intruders A and B here. They are indispensable to each other. Intruder B is the one who resembles the County Magistrate in appearance, thus making the impersonation possible; however, without the wit and contrivances of Intruder A, the impersonation would surely fail. Being a contrasting pair, the two always act in different ways, and thus create much laughter and amusement. One striking example is found in Act I Scene 2. It is the first meeting between the officials since Intruder B began to impersonate the County Magistrate. In this scene, Intruder B is seen frequently behaving involuntarily in a way which reveals his real identity. This naturally make Intruder A very anxious and he wastes no time to find excuses for Intruder B to cover up the impersonation. The following is a good example:

"Ai: According to my investigation, last night before the riot took place, there were two rebels (stares at the Secretary-general) who stealthily

County Magistrate (Scared): Steal? Steal what?

Ai: Don't be afraid, Your Honour. They did not steal things, but stealthily sneaked into the government office. Probably they are the ones who were the ringleaders! (Sternly) These two rebels cannot be let go easily! (Laughs) What do you think? Your Honour? Secretary-general?

Qi: Right! Right! The real rebels should not be let go! They must be arrested!

Secretary General: Last night I did see two persons who were obviously the ringleaders! I'd be able to identify them if they are caught!

Ai: That's right! Now let's not talk about the two rebels, what are we going to do with these folks who followed blindly?

Secretary General: The folks can surely be exempted

from penalty, but still they have to be punished severely! Most severely! (Throws away the cigarette end forcefully)
 County Magistrate (Picks up the cigarette end out of habit): Right! Right!
 Secretary General (Gives him a cigarette in haste): You want to light another one with it? Here it is! (Lights the cigarette, and throws away the cigarette end) Oh, Your Honour, you feel better already? You feel like smoking?
 County Magistrate: Yeah, yeah."

(Act I, pp.51-52)

Instances like this are abundant in the play. In all cases, Intruder B is always the blockhead who gets himself into troubles, either with his old habits or with women; and Intruder A is the one who always keeps his wits about him and saves the two of them from being discovered. In characterization, Intruders A and B contrast each other; but in the main issue of the impersonation, they are complementary to one another. On the one hand, there is the contradiction between the foolish and quick-witted; on the other hand, there is the contradiction between their real identity and their mistaken identity. It is through these contradictions that the comic and satiric effects are achieved.

Undoubtedly, the comic pair play a vital role in the play, as much of the comedy derives from the interaction between the smart thief and the stupid one. Use of this feature in Shengguan tu is unique among Chen's comedies, and indeed among other contemporary Chinese comedies as well. For instance, in another satire deriding the absurd conduct of the government officials, entitled Mianzi wenti 面子問題, the

treatment is quite different. Written by Lao She in 1941, Mianzi wenti tells the story of Secretary Dong Jingming 董景明, who clings to his view that one's 'face' or honour is the most important thing in life. Around Dong, there are his daughter Jifen 繼芬 and his colleague Yu Jianfeng 于建峰, who share his view but differ from him to a greater or lesser extent. In addition, there are Fang Xinzheng 方心正 and his wife, who have gone broke but still struggle hard to keep 'face'. Here, the Fang couple invite laughter from us, but they differ from the two thieves in Shengguan tu by the fact that they are both smart and they are never the centre of attention. As there is little drama in the play, much of the comedy comes from the dialogues of the characters and their behaviour towards each other. Similarly, in Ding Xilin's Miaofengshan 妙峰山 (1941), it is the dialogues rather than the dramatic action which invite our laughter and amusement. In Miaofengshan, Ding Xilin introduces to us three pairs of characters who are of much interest to us: Wang Laohu 王老虎 and Hua Hua 華華, Gu Shizhi 谷師芝 and her husband, the driver and his wife. Though within each pair, there are certain contrasting qualities between the two, none belongs to a smart-stupid couple. As the play belongs to the type of romantic or domestic comedy, our attention is drawn to the characters and the dialogues between them. Unlike Shengguan tu, the characters in Miaofengshan are all drawn in a more or less good light. No real villains are presented on stage.

Though there is a central theme of unifying against the common enemy, the love story of Wang Laohu and Hua Hua attracts much of our attention. Here, Ding shows his brilliant wit in the use of language, and once again there is the chop logic within the framework of formal debate which is a feature of his comedies. Indeed, as far as dramatic action is concerned, both Mianzi wenti and Miaofengshan are inferior to Shengguan tu. Nevertheless, Chen was not the only playwright among his contemporaries who was skilled in creating dramatic action in comedies. Li Jianwu's Yi shen zuo ze 以爲作則 (1936) is one example which is full of dramatic action, with some horseplay and slap-stick thrown in. The play is about a young officer, Fang Yisheng 方義生, falling in love at first sight with the daughter of a juren (provincial graduate) 舉人, and persisting in pursuit of her until he wins her hand. To break the barriers between them, Fang is helped by his crafty manservant, Baoshan 寶善, who devises all sort of tactics. Here, Fang and Baoshan work more or less as a team, and from them much of the action is evolved. However, unlike the two thieves in Shengguan tu, between Fang and Baoshan, the relationship is always that of master and servant. Though Baoshan is the crafty and resourceful one, he is under the command of Fang who is by no means stupid. Moreover, though together they create much excitement and laughter, it is with the presence of the juren, Xu Shouqing 徐守清, that the comic effect is fully manifested. A strict disciple of

Confucianism, Xu Shouqing invites our laughter as he laments over his loss of "hay, husks, bran, dried dates, cock, hen", succumbs to temptation and grasps hold of the maid. It is evident that the play rests on the character of Xu Shouqing, and it is from the duality of his character that the comedy arises. Fang and Baoshan, after all, are only subsidiary characters helping to reveal Xu's character to the full. Thus, we see that Li's treatment of comedy differs greatly from that of Chen. As regards the comic pair, it is beyond doubt that Chen has been very successful in their depiction. D. E. Pollard refers to this comic duo as belonging to "the Abbot and Costello kind" (112), and there may be some truth in that. As this kind of comedy duo does not feature in traditional Chinese comedy, or in The Government Inspector on which the play was modelled (which is to be discussed later), and as Chen admitted that he had been influenced by Western movies in his youth (113), it is possible that the inspiration might truly have come from the Abbot and Costello films.

As a satirical comedy, Shengguan tu points at its targets of attack in a stylized, imaginative and caricature manner. Impersonation is the main issue of the

(112) D. E. Pollard, 'Li Chien-wu and Modern Chinese Drama', Bulletin of The School of Oriental and African Studies, 1976, vol.39, part 2, p.387.

(113) Personal interview with Chen Baichen, November 12, 1983.

play. To pave the way for the impersonation to occur, Chen has to make use of coincidences and misunderstandings. One great coincidence which is vital to the plot is the similarity in appearances between Intruder B and the County Magistrate. Following this, another coincidence is that Intruder B has put on the Magistrate's clothes just before the arrival of the policemen. These coincidences add up together and give rise to the misunderstandings of the policemen and the officials who mistake the intruder for the County Magistrate. However, it has to be noted that here, in this play, coincidences and misunderstandings are used to a minimum, they serve more as integral parts of the plot than mere tools for easy laughs. Undoubtedly, Chen makes use of coincidences and misunderstandings to build up his story, but it is the absurdities revealed in the play that strike us most and make the play a masterpiece.

In Shengguan tu, in the two thieves' dream, everything seems to be exaggerated. The characters are cartoon-like, the language is over-the-top, the manners grotesque, and the situations absurd. It is an absurd world, in which corruption, hypocrisy and pretension are the keys to success. Chen is ingenious in making use of his rich imagination, exploiting all those improbabilities and impossibilities, to create a laughable but thought provoking picture. Take the instance of the officials'

preparations for the visit of the Governor. Beggars are caught and turned into temporary policemen; students, farmers, workers and women are gathered and dressed in uniforms to take part in a parade; prisoners are let go and made to pose as patients in hospitals; lorries are loaded with worn out machines labelled as imported goods, and with boxes packed with cotton wool and newspaper labelled as goods for export cars are instructed to shuttle to and fro on the road leading to the station; citizens dressed up as foreign travellers go in and out of the station The idea itself is ridiculous, not to mention the figures which amount to hundreds and thousands. Everything is done to give the impression of a bustling and booming town, while underneath it is totally rotten and decadent. Here, the contradiction between the appearance and reality is easily perceivable; the more exaggerated the appearance, the more satiric it becomes.

Undoubtedly, exaggeration is fully employed by Chen in this play to create the necessary satiric, and even farcical effect. But exaggeration is not the only means used. In some cases, Chen makes his characters and situations so ridiculous as to be absurd, and through the absurdity is revealed the reality of life. The scene of the curing of the Governor's disease is the best example, and is reckoned by many as Chen's master stroke in the play.

"(The Attendant gives a signal to the Governor)
Governor (Nods, immediately covers his forehead with
his hand, screams): Oh! Oh! Oh! My head is
going to burst!

(The door is flung open, and all are stunned)
Secretary General (Rushes forward): Your Honour,
what is the matter?

County Magistrate: Your Honour! Your.....

All (Crowds round): What is it?

Governor: Oh! Headache! Headache!

Attendant: Oh no! Oh no! His Honour is having a
headache again!

Secretary General: How is it?

Attendant: Every time His Honour loses his temper,
he gets a headache! Your Honour, go in and have
a rest! (Helps him to the bedroom) You stay
outside! His Honour is angry!

(The Attendant comes out from the bedroom)

Attendant: Sirs! It's indeed troublesome!

Secretary General: What is it?

Attendant: This illness of His Honour rarely
occurs, but once it does occurs, it's difficult to
tackle!

Secretary General: How difficult? Please instruct
us!

Zhong (Head of Health Bureau): What's the big deal
about a headache? Let me attend to it.

