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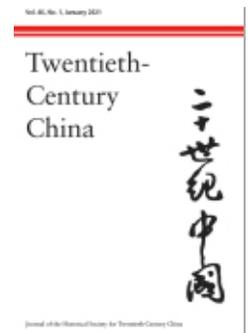
Collecting Theater in Republican Beijing: Research Methods
and the Birth of Chinese Opera Studies in Early
Twentieth-Century China

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COLLECTING THEATER IN REPUBLICAN BEIJING: RESEARCH METHODS AND THE BIRTH OF CHINESE OPERA STUDIES IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHINA

HSIAO-CHUN WU

As scholars propelled the study of Chinese opera into the twentieth century, they turned to collecting as their main research method, determined to ground their new discipline on a strong material base. Scholars such as Qi Rushan (1875–1962) and Zhang Cixi (1909–1968) explored every corner of Beijing, the one-time imperial capital, in search of a wide variety of materials not previously subjected to critical examination. Several of the city’s distinctive traits—thriving urban theaters, a rich tradition of imperial performances, and lively cultural marketplaces—enabled researchers to expand the conception and scope of what study materials could be. Beyond that, scholarly exchanges between China and Japan led to the reevaluation of once-overlooked texts of theatrical connoisseurship. The collection and publication of those texts equipped Chinese opera researchers with new resources to grow an emerging field of knowledge.

KEYWORDS: Aoki Masaru, Beijing opera, collecting, Peking opera, Qi Rushan, Republican Beijing, Zhang Cixi

Qi Rushan (齊如山 1875–1962), a polymath of *xiqu* (戲曲 Chinese song-opera) and the main adviser to the famous female impersonator Mei Lanfang (梅蘭芳 1894–1961),¹ once recalled an unexpected adventure that took place in 1911, after the fall of the Qing dynasty:

1 Qi Rushan’s involvement in the early Republic’s opera market was multifaceted. A seasoned connoisseur, he participated in the production of several of Mei Lanfang’s signature plays and took a leading role in organizing Mei’s visit to the United States. Through his research and writings, Qi became the key figure in shaping the understanding of Chinese opera in the twentieth century. See *Qi Rushan quanji* [Comprehensive writings of Qi Rushan] (Taipei: Qi Rushan xiansheng yichu bianyin weiyuanhui, 1964) for basic research materials.

My friend Mr. Zhao worked as a senior staff member at the Baizhi fang [白紙坊; here written 北直坊]² paper mill in the Nanxia wa [南下窪] neighborhood [of Beijing]. He paid a call on me and, pulling a roll of old paper from his sleeve, asked if I might want it. I became wild with joy upon seeing that it was official documents about theater drawn up by the Neiwu fu [內務府 Imperial Household Bureau]. . . . I summoned a cab right away, and we went [to the mill]. When I saw that the workers were tossing [papers] into a vat, I hurriedly collected them. But how many could I pick up by myself? I asked [Mr. Zhao] for some people to help me with this, for which I would certainly reward them later. As a result, we gathered quite a lot. However, compared with what had been destroyed, it was only one or two percent of the lot. Nevertheless, this was really sheer luck.³

The recovery of precious documents about Qing court performances was a matter of “sheer luck,” in other words, of historical contingency. Why did court documents end up in a paper mill? Why were they of interest to theater researchers such as Qi? Was Qi alone in discovering documents pertaining to performances in unexpected places, or does his anecdote reflect a larger trend of collecting materials of performance in early twentieth-century China?

As this article will show, not only court documents but also a wide array of tangible and intangible objects—official records of court performances, random notes from performing venues, scripts, costumes, and records of actors’ experiences in teaching and acting—all entered theatrical collections for research purposes at the turn of the twentieth century. The present article examines the way in which collecting these objects became deeply embedded in the history and space of Republican Beijing, home to *jingju* (京劇)—also known as Peking opera, Beijing opera, and *pihuang* (皮黃)—the dominant genre of the time. As the capital of the Qing dynasty, Beijing had seen the genre nurtured by the Manchu ruling house and the city’s commercial theaters. Formerly viewed as *huabu* (花部 flower opera), a lowbrow register of opera, by the end of the nineteenth century it had won an elite status without losing its popular charm.⁴ When Qi Rushan and his contemporaries started to collect materials on Chinese theater in the first decade of the twentieth century, *jingju* had secured a wide audience both in the capital and nationwide; an abundance of texts and materials had been produced by the Qing court and the city’s commercial playhouses.⁵ These materials found many outlets for circulation, notably Beijing’s well-established cultural marketplaces, particularly Liulichang (琉璃廠).⁶

2 Qi probably miswrote “Beizhi fang” for “Baizhi fang” (white papers district), an established district of the papermaking industry in Beijing since the Yuan dynasty.

3 Qi Rushan, *Qi Rushan huiyilu* [Memoirs of Qi Rushan] (Taipei: Zhongyang wenwu gongying she, 1956), 159.

4 On Qing patronage of *pihuang*, see Andrea S. Goldman, *Opera and the City: The Politics of Culture in Beijing, 1770–1900* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), chap. 3.

5 On the formation and rise of *jingju*, see Beijing shi yishu yanjiusuo and Shanghai yishu yanjiusuo [Beijing Municipal Art Research Institute and Shanghai Municipal Art Research Institute], *Zhongguo jingju shi* [History of *jingju* in China] (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1999), 1: 137–247.

6 For an overview of Liulichang’s history and its influence on Qing culture, commerce, and publication, see Christopher A. Reed, “Duke and Nobles Above, Scholars Below: Beijing’s Old Booksellers’ District Liulichang, 1769–1941—and Its Influence on 20th-Century Shanghai’s Book Trade,” *East Asian Publishing and Society* 5, no. 1 (2015): 74–128.

Beyond the immediate environment of Republican Beijing, transnational powers affected the supply and circulation of theatrical materials to meet collectors' interest. Starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, foreign powers began to challenge the legitimacy of Qing rule, initiating a change in the global order that would affect material culture.⁷ As the Qing polity crumbled, texts and materials used in court performances, together with other imperial belongings, became available on the market, allowing theatrical researchers to study the actual conditions of drama at the court and in the imperial capital. At the same time, foreign researchers able to read Chinese competed with Chinese researchers to collect theatrical materials, making collecting a transnational activity.

Collecting as a form of cultural production alters the meanings of objects.⁸ In the present paper, I argue that collecting is also a form of knowledge production that *creates* meanings. As scholars turned their attention to theatrical practices, they began to collect all materials related to performance in Beijing's environment, so full of theatrical-arts resources. Their search for these materials reveals the close link between the formation of a field of knowledge and the sites of research activities. This methodological development, I argue, marked the emergence of Chinese opera studies in the early twentieth century.

COLLECTING: A METHODOLOGICAL EXPLORATION

In the emerging field of opera studies, collecting was a research method that came into being dialectically, as practice and methodological reflection shaped one another without either taking precedence. Chronologically speaking, while a new phase of collecting theatrical materials was born in the first decade of the twentieth century, discussion of collecting as a research method to study Chinese drama emerged in the 1930s, taking actual precedents as examples to promote it to a wider audience. The present section focuses on that discussion, investigating the historical significance of the collectors' goals. In the following sections, I focus on collecting, examining how researchers searched for materials on the sites of operatic production and looking at how collecting activities in Beijing interacted with a larger transnational context.

