Catherine Vance Yeh

"Experimenting with Dance Drama: Peking Opera Modernity, Kabuki Theater Reform and the Denishawn's Tour of the Far East"

Abstract

During the 1910s and 20s, Peking opera underwent a fundamental transformation from a performing art primarily driven by singing to one included acting and dancing. Leading this new development were male actors playing female roles, with Mei Lanfang as the most outstanding example. The acknowledged sources on which these changes drew were the encounter with Western style opera. The artistic and social values carrying these changes, however, suggest that Peking opera underwent a qualitative reconceptualization that involved a critical break with its past. This paper will explore the artistic transformation of Peking opera of the 1910s-20s by focusing on the three areas of contact Paris, Japan and the US. It will argue that the particular artistic innovation in Peking can only be fully understood and appraised in the context of global cultural interaction. It suggests that a new assessment of the modernist movement is needed that sees it as a part of a global trend rather than only as a European phenomenon.

Author

Catherine Vance Yeh is Professor of Modern Chinese Literature and Transcultural Studies at Boston University. Her research focuses on the global migration of literary forms; the transformation of theater aesthetics in transcultural interaction, and entertainment culture as agent of social change. Her publications include *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals and Entertainment Culture, 1850-1910*; and *The Chinese Political Novel: Migration of a World Genre*.

Between 1910s and 1920s Peking opera underwent a dramatic transformation. It had been dominated by the old man role, known as *laosheng*, since its beginnings in eighteenth century Anhui opera and had developed into the theater form associated with the name of the capital city Beijing. Since the 1910s, however, a sudden and

abrupt change took place with the actors playing the female role, known as *dan*, taking over the leading roles in the Peking opera repertoire and on the public stage of stardom. The key figure in this transformation was Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳 (1894 -1961). He was followed shortly thereafter by three other *dan* actors and together they were lionized as the "four great *dan*" *sida mingdan*. While many social and political factors came together in this transformation of Peking Opera, the ultimate factor was an artistic innovation – the introduction of dance. With their new dance-driven operas, the most gifted of these *dan* actors became national stars.

The transformation of the genre strongly interacted with global stage trends. These were the ascendance of female characters to center stage in a theater tradition hitherto dominated by male roles and in particular those impersonating the statesman and the warrior; the creation of performances focused on a single principal actor which was the hallmark of the female-centered operas; the emergence of a star culture – in the Chinese case around the *dan* actors – that was driven by the new mass media; and the introduction of dance into Peking opera which led to a reconceptualization and reorientation of the artistic core of the genre. A case in point is Mei Lanfang's 'The Goddess Spreads Flowers' 天女散花 ("*Goddess*"), which was choreographed and performed for the public on November 3, 1917. Billed already at the time as a major event, it actually turned out to be a historical turning point for Peking opera while also setting Mei Lanfang on the way to national and international stardom. The modern media of photography and the reproduction of photographs in print spread the image of Mei Lanfang in the role of the Goddess throughout China as well as overseas. (Fig. 1)

Fig. 1: Mei Lanfang in the role of the Goddess in 'The Goddess Spreads Flowers" 天女散花 (Tiannü sanhua), 1917. Source: Mei Shaowu 梅紹武 eds., Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳 ([Pictorial album] Mei Lanfang) *(Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997), p. 49.*

These global stage trends were part of a modernist rebellion in the arts that was sweeping Europe during the early twentieth century, with Paris as its center. The impulse of this rebellion spread through manifestos, pamphlets, photographs, and theater criticisms published in newspapers as well as through the global migration of actors, directors, playwrights, and critics. The result was an imagined international space that was shared by the performing arts within which concepts, news and images as well as human actors circulated with ease across language and cultural borders.

In the case of Peking opera, the actors involved were Chinese men-of-letters personally experiencing the European theater scene, as Mei Lanfang's mentor Qi Rushan did in the early years of the twentieth century; Chinese actors going abroad to see performances and perform themselves as Mei Lanfang did in 1919 in Japan, where he encountered a new kind of Kabuki, which was also going through its own transformation of reinserting dance into its performances led by actors who were legendary already in their lifetimes, such as Nakamura Jakuemon III 中村雀右衛門 (三世, 1875 - 1927), Nakamura Utaemon 中村歌右衛門 V (五世, 1865 -1940) and his son; and as Mei Lanfang would do later in the United States and the Soviet Union with many avant-garde artists among his audiences; foreign dance performances, live or recorded on silent films that were also shown in China, such as early silent films with Loïe Fuller dancing and Charlie Chaplin or Lillian Gish acting or such events on stage as when the American modern dance group Denishawn came to Beijing in 1925 for a back-to-back performance with Mei Lanfang; and finally foreigners residing in China who were passionate about the stage, such as Mary Ferguson, the head of the Peking Society of Fine Arts in the 1920s, who invited the Denishawn dancers, or Benjamin March, who taught Far Eastern art in Peking during the 1920s and helped spread the fame of Mei's art in the United States.[1]