Ma: Right! Right! Mr. Zhong is an expert, last
time our County Magistrate's illness was
cured by him.

Attendant: Ha! You could do nothing even if you
were a magician!

Secretary General: Is there no way?

Attendant: There is a way, but you will not believe
it -- the prescription is a peculiar one.

.....

Secretary General: Please instruct us, what is the
prescription?

Attendant: Very simple, just one thing -- gold
bars. Put the gold bar over the fire until it
gives out smoke. Once His Honour smells the
smoke, the headache will vanish immediately!

Secretary General: Oh! (Realized) Oh! That
is easy! That is easy! (Secretly pulls the
dress of the County Magistrate)

Attendant: But the seriousness of the illness
differs, sometimes one gold bar is enough,
sometimes it needs more.

Secretary General: How to differentiate the
seriousness?

Attendant: Here's the way -- headache on the left,
one bar is enough; on the right, two bars; the
forehead, three bars; the hindbrain, four bars;
the most serious is to have headache on the

left, right, fore and hind, then it needs five bars!

Secretary General: Hm, hm

County Magistrate (Asks Secretary General): What is the whole thing about?

Attendant: The gold bars must be of pure gold, weighing fifty taels each, otherwise it's useless! Oh, one more thing: each gold bar can only be used once, if the headache recurs, it needs another new gold bar!"

(Act II, pp.95-101)

So, the scene is followed by a succession of shorter scenes, in which the officials, one by one, are conducted into the Governor's bedroom, and offer their gold bars accordingly. Here, Chen captures the different traits of his characters, and succeeds in making the series of repeated scenes into a succession of highly amusing and fantastic caricatures. Later, in Act III, when the Secretary General is imploring the Governor for a promotion, the subject of the headache is picked up again, and this time it is so serious that a double prescription is asked for. Indeed, the whole idea of curing of the headache by gold bars is absurd. It is through all these absurdities that we see the whole chain of operation between the corrupt officials. It is a microcosm of the whole society, in which money and power are the two determinative factors in everything.

In many respects, Shengguan tu resembles the great work of Gogol, The Government Inspector. Written in 1835, the play tells the story of a penniless clerk who comes from Moscow and is mistaken for a government inspector by

the corrupt officials of a small town in Tsarist Russia. The play was translated in Chinese in more than three versions, but its first performance on the Chinese stage did not come until 1935 (114). In 1952, Chen wrote an article on Gogol's The Government Inspector, and openly admitted that he was indebted to Gogol in the writing of Shengguan tu. To quote Chen's own words,

"One of my exercises -- Shengguan tu, though it tells of events in a remote, small town in Sichuan, I always think that this small town bears too many similarities with those in the small border town in ancient Russian! And more importantly, in respect of style, Shengguan tu is also under the irresistible influence of The Government Inspector; to this I can never forget." (115)

Indeed, as far as theme and subject matter are concerned, The Government Inspector and Shengguan tu do share a strong resemblance. In both plays, corruption is very much to the fore. Both have chosen nonentities, Khlestakov in the former and the two thieves in the latter, as central figures in order to expose the vices of officialdom. In both cases, the impersonation is not planned in advance; it is the situation that causes them to take up the impersonation and impels them to make it into an intentional one. When compared with the officials, Khlestakov and the two thieves cannot be considered any worse. Along the ladder of

(114) See Chen Baichen, 'Xunan zai Zhongguo -- jinian Guogeli shishi yibai zhounian' <巡捕>在中國——紀念果戈里逝世一百周年, Renmin ribao 人民日報, March 4, 1952.

(115) Ibid.

officialdom, it is ironic that those higher up are always the more corrupt and hypocritical. Undoubtedly, both Gogol and Chen are setting their targets at corruption and hypocrisy within the official circle. Though there is a gap of 110 years between the emergences of the two plays, the universality of the theme brings the two plays together and removes the differences between place and time.

However, as Chen said, the significance of the influence of The Government Inspector upon Shengguan tu lies not only in the respect of subject matter, but also in style. Ever since its emergence, The Government Inspector has been widely acclaimed as one of the finest of all satiric plays. It stands by itself among the dramatic works of Gogol and all other Russian writers, and it has even been called the best play written in the Russian language. The play strikes us by its excellent use of exaggeration, caricature, the grotesque and mimicry. In Shengguan tu, Chen's readiness to use the same type of exaggeration and grotesque is in itself evidence of the influence of Gogol. Though Chen has employed such devices in his earlier works, it is here in Shengguan tu that they are most fully exploited. Like The Government Inspector, Shengguan tu offers us a wealth of bizarre and improbable details, and strikes us by its ridiculousness and absurdity. It is important to note that it is the style

rather than the subject matter which gives the play its uniqueness and earns Chen the reputation as the most noteworthy satiric playwright in twentieth century China.

To a great extent, the success of Shengguan tu has much to do with Chen's acquisition of Western satiric skill. Traditionally, Chinese comedy emphasizes the concept of 'pleasure without excess' 樂而不淫, and satire is usually characterized by its subtlety and euphemism. The sharpness and poignancy of Chen's satire in Shengguan tu is, therefore, something more of Western rather than Chinese traditional influence. However, Chen has not adhered

solely to principles of the West; in respect of plot and characterization, he shows his indebtedness to Chinese traditional comedy. First, there is the device of the dream. In traditional comedy, dreams are a commonly used device through which the playwright develops his plot, drawing an analogy between fantasy and reality, or even tells the moral of the tale. The 'Four Dream Plays of Linchuan' 臨川四夢, written by the famous Ming 明 playwright Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 are among the finest examples. Of the 'Four Dream Plays', Nanke meng 南柯夢 and Handan meng 邯鄲夢 both tell the empty dream of a commoner who dreams of himself being raised to the position of a high official. In both plays, the fighting for power between high officials and the corruption in officialdom are much stressed to. In these respects, the similarity between Shengguan tu and these two plays of

Tang Xianzu is very evident. Second, there is the portrayal of the 'choujiao' 丑角 (broad comedians). In traditional comedy, 'choujiao' plays an important role and is characterized by a white patch on the nose. In some cases, 'choujiao' plays the roles of good-natured characters, who are humorous and comical in speech and behaviour. In other cases, 'choujiao' also plays the roles of the cunning and vicious, as well as miserly and mean persons. The corrupt officials in numerous traditional comedies are typical examples, and they are never mistaken by the audience as they all have white noses on their faces. In Shengguan tu, though we do not find the white-nosed characters, there is a group of corrupt officials whose appearances and manners show close affinity to those of the 'choujiao' in traditional comedy. With the exception of the Governor, all corrupt officials are presented as 'bad guys' as soon as they first step on stage; their physical appearances are enough to tell us that they are those who represent the vicious and mean, and that they are going to be the source and target of laughter. Even in the portrayals of the two thieves, it is not difficult to discover traces of the 'choujiao', as they share with the traditional figures the comical images which are central to the play and remain prominent throughout.

Lastly, it has to be added that when Shengguan tu was directed by Huang Zuolin 黄佐临 in Shanghai in 1946,

the elements of grotesque and exaggeration were fully elaborated. As one of the actors recalled in later years:

"The performance adopted the style of caricature. The set was designed by Ding Cong 丁聰. A large frame, which was an exaggerated version of a banknote issued by the Central Bank, occupied the whole stage. Characters moved around within the frame. The County Magistrate wore a misfitting Republican suit. The Secretary General dressed like a rascal, with rolled up sleeves and tilted hat. The wife of the County Magistrate wore a vase-like cheongsam. The Head of Education Bureau wore a mortarboard. The Head of Finance Bureau was played by a fat guy, on his gown there hung various coins, and he spoke with the accent of the war criminal Kong Xiangxi 孔祥熙. The Chief of Police was fully armed, and wore a badge as big as a rice bowl with the design of a white sun amid blue sky. The Governor's costume was an uglification of the full dress worn by Jiang Jieshi, as shown on the monthly calendar. The actor mimicked Jiang Jieshi's gestures and tone." (116)

Obviously, in the 1946 production, there was specific identification with the contemporary political world. The satire was taken much as a personal lampoon against the Guomindang Government. Such an interpretation was accepted by the audience, and the production proved to be a great success. One critic wrote in his review in 1946:

"The play was warmly received by the Shanghai audience, and it ran for more than two months I think the popularity of this play is partly due to Ding Cong for his costumes and set design. He has made the play into a satiric caricature, which is something new and fresh to the audience Of course, the factor leading to its greatest success is: while the scripts of most performances were written before the War, with little correlation with the reality; the emergence

(116) Lan Ma, 'Hu Feng jituan shi zenyang wumie Shengguan tu de', Xiju bao, 1955, no.8, p.42.

of such a play which speaks out the thinkings of the people will surely be welcomed by the public." (117)

To most critics in the People's Republic of China, Shengguan tu's success lies mainly in its political significance. This is not surprising since political consideration, have always been the main criterion of literary criticism in New China. Even Chen, in later years, called the play a 'nushu' 怒書, one written out of anger towards the Guomindang government (118). Such emphasis on the political aspect of the play can be ignored. It is true that in the 1940s its performances were endowed with much political colour; but the true essence of the play lies not in this. Shengguan tu strikes us by its blending of the comic elements from both Chinese and Western comedies, making full use of the grotesque and of caricature, and being entertaining and satiric at the same time. Among contemporary Chinese playwrights, Chen is the only one who shows such poignancy in his satires and vastness in imagination. Shengguan tu opens the realm of satirical comedy in China. Today, it remains the best play Chen ever wrote as well as one of the finest play in twentieth Century China.

(117) Zhou Xiao, 'Guan de chouju', Shanghai wenhua, 1946, no.7, p.46.

