

The Globalization and Modernization of *Huju*

Shanghai, as a city growing in worldly prominence, fosters the creativity that allows its music to grow and develop. With the opportunities that any large city offers, combined with a global city's unique ability to bridge cultural differences, Shanghai has cultivated its music by incorporating elements from many different cultures into a musical blend that is distinctly Shanghanese. Understanding the music of Shanghai is of great importance when endeavoring to connect with its culture. Opera makes an excellent vehicle for this study of culture and cross-cultural relationships because it is a musical form recognized around the world. Furthermore, it not only employs local musical styles and techniques, as local instrumental music does, but it also makes use of text, thus bringing in more aspects of local dialect and culture. Finally, because opera is a dramatic art form, it makes use of stories, themes, and morals that are of significance to the culture.

Huju developed as an opera form local to Shanghai during the same time period that the city was itself growing and emerging and a prominent world presence. *Huju* is a form specific to Shanghai culture and is the result of recent decades of musical refining through the influence of an urban environment. In examining Shanghai as a city, *huju* is particularly interesting because, as ethnomusicologist Jonathan Stock explains, it “allows us access to a rich and distinctive vein of indigenous commentary

on a multi-faceted period of modernization, internationalization and social change.”¹ *Huju* takes elements from various regional Chinese music styles that came to the city through migrants and combines them with the Western² influences that were imported to Shanghai. The result is a modern opera with musical elements from all over the world. The question becomes, however, how much of Shanghai is left in the music.

For most ethnomusicological endeavors into the world of Chinese music, the rural setting is, for some reason, more valued and is often regarded as more “authentic” or “traditional,” leaving urban music largely ignored as a “corrupted” or “impure” form of music.³ And yet, so often more traditions are kept preserved and alive in urban settings where there are better resources for performance and transmission of heritage. The urban setting is also excellent for studying of how the music reflects the ideals of the culture because there is so much opportunity for cross-cultural exchange, allowing refinement of beliefs along side the honing of technique. In a global city, many aspects of musical identity come together to form a larger cultural identity.

Though the intricacies of such a complex art form are difficult for a Westerner to grasp in one semester, through my research I have found that *huju* can, and most likely will, remain distinctly Shanganese, while still embracing innovations from other cultures. The biggest problem currently facing *Huju* is not, in fact, Western cultural invasion, a phenomena that *huju* troupes actually choose to embrace. The biggest

¹ Jonathan P. J. Stock, *Huju : Traditional Opera in Modern Shanghai* (Oxford ; New York: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2003), 9.

² For the purposes of this paper, Western musical influence is that which is commonly referred to in the classical art-music canon of predominantly European (and later American) composers from the 1600’s to the present.

³ *Ibid*, 205.

problem for the survival of *huju* actually lies in the increasing age of its audience and the very few young people becoming interested in attending regularly. The aging demographic of opera audiences is a global problem, and although technology and popular culture from the West has perhaps increased the speed at which the young audience leaves, it is not the sole source of competition for *huju*. *Huju* is in no danger of languishing in the face of Western cultural imperialism, but rather faces slipping away into history as its audiences dwindle, unless it can find a way to captivate younger viewers.

Huju is a modern form of opera that developed out of the early 1900's and much of it is the same today as it was then. The music stems from folksongs that peasants sang as they farmed the land.⁴ The works songs developed into more organized forms of entertainment and, as migrant workers moved to Shanghai to find jobs, some made their livings by singing. Short stories were sung as solos, duets, or in small groups. The popularity of these developing troupes grew and they soon found themselves employed for small parlor settings.⁵ Because *huju* was local to Shanghai, all performances were sung in Shanganese, rather than Mandarin. Rich families would hire a troupe for an evening to entertain guests as they ate and socialized at *tanghui* (small private parties).⁶ Aristocratic houses would have had stages built into their private *chayuan* (tea gardens) from which performers could be seen on three sides.

⁴ Ibid, 34.

⁵ Ibid, 42.

⁶ Ibid.

In early *Huju* performances, singers sat and accompanied themselves. Small instruments were used that could be played on their laps, such as the *erhu* (two stringed, bowed instrument), *pipa* (lute-like strummed instrument) and *guban* (woodblock clappers), but actors soon stood to more easily express dramatic elements in the plot.⁷ This led to the addition of a permanent orchestra, generally comprised of no more than thirty musicians playing from the floor in front of the stage and led by a *guban* player. Eventually, as *huju* gained prominences and popularity, troupes performed in more public forums, at first subsidized by private sponsors and later supporting themselves through the sales of tickets. With the advent of large multi-story entertainment complexes, called *youle chang*, *huju* troupes were able to take up residence in theaters and not worry about traveling between venues, focusing instead of perfecting their performances.⁸

For a long time, performers were looked down upon as lower class workers because of their origins as poor migrants. They had very few rights and little professional respect. Children were sent to join an opera troupes only if their family needed extra money or could no longer care for them.⁹ Otherwise, unless one performed in a troupe with one's family, adults joined troupes in times of financial need through an elaborate process of mentoring. An amateur singer desiring operatic training had to go through *bai shi* (seeking, and in a sense courting, a potential teacher) and might begin by attending the concerts of a singer he or she admired.¹⁰ After several

⁷ Ibid, 43.