As the wordless action of dance and silent film travelled much easier across language barriers and acting traditions than the other stage medium of modernity, the spoken drama,[2] the question will have to be explored whether this led to a rise of dance in the hierarchy of forms of performance and what role the appreciation of the dance-driven new Peking opera by international audiences in turn played in securing its status in the highly contested Chinese environment. To make this case, we will have to engage in a transcultural study that will explore the concepts, performances, and actors involved both in their given environments and their migration across cultures.

The Migration of the Concept of Dance: 1910s Paris

Mei Lanfang's dance-driven *Goddess* was a collective creation by Mei Lanfang and the inner circle of his supporters with Qi Rushan 齊如山 (1877-1962) being the principal mover behind its conception, execution and choreography. Working exclusively with Mei Lanfang, Qi Rushan became Peking opera's first and most prominent modern playwright, historian, choreographer and director, as well as the first theorist of Peking opera aesthetics. Working with Mei Lanfang over a 20 years period, he produced over 30 plays for him.

Qi Rushan himself described the experience that inspired him to consider inserting dance into Peking opera and the steps he took to implement this innovation. During his stay in Paris in 1908-1909, 1911 and 1913 he had often gone to see performances including operas.[3] This led him to conclude that Chinese opera was uncivilized, primitive and in urgent need of reform to make it "civilized."[4] After having, in the light of his new experiences, discovered what he considered the deep cultural roots of Peking Opera dance, he reversed this judgment in later writings. Once Peking opera drew again on these rich roots in traditional performance arts, especially those of dance, it was far from "primitive," would live up to what he had seen in Paris, and could even claim in the new Western terminology that Peking opera was a form of dance drama with a "integrated art system."[5] The existing operas, however, had lost this connection and were "primitive" indeed with the lack of dance the most salient feature. He set himself the task of bringing Chinese theater back to its roots and to recreate the forgotten dance. Mei Lanfang with his genius as an actor and his willingness to experiment with the new and join the "civilizing" mission was the perfect candidate to realize this ambitious plan. Thus beginning with "Chang'e escapes to the moon" 嫦娥奔月, "The Goddess Spreads Flowers," "Hegemon King Bids Farewell to His Concubine" 霸王別姬, "The Drunken Beauty Guifei" 貴妃醉酒, "The life of Yang Guifei"太真外传 (1925), "The Goddess of the River of Luo" 洛神 – to just name the most famous - Mei went on to create and perform many operas that combined dance with singing.[6]

Qi Rushan's experience of Paris performing arts could not have come at a more stimulating moment. After two decades of grand acclaim, Paris opera and ballet had been in a much-bemoaned decline by the 1890s. The next twenty years saw innovative forms of performance emerge that brought together a new crop of international performers and groups, composers, stage designers and graphic in new venues that included the Theatre d'Art (Theater of the Art) but also stages with vast popular audiences such as the Folies-Bergères. Between 1909 and 1913 the Paris stage saw performances by Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes of Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps*; by Loïe Fuller doing her Fire Dance and Snake Dance with her flowing silks and stunning lighting effects; by Isadora Duncan with her first independent dance productions; by the Japanese dance troupe of Sada Yacco performing in Loïe Fuller's theater, while other places were staging Strauss' *Salomé* with its dance of the seven veils. Artists such as Ferdinand Léger, Pablo Picasso or Léon Bakst were doing

the stage design and costumes while the art nouveau scene was obsessed with Loïe Fuller's dances, for which Henri Toulouse-Lautrec contributed the posters. These performances rejected a tradition considered formalistic, artificial and dead, and offered total works of art that included acting, singing, dancing, light effects, stage decor and new types of theater design.[7]