(118) See Chen Baichen, 'Houji', Chen Baichen xiju xuanji, 1956, p.266.

CHAPTER 5: PLAYS WRITTEN AFTER 1949

Introduction

At the time when the Communists took power in China and set up The People's Republic of China, Chen was forty-one years of age. In life, as in one's creative career, such an age should mark the beginning of another climax. Moreover, following the success of his dramatic works during the war period, it was only natural to expect much from him as the country was opening up a new page in nearly every aspect. However, it turned out to be quite the opposite.

Like many of his contemporaries, Chen plunged himself whole-heartedly into the setting up of a new China as soon as the Communists took power in 1949. In 1950, he joined the Communist Party and became a Party cadre. Since then, his productivity in playwriting dropped drastically. From 1949 to the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, Chen had published only one play (1). The play, titled Dongfeng zhihu ji (The East Wind and the

(1) According to Chen, he had written another full-length play in 1965, titled Dierge huihe 第二個回合 (The Second Round). The play was written in compliance with the wishes of the leaders. However, the play was never published.

Paper Tigers) 東風紙虎記 (2), was a four-act play drawn on current issue with anti-America theme; and as Chen himself confessed, "this was in fact not a serious work, but a fun piece of escapism." (3) The play was labelled "a topical satirical comedy", but it was nothing less than a mere propaganda piece. To a great extent, the play resembles a 'living newspaper' play. In the play, Chen pokes fun at the President and top officials of the United States, and conveys the message that all imperialists are paper tigers and they are doomed to failure. On the other hand, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China are portrayed as the forces of righteousness which are going to win the day. There is little doubt that the play was intended to propagate the idea and policy of the Chinese Communist Party. Aesthetically, the play has little worth mentioning.

During the Cultural Revolution, Chen was one of the many playwrights who were purged. His creative life came to a stop; and for another eleven years, he did not write a single play.

(2) The play was published in 1958. It was revised in the following year and renamed Zhilaohu xianxing ji 纸老虎現形記 (The Revelation of the Paper Tigers).

(3) Chen Baichen, 'Bianhou ji', Chen Baichen juzuo xuan, 1981, pp.557-558.

By the time Chen was rehabilitated, he was already approaching his seventies. In less than two years time, he completed and published a seven-act historical play, titled Dafeng ge (Hurricane Song) 大風歌. Chen called the play "my first serious creation in thirty years" (4). In other words, it was his first piece of dramatic work which he found satisfying since 1949. In another two years time, Chen completed A Quei zhengzhuan (The True Story of A Quei) 阿Q正傳, which was based on Lu Xun's short story of the same title. The play remained Chen's last play up to the end of the 1980s. However, as far as originality is concerned, Dafeng ge is more noteworthy, as A Quei zhengzhuan is very much circumscribed by the original short story in plot and characterization.

Indeed, the thirty years since 1949 had been an arid period in Chen's playwriting career. Following his rehabilitation in 1977, Chen had been trying hard to resume his playwriting career. The emergence of Dafeng ge and A Quei zhengchuan was clear evidence of his vigour in mind and body. However, as old age and poor health are becoming more and more threatening, it seems unlikely that

(4) Chen Baichen, 'Zizhuan', Zhongguo dangdai zuojia zizhuan, 1979, vol.3, p.77.

he is going to write any more plays (5). It might remain that A Quei zhengchuan will mark the end of Chen's playwriting career; which would mean that in the forty years of Communist rule, Chen managed to create only three plays.

(5) In a personal letter dated June 21, 1989, Chen confirmed that he has given up writing completely since 1988.

Dafeng ge (Hurricane Song) 大風歌 (1979)

In January 1979, Dafeng ge first made its appearance in a drama periodical Juben. In September of the same year, a separate volume of the play was published. In this volume, Chen inserted a preface titled 'Xian' 獻, in which he revealed his creative impulse in the writing of the play. According to Chen, at that time he was not given any assignment, and it was purely out of a personal urge that he wrote the play (6). The play was dedicated to Zhou Enlai, the beloved premier of the Chinese people. Obviously, it was out of deep love for Zhou and utter contempt for the Gang of Four (7) that Chen set his pen to paper. He started the writing in August 1977, and in less than two months completed the first draft, to which he gave the title Lü Hou 呂侯. The play was revised six times during 1978, and by the time it first appeared in print, it was renamed Dafeng ge.

At the time Dafeng ge emerged, Cao Yu had just published his new play Wang Zhaojun (8). Interestingly enough, the two plays share a number of similarities in

(6) See Chen Baichen, 'Xian', in Dafeng ge, 1979, p.7.

(7) The fall of the Gang of Four came in 1976, after the death of Zhou Enlai. In the following year, Chen was rehabilitated.

(8) Cao Yu's Wang Zhaojun was first published in Renmin wenxue 人民文學, 1978, no.11.

respect of background. Both plays were written by renowned playwrights who had written few plays after 1949, and both were historical plays dedicated to the late Chinese premier, Zhou Enlai. Moreover, in both cases, the fall of the Gang of Four was a trigger for writing of the plays. Nevertheless, there was one great difference between the two in regard of creative impulse. While Dafeng ge was said to be written out of mere personal urge and with haste, Wang Zhaojun was written as an assignment and with much deliberate thought (9). As most of their contemporaries were hampered by advanced age and/or poor health in the creation of new works, the emergence of Wang Zhaojun and Dafeng ge attracted much attention within theatrical circles in China. Seminars and talks were organized to facilitate free and open discussions on the plays, and performances took place in Beijing as well as other cities (10). From the reviews written on the plays and the performances, it can be seen that much discussion had been aroused. Though there was much controversy about the play, Chen was satisfied with the work. On more than one occasion, Chen

(9) According to Cao Yu, the idea was first raised by Zhou Enlai in the 1950s and he was assigned by Zhou to write the play. See 'Guanyu Wang Zhaojun de chuangzuo' 关于《王昭君》的创作, in Wang Zhaojun, 1979, p.192.

(10) Wang Zhaojun was first performed in Beijing, then Hong Kong, whereas Dafeng ge was performed in Zhejiang as well as Beijing.

referred to the play as his first serious dramatic work since 1949, as well as his best attempt at historical playwriting (11).

Dafeng ge is a seven-act play, with twenty-three scenes. In all editions, a statement is annexed to the play. It reads: "This play is based on Shiji 史記 written by the great Han historian Sima Qian 司馬遷; and references are also made to the relevant chapters in Ban Gu's 班固 Hanshu 漢書." Set in the early years of the Han 漢 dynasty, the play runs for fifteen years focusing on the struggle of power between Lü Zhi 呂雉 (Empress Lü) and the faithful courtiers of Han Gaozu 漢高祖 (Liu Bang 劉邦). When the curtain rises, Han Gaozu has just passed away and his widow, Lü Zhi, is holding back the news in order to plan for the usurpation of the throne. However, the news is leaked and Lü Zhi has to change her plan and order mourning rites to be held in honour of the death of Han Gaozu. In order to secure the Imperial seat for her own son, she sends Lady Qi 戚夫人 (Han Gaozu's favourite concubine whose son Ruyi 如意 has been appointed successor of the throne in Gaozu's last will) to prison, and gives order that no feudal lords and generals should leave their dominions for the capital to pay their last respects

(11) Personal interview with Chen Baichen on July 6, 1983. Also see Chen, 'Zizhuan', Zhongguo dangdai zuojia zizhuan, 1979, vol.3, p.77.

to Gaozu. Only one feudal lord dares to return, and that is Chen Ping 陳平. By his cleverness, Chen Ping has his life spared and is appointed the tutor of Liu Ying 劉盈 (Lü Zhi's son who succeeds Gaozu as Emperor).

The conspiracy of Lü Zhi intensifies in Acts II, III and IV. To cut off the opposition force, Lü metes out a severe punishment on Lady Qi, chopping off her four limbs and gouging out her eyes. She also sends for Ruyi to return and murders him by poisoning. At the same time, Zhou Bo 周勃, a renowned general who has been most faithful to Gaozu, returns to the capital after winning a great battle. Due to Zhou Bo's misunderstanding of Chen Ping, an alliance against Lü Zhi fails to take form. With Liu Ying's death in Act V, Lü Zhi strengthens her power by putting forward a supposititious child as the heir and proclaiming herself Regent. She further extends and consolidates her influence and power by appointing her near relatives as kings and lords, an act in violation of the rules set down by Gaozu. However the Act ends with the reconciliation of Zhou Bo and Chen Ping, striking a good balance between the contending forces.

The play reaches its climax as it goes into Act VI, as both sides are prepared for an onslaught and a bloodshed seems inevitable and imminent. In the banquet scene, the two forces are fully alert and each is trying to outwit the other. The killing of Hou Feng 侯封 (the favourite eunuch of Lü Zhi) by the opposition force pushes the climax to

another height. At the end of the scene, it is clear that the force led by Zhou Bo and Chen Ping has gained the upper hand. The scene foretells the downfall of Lü Zhi and her followers. In the following scene, Lü Zhi is found seriously ill and conflicts arise among her followers in the competition for greater power. When it comes to the final act, Lü Zhi has already died, and the opposition force is planning a counter-attack as the Lües are plotting for a complete overthrow of the Liu sovereignty. With Lü Zhi dead, the Lües lose the mastermind of their conspiracy and reveal their true nature as inferior and incapable people. Finally, the force led by Zhou Bo and Chen Ping wins a complete success, and a true son of Han Gaozu is restored to the throne. The play ends with Zhou Bo and Chen Ping addressing the armies and courtiers, giving thanks to Han Gaozu. With 'Dafeng ge' (Han Gaozu's favourite song which he used to sing) filling the air, the curtain falls.