⁸ Ibid, 110.

⁹ Ibid, 46.

¹⁰ Ibid, 47.

nights of observation, he or she would hire a runner to act as a go-between to arrange an agreement with the *xiangsheng* or “master.” The *xiangsheng* might then decide to take on the student in exchange for service as a stage hand and a sixty Yuan start up fee to cover expenses occurred in the course of beginning of the training.¹¹

From this point, the apprentices had the privilege of sitting in on rehearsals and observing the masters as they practiced. Very little actual instruction ever took place and it was more the students’ responsibility to learn and mimic anything they were able to glean from observation, especially since there were no written scripts available for *huju*. As the masters saw fit, the students were then allowed to play small roles and stand in when more prominent actors got were unable to perform. Eventually, students either started a new troupe of their own or remained in their master’s troupe, gaining seniority as older members retired.

In early *huju* troupes, the daily life was rough and performers lived from show to show. It wasn’t until 1930’s that the concept of ‘star performers’ developed out of the call for more honed skills, which made good performers a commodity.¹² From that point, *huju* began to function more like Western drama in that performers could command higher salaries and audiences would stand in line for tickets to see particularly well known singers. Today, students work towards such success by developing their musical skills from an early age by taking private lessons, much like in the United States. From the age of 20, young musicians join troupes as members of an

¹¹ Ibid, 48.

¹² Ibid, 98.

academy program and train in the midst of professionals.¹³ This style of learning comes from a blend of Western and traditional Chinese training. Troupes run on a ten year cycle, taking on a group of students at a time and training them together before taking on more.¹⁴ The education of a singer is now more formalized and structured, but it is still rooted in the context of observation and interaction with working professionals.

As *huju* became more popular, the dramas portrayed focused increasingly on common life and everyday stories of the people. From its origins as peasant worker songs, *huju* was focused on the trials of day to day circumstances. Rather than portraying mythical gods and monsters, plots were about young lovers struggling against arranged marriages and issues of familial loyalty.¹⁵ Furthermore, rather than focusing on the lives of aristocrats, the stories of working people were also given equal stage time. This is much like the late Classical shift in Western opera in which Enlightenment era ideals suddenly allowed for the lead character to be a rebellious servant, like Figaro.¹⁶ In *huju*, this dramatic pattern continued as performances became more public, further focusing on human emotion and urban drama. This helped boost *huju*'s popularity over other dramatic forms because its audience could more easily relate to the action on stage. Troupes in need of new material began to make a habit of dramatizing popular contemporary literature by famous authors, such as Cao Yu's

¹³ Lui Hui, Personal Communication. March 3, 2007.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Stock, *Huju : Traditional Opera in Modern Shanghai*, 55.

¹⁶ Although Beaumarchais's play *Le Nozze di Figaro*, met with significant controversy, Mozart's adaptation was quite popular. Although several more divisive sections were omitted, the primary concepts of human equality featured quite prominently throughout the opera.

Leiyu (“*Thunderstorm*”).¹⁷ This story has become famous among Shanghainese school children and is often used as the primary example of a *huju* story line. Troupes also adapted current news stories from the local papers of suburbs in which they were performing.¹⁸ During the 1950’s, *huju* was also highly influenced by Western film noir, in which a great effort was made to keep the drama as realistic as possible.¹⁹ The realism with which Western dramas were portrayed became a model for troupes wishing to modernize and make their performances more accessible, as we will discover below.

The music used to accompany the new dramas today remains largely the same as folk melodies from the fields. These tunes are familiar to the audience (as evidenced by audience members humming along), but the words are adapted to fit the plot of the night. This is often done spur of the moment and performers are required to be able to improvise words and musical ornamentation for long periods of time. In the case of duets, two performers take turns singing phrases and responding, being careful to incorporate the musical ideas suggested by what was previously sung. Two singers never sing at the same time and therefore do not harmonize with each other.²⁰ Neither does the accompaniment vary from the melody. In this way, composers are not needed because all melodies are learned and passed on orally and any new music is improvised. Eventually, as *huju* modernized, attempts were made to transcribe melodies and then

¹⁷ Amy Zhang, Personal Communication. March 3, 2007.

¹⁸ William H. Sun and Faye C. Fei, "Between Chinese Theatre and Western Theatre," *The Drama Review: TDR* 31, no. 2 (Summer, 1987), 153, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0012-5962%28198722%2931%3A2%3C151%3ABCTAWT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-T>.

¹⁹ Stock, *Huju : Traditional Opera in Modern Shanghai*, 23.

²⁰ Personal observation. March 1, 2007.

later to compose new ones, but as of yet they have not reached the popularity of the traditional melodies, mostly due to the audience's preference for predictability and familiarity.