Qi Rushan specifically mentions the overwhelming experience he had at the Paris Opera. While he does not give us the names of particular performances he saw, we can infer some of his most probably experiences from the records of the time. The Paris Opera at the time was the home to the Ballets Russes.[8] "Descriptions by Diaghilev's contemporaries of the reception of the Ballets Russes in Paris abounded in adjectives like 'marvelous,' 'overwhelming,' and 'intoxicating' and referred to the effect on the audiences in terms of 'shock' and even 'mass delirium.'"[9] Audiences were fascinated not only by the superb technical mastery of the Russian dancers, but also by their ability to express dramatic nuances not so much through miming, as had been the case with European ballet, but primarily through dance itself. Michel Fokine's choreography was revolutionary. The musical scores were exquisite; there was Chopin and Tchaikovsky, but also Alexander Borodin, Nikolai Tcherepnin, and Anton Arensky, all virtually unknown outside Russia, but whose unusual Slavic harmonies Paris audiences found spellbinding. Unquestionably the stage decors created the biggest sensation – highly stylized, in fantastic hues and shocking color combinations, they were a world apart from either traditional theater with its trompe l'oeil or the somber, austere air of the European avant-garde stage."[10] The stage and costume designs – mostly by Léon Bakst - were equally astonishing and new for the audience at the time. (Fig. 2) The program the Ballets Russes presented in their sojourn at the Paris Opera included ballets inspired by the historical periods favored by Diaghilev and his associates such as *Le pavillon d'Armide* – on the 18th century, Cleopatra – Egyptian, Polovtsian Dances – ancient Russia (1909 program). Their enthusiasm for Greek arts and theater resulted in "Narcisse" and other dances (1911-1912).[11]

Perhaps even more important for Qi Rushan were the performances of the American dancer Loïe Fuller, in particular her experimentation with silk and multi-colored tracking lights on an otherwise dark stage to create illusions and theatrical spectacles of dissolving the gravity of the body into a flowing movement with shifting colors. (Fig. 3) Mei Lanfang's dancing *Goddess* on a dimmed stage with her flowing silk sashes under tracking lights with shifting colors is clearly inspired by Fuller's performances. [12] This was the competitive and sophisticated international environment in which an art form had to prove itself. The harvest for Qi Rushan from his Paris experience was that opera performance had to combine song and dance. Embodied in the art of Ballets Russes and Fuller was the notion of a "total work of art" or a comprehensive and integrated art form that included music, dance, stage-sets and lighting, costumes design, singing and text.[13]

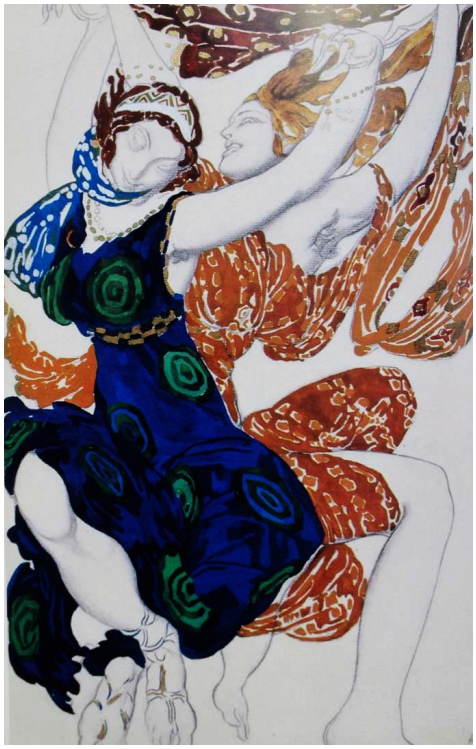

Fig. 2: One of the primary areas in which the Ballets Russes excelled, leaving and indelible impression on the development of twentieth century theater were costume and stage design. An example of Ballets Russes's production, costumes, stage design and dancers, in this case Bronislava Nijinska and Vera Fokina. Léon Bakst, "Nijinska and Fokina in 'Narcisse'." Pencil, watercolor, gouache, and gold and silver on paper. Dance Collection, *The New York Public Library.*

Fig. 3: A. Harlingue, Loïe Fuller in Costume. Photography, around 1909. Source: Jo-Anne Banzker, Loïe Fuller: Getanzter Jugendstil. *München & New York: Prestel, 1995, p. 88.*

This is what Qi Rushan had seen in what Pascal Casanova called the "capital of the world republic letters" and what seemed to him the highest achievement in theatrical art. This understanding of stage performance guided him throughout his thirty years' efforts to reform Peking opera and it informed everything he did with Mei Lanfang. Qi lamented that Chinese theater in fact once had dance as well as many other of these so-called modern and "civilized" theater practices. To restore the true and authentic Chinese theater as it was practiced in the ancient past became the "national anchor" for his modernization drive. It entailed a [re]construction of a Chinese theater that represented "Chinese high culture."