Unlike Chen's other historical plays, Dafeng ge confines itself to the intrigues within the Emperor's palaces. It is a play about the struggle between two contending forces, with the control of the ruling power as the main issue. On the one hand, there are the conspirators plotting for the usurpation of the throne; and on the other hand, there are the faithful followers of Han Gaozu defending the legitimate rule. Some critics

held the opinion that the power struggle depicted in the play is just a vendetta between two families, with nothing to do with principles and ideology. To this Chen strongly objected. Chen insisted that it is a matter of "unity and disruption, progression and regression", and that it is a "serious political struggle" (12). It is clear that Chen stood on the side of the Lius, whom he made the representative of the positive force. The Lüs are the conspirators, who bring disruption and chaos to the country. Through the struggle between the two political parties, Chen conveys to us the theme of consolidation of a unified country, in opposition to schism. To a certain extent, this theme corresponds to that of Wang Zhaojun, in which the unity between the Manchus and the Han Chinese is held in the highest regard. In both cases, the characters and events are of the past, but the yearning for peace and stability prevailing in the play transcends the time and appears to be of great significance in the present.

As Chen states in the preface to the play, Dafeng ge adheres quite closely to its historical sources. Lü Zhi, Zhou Bo, Chen Ping and others are all real historical figures, and most events (especially the main ones) in the

(12) See Tan Jiayou 談嘉祐, 'Fang zhuming juzuo jia Chen Baichen' 訪著名劇作家陳白塵, Shanxi xiju 陝西戲劇, 1981, no.3, p.41.

play conform to historical records. However, in spite of that, many critics shared the view that Chen was making insinuations in his play. To them, Lü Zhi might as well be Jiang Qing 江青 (the widow of Mao Zedong); while the patriotic Chen Ping is Zhou Enlai. The fact that the play was written in dedication to Zhou Enlai just after the fall of the Gang of Four adds more credibility to such speculation. Furthermore, some even thought that Chen deliberately inserted the statement of sources to conceal his intention of making insinuations; and the more it is concealed, the more it is conspicuous. Such speculation was again turned down by Chen, who declared that he had no intention of making insinuations (13). Yet, at the same time as he made his denial, Chen admitted his deliberation in drawing a close analogy between the past and present.

Chen wrote in 1979:

"..... I could not suppress my anger towards the Gang of Four -- the beasts who disguised themselves as human beings, the chief criminals of the injustice done at Tiananmen. I could not help lashing out at them! Hence, I found a mirror of history from the 2nd Century B.C., and let the true face of these careerists and conspirators be revealed through the indirect reflection of their 'ancestor' Lü Zhi." (14)

(13) See Tan Jiayou, 'Fang zhuming juzuo jia Chen Baichen', Shanxi xiju, 1981, no.3, p.41. Also see Chen Baichen, 'Wei Dafeng ge yanchu zhi shoudu guanzhong' 為《大風歌》演出致首都觀眾, Renmin ribao, August 22, 1979.

(14) Chen Baichen, 'Wei Dafeng ge yanchu zhi shoudu guanzhong', Renmin ribao, August 22, 1979.

Chen's contradiction is obvious. On the one hand, he rejected the idea that his play made insinuations; but on the other hand, he was ready to make his play as much a comment on the present as on the period about which it was ostensibly written. The duty to illuminate the past for the present had been deep-rooted in him, as he said:

"Historical plays are never written for the sake of history Today it is all the more important to make the past serve the present. If there is no such function, what is the point to dig out the old history of two thousand years ago?" (15)

Judging from the above, Chen's insistence of the play being free of insinuations can be ignored. In fact, since insinuation had been widely abused by the Gang of Four, Chen's rejection of it might as well be taken more as a notion. As far as the play is concerned, what is significant is that Chen has written the play with intent, aiming to envision the present by looking to the past. However, this is done through his choice of subject matter, rather than the recreation of characters and events with too great a variance from history.

In fact, Chen was not the only one who was interested in Lü Zhi at that time. In 1979, Li Jianwu completed a play on Lü Zhi, which he gave the title Lü

(15) See Zhou Ming 周明, 'Suihan zhi houdiao -- ji laozuojia Chen Baichen' 歲寒知後凋 -- 記老作家陳白塵, Juben, 1979, no.11, p.84.

Zhi, and labelled it a historical legend (16). However, the play was not published until late 1982 (17), and it did not enjoy the publicity which was given to Dafeng ge and Wang Zhaojun. In respect of subject matter, Lü Zhi has a close affinity to Dafeng ge. Both plays deal with the rise and fall of Lü Zhi, with the seizure of power by Lü Zhi as the main issue. It is noteworthy that though both playwrights chose the same subject matter, their treatments were quite different. In Lü Zhi, Li Jianwu's emphasis is laid more on the tragedy of Lü Zhi than the struggle of power between the two contending forces. The play opens with Lü Zhi's learning of Liu Bang's intention to remove Liu Ying and set Ruyi on the throne, and ends with Lü Zhi's death. The ending is a dispassionate one, but it tells the theme of the play.

"Eunuch B (Sighs): Good days will end soon.

Eunuch C: Plotting all the year round, and still plotting even at her deathbed.

Eunuch B: The kingdom still belongs to the Liu family. I wonder who is going to be the lucky prince to take possession of it.

Eunuch C: The Empress Dowager is dying. She can take nothing with her. It is all finished. We are all finished.

(16) According to Li Jianwu, Lü Zhi was an attempt at the reform in spoken drama, and it was his intention to give much stress on the legendary aspect. Thus he labelled it a historical legend instead of historical play. See Li Jianwu, 'Houji' 後記, Li Jianwu juzuo xuan 李健吾劇作選, 1982, p.567.

(17) According to Li Jianwu, the editor of Shiyue 十月 had taken the script for publication but rejected it later. The play was then compiled in Li Jianwu juzuo xuan, which was published in December, 1982.

(The Court Physician enters in haste)
(Crying is heard from the inner chamber)
(Eunuch D comes out from the inner chamber)
Eunuch D (With tears): The Empress Dowager is dead!
The Empress Dowager is dead! (Runs towards
outside, crying) The Empress Dowager is dead!
(All eunuchs run towards the inner chamber)
Court Physician (With deep feeling): She dies
because she refused to take my medicine. (Walks
towards the other direction, talking as he
leaves) The world is going to change again. I
will still do my job as Court Physician, who
cares whether it belongs to the Lius, or the
Lüs!" (18)

It is clear that Li Jianwu has taken a more detached attitude towards Lü Zhi's struggle for power. Her tragedy is best concluded through the short conversations between the eunuchs. Throughout her life she has never ceased plotting against her enemies, but in the end she gains nothing, she can take nothing with her to the grave. Indeed, there is something philosophical in this short conversation. Moreover, in the concluding speech of the Court Physician, we seem to hear the declaration of the playwright: no matter what the political situation is going to be, he will keep on doing his own job. Undoubtedly, Li Jianwu's approach is quite different from Chen Baichen's. And as both playwrights have always been different in their style of playwriting, the two plays turn out to be similar in the historical subject matter but diverse in style and theme.

(18) Li Jianwu, Lü Zhi, in Li Jianwu juzuo xuan, 1982, pp.564-565.

In the play as in history, the fifteen years (195 B.C. - 180 B.C.) of the Han dynasty had been the years of Lü Zhi. Though the country was free from natural and human calamities, intrigues and plotting never ceased within the palaces. Indeed, events during this period was dramatic enough. As mentioned above, Chen has not made great revision on the historical facts. His task in the play is to manipulate the facts of history to tighten the chain of events represented in the theatre. Here, in this play, the plot is less significant than the theme. To bring out the theme of peace and unity versus disruption and chaos, Chen gives us a full array of the two contending forces, and stresses the dramatic confrontation between them. Like players of a game, the two groups strive to beat the other side in their attempt to win power. By the use of a vast succession of short scenes arranged in chronological order, Chen presents to us a linear and fast-moving process of this power struggle. It is noteworthy that the arrangement of events in chronological order has been a common practice in Chen's historical plays, but the use of a vast succession of short scenes is exceptional. The latter feature is not uncommon in Western historical drama, but it is also one of the characteristics of Chinese traditional operas.

Dafeng ge has a large cast, from Lü Zhi to the anonymous crowd, there are over fifty characters.

Basically, the characters are drawn in black and white. The conspirators are the villains, and the defenders of the legitimate rule are the heroes. Among these characters, Lü Zhi is the central figure, around whom the action of the play revolves. The fact that the play was initially named Lü Hou tells already the importance of her role in the play. As the protagonist and main conspirator, she dictates the action during her life time and her influence continues after her death. It is to be noted that when curtain rises she already has great power. Being the widow of the late Emperor, and the mother of the successor to the throne, she is in a strong position to manipulate everything to her benefits. Even after the enthronement of Liu Ying, she is the one who holds actual power. However, her goal is not just power in the general sense, but sovereignty. She is not satisfied with administering state affairs behind the scene; she wants to be on stage and in the limelight. The greatest stumbling block in her way to success is the Imperial decree proclaimed by the late Emperor stating that no person other than the Liu family can be conferred the titles of Princes. It is this decree that gives the defenders of the legitimate rule the ammunition to challenge the Lües. Thus, in the struggle between the two contending forces, Lü Zhi belongs to the side which tries to secure their actual power and conspires to overthrow the legitimate rule completely. Virtually, she is the ruler, as she controls everything after the death of Han Gaozu; at the same time she is a

conspirator plotting against the legitimate rule. This dual identities make her the key person in the whole play; and once she dies, the whole struggle is resolved.