In 1931 Qi Rushan, Mei Lanfang, and a number of like-minded persons founded the Learned Society of National Drama (國劇學會 *Guoju xuehui*; hereafter Learned Society) to research and promote China's theatrical arts. Years later, when Qi recalled those days, he noted four kinds of sources: (1) public places such as theaters, (2) families with a distinguished history of performance (梨園世家 *liyuan shijia*), (3) Qing palaces, and (4) street stalls and markets.⁹ It is noteworthy that Qi's investigation was not limited to performing venues but encompassed all spaces where performing practitioners worked and lived and where theatrical products were consumed and circulated. Broadening the scope of research material, Qi forged a deeper engagement with the world of the

7 For instance, British imperialists seized Qing imperial booty in China as material evidence of Western superiority over the Chinese; see James L. Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 86–90.

8 Vimalin Rujivacharakul, "China and china: An Introduction to Materiality and a History of Collecting," in Vimalin Rujivacharakul, ed., *Collecting China: The World, China, and a History of Collecting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 15.

9 Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, 154–55.

performing arts, collecting materials—such as details about choreography and the arrangement of props—that had not previously been critically examined. His interactions with well-known performing families and a wider body of theatrical practitioners allowed him to obtain practical knowledge of performance that had left no written records or material traces.¹⁰ Through collecting, Qi strove to build and expand the basis for a theory (*lilun* 理論) of Chinese drama, which he supposed to have existed given the transmission of performance knowledge over time.¹¹

Qi's emphasis on collecting theatrical materials through total immersion in the performing world for research purposes distinguished him from drama aficionados of earlier times. Like the late Ming and early Qing dramatists—such as Li Yu (李漁 1611–1680)—Qi enjoyed a versatile career as a playwright, producer, and theatrical commentator.¹² However, his keen interest in analyzing onstage performance and the consequent material exploration reshaped the nature of a drama aficionado's engagement with the theatrical world. Qi Rushan's views on the consumption of opera also differed from the ideas expressed in connoisseurship texts written in the Qing. While connoisseurs wrote *huapu* (花譜 flowery registers) in which they forged a distinctive cultural identity based on their experience of boy actors' performances and bodies, Qi was more eager to uncover the contexts and mechanisms that produced operas.¹³ In other words, from a historical point of view, Qi's interest in collecting was innovative.

Contemporaries echoed Qi's interest in collecting. The Learned Society's mission statement (1932), written by one of its founding members, Fu Yunzi (傅芸子 1902–1948), emphasized the role that collecting played for scholars aiming to build the field of Chinese opera studies. Fu opened by commenting on the current state of Chinese opera research: “The attention paid to the variation of tunes and to reforming stage settings is exclusively a matter of performance technique [術 *shu*]. It has nothing to do with the basics [of drama].”¹⁴ On the other hand, he said, with some regret, “It is very rare to see domestic scholars engaging in research on theatrical organizations, textual analysis of the names of characters, collating old editions of scripts, collecting theatrical illustrated plates, and so on.”¹⁵ He hoped the Learned Society could reverse this situation, and he explained how:

Our association approaches drama with a purely scholarly attitude [純學者之態度 *chun xuezhe zhi taidu*] and a scientific method [科學方法 *kexue fangfa*] to

10 Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, 87–88.

11 Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, 85.

12 For a biographical sketch of Li Yu and his engagement with performance (especially the nature and operation of his family troupe), see Huang Guoquan, *Ya su zhi jian—Li Yu de wenhua rengen yu wenxue sixiang yanjiu* [Between elegance and vulgarity—a study of Li Yu's cultural character and literary thought] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004), 3–60. For a brief introduction to Li Yu's plays, see Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 15–20.

13 Goldman, *Opera and the City*, chap. 1.

14 Fu Yunzi, “Fakanci” [Mission statement], *Xiju congkan* [Drama series] 1 (1932): 1. Fu was actively involved in Chinese opera research, assuming key editorial responsibilities for *Xiju congkan* and *Guoju huabao* (National drama illustrated), the periodicals issued by the Learned Society. For a short biographical introduction of Fu, see Chen Zishan, “Bu gai bei yiwang de Fu Yunzi” [Fu Yunzi, who should not be forgotten], *Baolan chunshu* 11 (1998): 31.

15 Fu, “Fakanci,” 1.

systematically sort through materials and carry out research. [We] hope to exalt our country's native theatrical knowledge [發揮吾國原有之劇學 *fahui wuguo yuanyou zhi juxue*]. Whether [the style in question is] Kun [昆], Han [漢], Huang [黃], or Qin [秦], [we shall] emphasize the scholarly aspect [學的方面 *xue de fangmian*] and [bring to bear] a fully rounded scholarship on every kind of drama performed. The first step is to focus on collecting data, while considerable effort will also be devoted to investigation in the field. [We] will then sort and categorize [our collection] according to scientific methods. As patterns begin to emerge, we will compile and publish this work.¹⁶

The “purely scholarly attitude” would distinguish the society's contributions from old-fashioned criticism of opera (戲評 *xi ping*). Fu's emphasis on using a “scientific method”—which for him meant systemically sorting and categorizing materials for research—was reminiscent of Hu Shi's call for using the scientific method to reorganize the national past (整理國故 *zhengli guo gu*).¹⁷ In his inaugural statement published in the first issue of *Guoxue jikan* (國學季刊 National studies quarterly) in 1923, Hu advised fellow researchers that “to conduct national studies in the present age, we should humbly adopt their scientific method [i.e., that of European, American, and Japanese scholarship], a remedy for our routine lack of regulations and systems.”¹⁸ He added that since “the materials relevant to national studies are quite numerous,” it was necessary to make the effort to sort and arrange them.¹⁹ Under the banner of the scientific method, Hu and Fu shared a material-based approach to the study of China's past and culture in their vision of the birth of a new field of knowledge.

The Learned Society's ambitious mission was cross-genre and transnational. Only collecting the materials of a broad variety of theatrical forms could satisfy its goal of studying the drama of the whole nation (國劇 *guoju*). Adding a transnational dimension, Fu compared the achievements of Chinese collectors with those of two Japanese sinologists, Shionoya On (鹽谷澁 1878–1962), a drama specialist, and Nagasawa Kikuya (長澤規矩也 1902–1980), a renowned bibliographer.²⁰ This comparison would begin to lend the project a global perspective. Fu suggested that the culminating accomplishment of the Learned Society would be to “select important scholarly works [on Chinese drama] to translate into the languages of the East and the West.” This task was especially important because, “after Mei Lanfang's tour of the United States, old national drama

16 Fu, “Fakanci,” 1.

17 For discussion of Hu Shi's promotion of science and how it was exhibited in his call for reorganizing the national past, see Zhou Zhiping, “Ping Hu Shi de tichang kexue yu zhengli guo gu” [On Hu Shi's promotion of science and reorganizing the national past], in Zhou Cezong et al., *Hu Shi yu jindai Zhongguo* [Hu Shi and modern China] (Taipei: Shibao wenhua, 1991), 169–95.

18 Hu Shi, “Fa kan xuanyan” [Inaugural statement], *Guoxue jikan* 1, no. 1 (January 1923): 16.

19 Hu, “Fa kan xuanyan,” 13.

20 Shionoya On was the first Japanese scholar to earn a doctoral degree in Japan with research on Chinese drama. On his contribution to the field, see Tong Wancheng, *Riben Mingzhi Daizheng nianjian de Zhongguo xiqu yanjiu* [Japanese scholarship on Chinese song-drama during the Meiji and Taishō periods] (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2016), 103–10. On Nagasawa Kikuya's collection of rare editions of plays and novels, see Huang Shizhong, *Riben suocang Zhongguo xiqu wenxian yanjiu* [Studies of Chinese song-drama texts in Japan] (Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu, 2011), 103–70.