This emphasis on the use of well-known folk melodies caused problems as Western concepts of the prestigious Romantic-era composer made its way into the *hujū* world. Not only did visiting Western composers have trouble finding a place for their music, but Chinese composers emerging from the newly formed Western-style Shanghai Conservatory also had trouble finding a voice. Unable to introduce new melodies into their local art forms, composer often turned their talents to Western-style opera, which often meant setting the colors and textures of Shanghai aside. Furthermore, many talented composers from the conservatory, like Bright Sheng and Chen Yi, left China in pursuit of further education and employment abroad. These composers today often write folk-like tributes to Chinese melodies, but often with little more authenticity than many Western composers' attempts at "local color."²¹ By using Western orchestration and timbre, along with chordal structures and harmonic progressions common to Western music, these composers act as ambassadors and make Shanghainese music accessible to the West. But they also sacrifice a level of unique beauty of the original melodies.

Institutions, such as the Shanghai Conservatory, now educate composers in both Western and Chinese music theory. What results, is a new breed of musician who takes both forms of music to create a sort of hybrid. They combine various Chinese

²¹ Bright Sheng, *Three Chinese Love Songs: For Voice, Viola and Piano* (New York: G. Schirmer; 1988).

languages, stories, and musical colors and filter them through Western music theory and performance practice. Understanding this fusion also yields a comprehension of Western culture and its role as it influences other parts of the world. There is a craving in the West for the 'exotic' sound, which leads to the use of local color in operas like Verdi's *Aida*. This desire also puts pressure on other cultures to conform to their stereotypes in order to attract foreign tourist dollars, a phenomenon discussed below. Ethnomusicologist Colin Mackerras recognizes that "It's definitely a reconstituted identity, [but] that doesn't make it bad, by the way."²² But Western audiences will not tolerate anything that is too unfamiliar to their ears and one wonders if this will result in an amalgamated Chinese-Western musical tradition of a cultural identity and value that is yet to be determined.

When dealing with the music that remains in China, not only does the Western concept of opera find opposition in ideas of composing, but it also conflicts with the *huju* method of theatrical perpetration. Because so much of the performance is comprised of either well-known melodies or improvisation, little group preparation work is needed before hand.²³ Performers might communicate with each other about the intent and direction of a shared scene, but even the interaction between characters is created with a sense of spontaneity that brings a realistic and lively dynamic to the performance. It is also considered a showcase of performer's expert skills when they

²² Colin Mackerras, Personal Communication. February 22, 2007.

²³ This is not to say that singers lackadaisically "wing" their performances. There is actually substantial individual preparation that is quite rigorous, but this work is more for honing technique rather than for rehearsing for a specific show.

are able to elegantly respond to the action on stage without having to plan out their scene before hand.

Huju's propensity for improvised drama makes collaboration difficult when encountering Western styles of directing and rehearsing. Directors wanting to maintain control of the production often demand long hours of rehearsal, for which actors have little patience.²⁴ Productions will frequently be in a state of disaster at the dress rehearsal, only to go remarkably well opening night, surprising no one but the apprehensive Western director. Directors also have problems communicating their vision for blocking to actors, who generally move as they feel the scene developing. Furthermore, in traditional *huju*, emotions are most strongly communicated from hand positioning and facial expression.²⁵ Very little emotion flows from the rest of the body and it is actually to be kept as still as possible.

This concept is quite strange to directors like Dr. Maurizio Di Mattia, the stage director of the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma. I observed his struggling for hours in a production of Mascagnito's *Cavalleria Rusticana* to get Shanganese chorus members to express feelings of love and desire using sensual movements of their bodies. His pleading and examples were useless and he ended up only being the recipient of tactfully discrete ridicule when his back was turned. Despite this resistance, the methodology of facial expression has evolved quite a bit in *huju* and in modern

²⁴ Stock, *Huju : Traditional Opera in Modern Shanghai*, 198.

²⁵ Wang-Ngai Siu and Peter Lovrick, *Chinese Opera : Images and Stories* (Vancouver, BC; Seattle: UBC Press; University of Washington Press, 1997), 8.

performances there is more Western-style acting and realism. Rarely, however, is it as pronounced as in a romantic Italian opera.

The methodology of *huju* performance is not in conflict with all forms of Western music. Indeed, *huju*'s improvisational environment is much like that of Western jazz combo performances and, in fact, such concerts were quite popular in the time of *huju*'s development. Jazz musicians from the United States first began performing in Shanghai in the 1920's and it became quite popular at that time. Shanghainese composers like Li Jin Hui began to arrange pieces for jazz combos using Chinese folk music and the sound of big band jazz. He desired not only to create Chinese jazz, but more specifically, Shanghai jazz.²⁶ His melding of musical cultures met with much better success than that of Western opera composers, not only because he "took great pains to emphasize the Chinese-ness of both the band and the music,"²⁷ but also largely because of the many similarities between jazz and the performance traditions of Chinese music.