Though as Lindenberger says, "From the standpoint of an audience's sympathies, the great conspiracy plays characteristically thrive on ambivalence" (19); Dafeng ge does not force the audience to find a middle ground between the opposing sides. Instead, it belongs to a simpler form of the conspiracy play which demands a quite uncomplicated response from the audience. Thus, in the portrayal of characters, we find an apparent revelation of the playwright's distinct feelings of love and hatred towards the characters. Chen is full of hatred and condemnation towards Lü Zhi. She is portrayed as an ambitious, scheming old fox, who will try every means to attain her end of procuring supreme power and authority. In her first appearance on stage, she is already shown in the light of a plotter, directing everything in an overbearing manner.

"(The curtain leading to the western chamber draws open suddenly, an angry Lü Zhi appears. With Lü Yi on her right, Zhang Shi on her left, four eunuchs and four court ladies at the back, she enters abruptly. She waves her hand, at once the eunuchs and court ladies retreat to the

(19) Herbert Lindenberger, Historical Drama, 1975, p.36.

sides, Lü Yi and Zhang Shi steps back as well)
(Lü Zhi says nothing, but walks to and fro at a good pace)
(Shen Yiji rushes in, and at the sight of such a scene, stands aside with hands straight down. Silence)

Lü Zhi (Stops abruptly): The task is not yet accomplished, and news has already leaked out! Good-for-nothing!

Lü Yi (In a low voice): Aunt, please cool your wrath. Let's have Li Shang killed immediately to prevent the secret from leaking out!
(Lü Zhi says nothing, but stares at Shen Yiji. Shen Yiji remains silent)

Lü Yi: Li Shang's son Li Ji should be killed too!

Lü Zhi: In that case, kill your brother Lü Lu first!

(Lü Yi at once stoops, with hands straight down. Zhang Shi signals the eunuchs and court ladies to retreat)

(Outside, guards and eunuchs appear again, come and go without cessation)

Lü Zhi (Watches outside for long, then to Zhang Shi, signalling outside): Call off!

Zhang Shi: Yes! (Hurries off)

Lü Yi (Greatly surprised) Aunt?

Lü Zhi (Raises her head, laughs lightly): I will start a thorough reform! Prepare for the funeral immediately!

Lü Yi (Alarmed): What about the plot set up in these three days? Give it up in this way?

Shen Yiji: The news has leaked. One false move leads to the loss of the whole game. If we don't rein in the horse on the brink of a precipice, we'll have a crashing defeat! The Empress's opinion is most right!"

(Act I, pp.4-5)

As the play goes on, Lü Zhi's insidious and ruthless character is further exposed. Not only is she ready to obliterate all obstacles which stand in her way to success, but she also grabs every chance to revenge and vent her spite upon her enemies. Her treatment of Lady Qi is the most striking example in the play. According to historical records, the torture inflicted on Lady Qi was

one of the most cruelest punishment in Chinese history. Chen makes use of this historical fact and dramatizes it in a short scene in Act II. Immediately after Lady Qi learns from her court ladies (Mingyu 鳴玉 and Peilan 佩蘭) the good news that her son Zhao Wang 趙王 (Ruyi) has returned to the Capital, the eunuchs of Lü Zhi headed by Hou Feng arrive.

Hou Feng (Mildly): Congratulation, Lady Qi!

Lady Qi (Coldly, in silence):

Hou Feng: You've been thinking day and night for Zhao Wang, and today Zhao Wang is back. We come to bring you this good news!

Lady Qi (Her eyes brighten, but still remains silent):

Hou Feng: So you have come to bring the news secretly?

Mingyu: Who doesn't know Zhao Wang has returned to the Capital? What's the need to bring the news secretly?

Peilan: Can't we bring food to the Lady?

Hou Feng (Laughs): You can. You can. (To Lady Qi) Do you want to see Zhao Wang?

Lady Qi (Looks askance, in silence):

Hou Feng (Pretends to be mild): Don't you love your son?

Lady Qi (Indignantly): I do!

Hou Feng: If the Queen Dowager has mercy on you, and lets you see Zhou Wang

Lady Qi: If she still has a heart

Hou Feng: But the Queen Dowager says, your eyes should first be gouged out!

Lady Qi: What does it matter if both eyes are gouged out? I have two ears, and can hear him speak!

Hou Feng: And your two ears should be fumigated to deafness!

Lady Qi (Angrily): I still have a mouth, I can call him!

Hou Feng: And your throat should be poisoned to dumbness!

Lady Qi: I have two hands, I can caress him!

Hou Feng: And your hands and feet should be cut off!

Lady Qi: I still have a mother's heart, I can love him!

Hou Feng (Smiles slyly): Good, let your wish be fulfilled. (To the eunuch) Take her away! Apply the punishments one by one!"

(Act II, pp.41-2)

Undoubtedly, Chen has labelled Lü Zhi the greatest sinner and the worst among the villains. To a great extent, the struggle between the two forces in the play is a struggle between good and evil, and Lü Zhi is Satan. It is significant that even on the brink of death Lü Zhi never gives up her dream of procuring sovereignty power. She looks at the mirror and tells herself, "You can't die! Chen Ping, Zhou Bo are still alive, you shouldn't die! Lü Chan, Lü Lu are good for nothing! Good for nothing! ... You will not die! The Empire should belong to the Lü!" (20) She is still desperate for power, and she is determined to fight to the end. Moreover, she realizes that her followers are no match for her opponents, and this urges her to cling even more desperately to her life. Chen erects her as the pole of evil, upon which he pours his condemnation without reserve. Once the pole topples the whole structure collapses. Thus, after her death has taken place behind the scenes, the opening of Act VII foretells the downfall of the evil force.

In contrast to Lü Zhi, Chen Ping is portrayed with the greatest love and respect. As the antagonist, Chen Ping stands in opposition to Lü Zhi and is at all times the greatest threat to her power. He is the representation of the good force, the

(20) Chen Baichen, Dafeng ge, 1979, p.122.

pole of peace and stability. In all respects, Chen Ping is opposite to Lü Zhi, except that they both work towards their goals strenuously. But while Lü Zhi is driven by her own ambition and lust for power, Chen Ping's source of strength comes from his yearning for peace and stability. To a certain extent, Chen Ping is portrayed as an idealist. He is one who places the interest of the public as the first priority; and his ideal is to see his country prospers and the people live in peace. He realizes that Lü Zhi's ambition and plotting will force the country into chaos and disruption, and thus he is ready to sacrifice everything to fight against her. Indeed, unlike Lü Zhi, whose struggle is a struggle for personal gain, Chen Ping's struggle is a struggle for idealism.

As the leader of the opposition party, Chen Ping's role in the play is no inferior to Lü Zhi's. He first appears on stage in Act I Scene 3, and immediately impresses us by his bravery and wit. Alone and having taken no obvious precaution taken, he returns to the Capital in defiance of Lü Zhi's order. The situation is very much like that of Daniel in the lion's den. It is obvious from the outset the playwright is determined to portray Chen Ping as the hero of the play. Here is a man who dares to challenge power and might, who takes his life in his hand to fulfill his duty to the past Emperor. But while his lonely return surprises the Lües, it also arouses

the speculation of his colleagues. His integrity is queried, and he is taken as a traitor by the loyalists. Thus, for most part of the play, he has to fight two battles: one against the Lü's conspiracy, and the other to win over his colleagues. This gives him a role which is unique in the play. He is the key person in uniting all forces to fight against Lü's conspiracy.

Though there are critics who criticized Chen Baichen for distortion of historical facts in the creation of Chen Ping (21), the portrayal of Chen Ping is nevertheless a success. Out of the twenty-three scenes in the play, Chen Ping appears in fourteen of them. Even in scenes where he does not appear, one can still feel his presence through the conversations of the other characters. In his own camp as well as the opposing camp, Chen Ping is always the subject of their concerns. In Act III Scene 8, Lü Zhi tells her followers, "You are no match for Chen Ping! (Sighs) If you want to be in power, you'll have to learn much from him!" (22) It is significant that even Lü Zhi has to recognize the wits and superiority of Chen Ping to her followers. Indeed, Chen Ping's quick wits are his fundamental trait, which makes him stand out among his colleagues as

(21) See Gu Xiaohu 顧小虎, Zeng Liping 曾立平, 'Dafeng ge duhou' <大風歌>讀後, Wenxue pinglun 文學評論, 1980, no.6, p.96.

(22) Chen Baichen, Dafeng ge, 1979, p.49.

well as enemies. To exhibit Chen Ping's the full, the playwright arranges for Chen Ping to appear at the most critical moments, tackling the most tricky problems which are put forward by Lü Zhi. As Chen Ping solves the problem one by one, he impresses the Lü's with his quick thinking and at the same time awes them even further.

But Chen Ping's quick thinking is not the only thing that draws us to his character. As the main opponent to Lü Zhi, Chen Ping also strikes us by his strong will power and perseverance. As mentioned above, Chen Ping's struggle in the play is twofold. On the one hand, he has to fight against the Lü's conspiracy; on the other hand, he has to face pressure from the loyalists who suspect his motives. Throughout the play, the playwright is careful in dealing with the relationships between Chen Ping and the other characters. Before the Lü's, Chen Ping is neither humble nor ingratiating. He hates the Lü's, yet he always manages to stay composed and discuss state affairs calmly with the Lü's. However, before the loyalists, Chen Ping is always humble and is willing to bear disgrace. In his struggle against the Lü's, his strong will power is one of the vital factors which make the final victory over the Lü's possible. As the audience, we are fully aware of the misunderstanding between Chen Ping and the loyalists. As early as Act I Scene 4, the playwright has disclosed to us the real sentiments of Chen Ping through the visit of

Lu Jia 陸賈, one of the loyalists. Thus, as the play goes on, and as Chen Ping persists in pursuing his lonely task and in struggling to win the understanding of the loyalists, we are all the more impressed and attracted to his character. Undoubtedly, the playwright has written this character with all his love and respect. Here is a man who possesses all virtues. He is an exceptionally quick-thinking man, faithful to his country and people, selfless and persevering; and together with his moral uprightness, we find him to be a character who is almost too good to be true.