(舊日國劇 *jiu ri guoju*) has provoked interest among scholars the world over.”²¹ By taking collecting as its method, the Learned Society aimed to claim a leading position in the global emergence of Chinese opera research.

Many pioneers collected theatrical materials for research. In his statement, Fu acknowledged Mei Lanfang for his collection of illustrated plates of Ming and Qing face painting as well as historian Zhu Xizu (朱希祖 1879–1944) for his special interest in documents related to Qing court performance.²² Collecting was also the shared focus of the Collecting and Sorting Group (整理派 *Zhengli pai*) and the Collating and Editing Group (校勘派 *Jiaokan pai*), two contemporary schools of opera studies that Fu discussed in a talk given at the Learned Society for Chinese Studies (支那学会 *Shina gakkai*) at the Imperial Kyoto University. Both groups emphasized the “preservation of drama texts and images.”²³ Specifically, Fu applauded Qi Rushan as a leading figure in the former school, citing his unparalleled efforts to collect stage props, costumes, musical instruments, and illustrations of painted faces. Since Qi had used such materials to launch both “systematic research” (系統研究 *xitong yanjiu*) and “comparative research” (比較研究 *bijiao yanjiu*) into Chinese drama, Fu acclaimed Qi’s approach as “deeply engaged with the modern scientific method” (深合於現代之科學方法).²⁴ Such an evaluation again demonstrates Hu Shi’s influence on Fu. In the inaugural statement he wrote for *Guoxue jikan*, Hu listed a “systematic” approach (“using systematic sorting to arrange the materials for national studies”) and comparative studies (“conducting comparative research to assist in understanding and interpreting the materials for national studies”) among the three directions that he encouraged researchers to take.²⁵ The similarities between the methods that Hu and opera researchers thought valuable attests both to the impact that the idea of a scientific method had across disciplines and to its great potential for expanding new fields of knowledge.

Nevertheless, one may not find in the ardent drama researchers of that era a pure dedication to scientism. Rather, Fu and his contemporaries pursued “certainty in method” in the name of being scientific to safeguard the nascent discipline against the age-old stigma associated with literati consumption of opera and actors’ bodies.²⁶ This discursive strategy was also used by other contemporary theatrical writers and commentators who argued for making Chinese opera an academic discipline. For instance, when acclaiming

21 Fu, “Fakanci,” 1.

22 Fu, “Fakanci,” 1.

23 Fu Yunzi, “Zhongguo xiqu yanjiu zhi xin qushi” [New trends in the study of Chinese song-drama], *Xiju congkan* 3 (1932): 3. The article also appeared in *Shina gaku* 6, no. 4 (1932): 111–16, with six footnotes to the article and a brief passage mourning the passing of musician Liu Tianhua (1895–1932) that did not appear in the *Xiju congkan* version. *Shina gaku* was published by *Shina gakkai* at the Imperial Kyoto University, which invited Fu to deliver the talk.

24 Fu, “Zhongguo xiqu yanjiu,” 3.

25 Hu, “Fa kan xuanyan,” 16.

26 On the historical context and evolution of scientism in twentieth-century China, see Grace Yen Shen, “Scientism in the Twentieth Century,” in Vincent Goossaert, Jan Kiely, and John Lagerwey, eds., *Modern Chinese Religion 2, 1850–2015*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 91–137; see esp. pp. 108–11 on the connotations of scientific method and how it grants science the authority in political, social, and philosophical realms. On the business and consumption of boy actors in the late Qing, see Yao Shuyi, *Wan Qing xiqu de biange* [The transformation of song-drama in the late Qing] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2018), chap. 4.

Qi's achievement of "making a foothold as a scholar" (立足於學者之地位 *lizu yu xueche zhi diwei*), theatrical critic Feng Shuluan (馮叔鸞 1884–1942) warned scholars against "transforming themselves into actors" when studying drama. His solution was straightforward: "People who adopt the scientific method must extensively collect all related materials. [They] must then arrange [what they have collected] in order. . . . This is the way to ensure that [the study of drama] is systematically researched."²⁷

In a nutshell, collecting paved an empirical ground that enabled the members of the Learned Society to reveal the significance of native drama by recasting their interest as an epistemological discipline, a *xue* (學). This also signified a temporal progression. As the mission statement stated, the pursuit of technique (*shu*) belonged to the past, and the making of a discipline (*xue*)—namely constructing a field of knowledge of Chinese opera—took place in the present for the future. The rupture with the past manifested the modernity not of scientific method per se but of a new field of knowledge that opera researchers envisioned to be built. In early twentieth-century China, such a trajectory was paralleled by other emerging fields of knowledge. Archaeology, for instance, also grew from an epistemological transformation based on the discovery and reevaluation of research materials.²⁸

To examine exactly how collecting took place, the following section focuses on local factors. In myriad ways, Republican Beijing with its imperial legacy and its distinctively urban theaters and cultural markets supported researchers' aspiration to launch a modern epistemological project on opera. The pursuit of *xue* drove theatrical connoisseurs to step further into the world of performance, transforming them from audiences in front of the stage to collectors backstage. As they chose the site of their collecting activities, the contents and outlook of their scholarship were, in turn, shaped by the history and resources of the site.

THE BEIJING WONDERLAND: COLLECTING IN THE CITY

In the early twentieth century, Beijing captured the attention of theatrical collectors for two reasons: the Qing's imperial patronage of opera and the city's long history of commercial performances. Under Manchu rule, court performances had played various roles ranging from private entertainment for the imperial family to the display of China's power to visiting foreign embassies.²⁹ The tie between court performance and urban theater grew closer during the last decades of Qing rule, since by then Empress Dowager Cixi (de facto ruler 1861–1908) was a wholehearted patron of *pihuang*, the most popular performance style of the time. Materials related to court performance caught the attention of early theatrical collectors, who considered

27 Feng Shuluan, "Xu" [Preface], in Qi Rushan, *Zhongguo ju zhi zuzhi* [The organization of Chinese drama, 1928], repr. in *Qi Rushan quanqi*, vol. 1, 6.

28 For how China's long tradition of antiquarianism prepared a material-based approach of artifact studies for the birth of modern Chinese historiography, see Shana J. Brown, *Pastimes: From Art and Antiquarianism to Modern Chinese Historiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011).

29 On the theatrical performances mounted for special occasions at the Qing court, see Ye Xiaoqing, *Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas: Drama and the Qing Imperial Court* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2012), chap. 2.

imperial institutions pivotal to writing a history of Chinese drama, all the truer if they took *jingju* as the representative genre.

