

The Stereotypical Characterizations in Chinese Drama during Republican Period

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ABSTRACT

The White-Haired Girl is the first mileage-brand work in the history of Chinese opera, which is the symbol of the maturity of Chinese national opera. Its successful performance is of great significance in the history of Chinese modern music and opens up a new stage for the development of Chinese opera creation. But it also laid the foundation for a series of revolutionary dramas, including characterizations and social settings. These repetitive depictions eventually established stereotypes within the drama performances during the republican period. This article concludes the common characterizations in Chinese drama through given a specific perspective on the White Hair Girl and analyzes the components in the performance. The conclusion is that the drama in the Republic of China has a fixed format of structure and characterizations which thoroughly affected the development of revolutionary melodrama.

Keywords: Racism, revolution, communist party, melodrama, class distinction

1. INTRODUCTION

On May 28, 1942, Mao Zedong, a Marxist theorist, revolutionary, the first chairman of the People's Republic of China, in his Speech at the Yan 'an Forum on Literature and Art, he proposed that literature and art should be integrated with the masses, workers, peasants and soldiers, rather than Supra-class. During the same period, the communists in Yan 'an also launched the rectification movement and the mass production movement. This made the literary and art workers in Yan 'an awareness of the need to create a whole new kind of art that reflected the ideals of the Communist Party. [4]

As the Communist Party was preparing to hold its congress in 1945, the Red Army of the Soviet Union was already attacking Germany and the dawn of victory in World War II had begun. Under the direction of President Zhou Yang, some artists at the Lu Xun Art Institute in Yan 'an produced the opera The White-Haired Girl, based on the folk tales of the "White-Haired Fairy Girl" spread in the Shanxi-Chaha-Hebei border region in 1940. The White-Haired Girl combined the strong romantic spirit with the class struggle theory of the Communist Party, and became a literary symbol of the liberated areas, which quickly swept the liberated areas.

The study of the stereotypes that were prevalent in the dramas of the Republic period is inspired by the portrayal

of the characters in this play. The focus of this study is to analyze the structure of social classes reflected in white-haired girl and the stereotypical characterization, performance techniques on stage which implies the temporal social conflict during the Republican period. These points will be presented from the aspects of the presentation of the White Haired Girl whether as dance drama, melodrama or opera. his study revealed a series of stereotypes caused by racial and class prejudice at that time, and even continued to present society with indelible influence.



Figure 1: Cover of the China Pictorial in August 1972

2. ART PERFORMANCES DURING REPUBLICAN PERIOD

During the period of the Republic of China, people were trapped in a rigid feudal society. There are two kinds of dramas born out of this period: the first is to extol the greatness of the prospect of the Communist revolution, and the second is to expose the tragedy under the current social oppression. In the social environment at that time, the second kind of performance is the most in line with the people's hearts, and also the most corresponding presentations to reflect the hierarchical difference. One of the most representative art performances which combined both of these two kinds of drama is "The White-Haired Girl" (TWHG). The story was spread to Yan 'an in 1944 and pulled in incredible consideration from scholarly and craftsmanship specialists. The musical drama TWHG has arranged the taking after year. The musical drama combines the creative abilities of a practical show, society craftsmanship and tune and move shapes, as well as vivid spoken dialogues, and is exceptionally prevalent with the group of onlookers. It was arranged more than 30 times in a couple of months. It was adjusted into a feature film in 1950 and an expressive dance arranges craftsmanship film in 1972. It can be said that to an expansive degree, TWHG has poured the considerations and feelings of an entire era of Chinese individuals amid the progressive period with its overwhelming charisma.

Meng Yue has pointed out that the musical drama TWHG has made two major changes to the initial story: one is to include the opening scene of celebrating the Unused Year; The other is to alter the cadre into Xier's fiancé Wang Dachun. [1] The first story had as it were three primary characters: the "white-haired girl", her father, and the bully landowner. By itself, the story may have taken put in any patriarchal society where ladies were traded. In reality, there's no deficiency of such stories in nearly any scholarly convention. In arrange to diminish the different social inconsistencies in provincial ranges - - in this case, the abuse of ladies by the patriarchy -- to class contradictions, the musical drama journalists attempted to play down and eradicate the sex and intergenerational conflicts, which have been especially vital since the May 4th Development. They presented a scene of an Unused Year celebration, coupled with the engagement of Dachun and Xier, to weave a picture of a natural community of villagers. In this picture, relatives are adoring and concordant, neighbors are liberal and kind-hearted, individuals take after the time-honored, straightforward and agreeable behavior convention, coexist gently and participate with each other, and there's indeed a sentimental free cherish between youthful people.[1]

Peter Brooks said that melodrama is the best form of revolutionary moralism since it is about humble individuals standing up against a murderous tyrant or thug and expressing their ordinary, humble and respectable sentiments. [3] The evil characters always get their retribution at the end of the play, TWHG can be said to be the foremost exceptional drama within the history of modern Chinese writing. It has the essential typical features and details of melodrama. First, the good guys and the bad guys are clearly separated and there is no middle character. Second, the forces of good guys in the play are imprisoned but always liberated while the forces of evil. Though they brag at the beginning, they still are bound to be punished in the end and justice always appears. The crucial part of a melodrama is the judicial assembly at the end of the play. It is the place where innocence and goodness are acknowledged and evil is banished from the stage, symbolically banished from the world. The body of the character becomes a pure symbol of truth. Xier's solo dance after the death of Yang Bailao expresses the hatred of the oppressed people under patriarchal society through an extremely twisted, almost hysterical body shape. These symbolic characterizations are always stereotyping the "innocent" peasantry against the demanding landlord class which ingrained this idea in the minds of the audience.