It is noteworthy that in the struggle between the two contending forces, Chen Ping is not the only hero. Alongside Chen Ping, there is another character, Zhou Bo. A prestigious man from the military, Zhou Bo takes a vital part in the crushing up of the Lü's' conspiracy. Just like Chen Ping, Zhou Bo, too is portrayed as a hero. But while Chen Ping distinguishes himself by quick wits, Zhou Bo stands out because of his bravery. It is evident that the playwright has given Chen Ping and Zhou Bo the roles of the intellectual and the fighter respectively, and has intended to make them a good pair. It is interesting that they share little in common as far as personalities are concerned, but it is their loyalty towards their country that draw them together. In fact, for the greater part of the play, they are in conflict with each other. It is only towards the end that the misunderstanding is cleared up and a reconciliation takes place, making the final victory over

the Lü's possible. Indeed, throughout the play, the relationship between Chen Ping and Zhou Bo is greatly stressed

It becomes a subplot to the play, adding much complexity to the central issue as well as dramatic interest to the play. Though Zhou Bo has a lesser role than Chen Ping in the play, he fits into the picture well and remains the third most important character, after Lü Zhi and Chen Ping.

A further point to be noted in respect of the characterization is that in this play emphasis has been put on the rulers and their courtiers, as it is after all a play of palace intrigues. This is uncommon in Chen's historical plays, which usually deal with the lower class as well as upper class people. Here, in this play, even the crowd is of little importance and its dramatic role is very limited. For more than two thirds of the play, the crowd is absent from the stage. It is only towards the end that the crowd begins to play a more significant role in the action. In Act VI Scene 18, a group of veterans are introduced on stage, singing as they stroll along the river bank. The sight is a pitiful one, as the group consists of disabled people and cripples. The song is a distressing one, as it reveals the sufferings and sentiments of the ordinary folks. Here, the crowd acts as a catalyst, urging Zhou Bo to make the decision to take action against the Lü's.

As the play goes into the final act, the soldiers begin to occupy the stage. The climax is reached when the soldiers bare their left arms as signs of support to Zhou Bo, vowing to overthrow the rule of the Lüs (Act VII, Scene 22). Indeed, the final victory over the Lüs will never be realized without the participation of the soldiers. Nevertheless, Chen's keeps his emphasis on the heroes, and the chief function of the crowd is confined to help building up the heroes in our eyes.

Basically, Dafeng ge and Wang Zhaojun resemble each other in their black and white characterizations. In Wang Zhaojun, characters are drawn into two camps too: one in favour of the unity between the Manchu and the Han Chinese, the other against it. In both plays, there is an ideal figure, who is almost too good to be true. In the former, there is Chen Ping, whereas in the latter there is Wang Zhaojun. In both cases, the psychological development of the characters is not the primary concern, and instead the importance of the characters lies mainly in their functional roles. However, it is noteworthy that while Cao Yu freely employs soliloquy to reveal the inner feelings of his characters, Chen does not use such a device but allows his characters to be involved directly in the action and reveal their feelings through their interaction. Thus, Cao Yu's characters impress us most during their quiet moments, whereas Chen's characters distinguish themselves by being dynamic and active.

Apart from characterization, the language of this play is also worth noticing. Unlike Chen's other historical plays which are usually characterized by simple, plain and unadorned language, the language in this play is on the whole formal, rhetorically polished and refined. It is easily understandable as it is the only play of Chen dealing with palace intrigues; and we would expect kings and courtiers to speak in high language rather than low language. As concerns the language used in historical plays, Chen has been consistent in his views throughout the years. As early as in 1937, when Chen wrote Jintiancun, he had worked out a formula the language to be used in historical plays (23). According to his formula, language used in historical plays should avoid phrases and idioms used in modern days, and it should give the impression of being the language used in the days of which the play is set. Chen expanded his views in 1943 after his completion of Daduhe (24). His criteria are clear: (i) it should sound like language spoken by living people; (ii) it should be understood by the audience; and (iii) it should be free of modern idioms and phrases. In other

(23) See Chen Baichen, 'Lishiju de yuyan wenti', in Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1983, pp.146-147.

(24) See Chen Baichen, 'Lishi yu xianshi -- shiju Shi Dakai daixu', in Chen Baichen zhuanji, 1983, pp.223-224.

words, it is a kind of "mock-historical" language. The purpose of using such kind of language is to allow the readers and audience to feel the historical atmosphere and to set the language more in harmony with the historical setting. In Dafeng ge, Chen sticks to this principle. On one occasion he talked about the language used in Dafeng ge:

"I have an idea, may be it is a prejudice. I think that there should be some differences between the language used in historical plays and modern language. But I am not saying that historical plays should use the language in history. In fact, nowadays who could understand authentic ancient Chinese, say, the language in Han dynasty? I am only saying, in historical plays one should try to use as little modern language as possible, so that on hearing it the audience may feel a sense of historicity. thus, throughout the play I used a kind of relatively unified 'mock-historical' language. That is, on the basis of simple literary language, I imitated the vivid expressions of the spoken dialogues of Peking opera." (25)

It has to be admitted that in the respect of language, Chen has achieved his aim in Dafeng ge. The simple literary language and the expressions from Peking opera are blended together so skilfully that it gives vividness as well as strong sense of historicity to the play. Four-character phrases are frequently used, adding much regularity and elegance to the play. There is no doubt that Dafeng ge shows Chen's maturity in the use of language in historical plays. The play also becomes one good example

(25) Chen Baichen, 'Chen Baichen tongzhi tan Dafeng ge he lishiju' 陳白塵同志談《大風歌》和歷史劇, Juben, 1979, no.9, p.62.

of how traditional drama can be incorporated in modern historical play in China.

In addition to the above, there is a minor yet significant point which has been overlooked by the critics. Dafeng ge is a serious historical play, with weighty political content. However, to 'lighten' the play, Chen has also introduced the element of love. Amidst the in-fighting and plotting, there is the love between mother and son, brother and sister, which impresses and touches our hearts. First of all, there is the love between Lady Qi and her son Ruyi, which is in sharp contrast to the relationship between Lü Zhi and her son Liu Ying. Though Ruyi never appears on stage, he is constantly mentioned by the other characters. It is evident that a deep love exists between Lady Qi and Ruyi, and thus their failure to see each other adds a very tragic element to the play. Secondly, there are also hints of the love between Liu Ying and his sister Lu Yuan 兒女 . In Act II Scene 5, Chen arranges for Lu Yuan to visit her brother Liu Ying. The scene is a short one, in which the restraint of Lu Yuan is contrasted sharply with Liu Ying's outburst of enthusiasm and passion. It is the only meeting between the brother and sister in the play, and though it is a brief one, the tenderness and love between the two permeate the whole scene. Thirdly, and the most impressive of all, there is the love between Liu Ying and

his half-brother Ruyi. As early as in Act I Scene 3, Liu Ying tells his mother, "Ruyi and I spent our childhood together, therefore I miss him a lot." (26) Later, when news comes that Ruyi is on his way to the Capital and Lü Zhi is plotting against his life, Liu Ying does not hesitate to place himself as protector to Ruyi. He vows, "I will protect Ruyi even at the risk of my own life! Let it be done! I will meet him and take him to Weiyang Palace, let him accompany me wherever I go, eat with me, sleep with me, and see who can do any harm to him!" (27) It is significant that Liu Ying is ready to oppose his mother and take Ruyi into his charge. It is brotherly love which wins over everything. Thus, when Ruyi is murdered, Liu Ying collapses completely. Here, Chen makes a minor change of historical facts, and arranges Liu Ying to implore Lü Zhi to allow him to see Lady Qi. By such a change, Chen emphasizes the love of Liu Ying towards his brother. Liu Ying knows that it has always been Ruyi's wish to see Lady Qi, so he is going to see her on Ruyi's behalf and to fulfill his wish. The way he begs his mother in Act III Scene 10 becomes one of the most touching pieces in the play, as we feel through the lines the strong love between the brothers.

(26) Chen Baichen, Dafeng ge, 1979, p.14.

(27) Ibid., p.31.

Indeed, though there is the element of love in the play, it does not play a great part. Love becomes a kind of dessert to counteract the effects of too heavy a historical meal. Nevertheless, it is significant as it contrasts sharply with the ruthlessness and cruelty of Lü Zhi. Moreover, in the case of Liu Ying, the love element also helps in the portrayal of his character, making him a foil within the circle of the ruling family to the ruthless and utterly self-seeking members.

From the above, it can be seen that Dafeng ge retains many of the qualities which are characteristic of Chen's plays. However, the play is not without its defects. In an article published in 1980, a critic points out that "how to conclude the play is a problem difficult to solve" (28). As the play bears the theme of consolidation of a unified country in opposition to schism, it is natural that the play should end with the victory of the positive force. However, as Lü Zhi is given the vital role in the power struggle, her death behind the scene after Act VI inevitably brings about the collapse of the Lüs and the end of the dramatic conflict as well. As a result, when the curtain rises in Act VII, it is apparent that the balance of power between the two contending forces has

(28) Lin Lang 林琅, 'Kan Dafeng ge' 看《大風歌》, Xiju yishu luncong 戲劇藝術論叢, 1980, vol.2, p.130.

already shifted. When confront with Zhou Bo and Chen Ping, the other members of the Lü appear weak and incompetent. There is not much dramatic interest between the two camps exploit. Victory comes, as expected; but the sense of satisfaction is limited, as everything comes along so easily and thus has little impact. That is why "it gives the audience a feeling that the play ends a bit too hastily." (29) Chen himself is aware of this defect. In an article written in 1982, Chen admits that he failed to make other members of the Lü ~~clan~~ the equals of Zhou Bo and Chen Ping, thus weakening the effect and impact of the concluding act (30). He is particularly dissatisfied with the scene of Zhou Bo's night intrusion into the camp of the Northern Army. In Sima Qian's Shiji, the incident is of great dramatic interest and is very vividly described. However, in the play, the inferiority of the Lüs has again made way too easily for the victory of Zhou Bo, and the incident ends before another climax can be built up. Chen is right in saying that the scene "ends in great haste" (31). Indeed, as a whole, Act VII does give us the impression of

(29) Lin Lang, 'Kan Dafeng ge', Xiju yishu luncong, 1980, vol.2, p.130.