Among all of the imperial institutions, the Shengping shu (昇平署 Bureau of Ascendant Peace), the agency that succeeded the Nan fu (南府 Southern Office) in the reign of the Daoguang Emperor (1820–1850) to take charge of court performance, drew the most attention from researchers.³⁰ In the introduction to his monograph on the bureau, drama historian Wang Zhizhang (王芷章 1903–1982) explained why collecting primary sources from the bureau was a critical task:

[The Shengping shu] existed for almost 200 years. Thousands of plays were written and performed [under its auspices]. . . . However, today very few people are familiar with its history, achievements, regulations, and internal workings. Even officially edited accounts, such as *Da Qing huidian* [大清會典 Collected statutes of the great Qing], *Gongzhong xianxing zeli* [宮中現行則例 Current regulations at the court], and *Qingshi gao* [清史稿 Draft history of the Qing], had little to say about it. When miscellaneous writings by officials [touch on the bureau], they are unreliable and full of mistakes, not to mention rumors and hearsay. This is why outsiders never grasped its mystery.³¹

To produce a better understanding of the imperial theater, Wang argued, researchers had to seek out the most original materials possible. His criteria for acceptable primary sources were very strict; even official publications compiled during Qing times (such as *Da Qing huidian* and *Gongzhong xianxing zeli*) were considered imperfect. In his view, only the records produced by and at the Shengping shu could provide truly reliable information.

However, the records produced by the imperial theater did not become accessible to researchers immediately after the Revolution of 1911. So long as the abdicated Xuantong Emperor, Pu Yi (溥儀 1906–1967), lingered within the Forbidden City, Qi Rushan recalled, “there was no way to get into the palace to search for these materials.”³² Nevertheless, in a piecemeal way, Qi managed to collect not only official documents but also “fragmentary volumes, individual sheets of paper, and objects” that shed light on the changes that had affected drama in the imperial court.³³ Qi could not obtain materials from the Qing court in larger quantities since the eunuchs dared not bring them to market openly, but he managed “gradually to get a fair number of theatrical scripts by looking constantly for eunuchs who had worked at the bureau.”³⁴ He came to know a certain Xiang Wang Laoye (箱王老爺

30 The Nanfu was first established early in the Qianlong reign (in 1740) to train eunuch actors and to manage court performances. On the development of court performance, see Goldman, *Opera and the City*, chaps. 2–3. See also Colin P. Mackerras, *The Rise of the Peking Opera, 1770–1870: Social Aspects of the Theatre in Manchu China* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1972), 121. For the major changes and developments within the Shengping shu, see Wang Zhizhang, *Qing Shengping shu zilue* [A brief history of the Shengping shu during the Qing] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937). See also Ye, *Ascendant Peace*, 27–34.

31 Wang Zhizhang, *Qing Shengping shu zilue*, 3.

32 Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, 158.

33 Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, 57.

34 Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, 159.

Master Wang of the costume and prop trunks), a eunuch who had been in charge of the performances presented to the emperor, and learned a great deal about the management of costumes and props, acquiring some partial lists of costumes.³⁵

The Shengping shu continued to function after the 1911 Revolution, but its powers were scaled back: it exercised its authority only within the inner court, and no longer could it claim any control over Beijing's commercial theaters.³⁶ The bureau suffered a major setback in 1913, when Yuan Shikai requisitioned its building for his guards and forcibly relocated the bureau to Jingshan (景山) and Beihai (北海).³⁷ Yuan's order was to be carried out on short notice (the staff was given only five days to move out), prompting panic and anger among the staff; according to drama scholar Ye Xiaoqing, many of the bureau's records and other materials must have been lost.³⁸ Nevertheless, as noted by Zhu Xizu, the relocation provided a great opportunity for researchers to gain access to materials related to court performances. As the bureau was now located outside the palace complex, court records and materials soon became available to private collectors.³⁹

To get larger quantities of the materials associated with court performances, collectors would have to wait until November 5, 1924, when Pu Yi was forced to move out of the Forbidden City. Less than two months after the emperor was evicted, Zhu Xizu purchased a considerable amount of the Shengping shu materials:

On December 10, in the 13th year of the Republic [1924], at the Huiji [匯記] bookstore on Xuanwumenwai [宣武門外] Boulevard in Beijing, I purchased one thousand and several hundred volumes of documents and handwritten copies of scripts that had come from the Shengping shu. At that time, the dethroned emperor of the Qing had just moved out of the palace.⁴⁰

Through this acquisition, Zhu Xizu obtained the valuable sources that would enable researchers to “find evidence of the changes in drama over the recent centuries, the rise and fall of famous actors, as well as a general idea of daily life at the imperial court, of ceremonies of greeting, conferring honorable titles, marriages, and funerals.”⁴¹ Having acquired the Shengping shu materials from a private bookstore, Zhu later donated them to the Beiping Library (now the National Library of China), where Wang Zhizhang read them and wrote his research findings into *Qing Shengping shu zhi lue* (清昇平署志略 A brief history of the Shengping shu during the Qing).⁴²

Zhu's account points to the intermediate function fulfilled by the market, circulating research materials and sustaining a collector's activities. Instead of buying the materials

35 Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, 159–60.

36 Ye, *Ascendant Peace*, 42.

37 Wang Zhizhang, *Qing Shengping shu zhilue*, 3.

38 Ye, *Ascendant Peace*, 7–8.

39 Zhu Xizu, “Zhengli Shengping shu dang'an ji” [Notes on collecting documents from the Shengping shu], *Yanjing xuebao* [Yanjing journal of Chinese studies] 10 (1931): 2083.

40 Zhu, “Zhengli Shengping shu dang'an ji,” 2083.

41 Zhu, “Zhengli Shengping shu dang'an ji,” 2083.

42 Zhu Xizu, *Qing Shengping shu zhilue xu* [Preface to *A Brief History of the Shengping Shu during the Qing*], in Wang Zhizhang, *Qing Shengping shu zhilue*, 1.

from eunuchs, Zhu acquired his collection from a bookstore. He was also aware that there were other bookstores, such as the Wenyou tang (文友堂) in Liulichang, that participated in the business of buying and selling.⁴³ As Beijing residents, theatrical collectors tracked down research materials in an urban environment in which they felt right at home, an environment that provided city dwellers with a wide variety of shops selling cultural materials, ranging from small street stalls to well-established bookstores. Indeed, reading Qi Rushan's recollections of his collecting career in Republican Beijing leaves one with the impression that he was guiding his readers on a walk through the streets and neighborhoods where he once lived and worked. The familiarity collectors had with the city created a "roadmap" that enabled them to search for desired objects in likely places. This intimate interaction between collectors and their environment implies an intricate relation between the making of modern scholarship and the local conditions under which it was produced.

As a shrewd Beijing resident, Qi Rushan did not begin his search for theatrical materials in the most obvious spot—Liulichang—but at the city's other markets and roadside stands, which he considered "very important places to search for materials."⁴⁴ He adopted this strategy early, when he began his collecting activities, as theatrical materials were not then available at larger bookstores:

Before the 10th year of the Republic [1921], formal bookstores paid no attention to the sorts of materials that I was interested in buying. They would not accept them [even if they were offered]. It was during the second decade of the Republic that the small bookstores inside the Shunzhi [順治] Gate and those in the Dongan [東安] Market began to purchase [these items]. However, large bookstores in Liulichang and at the Fulong [福隆] Temple still refused them. It was only in the third decade of the Republic that large bookstores started to purchase them. Therefore, in my search for such materials I was forced to go to street vendors in those days.⁴⁵

Qi began with the markets that specialized in vintage materials. He frequented the night market north of the Temple of Heaven, which opened at three in the morning and closed at dawn; the vendors on Yandai (煙袋) Alley were a good choice for materials from the Qing palace and Manchu households—they sold him drawings of painted faces from the Qianlong period. The shops that sold secondhand goods (掛貨舖 *guahuo pu*) spread from Zhu shi kou (珠市口) to Tianqiao (天橋), and the vendors and shops in Dongan Market sold a great variety of musical instruments used in theatrical performance. Knowledge of the lifestyle of the Qing official was helpful to collectors. Knowing that the Neiwu fu was located inside of Xihua (西華) Gate, and that most of its employees resided in the west part of Beijing and often took Xihua Street to work, Qi turned to the vendors who bought and sold along Xihua Street, acquiring many materials from the Neiwu fu and the Shengping shu.⁴⁶ In sum, Qi's "field notes" of an urban shopper show that he had surveyed the four corners of Beijing in his search for theatrical materials. He wandered through the city's complex, flourishing network of markets, where nearly anything could be found.