One example of these similarities is that jazz concerts are structured around a set-list of songs to be played in the course of the evening, much like the general structure of scenes and plot line in a *huju* drama. Jazz music itself is structured around a chorus, or what is known as the "head." This often consists of a well known melody from which performers could build their own melodic material, in much the same way that *huju* performers use traditional folk melodies. Jazz musicians remain in sync with

²⁶ Andrew F. Jones, *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 100.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

each other because they follow foundational chord progressions that are available to each of the performers. In the same way, once a *huju* singer begins improvisation, he or she still follows a basic pattern that can be easily followed and accompanied by the orchestra. For both of these musical genres, the idea of improvisation is a sign of excellence, rather than one of poor planning or organization, as it is sometimes seen from the perspective of Western musicians.

In both jazz and *huju*, individuals are given the freedom to explore everything the given melody has to offer them and virtuosity is highly valued. Planning solos ahead of a performance is considered a sign of poor musicianship. In jazz, after an instrument finishes an improvised solo it becomes another player's turn to showcase his or her skills and a player who can incorporate the previous solo is considered particularly skilled. In the same way, singers in *huju* pass lines to each other and interact thorough musical creating and responsiveness. Relationships are created between duettists that are just as strong as the famous dynamic jazz relationships, such as Loring "Red" Nichols and Miff Mole. In these ways, jazz in Shanghai both reflected and influenced *huju* as they both emerged in the public concert arena.

Huju flourished in this way after its initial development for many years. During the Cultural Revolution, however, only select *huju* troupes and scripts were allowed performance space.²⁸ Much of the momentum of development was lost. The styles of individuals and troupes were forgotten and "China's performing arts suffered a twenty-

²⁸ Stock, *Huju : Traditional Opera in Modern Shanghai*, 158.

five year setback as a result.”²⁹ After the bans were lifted, troupes were quick to reform, but the threat of extinction was enough to motivate the transcription of many melodies and even entire operas. This effort has both benefits and costs. There was a loss of the unique local sound because of the limitations of written music. Nuances and details of performance cannot be perfectly transcribed, but what is written has a better chance of surviving for others to perform in the future. However, preservation itself takes away from the innovation that is distinctly characteristic of *huju*.

Today, the principles of *huju* remain, even in the face of changes in orchestration and musical character. There is still a strong emphasis on modern plots and the costuming is true to the times they represent. The audience’s relationship with the performance is largely the same as it was in the parlors of the wealthy of old Shanghai. Although full meals are not served, snacks are consumed and audience members are accustomed to carrying conversations through the drama regardless of the action on stage, pausing to give their full attention to only the most impressive arias. Even cell phones can be answered if the conversation is kept short.³⁰ Although this contrasts with the ridged rules of audience etiquette for modern Western opera performances, it is surprisingly similar to concert habits of Europe in the 1700’s. Audiences were known to talk, play card games and meander around the theater if an opera did not particularly fill their attention. Western instruments, such as saxophones, clarinets, and string quartets have been added to the small orchestra (but no brass) and

²⁹ Daniel S. P. Yang, "Theatre in Post Cultural Revolution China: A Report Based on Field Research in the Fall and Winter of 1981," *Asian Theatre Journal* 1, no. 1 (Spring, 1984), 92, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0742-5457%28198421%291%3A1%3C90%3ATIPCRC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-U>.

³⁰ Personal observation. March 28, 2007.

are often used to convey the romanticism of the jazz era.³¹ Both traditional Chinese and Western sheet music are used, independent of the region of the instrument's origin. Despite all of its modernization, however, *huju* is rooted in its musical past and the vocal technique remains true to the bright and focused sounds of Chinese folk melody.

Not only does *huju* maintain a unique relationship with Western opera, it also upholds its affiliation with other Chinese opera forms. All provinces in China, and even many other cities, claim their own distinct form of opera. As of 1981, there were twenty-six traditional theater companies, among them eight *huju* and three *jingju* troupes.³² Most regional operas use similar traditional instrumentation, but for most operas other than *huju*, the orchestra is kept up on stage, to the left of the performers, rather than off stage in an orchestra pit.³³ Although the details of the techniques may vary slightly from region to region, songs are all generally quite high pitched, nasal, and maintain ranges of a couple of octaves. These sounds are “considered a positive aesthetic value and extended high pitch requires considerable skill to maintain.”³⁴ The sound is focused and glottal attacks are important for vocal expression and are used to more closely mimic the melody as expressed by the *pipa*. Every sound corresponds to particular emotions and, to achieve many emotional sounds, singers often perform “with the mouth half-closed, and some sounds have to be made with a completely

³¹ Zhang, *Personal Communication*.

³² Yang, *Theatre in Post Cultural Revolution China: A Report Based on Field Research in the Fall and Winter of 1981*, 91.

³³ Siu and Lovrick, *Chinese Opera : Images and Stories*, 29.

³⁴ Elizabeth Wichmann, "Tradition and Innovation in Contemporary Beijing Opera Performance," *TDR (1988-)* 34, no. 1 (Spring, 1990), 151, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1054-2043%28199021%2934%3A1%3C146%3ATAIICB%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Z> (accessed February 8, 2007).

closed mouth.”³⁵ Most regional operas now use female actors, but for quite sometime men could make their careers by playing female roles, raising the pitch of their voice to exaggerate the gender difference. Beyond these basic similarities, there can be wide variation in the style of opera performed from city to city.