(30) See Chen Baichen, 'Cong Dafeng ge yanchuben tanqi' 從《大風歌》演出本談起, in Xiju yanjiu 戲劇研究, 1982, no.7, p.60. The article was first published in Xinghuo 星火, 1982, no.7.

(31) Ibid.

being concluded in haste. And with the speeches of Zhou Bo and Chen Ping at the very end of the play, the impression of finding an easy way out with a moralistic touch is even stronger.

All in all, Dafeng ge is a successful piece of work. Together with Wang Zhaojun it is conspicuous in the Chinese theatre of the late 1970s for being a dramatic work which shows the maturity and dexterity of the playwrights. However, since Wang Zhaojun was written as an assignment, and Cao Yu had to take great pains to portray "a smiling Wang Zhaojun" (32) so as to bring out the theme of the unity between the Manchus and the Han Chinese, the play appears contrived and unconvincing. In comparison, Dafeng ge was more freely written, after all, it was a play written out of a personal urge rather than the political exigency. Moreover, Chen has made a good choice in the selection of material. The history of the struggle for power between Lü Zhi and her opponents is in itself a very dramatic one; at the same time, that part of history

(32) In legends and other literary works on Wang Zhaojun, Wang is always portrayed as a tragic figure who has to leave her own country and marry a barbarian. Thus, she portrays the image of a sad lady, always in tears and full of lamentation. However, as Cao Yu's task was to portray Wang Zhaojun as a conscientious mediator who devoted herself to the unity of the nation, he had to change the image of Wang to a 'smiling Wang Zhaojun', who volunteered to leave her homeland and marry a Manchu. See Cao Yu, 'Guanyu Wang Zhaojun de chuangzuo', in Wang Zhaojun, 1979, pp.192-195.

can very well manifest the theme of unity and schism. Chen's success lies in his grasping hold of the historical facts and making the whole a dramatic piece. In other words, he has struck a better balance between historical fidelity and dramatic artistry. To conclude, Dafeng ge can be regarded as Chen's best historical play. Though for more than thirty years Chen had not written a single historical play, the emergence of Dafeng ge shows that he is still a master of his trade. The whole play seems to work smoothly especially in the respects of the portrayal of characters and the use of language. Here, in this play, the clumsiness and crudeness which were found in his previous historical plays are replaced by maturity and compactness. It is not the best play ever written by Chen, but there is little doubt that the play stands out among Chen's historical plays and that it can be counted as one of his most significant plays.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

For nearly half a century, Chen had devoted himself to playwriting and the development of modern Chinese drama. From the publication of his first play in 1931 to his last play in 1981, Chen experienced a creative road which can be described as 'long and winding'. Like most of his contemporaries, the years before 1949 had been his most prolific years. As a new hand in the 1930s, he learned his trade step by step and gained maturity in the 1940s. After the setting up of The people's Republic of China, his plays dropped drastically in number as well as in quality. When the Cultural Revolution broke out in 1966, he was among those who were persecuted and a period of quiescence which lasted for eleven years followed. Up until his rehabilitation in 1977, Chen's creative path showed the pattern of development of most contemporary playwrights in China. While war and social unrest had engendered a boom in drama and playwriting, a reign of 'peace and order' had brought about stagnancy and retrogression instead. However, unlike most of his contemporaries, Chen experienced a 'revival' after his rehabilitation, thus making his creative path a longer and more complicated one.

As a playwright active in the 1930s and 1940s, Chen shared with his contemporaries a strong concern for society and his country. His plays, which were written

out of a deep-seated urge rather than mere pleasure, showed a close relationship to the political and social situations of the times. In most cases, he drew his characters and stories from actual persons and topical events, giving a strong sense of actuality to his plays. Undoubtedly, his attention has been focused on the present, not on the past, as he firmly believed that drama is a means to achieve moral, social, political, or educational purposes. Even in his historical plays, it is evident that it was not the past that attracted him as such, but its value in elucidating certain contemporary tendencies. Moreover, claiming himself a realist, Chen has shown great reliance on documentation and observation, and taken great pains not to allow any personal prejudice or predilection to divert him from presenting things as they are. As regards realistic aspects, his plays follow the general trend of modern Chinese drama which has been very closely related to the political and social milieu.

Chen is a doer, not a talker. He learned his trade through practices rather than theories. Since the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, he engaged himself in theatrical works, acquainting himself with the various aspects of theatre. It is evident that the theatre had contributed greatly to his growth, especially in respect of the acquisition of dramatic techniques. Apart from those hasty works written mainly for propagandist purposes, Chen's plays are always marked by their explicit

themes, vivid characterizations, ~~fluent~~ use of language, and masterful orchestration of manners and moods. Even in his early premature works, such as the plays on prison life, there was already a strong notion of his attempt to grasp hold of the characters and situations so as to create the necessary dramatic effect. As he gained more experience and maturity in the art of playwriting during the war period, he showed greater confidence and applied a freer hand to the writing of his plays. Indeed, his greatest success lies in his satirical comedies. Chen's readiness to use the elements of grotesque and exaggeration had made his plays like Luanshi nannu and Shengguan tu unique among the plays of his contemporaries. The satirical element has become the most outstanding characteristic of his plays, and it remains unrivalled in modern Chinese drama up to the present.

But Chen's success lies not only in his satirical comedies. Having had no proper training in drama and playwriting, Chen started playwriting by imitating established playwrights and opened up himself to all sorts of influences. His interests were diverse. Thus he wrote satirical comedies, serious dramas, as well as historical plays, drawing his materials from legends, historical events, current and contemporary issues. As far as quantity is concerned, the different genres were quite evenly distributed. Similarly, a high standard was

maintained in each of these genres, as his successful plays embraced all three genres instead of one. The production of such a wide range of high quality plays from one playwright has been unique in modern Chinese theatre. We have to admit that as a playwright, Chen is a versatile man, he has explored the vast domain of modern Chinese drama and has opened up a new realm in the creation of modern Chinese satirical comedies.

In May 1988, a celebration on the sixtieth anniversary of Chen's involvement in literary and drama activities, as well as on his eightieth birthday was held in Nanjing (1). Significantly, the year also marked the end of Chen's creative career. Due to advanced age and poor health, Chen had to give up writing. It is a pity that Chen was not able to produce another satirical comedy which exceeds or parallels Shengguan tu in success. Though after his rehabilitation in 1977, Chen was enthusiastic about picking up his pen and expressing his true feelings through plays (2), he never tried his hand

(1) See Juben, 1988, no.5, p.85; and Chen Hong 陳虹, Chen Jing 陳晶, 'Chen Baichen nianpu' 陳白塵年譜, Xinwenxue shiliao 新文學史料, 1989, no.4, p.192.

(2) Chen talked of his creative desire on several occasions. One occasion was on January 17, 1983 when he talked to writers during his visit to Hong Kong. See 'Chen Baichen tan Zhongguo xiju' 陳白塵談中國戲劇, Xinwan bao 新晚報 (Hong Kong), January 30, 1983. Also in a personal interview held on August 20, 1981, Chen mentioned that he was keen on writing another satirical comedy.

at satirical comedy again (3). Since 1977, besides two plays, Chen had written numerous articles. His productivity at such an old age is a rarity in modern China, but more importantly, the articles unveiled his emotions and feelings which had been suppressed for years, and threw light on the sixty years of his creative life.

To us, Chen's creative path is one of the best illustration of how creativity can be easily smothered by political constraints. As is well known, under the new regime of the Chinese Communists, the doctrines advocated by the Party and the intervention of the government have always been the greatest stumbling block in the creation of literature and art. However, in the case of Chen Baichen, the constraints existed not just externally, but also internally. It is significant that while external pressure may loosen due to changes in political climate, internal pressure is hard to overcome. Since 1950, when Chen became a Chinese Communist, he vowed to become a spokesman for the masses. As a party cadre, he was all the more conscious of acting in compliance with the party leadership. Even during his persecution in the Cultural Revolution, he never queried his political belief. To

(3) Chen wrote A Quei zhengzuan in 1980. The play is a satirical comedy, but Chen regarded it more as an adaptation than an original creation.

him, Communism had saved China. He had passed through the war years, and he realized how difficult it had been to set up a new China. He treasured the change in his country from chaos to peace and order, and as he firmly believed that drama is a means to serve political, social and educational ends, he was cautious not to jeopardize the stability of the country through dramatic works. It was this self-inflicted pressure that became the major stumbling block to the progression of his playwriting. Even after his rehabilitation in 1977, when he experienced the greatest freedom since the setting up of The People's Republic of China, he was still unable to shake off the burden of being a Communist playwright. From 1977 to 1988, apart from an adaptation work of Lu Xun's A Quei zhengzuan, he succeeded in writing only one play (Dafeng ge); and significantly enough, the play chose stability versus chaos as its theme. It is evident that his deep-rooted conviction of the pragmatic function of drama and his political belief had turned out to be the obstacles block in his playwriting career.