43 Zhu, "Zhengli Shengping shu dang'an ji," 2083.

44 Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, 162–64.

45 Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, 162.

46 Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, 162–64.

In two different ways, tracing the chronology of Qi's career as a collector illustrates how scholarly interest in theatrical materials changed over time. First, there was a spatial change: materials were first found at street stalls and only later in the more renowned cultural markets. Within this spatial transformation we can see a clear hierarchy of sellers: the bookstores of Liulichang, prominent since the third quarter of the eighteenth century, occupied the top position; well-to-do but smaller-scale bookstores were situated in the middle; other, even smaller shops and stalls across the city were located at the low end of the market hierarchy. Second, a temporal change occurred. Theatrical materials were initially of interest only to smaller vendors, but over time they gradually drew the attention of major bookstores in Liulichang. This represented a new direction for a business that had long targeted bibliophiles eager to build up their collections of rare books.⁴⁷ Viewed together, these two changes in Beijing's cultural market indicate that in the first 30 years of the Republic the scholarly interest in theater moved from the margins to the center of cultural consumption.

Qi's observation about the shifting interest in theatrical materials within urban resale shops fits a larger picture of Beijing's cultural market: books moved from imperial collections into the hands of private scholars to feed the growing, transnational interest in materials about "Chinese civilization" broadly defined. This was quite noticeable in Liulichang. As one book shopper recalled: "It was just after the unrest of the year of Gengzi [庚子 1900]. Princely households and prestigious families were getting rid of [their book collections] on a large scale. . . . I stared and stared [at the myriad books]."⁴⁸ The flow of books, documents, and objects onto the public market only increased after the fall of the Qing, as the market adapted to the new political environment. "Ever since the year of Xinhai [辛亥 1911]," wrote renowned bibliophile Lun Zheru (倫哲如 1875–1944), "overseas scholars have eagerly promoted Eastern culture. This interest could be seen at universities and among individuals. The demand for [Chinese books] was unlimited, and the local market could not satisfy it."⁴⁹ In Liulichang, overseas buyers were preeminent, leaving contemporary observers with little question about their purchasing power. As another commentator lamented, "The great elegance [大雅 *daya*] has lately declined, and there are few antique books in the book stores of Haiwang [海王] Village. How has it come to pass that those visitors with blue eyes and yellow whiskers sweep up all the Yuan and Ming editions?"⁵⁰

In the transnational competition to acquire materials pertinent to China, texts related to popular culture, including theatrical texts, became desirable. Sun Yaoqing (孫耀卿 1894–1958), a seasoned book dealer, recalled that most of the old editions of novels and drama scripts for sale had been snatched up by Japanese and Western collectors.⁵¹ Others commented on rising prices. Liu Fu (劉復 1891–1934), the leading scholar of Chinese folksong, wrote: "Beiping's booksellers have senses keener than those of any animal in the world! Since [1925], the price of [materials] on folks songs [俗曲 *suqu*] has gone

47 Sun Dianqi, ed., *Liulichang xiaozhi* [Minor records of Liulichang] (Beijing: Guji chubanshe, 1982), 196.

48 Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, 13.

49 Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, 13.

50 Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, 76.

51 Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, 371.

up daily. What had been considered scrap, catching no one's attention, has now become precious blue cloth bundles. Certainly, this made things rather difficult for those of us who were determined to collect."⁵²

The surging price of theatrical texts was noted into the 1930s. One market observer remarked, "Novels and dramas were quite cheap in the early years of the Republic. Around the 20th year of the Republic, their prices surged because by then Hu Shi was eagerly selecting and purchasing [such books]."⁵³ Although such an observation appears to be contradicted by Hu's harsh criticism of "old drama," it does reflect how sellers saw the market. It also reminds us of the necessity of distinguishing between drama as a performing art with aesthetic value and as a subject of scholarly inquiry—while old drama was attacked for lacking the realism found in Western theater, its scholarly value could nevertheless be reappreciated within the changing intellectual terrain.⁵⁴

Collectors' search for a broader variety of theatrical materials shaped the trajectory of Chinese opera studies. Taking as a case in point the publication of *Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao huibian* (清代燕都梨園史料彙編 Collected historical sources on Beijing theater during the Qing; hereafter *Qingdai huibian*) and *Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao xubian* (清代燕都梨園史料續編 *Sequel to Collected Historical Sources on Beijing Theater during the Qing*; hereafter *Qingdai xubian*)—two series composed of a total of 51 titles of connoisseurship, biographies of leading actors, and related historical records—the following section shows how reprinting collected theatrical texts made it possible for Chinese researchers to engage in the transnational exploration of China's theatrical past.

COLLECTING, REPRINTING, AND DEBATING OPERA HISTORIOGRAPHY

Qingdai huibian could only be published thanks to three intersecting historical phenomena: the desire to collect theatrical materials, collectors' personal networks, and the existing practice of bookstores as printing houses. The compiler of the series, Zhang Cixi (張次溪 1909–1968), was a native of Guangdong who grew up in Beijing. Zhang came to see the city as his "second hometown" and developed "a keen interest in the city's famous sites, historical relics, famous figures, and history."⁵⁵ This drove him to write and compile texts on life and urban space in Beijing. Given

52 Liu Fu, "Zhongguo suju zongmu gaoxu" [Preface to the manuscript of *A Comprehensive Catalogue of Chinese Folksongs*], in Liu Fu, *Bannong zawan er ji* [Miscellaneous writings by Liu Bannong, vol. 2] (Shanghai: Liangyou tushu yinshua gongsi, 1935), 294.

53 Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, 49.

54 For the attack on old drama "founded on an evolutionary teleology," see Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 145–48. Hu Shi's attitude toward song-drama was ambivalent: he thought it worth studying as part of "popular culture," yet he attacked it for encouraging "evil habits"; see Hsiao-t'i Li, *Opera, Society, and Politics in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2019), 60–61.