Whereas most of the characteristics of *huju* mentioned above were developed in the mid-twentieth century, other forms of Chinese opera had been developing for quite some time. To gain an understanding of the radical ground that *huju* would break as it developed, we take a moment to examine *jingju*, the national opera of China. *Jingju* was originally the opera form local to Beijing (from which its common Western names, Beijing opera and Peking opera, are derived) and from its introduction to the city it was highly favored by the emperors.³⁶ *Jingju* represents the common Western perception of Chinese opera. It is characterized by bright make-up and ornate face masks. Costumes are also elaborate and vibrantly colored. This is in stark contrast to the lovely, but realistic costumes of *huju*. Every color has symbolism and history associated to it so it takes great dedication to master all the nuances of *jingju*.

The plotlines of *jingju* are quite distinct from those of *huju*. Rather than the realism of everyday life, *jingju* draws its stories from mythology. Although sometimes there is underlying commentary on current events, present times are never directly referenced on stage. Dramas instead involve large-scale adventure mythology with stories about emperors and their concubines or a young warrior’s struggles against an

³⁵ Kristofer Schipper, "Voice Technique ." *Liner Notes. Chine: Nan-Kouan.-Musique Et Chant Courtois De La Chine Du Sud.*, Kristofer Schipper, CD, 1988 Ocora.

³⁶ Siu and Lovrick, *Chinese Opera : Images and Stories*, 15.

angry deity.³⁷ Stories are often accompanied by a moral and focus on the virtues of humble service and bravery. Acting is highly disciplined and precise hand gestures and facial expressions are required, even more so than in *huju*. Detailed attention is given to the prescribed positions for the mouth and eyes.³⁸ This contrasts with the realism of *huju* stories for which actors are allowed to use a wide range of facial techniques for expression.

The actual music of *jingju* is also distinctive from *huju*. The singing is extremely nasal, even for Chinese opera, and even the speech carries a high lyrical quality that requires super-titles to be understood at all.³⁹ Recitatives are accompanied, not only by woodblock, as they are in *huju*,⁴⁰ but also by a loud gong, which is added for emphasis.⁴¹ During the aria itself, singers are in unison or octaves with the melodic orchestra parts, rather than being polyphonically accompanied, as is heard in *huju* and Western opera.

As with many other forms of Chinese opera, *jingju* has distinct roles in which actors specialize. This is similar to the specialization of Western opera singers, based on their natural talents, into categories such as Wagnerian, lyric or coloratura singers. In Chinese opera, the broadest categories are *dan* (female roles, not necessarily played

³⁷ Ibid, 100.

³⁸ Marie-Claire Quiquemelle, *The Education of a Singer at the Beijing Opera* (Princeton, NJ: Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 1994).

³⁹ Globally, most opera forms, in any language, require either a detailed knowledge of the plot or super-titles, owing to the elongation of vowels required for singing. However, super-titles are particularly important for Chinese opera because sung, or lyrically spoken, words lose the distinctive tones used to distinguish meaning.

⁴⁰ Often, recitative is not even present in *huju* and instead there is more use of the spoken dialogue. This helps to increase *huju*'s accessibility. When recitative is used, however, it is only accompanied by woodblock, while the rest of the orchestra is tacit

⁴¹ Personal observation. March 3, 2007.

by a female), *sheng* (male roles), *jing* (painted face roles in which the forehead is enlarged and the entire face is painted in colors appropriate to the character—for example, a white face may indicate treachery or craftiness), and *chou* (clown roles that also has distinctive face painting patterns).⁴² Each of these categories can have subcategories. For example, within the range of the *dan* character, there are six main subcategories, like *qingyi*, a young graceful maiden that serves as a romantic protagonist. In contrast, there is also *wudan*, a warrior woman with excellent training in fight choreography and acrobatics.⁴³ Indeed, the acrobatics involved in *jingju* are among the mores elaborate and complex in the world.

Because of the precision and attention to detail need to perform each of these roles, singers begin training as children and are sent to boarding schools specifically for this sort of education.⁴⁴ *Huju* does not involve the same levels of symbolism in every detail of performance and there is less of a need to specialize in specific role types, especially since its stories are not mythology based. Roles, like the monkey king and warrior god, simply do not exist in *huju* and, although an actor might specialize in playing certain reoccurring roles, like elderly men, actors are given much more freedom to develop characters as they see fit.

As distinct as *jingju* is from *huju*, it is even more different from traditional Western opera. As the popularity of *jingju* spread throughout China, its distinctive qualities caught the eyes of foreigners. Because of its origins in Beijing, *jingju* had

⁴² Siu and Lovrick, *Chinese Opera : Images and Stories*, 33-37.

⁴³ Ibid, 34.