The creation of Mei Lanfang's dance drama grew out of Qi's desire to draw the lessons from his Paris experience, and to establish a Chinese performance form that included both dance and singing in a dialogue with Western performance styles, and find recognition for it as a leading member of World Theater. This desire and mission were translated into recasting Peking opera along the lines of what Qi perceived as the standard of "civilized" opera from the West. To join this world community, however, one must first clearly define the own cultural identity. For Qi Rushan, this identity needed to be recast from the Chinese cultural past. It is this heritage that will provide Peking opera with a new source for identity and innovation. In other words, Peking opera entered world-theater by establishing its "local authenticity".

While Qi Rushan's Peking opera reform drew inspiration from this Paris experience, he also found a way there to transform Peking opera in a way that would enable it to reach international audiences. After all, artists and audiences in Paris were congregating from all over the world and the stage language developed there was accessible to them all. Qi Rushan wrote:

> After [*Chang'e escapes to the moon*], the purposes of creating new operas had two objectives: the first was to enable Mei to draw in large audiences and have success at the box office; the other was to use [these new operas] as means to put Peking opera on the world map. To be successful in both made the task of choreographing new operas much harder. But fortunately it was during the years 1915 and 1916, when [we] still had not yet developed the idea of going abroad and actually performing Chinese drama on foreign stage; what we meant by putting Peking opera on the world map, initially was no more than the idea of inviting foreigners to see the shows [in China]. Since they appreciated ballet/dance drama, we began to develop in this direction. The new creations included "myth-based operas" *The Goddess of the River of Luo*, *Hongxian Steals the Seal of Power*, *The Goddess Spreads Flowers*, *Lian Jingfeng*, *The Life of Yang Guifei*, *Madam Shangyuan* etc., (the last act in *The Life of Yang Guifei* belongs to myth). They all incorporated ancient dance, such as "diaoxiuer" dance, "feather" dance, "whisk" dance, "chuishou" dance, "cup and tray" dance, "shou" dance etc. We tried in every way possible to insert dance into these [newly arranged] operas. [14]

Dance thus entered Peking opera with a double mission: to represent Chinese theater in compliance with world theater standards, and to create a common language that would ensure understanding and appreciation within the world theater scene as led by the advanced nations. This wish to communicate with international audiences was one of the major reasons for inserting dance into Peking opera. Looming large behind this urge to communicate, however, was the search for an artistic form that would be universally recognized as the cultural signature of a modern and "civilized" nation.

Actual encounters, both in China and abroad, of the performers and managers of the new Peking opera with international audiences helped in developing the particular performance style that would fit the reform agenda while also familiarizing these performers and managers with the stage reforms going on elsewhere. The result of these encounters was a new generation of Chinese artists who were familiar with modern theater aesthetics and shared its agenda.

Mei Lanfang's Encounter with the Reformed Kabuki in Japan

In 1919 Mei Lanfang was invited to perform at the Japanese Imperial Theater or Teikoku Gekijō, at the time the most Westernized and best-equipped theater in Tokyo. The man who invited him was none other than Ōkura Kihachirō 大倉喜八郎 (1837-1928), the founder of Japan's largest conglomerate, the *Ōkura zaibatsu* with its extensive interests in Korea and Manchuria, who chaired the board of directors of the Imperial Theater. Ōkura had seen Mei performing the *Goddess*, and was overwhelmed by his beauty and genius. It was this piece that sealed the deal.