55 Zhang Cixi, "Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao zixu" [Author's preface to *Collected Historical Sources on Beijing Theater during the Qing*], in Zhang Cixi, ed., *Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao huibian* [Collected historical sources on Beijing theater during the Qing], repr. in *Pingju shiliao congkan* [Collected historical materials of Beijing opera] (Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue, 1974), vol. 4, 42.

the omnipresence of operatic performance in the city, performing venues and professional associations occupy a central place in Zhang's documentation of Beijing's urban space. For instance, in *Yanjing fang gu lu* (燕京訪古錄 Visiting ancient sites in Beijing), Zhang described the history and interior design of the great teahouse Guanghe lou (廣和樓), as well as the establishment of the Liyuan huiguan (梨園會館 Pear Garden Association).⁵⁶ It is not too surprising that Zhang would use opera to narrate the history of Beijing. As he wrote in the preface to *Qingdai xubian*: "The publication of the present sequel was completed at the beginning of the 26th year of the Republic, which is exactly a millennium after the founding of Yandu [燕都 i.e., Beijing]. This sort of cause and effect and coincidence could only occur once in a thousand years. How could there be no record of this?"⁵⁷

Zhang's zealous pursuit of materials related to Beijing's theatrical world is captured in a preface to *Qingdai huibian* by Wang Zhizhang, who wrote in his preface: "For seven or eight years now, Cixi has devoted his life to collecting materials on a daily basis. Concerned that his own efforts might not be sufficient, he asked Mr. Fang Wenxi [方問溪 1911–?] to help him. Together they left their footprints in every major and minor bookstore in Beijing, visiting even those who sell books on the street. Not one of these places was unfamiliar with them. This alone proves their diligence."⁵⁸ Acquiring the rare reprints of *Yanlan xiaopu* (燕蘭小譜 A brief register of the orchids of Yan) and *Faying miji* (法嬰秘笈 Secret notes on boy actors) also evidenced Zhang's extraordinary ability as a book collector.⁵⁹

In addition to scouring Beijing's bookshops, Zhang built up his collection through personal exchanges with famous collectors such as Fang Wenxi, Pan Guangdan (潘光旦 1899–1967), and Lun Zheru.⁶⁰ Lun in particular played a crucial role in the publication of *Qingdai huibian*. He was a good friend of fellow Guangdong native Zhang Bozhen (張伯楨 1877–1947), the father of Zhang Cixi.⁶¹ Presumably, Lun and Zhang Cixi were also good friends.⁶² Lun considered Zhang his peer as a collector, and in the poems he

56 Zhang Cixi, *Yanjing fanggu lu* [Visiting ancient sites in Beijing] (Beiping: Zhonghua yinshuju, 1934), 45–58.

57 Zhang Cixi, "Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao xubian zixu" [Author's preface to *Sequel to Collected Historical Sources on Beijing Theater during the Qing*], in Zhang Cixi, ed., *Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao xubian* [Sequel to *Collected Historical Sources on Beijing Theater during the Qing*], repr. in *Pingju shiliao congkan*, vol. 5, 10.

58 Wang Zhizhang, "Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao xu," [Preface to *Collected Historical Sources on Beijing Theater during the Qing*], in Zhang, *Qingdai huibian*, repr. in *Pingju shiliao congkan*, vol. 4, 34. On Fang Wenxi's biography and the Fang family's involvement in song-drama, see Qu Yanbing, "Lun Fang Wenxi Liyuan hua jiqi xiju shi yiyi" [On Fang Wenxi's *Liyuan hua* and its significance in the history of drama], *Wenhua xuekan* 6 (November 2014): 91–104.

59 Wang Zhizhang, "Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao xu," 4:34–35.

60 Zhang, "Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao zixu," 4:42. For Zhang's exchanges with contemporary theatrical collectors, see Zhang, "Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao xubian zixu," 5:10.

61 Lun Ming, *Xinhai yilai cangshu jishi shi* [Narrative poems on book collecting since the year of Xinhai] (Beijing: Beijing Yanshan chubanshe, 2008), 95.

62 For instance, Lun wrote a poem to congratulate Zhang Cixi on his marriage; see Lun Zheru, "He Zhang Cixi shi xiong xinhun, si shou zhi yi" [Congratulations on the occasion of the marriage of my friend's son Zhang Cixi: one of four poems], in Dongguan tushuguan [Dongguan Library], ed., *Lun Ming quanji* [Complete writings of Lun Ming] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2012), 50.

devoted to famous bibliophiles of the Republican period he singled out Zhang's fine set of books by Qing theatrical connoisseurs.⁶³

At Zhang's request, Lun contacted the owners of bookstores in Liulichang about potential collaborations, and he introduced Zhang to Dong Jinbang (董金榜), the owner of Suiyazhai (邃雅齋), who would publish, in 1934, the first series of Zhang's collection.⁶⁴ In 1937, another bookstore in Liulichang, Songyunge (松筠閣), published the sequel to the collection.⁶⁵ These two series marked a new stage in Liulichang's publishing history: books of theatrical connoisseurship were printed to meet a scholarly demand for research materials.⁶⁶

Moving beyond Beijing, the publication of *Qingdai huibian* reflected the burgeoning relations between scholars in China and Japan, a complex situation that involved fruitful exchanges and intense competition. According to the renowned female impersonator Cheng Yanqiu (程硯秋 1904–1958)⁶⁷ and Wang Zhizhang, the value of *Qingdai huibian* lies in the textual basis it provides for revising the theatrical studies by Japanese researchers, represented by *Shina kinsei gikyokushi* (支那近世戲曲史 A history of Chinese song-drama in modern times; 1931) by Aoki Masaru (青木正兒 1887–1964). In their prefaces to the collection, Cheng and Wang grounded their critiques of Aoki's work in nationalistic sentiments, as they hoped *Qingdai huibian* would enable Chinese drama scholars to glorify the nation through research. In Cheng's words, "Aoki Masaru is a foreigner. Certainly, his devotion to research is worthy of our appreciation—a foreigner managed to complete a monograph on Chinese drama. However, he cannot explicate the depths of Chinese drama since. . . what he has seen and heard has been too narrow."⁶⁸ He urged, "Chinese people must solve their own problems. Similarly, the history of Chinese drama can only be compiled by Chinese hands!" Cheng hoped that "those who have consulted this book. . . can quickly compile a history of drama in modern China."⁶⁹ Similarly, Wang Zhizhang regretted that "since we dismiss our treasures at home, foreigners take over what should be our job." He continued: "People who have not conducted in-depth research on the drama of our country must have initially been dazzled by it. However, some actual investigation will show that many mistakes can be found in [*Shina kinsei gikyokushi*]." Together with like-minded researchers, who "thought to win honor for our mother country," Wang "had been striving even harder to collect historical materials in the hope of [producing scholarship that] refutes [Aoki's] mistakes."⁷⁰ Intriguingly, Aoki's work became the benchmark against which to measure native—by definition, more accurate—scholarship on Chinese drama.

Translation complicated the transnational race to study Chinese drama. There is no evidence that Wang Zhizhang could read Japanese; his criticisms might be based

63 Lun Ming, *Xinhai yilai cangshu jishi shi*, 96–97.

64 Zhang, "Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao zixu," 4:43; Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, 183–85.

65 Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, 175–76.

66 Many of the bookstores in Liulichang had published books as early as the mid-Qing; see Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, 157.

67 Cheng Yanqiu was one of the four famous female impersonators (*dan*) in the Republican period. For his artistic characteristics and signature plays, see Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, 260–63, 280–81.