⁴⁴ Quiquemelle, *The Education of a Singer at the Beijing Opera*

sufficient funding to increase its range of influence. As more tourists viewed *jingju*, its reputation grew in the West. *Jingju* performers are careful to maintain the heritage and traditions of ancient productions, unlike the ever evolving *huju*, and so to the Western eyes, *jingju* was seen as something exotic, an exhibition at which to marvel. The tourism revenue power of *jingju* contributed to its role as the national opera form. Today, the government still funds *jingju* troupes all over the country, although its value as a tourist attraction has declined. Maintaining a national opera form is, however, detrimental to other opera forms, in that it homogenizes the West's concept of Chinese opera and focuses ticket revenues on one specific genre.

Because *huju* cannot rely on tourism revenues as much, it must find other means of financially supporting its perpetuation. *Huju* is a cultural icon that is unique to the city and for this reason Shanghai's municipality supports certain *huju* troupes. Currently the city government support goes to the Shanghai Huju Yuan and this troupe is considered the most authentic and legitimized *huju* troupe.⁴⁵ Other troupes perform and tour, but they must rely solely on ticket revenues, or the sponsorship of a different providence. The Shanghai government requires the Yuan to perform its "task," that is to say, fill a quota of performances per year. Regardless of attendances at these shows, the troupe is paid once the performances have been completed. In the interest of preserving the history of *huju*, these performances are often more traditional forms of *huju* with stories and costumes from the 1930's. Despite the fact that *huju* itself less than one hundred years old, it is still constantly changing and being remade into newer forms. Without

⁴⁵ Lui Hui, *Personal Communication*.

government subsidies for traditional opera, styles and stories that are less than fifty years old would be lost to changing fashions. This is in stark contrast to opera forms like *jingju*, which have remained the same for hundreds of centuries. This demonstrates musicologist William Sun's point that "the slow homogeneous evolution of Chinese theater over a thousand years has been replaced by increasing diversity."⁴⁶ This speed of change also means an increased rate of loss and forgetfulness of the historical permutations of modern operatic models.

Although the loss of the original operas in favor of innovation might not necessarily be bad, many believe there is value in preserving the Shanghai heritage, just as the Beijing heritage is being preserved. In many ways, the government desires that *hujū* remain frozen as a monument to the past, as a museum piece of performance practice, without evolving with changing cultural identity. There is an understanding, as expressed by historian Ackbar Abbas, that "preservation in Shanghai is motivated by something quite different from the usual pieties about 'cultural heritage.'"⁴⁷ The sentiment is similar to the principle governing Shanghai's architecture, that preservation is "a way by which the state can enter the global market through promoting the city's past—that is, through heritage industry."⁴⁸ The government feels there is a need to retain a culture unique to Shanghai, if only to serve as an attraction for tourists.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Sun and Fei, *Between Chinese Theatre and Western Theatre*, 154.

⁴⁷ Ackbar Abbas, "Cosmopolitan De-Scriptions: Shanghai and Hong Kong," *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000), 780.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 781.

⁴⁹ The target audience of traditional *hujū* is more apt to be Chinese tourist from other cities, rather than Western tourists, who are likely to invest their money into *jinju* performances.

However, ethnomusicologist Peter Lovrick rightly recognizes that “the danger is that classical opera is not so much fostered as reserved, a very different thing. To foster is to encourage growth as a part of a tradition formed by a close relationship with the audience.”⁵⁰ Indeed, some innovations are accepted, like the use of microphones, prerecorded sound effects and modern lighting equipment. Also, there is no stigma, as there is in the West, to using a synthesizer in the pit to add richness to the sound.⁵¹ It can even be used as a drum set, as I observed as I sat in the pit for the Shanghai Huju Yuan’s performance of *Shi Liu Qun Xia* (Literally: “*Under the Crimson Skirt*”). Nevertheless, large changes to governmentally funded productions come slowly.

Rather than the technical aspects of the production, it is the drama and music itself that is most valued in its original form. The government has an interest in keeping sacred those arts that are distinctly Shanganese, which is difficult to do in the face of a global Shanghai. Because audience attendance is not high enough in the modernizing environment to support the old arts, the government feels compelled to subsidize it. As a result of this funding, the troupe is sometimes required to travel to the outskirts of the city to do outreach programs for people that would not normally get to see *huju*. These performances are extremely well attended, despite stories that are often perceived as old fashioned, because the government sponsors the performances and tickets are free (or not even required). This practice of governmentally produced historical shows ensures that the old style of performing will be remembered. There is still a hope that by maintaining these performances, Shanghai can hold on to its mystic exoticism and that

⁵⁰ Siu and Lovrick, *Chinese Opera : Images and Stories*, 212.

⁵¹ Zhang, *Personal Communication*.

by doing so Abbas suggests “the past allows the present to pursue the future.”⁵² The government is literally banking on the understanding that “the economic importance of preservation cannot be underestimated” because it “enhances the city’s attractiveness...for foreign investment and the tourist trade.”⁵³ According to the Shanghai Huju Yuan’s *erhu* player, Lui Hui, no one really worries about the art form dying out as long as this principle stands. Unfortunately, at present, *huju* is not effective at bringing in extra revenue for the city. But for now, at least, the government ensures the preservation of performances.