Articles published at the time in Japanese newspapers and periodicals hailed Mei's *Goddess* as a revolution in Chinese opera.[15] Mei's performance was a complete success. Most of the pieces chosen by the Japanese to be performed were newly created for Mei by his supporters on the basis of traditional operas but with strong emphasis on dance.[16]

The *Goddess* was the central piece and the highlight of the visit as it was most often performed and extensively discussed by critics. In preparing for the visit to Japan, however, regardless of its overwhelming popularity among Chinese audiences, the press, the international community and many imitators, Qi Rushan opposed including the *Goddess* into the program. His surprising argument was that it did not represent traditional Chinese theater arts because it was a new piece driven by dance.[17] This contradiction between the desire to have Peking opera appreciated as an art form steeped in a rich cultural tradition; and to have it recognized as able to transform itself so as to be relevant in the modern world was shared by the Japanese

hosts. For some among the Japanese audiences the *Goddess* symbolized China's new spirit of cultural regeneration and the modernization of its theater, in short the coming of the modern to Chinese culture. They appreciated the innovative incorporation of Japanese and Western dance elements in the piece.[18] For others, the traditional *kun* opera pieces and the dance-centered pieces such as the "Drunken Beauty" (Guifei zuijiu), were more rewarding as they evoked an imagined ancient Japanese theater and dance tradition that was now lost.[19] Japanese audiences related to most strongly were the elements that were new to Peking opera and marked Mei Lanfang's personal acting style, namely dance and the expression of the character's emotions through facial expression and gesture.[20]

Mei's encounter with the Japanese stage on the "new Kabuki," *shin kabuki,* which had reintroduced dance and of which he probably already had heard much. On April 27, 1919, a day after arriving in Japan, he went to see Nakamura Utaemon V 中村歌右衛門 (五世, 1865 -1940), Japan's greatest living female impersonators or *onnagata*, playing Lady Yodo in *The Sinking Moon over the Lonely Castle Where the Cuckoo Cries*, Hototogisu Kojō no Rakugetsu 沓手鳥孤城落月, at the Kabuki-za Theater.[21] This new play had been written in 1905 by Tsubouchi Shōyō 坪内逍遙 (1859-1935), one of Japan's leading intellectuals, playwrights and literary critics, had been a professor of social science at Waseda University and was at the time translating Shakespeare into Kabuki-style Japanese.[22] The role of Lady Yodo was extremely challenging. She was the mother of Shogun Hideyoshi's designed heir Hideyori and lived with him in Ōsaka castle. As Tokugawa Ieyasu is usurping power and sets out to besiege the castle, he tries out to rescue his granddaughter whom he had married to Hideyori. Lady Yodo is driven mad as suspects everyone to be involved in this plot, in the end not even recognizing her own son. To familiarize himself with the body language of such a character, Nakamura actually had visited a madhouse. (Fig. 4) He continuously staged new Kabuki plays, some of them expressly written for him.[23]

Mei was obviously impressed by the boldness of this performance, and later had his own take on performing (in this case pretended) madness in "Yuzhoufeng" (The Precious Sword Named *Yuzhoufeng*; Fig. 5). It may even be that the series of photographs showing Nakamura Utaemon as Lady Yoda inspired Mei many years later to use this format for recording his facial expressions. (Fig. 6)

A few days after his own performance on April 27, Nakamura Utaemon V would in his turn be in the audience of Mei Lanfang's first performance at the Imperial Theater.

Fig. 4: Nakamura Utaemon as Lady Yoda in The Sinking Moon over the Lonely Castle Where the Cuckoo Cries. The photographs depict the different psychological states of Lady Yoda as she turns mad. Photograph, 1914, from a performance at the Kabuki-za. Source: Photo album, Kaigyoku Utaemon 魁玉歌右衛門 (Nakamura Utaemon V Photos)*, Yutaka Abe, ed; supervised by Nakamura Utaemon. Tokyo: Kōbunsha publishing house, 1936, p. 72.*

Fig. 5: Mei Lanfang in the role of Zhoa Yanrong, the daughter of the Prime Minster of the Qin dynasty. When her father tried to force her to marry the Emperor although she was a married woman, she fought back by pretending to be mad. (Photograph, 1950s? Source: Mei Shaowu eds., Mei Lanfang ([Pictorial album] Mei Lanfang) *(Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997), p. 290.*