68 Cheng Yanqiu, "Xu" [Preface], in Zhang, *Qingdai huibian*, repr. in *Pingju shiliao congkan*, vol. 4, 28–29.

69 Cheng, "Xu," 4:31.

70 Wang Zhizhang, "Qingdai yandu liyuan shiliao xu," 4:37.

on a Chinese edition of *Shina kinsei gikyokushi* that he mentioned in the preface, the abridged one produced by Zheng Zhen (鄭震), published in China in 1933 (two years after the Japanese original was published) under the title *Zhongguo jindai xiqu shi* (中國近代戲曲史 A history of Chinese song-drama in modern times). Not until 1936, one year prior to the appearance of *Qingdai xubian*, did the Commercial Press publish a complete translation by Wang Gulu (王古魯 1901–1958) under the title *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi* (中國近世戲曲史 A history of Chinese song-drama in modern times). It is possible that the omissions Zheng made led to Wang Zhizhang's discontent with Aoki's work. In his translator's note, Zheng stated that "this book did not emphasize traditional, conventional opinions, and it does not include the translation of the lengthy and pointless materials related to textual research." He also deleted most of the "Chinese literati's comments on the language of the plays through the ages" in his translation.⁷¹ In fact, a comparison between Zheng's abridged translation and Wang Gulu's full translation shows that Zheng not only significantly reduced the content of Aoki's work but also added new content unsubstantiated by research.⁷² For instance, in the opening paragraphs of the chapter discussing the rise of *huabu*, Zheng wrote, "In the past, a group of literati called these tunes [i.e., *huabu*] local vernacular drama [地方土戲 *difang tuxi*] to distinguish them from Kun opera, which was only for the entertainment of the dominant class."⁷³ However, this passage is not found in Wang Gulu's translation, in which Aoki only traces the early history of *huabu* to the Wangli period of the Ming and briefly mentions the rise of *huabu* and the fall of Kun opera in the Qing.⁷⁴ It is not too surprising that Wang Zhizhang, a well-trained scholar, took issue with the assertive, unsupported arguments in Zheng's translation.

Within six years of the publication of *Shina kinsei gikyokushi*, two translations had appeared, as had two series of publications on research materials of Chinese theater. These publications were the fruits of the lively and timely scholarly exchange between China and Japan, which, ironically, coexisted with nationalistic rhetoric, even enmity. The Sino-Japanese dialogue relied on Wang Gulu and the others who traveled and lived overseas; they brought firsthand information on research on China to Chinese readers.⁷⁵

71 Zheng Zhen "Bianyi lueli" [A brief note on the translation and editing], in Zheng Zhen, trans. and ed., *Zhongguo jindai xiqu shi* [A history of Chinese song-drama in modern times] (Shanghai: Beixin shuju, 1933), 1.

72 *Shina kinsei gikyokushi* is comprised of five sections (*bien*), with the last titled *yulun*, or supplementary discussion. Zheng's translation cut it into three sections and one chapter of supplementary discussion, see "Muzi" [Table of contents], in Zheng Zhen, *Zhongguo jindai xiqu shi*, 1–3.

73 Zheng, *Zhongguo jindai xiqu shi*, 372.

74 Aoki Masaru, *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi* [A history of Chinese song-drama in modern times], trans. Wang Gulu (Beijing: Chunghua shuju, 2010), 325.

75 For a discussion of Wang Gulu's intellectual background and his personal exchanges with Aoki, see Cai Yi, "Xueshu fanyi yu wenhua jiaoliu—Qingmu Zhenger yuanchu, Wang Gulu yichu, Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi shuhou" [Academic translation and cultural exchange: behind *A History of Chinese Song-Drama in Modern Times*, written by Aoki Masaru and translated by Wang Gulu], in Cai Yi, *Riben Hanshi lungao* [Articles on Chinese poetry in Japan] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 301–19. Wang Gulu introduced overseas research on sinology to China, taking Japanese scholarship as his main sources. For instance, see Tanaka Suiichirō, "Xiren yenjiu Zhongguo xueshu zhi yenge" [A historical review on Westerners' scholarly research on China], trans. Wang Gulu, *Jinling xuebao* [Academic journal of Jinling University], 1, no. 1 (May 1931): 83–118. He also wrote on Japanese sinologists; see Wang Gulu, "Bainiao Kuji jiqi zhuzuo" [Shiratori Kurakichi and his writings], *Jinling xuebao* 6, no. 2 (November 1936): 183–99.

Wang Gulu's translation of *Shina kinsei gikyokushi* was one of his contributions introducing Japanese sinology to Chinese readers. In 1935, under the title *Zuijin Riren yanjiu Zhongguo xueshu zhi yiban* (最近日人研究中國學術之一斑 A brief survey of recent sinological studies in Japan), Wang published a monograph that extensively surveyed the state of Japanese sinology. In the chapter detailing the research on China conducted at Japan's major universities, he described the Kyoto school of Chinese historiography, to which Aoki belonged, as well as the Learned Society for Chinese Studies at Imperial Kyoto University, a scholarly association in which Aoki and his peers participated.⁷⁶

As its title indicates, *Shina kinsei gikyokushi* is a product of the Kyoto school's historiography, reflecting the political culture of Japanese imperialism within which the book was written. While *Shina* (支那 China), the title's geographical identifier, echoed Japanese sinologists' objectification of China in their research, the temporal identifier "kinsei" sees Aoki's adaption of the Kyoto school's periodization of Chinese history, which divided Chinese history into three periods: *jōko* (上古 antiquity), *chūko* (中古 medieval), and *kinsei* (近世 modern).⁷⁷ Although he originally thought to entitle the book "Ming Qing xiqu shi" (明清戲曲史 A history of Ming and Qing drama), Aoki intentionally chose *kinsei* for the title to make his work more accessible among Japanese readers since this periodization was current in Japanese sinology.⁷⁸

Aoki's choice of a title points to a methodological issue that haunts the writing of Chinese drama history: when did Chinese drama enter a modern period? Interestingly, Aoki disagreed with Naito Konan's opinion that the *kinsei* period had begun with the Song and Yuan dynasties.⁷⁹ As he explained in the preface to *Shina kinsei gikyokushi*:

The reason why I called [the time period examined in my book] *kinsei* was that drama before the Tang was negligible. It gradually began to develop in the Song, blossomed in the Yuan, and flourished ever more greatly in the Ming and Qing. . . . Moreover, when Mr. Wang [王國維 Wang Guowei 1877–1927] compiled his history of drama, he identified the period before the Song as ancient, therefore to be distinguished from the drama of the Yuan.⁸⁰

Following Wang Guowei's periodization, Aoki continued, "I consider the Yuan the medieval era in the history of drama, while the Ming gave us the modern era [*kinsei*]."⁸¹ In this way, Aoki arranged the historiography on Chinese drama in the following temporal order: Wang's work on Song and Yuan drama focused on drama of a more distant past, his own work on the Ming and Qing was devoted to the more recent past.

76 Wang Gulu, *Zuijin Riren yanjiu Zhongguo xueshu zhi yiban* (Changshu: 1936), 22–26, 30–31.

77 Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 19; Joshua A. Fogel, *Politics and Sinology: The Case of Naito Konan (1866–1934)* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984), 200.

78 Aoki Masaru, "Yuanxu," [Original preface], in Aoki, *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi*, 1.

79 For Naito's characterizations of the Tang-Song transition, see Fogel, *Politics and Sinology*, 170–82.

80 Aoki, *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi*, 1.

81 Aoki, *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi*, 1.

The different temporal focuses of Wang Guowei and Aoki speak to different aspects in examining Chinese theatrical arts—Wang, the literary aspect; Aoki, the performative aspect. When Aoki recalled his first encounter with Wang in Kyoto, which took place in 1912, he said that Wang had seemed totally uninterested in performance: “Mr. Wang was exclusively devoted to reading *qu* [曲] literature. He had no interest in watching drama and no zest for music.”⁸² When Aoki mentioned to Wang his plan to study the drama of the Ming and Qing when they met again in 1925, Wang’s reply was rather cold: “There is nothing to discuss after Ming times. . . . The *qu* of Yuan times is living literature [活文學 *huo wenxue*], whereas the *qu* of Ming and Qing times is dead literature [死文學 *si wenxue*].”⁸³ However, with his attention to stage performance, Aoki contended, “As for the operatic field nowadays, the *qu* of the Yuan has died out, while the *qu* of the Ming and Qing remain popular. Therefore, Yuan *qu* is dead drama [死劇 *si ju*], while the *qu* of the Ming and Qing is living drama [活劇 *huo ju*].”⁸⁴ In this way, Aoki redefined the dichotomy of living and dead arts, arguing for the worth of studying recent theater.