The stipend provided by the government is not very high, however, and the Shanghai Huju Yuan must perform many shows in addition to those required by the government. It is with these shows that the troupe chooses more modern stories and is more innovative in its performances in an effort to draw paying audiences. This is the environment in which *huju* continues to evolve and artistic experimentation is alive. The hope is that “‘preservation’” and ‘heritage’ do not act as brakes against development...they further a developmental agenda.”⁵⁴ Therefore, with this system there is mixing of government sponsorship and private funding in a balance between modernization and remembrance of *huju*’s musical heritage.

It is most impressive that both aspects of *huju* are being represented in the same troupe. In the United States, opera companies tend to specialize, focusing their efforts on either recreating old productions of Romantic composers, or emphasizing the music

⁵² Abbas, *Cosmopolitan De-Scriptions: Shanghai and Hong Kong*, 780.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 781.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 783.

of new composers. This is most distinctly seen in New York, where tried and true traditionalists flock to the Metropolitan Opera and vote with their subscriptions and donations that they are not interested in pushing the boundaries of artistic expression. New York City Opera, on the other hand, thrives on works by new composers or radical new productions of traditional operas. Both companies are housed at the Lincoln Center and are within feet of each other, but they are still independent in their finances and management. To incorporate both performance focuses into one troupe is a lot to ask and cause strain on the governmentally sponsored *huju* troupe. Those troupes not receiving funding can more easily devote their performing efforts to innovation in order to attract higher numbers of people to the theaters.

For all troupes, whether they are receiving government funding or are independent, the average age of audience members is steadily increasing and this is a significant problem. For the majority of the Shanganese youth, opera is simply not an in-vogue way to spend one's time. It is considered old fashioned and more for their parents' generation.⁵⁵ In observing this reaction, Peter Lovrick fears that "when the audience is largely lost and what remains is for the most part an older generation, the opera stops growing."⁵⁶ The challenge facing *huju* troupes now is how to renovate their image to add youthful vigor and appeal to their productions. Again, Lovrick feels that opera forms, like *huju*, must "continue an exquisite tradition in a lovely way to regain a lost audience. Chinese opera must avoid fossilization, yet at the same time maintain the

⁵⁵ Apple, Personal Communicaton. March 5, 2007.

⁵⁶ Siu and Lovrick, *Chinese Opera : Images and Stories*, 212.

thread that gives it its identity.”⁵⁷ This not an easy task in the face of older audience members, who make up the core of the donors and paying ticket holders and insist on seeing the *huju* of their memories.⁵⁸ Cultural experts have suggested that “to avoid ‘a natural death,’ the companies should adapt their themes for a wider audience.”⁵⁹ But attracting young audiences is especially difficult in the age of movies, TV, and video games, which have contributed to the significant decrease in audience size over the past several years.⁶⁰ What is more, it would be “very difficult to adapt the many artistic elements into a modern play without the chance of losing the authenticity of the art.”⁶¹ But for students, paying significant amounts of money to see a singer (whose recordings iTunes wouldn’t even consider selling take twenty minutes to express her feelings about her impending arranged marriage is not considered a valuable investment.⁶² The desire to sit quietly for three hours, watching a story line with very little fast paced action or sex appeal, has simply faded out of style.

If the plot of *huju* is not as compelling as a 30 minute sit com, *huju* must either adapt its stories (which it does try to do to some extent), or it must make the music the compelling reason for coming. Unfortunately, a deeper appreciation for the intricacy of classical Chinese music is not taught in schools. Instead, the Shanghanese youth experience what many Westerners do when they first hear *huju*: a lot of high pitch

⁵⁷ Ibid, 11.

⁵⁸ Wichmann, *Tradition and Innovation in Contemporary Beijing Opera Performance*, 152.

⁵⁹ Arnold Perris, "Chinese Wayang: The Survival of Chinese Opera in the Streets of Singapore," *Ethnomusicology* 22, no. 2 (May, 1978), 302, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0014-1836%28197805%2922%3A2%3C297%3ACWTSOC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-X>.

⁶⁰ Wichmann, *Tradition and Innovation in Contemporary Beijing Opera Performance*, 148.

⁶¹ Perris, *Chinese Wayang: The Survival of Chinese Opera in the Streets of Singapore*, 303.

⁶² Apple, *Personal Communicaton*.

screeching and melodrama. Any attempts to bridge the cultural divide simply “appear to be tacked on, [which is] unsettling in what is traditionally experienced as a highly synthesized art.”⁶³ To many young Shanghainese, their own local opera seems quite foreign.

Huju even has an advantage over other Chinese opera forms in that it has more accessibility in its modernity. In many ways this makes *huju* more like the American Broadway musical than Western opera, in that it is not the most classical form and yet not popular or mainstream. It can be seen as “a bridge between the traditional theater and modern spoken drama.”⁶⁴ But it is simply not modern enough for this city of fickle fashion. Part of the problem harkens back to the influence of the West and the desire to modernize to meld with Western standards. *Huju* is simply not Western enough to be cool, which is ironic in the face of the governmental opinion that it is becoming too Western. Granted, the situation may have been just as insidious without Western cultural imperialism, but it certainly does not help to slow the process of deterioration.