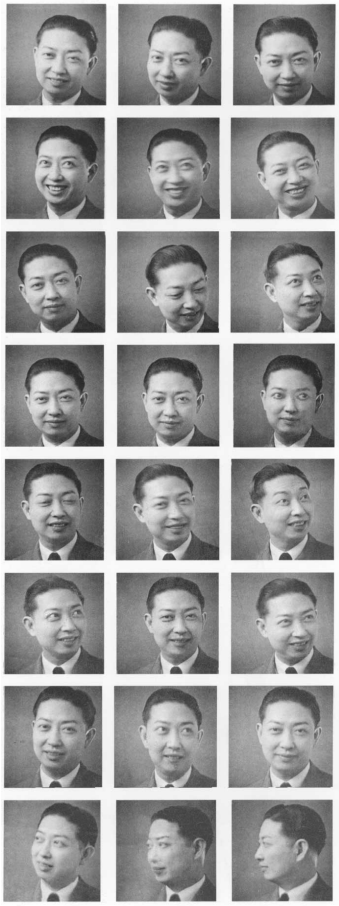

Fig. 6: Mei Lanfang, exercise of glance*, undated. Source: Mei Shaowu ed., Mei Lanfang ([Pictorial album] Mei Lanfang) (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997), p. 184.*

Mei Lanfang also met the *onnagata* actor Nakamura Jakuemon III 中村雀右衛門 (三世, 1875 - 1927) who was performing at the Tokyo Meiji-za theater in the role of the Heron Lady 雞娘 with the famous Sagi Musume dance that starts off with a young maiden in the joy of love, and ends with her collapsing after her frantically going through the torments of hell.[24] Mei met this *onnagata* actor again in Ōsaka after his playing of the extremely challenging role of Princesses Yaegaki in the "Fox fire," *kitunebi* 狐火, act of the play *Twenty-Four Examples of Filial Piety in our own Times*, Honchô Nijûshikô 本朝二十四孝. Upon learning of her betrothed's (actually pretended) death, the Princess sings and dances her grief and agony in a highly psychological acting style. Afterwards, the two actors exchanged ideas about acting techniques, and as Mei was much impressed by his colleague's skillful make-up, he adopted some changes for himself.[25] The encounter with these two actors and the performances he saw in various theaters in Japan at the time introduced Mei to a new kind of Kabuki that was going through its own reforms. Much like Peking opera at the beginning of the Republican period, Kabuki was regarded during the early Meiji reform period as a backward relic of the past by reform-oriented intellectuals.

While for political reasons it was patronized by the Meiji emperor, its modernization was hampered in these early years by its inability to attract talented playwrights.[26] By the turn of the twentieth century, however, high profile intellectuals such as Tsubouchi Shōyō had become involved in Kabuki reform. What Mei Lanfang saw in Japan were the fruits of these reforms.

Tsubouchi Shōyō was among the dignitaries attending Mei Lanfang's performance at the Imperial Theater. What he saw reinforced his idea about creating a new Japanese theater that was based on traditional Japanese theater. Rather than making a complete break with the past, the new Japanese theater, he felt, should be established on the basis of Japan's own cultural heritage.[27] Once people with his kind of learning and creative powers started writing new Kabuki plays that would suit modern times, the new Kabuki gained status and momentum. Already in 1904, he had written the first "historical" or "new" kabuki, *A Paulownia Leaf*, Kiri Hitoha, a piece that drew both on Chikamatsu Monzaemon 近松門左衛門 (1653 - 1725) , the most famous author of Kabuki and puppet theater, Jōruri, plays, and on William Shakespeare. This play, performed only since 1904, laid the groundwork for the New Kabuki.[28] It was the first time, writes Yanagida, that the old barriers confining Kabuki were broken down and fresh breezes of freedom swept in. The lyrical beauty and the well-wrought cadences of the language of this play made it appealing for both theater audiences and readers.[29] Tsubouchi Shōyō not only wrote new plays, but also worked with Kabuki actors such as Nakamura Utaemon V to put them on. (Fig. 7)

Fig. 7: Tsubouchi Shōyō's and Nakamura Utaemon V working on the production of A Paulownia Leaf *(Kiri Hitoha). Photograph, date unclear. Source: Engeki jin:* Tsubouchi Shōyō (A theater person: Tsubouchi Shōyō*). Tokyo: Waseda University Tsubouchi Shōyō Memorial Theater Museum, 2007, p. 10.*