The different focuses in the transnational discussion of Chinese drama had a profound impact on the research methodology of this emerging field of knowledge. As Aoki’s focus on *kinsei* shaped the performative orientation in his research, the rare materials that captured the recent theatrical scene became much sought after.⁸⁵ In his chapters on the emergence of *huabu* genres and theatrical life in the Qing, Aoki referred to some of the very texts anthologized by Zhang Cixi to capture what he called “living drama.” These texts included *Yanlan xiaopu*, *Menghua subu* (夢華瑣簿 Assorted notes on a dream of splendors past), and *Jintai canlei ji* (金臺殘淚記 A record of tear stains from the golden stage), among others, all of which offered firsthand observations of live performances in the Qing.⁸⁶

Shina kinsei gikyokushi introduced these research materials to a new generation of aspiring drama researchers. For instance, Zhao Jingshen (趙景深 1902–1985) recalled in his preface to *Qingdai xubian*, “At first, I only learned from Aoki Masaru’s *Zhongguo jingdai xiqu shi* the four titles *Yanlan xiaopu*, *Tingchun xinyong* [聽春新詠 New poems on listening to youth], *Huaifang ji* [懷芳記 Records of cherished flowers], and *Mingtong helu* [明僮合錄 Collected records of child actors]. Then I learned five more titles: *Jingtai canlei ji*, *Chang’an kanjia ji* [長安看花記 A record of viewing flowers in Chang’an], *Xinren kuijia lu* [A record from the *xinmao* year to the *jiawu* year], *Dingnian yusun zhi* [丁年玉筍志 A record of jade-like beauties in the *dingyou* year], and *Menghua subu*.”⁸⁷ Zhao was surely overjoyed to see the publication of *Qingdai huibian* and its sequel, which included not only all of the aforementioned titles but also many others that facilitated the study of “the transformation from Kun opera to *pihuang*.”⁸⁸

82 Aoki, *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi*, 1.

83 Aoki, *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi*, 1.

84 Aoki, *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi*, 1.

85 Aoki, *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi*, 1. On Aoki’s attention to onstage performance and view on *pihuang* as a leading contemporary genre, see Wang Gulu, “Yizhu zhe xuyen” [Notes from the translator], in *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi*, 11.

86 Aoki, *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi*, chaps. 13, 15.

87 Zhao Jingshen, “Xu” [Preface], in Zhang, ed., *Qingdai xubian*, repr. in *Pingju shiliao congkan*, vol. 5, 5.

88 Zhao, “Xu,” 5:6.

More fundamental is the reevaluation of these once despised, neglected texts for serious research. As historian Gu Jiegang (顧頡剛 1893–1980) pointed out in his preface to the compilation, earlier writings on theater suffered the stigma of being thought nothing but dilettantish *jeux d’esprit* because of “the [then] prevalent view” of texts of theatrical connoisseurship as trivial. He reminded his readers that the value of the works compiled by Zhang depended on “the insights of those who studied these materials.”⁸⁹ Such insights, I would add, were stimulated by an increasingly respectable curiosity about all aspects of China’s theatrical experience and by the aspiration to emerge victorious in the transnational competition to illuminate Chinese culture.

CONCLUSION

The collecting of theatrical materials and texts marked the birth of a new field of knowledge that soon won plaudits. In one newspaper article, the author celebrated the appearance of “experts specializing in the study of national drama,” citing Qi Rushan as one who “expounds [the essence of] national drama from a scholarly point of view.” Even more noteworthy, the author suggested, was the establishment of the Exhibition Hall of National Drama (國劇學會陳列館 *Guoju xuehui chenlie guan*), made possible by Qi and his fellow researchers.⁹⁰ The exhibition hall and a research library (國劇學會圖書館 *Guoju xuehui tushuguan*) were both affiliated with the Learned Society of National Drama. The former was devoted to collecting artifacts and written objects related to Chinese theater, whereas the latter preserved scripts from a wide array of theatrical genres, as well as historical and contemporary documents and publications on drama.⁹¹ The items in both collections—from miscellaneous props to official documents, notes on choreography, and carefully crafted texts by literati connoisseurs—would make it possible for scholars to ground their research on a solid material basis, essential for a new field of knowledge.

Collecting is an adventure; its outcome is often unpredictable. In his essay on discovering theatrical texts in Tokyo’s major collections, Fu Yunzi used an idiom that the desired objects could only be acquired through “random encounters but not intentional requests” (可遇而不可求 *ke yu er bu ke qiu*) to describe how much an enterprise of collecting relies on contingency.⁹² However, this paper shows that, examined as a whole, the

89 Gu Jiegang, “Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao xu” [Preface to *Collected Historical Sources on Beijing Theater during the Qing*], in Zhang, ed., *Qingdai huibian*, repr. in *Pingju shiliao congkan*, vol. 4, 8.

90 Zhang Zhi, “Zi tou fawang tan guoju” [Discussing national drama means walking into a trap], *Beiping chenbao* [Beiping morning post], January 24, 1935.

91 For contemporary responses to the exhibition hall and the library, see Wu Sheng, “Beiping guoju chenlieguan gaiguan” [An overview of the Beiping Exhibition Hall of National Drama], *Beiping chenbao*, September 10, 1936; Wu Sheng, “Beiping guoju tushuguan gaiguan” [An overview of the Beiping Library of National Drama], *Beiping chenbao*, October 8, 1936. For detailed catalogs of the collections, see Qi Rushan, ed., *Beiping guoju xuehui chenlieguan mulu* [Catalog of the Beiping Exhibition Hall of the Learned Society of National Drama] (Beijing: Beiping guoju xuehui, 1935); Fu Xihua, ed., *Guoju xuehui tushuguan shumu* [Catalog of the Library of the Learned Society of National Drama] (Beijing: Beiping guoju xuehui, 1935).

92 Fu Yunzi, “Dongjing guan shu ji” [Notes on viewing books in Tokyo], in *Zheng cang yuan kaogu ji: Baichuan ji* [Archaeology studies at Shōsōin: notes by Shirakawa] (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), 124.

history of collecting materials for Chinese opera studies in early twentieth-century China is a history of intentional searching—searching for those materials that reveal the actual practice and history of the Chinese theater. It began with the aspiration of a generation of drama scholars to expand what were considered legitimate research materials, manifesting how the local resources of Republican Beijing were mobilized to fulfill collectors' thirst, making available, moreover, a theatrical past within a transnational context of intellectual exchange and contestation. It was through a multilayered set of activities and discourses—individual and collective endeavors, the investigation of textual and nontextual materials, and conversations within local and transnational contexts—that a new generation of Chinese drama researchers engaged in an ongoing discussion about the place of Chinese civilization in the world.

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