The problem of making music that is more accessible and modern in order to attract the youth to opera is not unique to Shanghai. In fact, in studying *huju*'s situation, I discovered it is a problem shared with the entire world. Dr. Di Mattia, vehemently lamented the apathy towards “true Italian opera” that he sees coming from the Italian youth⁶⁵. Furthermore, Amy Zhang, the assistant to the president of Shanghai Opera (Shanghai's Western opera company) expressed frustration at their inability to attract

⁶³ Wichmann, *Tradition and Innovation in Contemporary Beijing Opera Performance*, 151.

⁶⁴ Sun and Fei, *Between Chinese Theatre and Western Theatre*, 153.

⁶⁵ Maurizio Di Mattia, Personal Communication. March 4, 2007.

young audiences.⁶⁶ *Jingju* expert, Colin Mackerras notes the same phenomenon occurring with *jingju*, stating “the future of Peking Opera may resemble that of a popular museum piece,”⁶⁷ a relic that no one enjoys, but thinks is important to preserve. There is a view in the United States that any older form of music “has to change or evolve or it will die.”⁶⁸ For the artists, there is a level of resentment towards this sentiment because “if you change something from one thing to something else, it isn’t alive anyway...It just needs new breath,”⁶⁹ rather than being fully changed. In cities all over the United States and Europe opera houses struggle with the ever-looming threat of losing their audience to nursing homes and Alzheimer’s disease.

Troupes are experimenting with many techniques to try to circumvent the issue. The Shanghai Huju Yuan is focusing more on its students and given them more playing time than they used to do.⁷⁰ This gets them involved and enjoying *huju* at an earlier age rather than forcing them to take a back seat to professionals. The Yuan also uses some of its outreach tours to visit schools, including early elementary schools, preparatory schools, and colleges. In 2007, they gave sixteen performances to universities and found that many students are actually quite interested in the performances and pay attention.⁷¹ So why won’t they come to shows of their own volition? A lot of it has to do with the number of choices that the students are presented with after school. They are simply too over committed.

⁶⁶ Zhang, *Personal Communication*.

⁶⁷ Colin Mackerras, *Peking Opera* (Hong Kong ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 72.

⁶⁸ Modlin Center for the Arts, *Cherryholmes: About the Artists*, February 11, 2007).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Lui Hui, *Personal Communication*.

⁷¹ Zhang, *Personal Communication*.

A larger barrier to youth attendance, however, is the price of tickets, which can be expensive. The Yuan gives away many free tickets to students, but this becomes difficult to sustain financially. To combat this dilemma, the Yuan, as well as the Metropolitan Opera and other companies around the world, offer student ticket at drastically reduced prices. These tickets are usually offered only the week of (or even only hours before) a performance. This way, the troupes are able to maximize revenue from those paying for full price tickets. But even with programs such as these, troupes find that the youth simply cannot be bothered to attend. Perhaps a slow death of old age is what is in store for the future of *huju* and its cultural history. To many this would be sad, but then again, if it does come to that point, by definition the very people who might care about losing *huju* will no longer be alive to miss its presence.

The Western influences on *huju* are neither good nor bad. They are simply the natural result of Shanghai's globalization. These foreign influences, as well as the influences of other Chinese musical forms, lead to new styles of Chinese opera.

Huju takes aspects of Western drama, like realism, and adds them to the beauty of an already existing heritage. There is a question, perhaps, as to why there is less evidence of the Chinese influences traveling westward. Although Western audiences may enjoy *jingju* as a diversion, or as an exotic treat, its theatrical elements of careful attention to gesture and eye movement do not heavily infiltrate Western dramatic technique.

Certainly *huju* itself is rarely, if ever, performed in the West and its vocal techniques are never used on Western opera stages. One wonders why this is, if it is a result of a Western supercilious subconscious, perhaps a hold over from colonialism. Or could

there possibly be an inherent evolution of theater that presumes some division of quality? It might not be possible for any art form to maintain independence from Western musical influence in a city that desires to be seen as a global force. *Huju* is at the same time very similar to and very different from other forms of Chinese opera, and maintains a similar position with Western opera. *Huju* lives in the middle ground as a bastard, or a beauty, of both forms “with old and new compressed together in an apocalyptic now.”⁷² Actually, *huju* itself maybe the result of subconscious preservation because it uses traditional music as well as modern plots to maintain its persistence. Although it is difficult to continue walking the line between old and new, East and West, preservation and innovation, it is my personal hope that *huju* will remain strong in its commitment to all aspects of its identity.

⁷² Abbas, *Cosmopolitan De-Descriptions: Shanghai and Hong Kong*, 782.

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Better title

Didn't note passive voice

Go back and add pictures

Integrity—would I be ok with stock and Macarras reading this?

Read by Amy zaghn

Her friend

Ryan, mom, dad, doc,

FOR SYMPOSIUM WITH MUSIC EXAMPLES—bright sheng, mall, turendot
(pictures turendot, jingju *huju*)

Small cultural survey

More personal observation

Site more my speculation?

Who is being quoted