A part of his Kabuki reforms was the (re) insertion of dance. In his 1904 *On a New Music Drama*, Shin gakugekiron 新樂劇論, he called for a new kind of dance that would represent the new spirit of Japan [as a civilized nation]. It might either be part of the New Kabuki or be independent of it. His call for a reform of dance coincided with the 1900- 1920s modern dance movement in Paris and Berlin. A new nation, he argued, needed a new pastime and the new citizens should be able to enjoy for relaxation/cultivation in a new kind of musical drama that consisted of music and dance. He created a new term for dance, buyō 舞踊.[30] To offer an example of such a Kabuki play, he created *New Song of Urashima*, Shinkyoku Urashima 新曲浦島, in 1906 using Wagner's opera as a template. However, because he was to create a modern version of what he considered traditional Japanese dance, he also made use of the traditional Japanese form called Nihon buyō 日本邦樂. In 1922, he followed up with "Long live new Urashima"長生新浦島, a new dance production based on the first, for which he also developed elements of the choreography.[31] (Fig. 8)

Fig. 8: New dance movement created by Tsubouchi Shōyō for his dance drama "Long live new Urashima." *Photograph, 1922? Source: Engeki jin:* Tsubouchi Shōyō (A theater person: Tsubouchi Shōyō). *Tokyo: Waseda University Tsubouchi Shōyō Memorial Theater Museum, 2007, p. 18.*

The efforts to create new dance and insert it into Kabuki reflected the status of dance as the sign of a nation's modernity. This was the context in which Mei Lanfang's *Goddess* was received in Japan. Through dance, the artist and the audience were able to emotionally connect independent of language. When Mei Lanfang arrived in Japan, he unwittingly became part of and was witness to an ongoing discussion about the direction the Japanese theater and dance reform should take, a discussion bound up with that of the markers of cultural identity.

Both Peking opera and Kabuki faced the challenge to become relevant in the fast changing modern societies of China and Japan. One of the central choices to be made was that between a psychologically realistic expression of the character's emotion through facial expression and the stylized indication of these emotions through

gesture. Performance techniques in Kabuki and Peking opera had traditionally relied on the latter, conceptualized as *kata* 型, "form", in Japan and *shenduan* 身段, "body posture", in China. Developing the former, referred to as *kimochi* 気持, "feeling", was one of the main aims of Kabuki reform.[32] As Mei Lanfang observed in a speech given when he was leaving Japan to return to China:

Our Chinese theater tradition should be described as placing its emphasis on listening rather than on given pleasure to the eye. My visit to Japan has greatly stimulated me. ... [Japanese theater, old and new style] all place tremendous emphasis on [acting] technique. We express happiness, anger, sadness and joy entirely through set gestures or *shenduan*. When we encountered the refined and highly suggestive [facial] expressions [of the Japanese actors], we were quite shocked.[33]

From comments by Japanese contemporaries at the time it becomes clear that Mei Lanfang was already engaged in the new style of dance and psychological acting.[34] The comments just quoted show him aware that this new style of acting was an internationally dominant trend and that his reform of Peking opera was in good company.

During the early Meiji period, the new emphasis on realistic acting in what was eventually called the "new school" or *shinpai* had actually reduced the importance of dance. However, this did not become the dominant trend. As James Brandon pointed out, "released from previous government restrictions, Kabuki artists created dance dramas from the Noh play *The Maple Viewing* and others, in which the elevated tone of the Noh original was purposely retained."[35] Highly stylized dance based on a combination of traditional and new elements together with psychological acting where dance was part of its expression, was reaffirmed by Nakamura Utaemon VI (1917-2001), the son of probably the most famous *onnagata* actors of the early twentieth century. When asked about the most important aspects of his training, he answered: "Above all, however, the actor must master the art of dance since dance is the most important part of Kabuki acting. The dance technique must be dominant in forms such as sawari, kudoki,[36] and gidayu[37], since without dance the acting would lack beauty, taste, and depth. This is why everybody begins to learn dance as a child before learning anything else." He added this had not been so in the past,[38] and that his father had "used to teach me and other apprentices to learn the interiorization of characters before anything else. He used to ask us: 'What is this part about? What emotions are proper to it?' That was the first thing. After that came the approach through *kata*."[39] One of Nakamura Utaemon V's most frequently performed pieces was the dance drama *Hagoromo* 羽衣 (Feather robe), attested to this theory of dance being at the core of kabuki performing arts. The play was based on a Japanese legend and the most famous Nō dramas sharing its name. The story tells of a young man who finds an extraordinary feather robe hanging on a branch of a tree besides a lake.

It belonged to a Celestial maiden who found the lake so lovely that she decided to bath into and left her winds – the feather robe – on the branch. The young man agreed to return the robe to Celestial maiden if she would dance for him; which she did.