Figure 2: Shanghai Ballet in The White Haired Girl

3. STEREOTYPICAL DEPICTION ON SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Why do a woman's misfortunes become a model story of national liberation and class struggle? This starts with the relationship between class and nation.

In Chinese patriotism, the exploiting class and the exploited class are set against each other, each endowed with a set of fictional physical features, political programs, historical timeline, ethical values and even emotional choices. The emperors, ministers, merchants and landlords in the past became the “ancestors” of capitalists and landlords in 20th century China, while the workers and peasants were the descendants of the suffering laboring residents in the past generations. Their various riots, rebellions and uprisings formed a glorious revolutionary history of battling against exploitation and oppression. [2] The exploiting class people are deceptive, cunning, despicable and hideous, while the working class is kind, indomitable, strong and powerful. The physiological transformation of class characterizations was fully developed in the constituent system after the founding of the People’s Republic of China. Since the system is obsessed with blood lineage and ancestry, this makes racism becomes particularly potent at that time.

"The White-Haired Girl" uses the characterizations where good against evil in melodrama to achieve a visual class of race. In the movie, for example, Huang Shiren's eyes are drawn in the shape of an inverted triangle of a clown; In the dance play, Huang and his minions, dressed in black and half hunched, scurry around the stage like rats across the street. Huang's mother, with a face of miserable blue, strolls in the gloomy temple with a bad sense of purpose. In sharp contrast to them are the figures of red-faced, twinkling - eyed working people. [1] The working people may be ragged, but they are always clean; Their backs are straight and their steps are straight; They do not bend for suffering and do not lose their dignity for poverty. These facial expressions further demonstrate the deliberated descriptions of class differences and their physical features which present their rigid impressions. In a society beset by corruption, war, and poverty, the racialization of classes provides emotional ties and

historical evidence of the formation of national communities. In such an environment, the nation-state was conceived as a community of working class people. The internal enemies of the nation-state -- that is, the exploiting class -- are logically similar to the foreign enemies. They are traitors who collude with the emperor and betray the country and national interests. In this way, a system of effective differences-akin to the heads and tails of a coin-emerged. Within "The White-Haired Girl," a new emotional bond, centered on working class people, is dramatically distilled in scenes like the judicial assembly as being mentioned beforehand. In the process, the peasants acquired a new political identity: the promoted captains. During the process of turning over, the laborers would stand up and complained. Each peasant may tell a different story of suffering, and the victims may be as varied as the corrupt village head, the landlords or landlords' wives, the local tyrants and evil gentry, henchmen, adulterers, witches and sorcerers. However, the main function of the judicial assembly, which was similar to the religious ceremony, was to integrate the personal grudges and grievances of the peasants, and make these conflicts go up to "class hatred". At the same time, unifying all these variables into a single title : "class enemy". Thus, the so-called exploiting class and the exploited class were born only in the time and environment where the process of turning over appears, but not from time to time.

The new community formed by the people who were reborn in the revolutionary wars of the transformation is the so-called "new society". There is a well-known saying in “The White-Haired Girl”: "In the old society, people were turned into ghosts, but in the new society, ghosts are turned into people." The landowner capitalists in the past would no longer possess the means of production and can no longer exploit or ride over the people. In this way, the new community reaches its ideal appearance which is pure of their considered “justice”.



Figure 3: Movie version of The White Haired Girl (1951)

4. CONCLUSION

According to the previous research, in the national narrative of communism, the logic of racism deepens the various internal contradictions and conflicts of nationalism through the analysis of stereotypical characterizations in Chinese drama during the Republican period of time. As Naoki Sakai said: "Specialism and universalism are not opposite but mutually inside and outside." Racialized class identity is not just an ideology, it is also a visible and tangible biological trait. The physiological characteristics of class replaced the status and significance of gender characteristics in the May Fourth Movement period. This means that when faced with a standard "new socialist," we should be able first to judge his or her class attributes and second to judge, if necessary, whether he or she is male or female. In several texts of the white-haired girl, the image of Xier goes through a process from woman to matron, from gender to class. This conclusion gives a reminder to also investigate the significance of gender politics which internally interacted with races. Therefore, the political goals of feminism and the interconnection with racism may be the next aspect that I will do research on. Yet, this research mainly focuses on the performance of the White Hair Girl, further evidence and comparison with other drama may be lacking. I will improve these deficiencies and propose them in my next research paper which focuses on the topic I have mentioned previously.

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