George Orwell says, "A writer cannot be a loyal member of a political party." (4) There is great truth in this. No matter what method or attitude the playwright

(4) See Audrey Cappard and Bernard Crick, ed., 'Introduction', Orwell Remembered, 1984, p.13.

adopts , art is that which induces an aesthetic effect, whatever ~~that may be~~. Creative freedom is essential for the emergence of good works. It is only when the playwright is free from constraints (external and internal) that he is able to produce plays of artistic merit . Chen Baichen's creative path shows the pattern of development of modern Chinese dramatists; in him, we also see the development of modern Chinese drama which took its rise in the early 20th Century, flourished in the 1930s and 1940s, and stagnated since the 1950s. Today, we still have to admit that of the sixty years of creative life, Chen Baichen enjoyed most creative freedom during the 1930s and 1940s, and his greatest success in playwriting lies in his pre-1949 works.

APPENDICES

A. Main biographical data of Chen Baichen:

- 1908 Born in Huaiyin, Jiangsu 江蘇淮陰
- 1914 Started schooling at a private tutorial school
Used the name Chen Zenghong 陳增鴻 at school
- 1924 Started writing poems and short stories, and sent them to periodicals for publication
- 1926 Graduated from high school, changed his name to Chen Zhenghong 陳征鴻
Autumn, entered Shanghai wenke zhuanke xuexiao 上海文科專科學校
- 1927 Entered Shanghai yishu daxue 上海藝術大學
Took part in the productions of Tian Han's movies and plays
- 1928 Entered Shanghai nanguo yishu xueyuan 上海南國藝術學院, founded by Tian Han
Autumn, ended his schooling after the closing down of the college
October, publication of his first novel, with the pseudonym 'Baichen' 白塵
- 1929 Took part in Nanguoshe's 南國社 drama performances in Nanjing
Founded Minzhong jushe 民眾劇社 and Modeng jushe 摩登劇社

- 1931 Took up teaching in secondary school, later was dismissed for his involvement in political activities
- 1932 Joined Gongchan zhuyi qingnian tuan 共產主義青年團
September, arrested by the Guomindang and was put to jail
- 1935 Released from jail
Went to Shanghai and started his life as a professional writer
- 1937 Publication of Jintiancun, which was later performed in Shanghai and became his first staged play
Collaborated in the writing of the first propaganda play against Japanese aggression, Baowei Lugouqiao
Helped organize Shanghai yingren jutuan 上海影人劇團,
toured West China (Chengdu, Chongqing), giving performances designed to boost wartime morale
- 1938 Part-time lecturer at Guoli juzhuan 國立劇專
Joined Zhonghua quanguo wenyijie kangdi xiehui 中華全國文藝界抗敵協會
- 1939 Lecturer at Jiaodao jutuan 教導劇團
- 1940 Lecturer at Sichuan xiju yinyue xuexiao 四川戲劇音樂學校
- 1941 Helped organize Zhonghua juyishe 中華劇藝社
- 1943 Editor of the literary supplements of Huaxi wanbao 華西晚報 and Huaxi ribao 華西日報 at Chengdu
- 1946 Returned to Shanghai

- 1947 Part-time lecturer at Shanghai xiju zhuanke xuexiao
上海戲劇專科學校
Started writing screen scripts
- 1948 Submitted application for member of the Chinese
Communist Party
- 1949 Elected committee member of Quanguo wenlian quanguo
weiyuanhui 全國文聯全國委員會
- 1950 Elected People's Representative of Shanghai, and
Chief Secretary of Shanghai wenxue yishujie
lianhehui 上海文學藝術界聯合會
Joined the Chinese Communist Party
- 1953 Appointed Chief Secretary of Zhongguo wenxue
gongzuozhe xiehui 中國文學工作者協會
Elected Chief Secretary of Zhongguo zuojia xiehui
中國作家協會
- 1957 Appointed Deputy Editor of Renmin wenxue 人民文學
- 1962 As representative of Zhongguo zuojia xiehui,
visited Rumania, Bulgaria and Russia
- 1965 Demoted to Jiangsu
- 1966 Back to Beijing; being labelled 'member of a
renegade clique', under investigation
- 1969 Sent to Hubei 湖北 to reform through labour
- 1970 Under open attack for being a traitor and anti-
communism
- 1973 Returned to Nanjing due to illness
- 1976 Summoned to Beijing as a witness in the prosecution of Zhang
Chunqiao 張春橋 (one of the members of the Gang of
Four)

- 1977 Returned to Nanjing; assigned to work under the creative section of Jiangsu Cultural Bureau
- 1978 Department Head of Chinese Department, University of Nanjing
- 1979 Formally rehabilitated
- 1980 Resigned from the position of Department Head
Chief of Drama Research Unit, University of Nanjing
- 1982 Visit to U.S.A. at the invitation of Nie Hualing
聶華苓 of University of Iowa
- 1983 Returned to China
Visit to Hong Kong at the invitation of the Urban Council, Hong Kong for the premiere of A Quei zhengzhuan
- 1984 Elected President of Jiangsu xiandai wenxue yanjiuhui 江蘇現代文學研究會
- 1985 Director of Nanjing yeyu wenke daxue dongshihui 南京業餘文科大學董事會
- 1987 Awarded 'Jiangsu wenxuejiang' 江蘇文學獎
- 1988 Celebration of 'The Sixtieth Anniversary of involvement in literary and drama activities on the occasion of his Eightieth Birthday', jointly organized by University of Nanjing, Zhongguo xijujia xiehui 中國戲劇家協會, Jiangsu sheng wenlian 江蘇省文聯, and the Jiangsu Branches of Zhongguo zuoxie 中國作協, Zhongguo juxie 中國劇協, Zhongguo yingxie 中國影協

B. List of plays by Chen Baichen:

- 1931 Fenhewan 汾河灣 (Xiaoshuo yuebao 小說月報, vol.22, no.4)
- 1933 Yuji 嚴姐 (Wenxue 文學, vol.1, no.3)
- 1933 Guizi hao 榮字號 (Zhonghua yuebao 中華月報, vol.1, no.8)
- 1934 Dafengyu zhi xi 大風雨之夜 (Wenxue, vol.2 no.2)
- 1934 Jietou yejing 街頭夜景 (Xiandai 現代, vol.4, no.5)
- 1934 Liangge haizi 兩個孩子 (Maodun 矛盾, vol.3, no.2)
- 1934 Tiebaochu de zaochen 貼報處的早晨 (Dangdai wenxue 當代文學 vol.1, no.1)
- 1934 *Chuxi 除夕 (Wenxue, vol.3, no.1)
- 1935 Fuzi xiongdi 父子兄弟 (Wenxue, vol.5, no.1)
- 1935 Zhenghun 徵婚 (Chuangzuo 創作, vol.1, no.1)
- 1935 Erlou shang 二樓上 (Chuangzuo, vol.1, no.2)
- 1936 Zhongqiu yue 中秋月 (Wenxue congbao 文學叢報, no.3)
- 1936 *Shi Dakai de molu 石達開的末路 (Shenghuo shudian 生活書店)
- 1936 *Gongxi facai 恭喜發財 (Wenxue, vol.7, nos.1 & 2)
- 1936 Yanbuchu de xi 演不出的戲 (Wenyi, Dagong bao 大公報. 文藝, no.198)
- 1937 *Jintiancun 金田村 (Wenxue, vol.8, nos.3,4 & 5)
- 1937 *Lugougiao zhi zhan 盧溝橋之戰 (Wenxue, etal. provisional edition)
- 1937 Saoshe 掃射 (Zhanshi lianhe xunkan 戰時聯合旬刊, vol.3)

- 1938 *Hanjian 漢奸 (Kangzhan xiju 抗戰戲劇, vol.1, nos.6,7 & 8)
- 1938 *Moku 魔窟 (Wenyi zhendi 文藝陣地, nos.6 & 7)
- 1939 *Luanshi nannu 亂世男女 (Shanghai zazhi kongsi 上海雜誌公司)
- 1939 Youjidui guoguan 游擊隊過關 (Kangzhan wenyi 抗戰文藝, vol.4, nos.5 & 6)
- 1940 *Wang Jingwei xianxing ji 汪精衛現形記 (Zhongguo xiqu biankanshe 中國戲曲編刊社)
- 1940 Weihun fuqi 未婚夫妻 (Wenxue yuebao 文學月報, vol.1, no.5)
- 1941 Jinzhixiaobian 禁止小便 (Houfang xiaoxiju 後方小喜劇, Chongqing shenghuo shudian 重慶生活書店)
- 1941 Fengsuoxian shang 封鎖線上 (Houfang xiaoxiju, Chongqing shenghuo shudian)
- 1941 Luo Guofu 羅國富 (Houfang xiaoxiju, Chongqing shenghuo shudian)
- 1941 Huoyan 火燄 (Houfang xiaoxiju, Chongqing shenghuo shudian)
- 1941 *Qiushou 秋收 (Shanghai zazhi kongsi)
- 1941 *Dadi huichun 大地回春 (Guilin wenhua gongyingshe 桂林文化供應社)
- 1942 *Jiehun jinxingqu 結婚進行曲 (Chongqing zuojia shuwu 重慶作家書屋)
- 1945 *Suihan tu 歲寒圖 (Chongqing qunyi chubanshe 重慶群益出版社)

- 1945 *Shengguan tu 升官圖 (Yitan, Huaxi wanbao 華西晚報.
藝壇)
- 1946 *Daduhe 大渡河 (Shanghai qunyi chubanshe 上海群益
出版社)
- 1947 *Xuanya zhi lian 懸崖之戀 (Shanghai qunyi chubanshe)
- 1958 *Dongfeng zhihu ji 東風紙虎記 (Shouhuo 收穫, no.6)
- 1979 *Dafeng ge 大風歌 (Juben 劇本, no.1)
- 1981 *A Quei zhengzhuan 阿Q正傳 (Juben, no.4)

* Full-length plays

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