Fujima Shizue 藤間静枝, later known under the name Fujikage Seiju 藤蔭静樹 (1880-1966), was among the first to put Tsubouchi Shōyō's theory of new dance into practice. At a time when Nakamura Utaemon V and Nakamura Jakuemon III were reaffirming the central position of dance in Kabuki, she became one of the first to push for dance as a performance art independent from Kabuki and developed her own dance style.[40]

Mei Lanfang saw her dancing in 1919 and was impressed, and when he returned in 1924, his first question was how she was doing. "I have seen her perform", he told his interviewer, and it was obvious that her dance had left a strong impression on him. He commented that since he did not know Japanese, he was engaging with Japanese performing arts by looking at dance. For Mei himself as well as his Japanese audiences, dance became the most effective medium of artistic communication. Apparently, Fujikage Seijiyo had also seen Mei's performance in 1919.

Fig. 9: Nakamura Utaemon V at the Kabuki-za, 1920 in the role of "Celestial maide" *天津乙女 in the 1898 Kabuki dance drama Hagoromo 羽衣 (Feather robe). Photograph, 1920. Source:* Photo album, Kaigyoku Utaemon *魁玉歌右衛門 (Nakamura Utaemon V Photos), Yutaka Abe, ed; supervisor: Nakamura Utaemon. Tokyo: Kōbunsha Publishers, 1936, p. xx.*

It inspired her to recast one of Mei's new operas "A nun's yearning for mortal life," *Si fan* 思凡, into a dance to great acclaim.[41]

The markers of theater modernity explored by of Nakamura Utaemon and Mei Lanfang were expressive dance and psychological acting. In his speech, when leaving

Japan, Mei said that theater's lifeline was its relevance for issues of the time. While he mentioned using modern stage props and costumes in this context, the deepest impression from his Japan tour was in the domains of psychological acting, character internalization, and of featuring dance as a primary medium of artistic expression and communication.

While individual artists and cultural brokers in East Asia found in the new expressive dance that was dominating the European stage the means to express new aesthetic and social ideas, the results became increasingly "national" in character. The very intensity of transcultural interaction brought the issue of national identity in the performing arts to the fore. The drive to develop dance as a signal of modernity achieved heightened the anxiety about cultural identity. As a result, Mei Lanfang, Qi Rushan, Nakamura Utaemon VI, and Tsubouchi Shōyō all played down the importance of their transcultural exposure and claimed that dance was an organic, but lost, part of China's and Japan's theater tradition that was now renewed and revitalized. The flow of ideas and forms in dance is not a one-way street. Artists across Europe, the United States, and Asia have been looking for performance styles and ideas that retained a primordial artistic quality without having the flaws of a contrived and empty formalism, and they had turned to different cultures as well as the "foreign country of the past" to find inspiration. This impulse was behind Mei Lanfang's invitations to Japan in 1919, to the United States in 1930, and the Soviet Union in 1935 as well as his accepting these invitations, and it brought the Denishawn dancers in 1925 to Beijing to perform there and meet Mei Lanfang.

Using such foreign inspirations to break through the confines of the present and searching "authentic" roots of modernity in one's own tradition are two closely connected, albeit contrary, aspects of the dynamics of transcultural interaction. To reduce this dynamics to asymmetrical relations of power is a misunderstanding that lives off disregarding the counter-evidence for the cultural agency, and on occasion even hegemony, achieved by the less powerful part even with the consent of the superior military and economic power.

Mei Lanfang, the Denishawn Dancers, and the World Stage

In early November 1925, the Denishawn Dancers lead by Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis, who were the pioneers of American modern dance and helped to establish dance as an art form in America, reached Beijing after first visiting Japan in the course of an "Oriental Tour" tour that lasted fifteen months. As the first American dance troupe to tour the Far East, their performances were greeted with great curiosity, and wherever they went, the outcome was extremely positive. Together with showing their programs to new Asian audiences, their aim in coming to the

Orient was to find new inspirations from local dance traditions. During the Tour, they continued to add new dances to their program, which were based on the local dance traditions they had observed or learned from local teachers. They also bought costumes and props for use in their own performances.[42]

They had been invited to Beijing by Mary Ferguson, the very active head of the Peking Society of Fine Arts, who also established the contact with Mei Lanfang, who by 1925, much like the Great Wall and the Temple of Heaven in Peking, had become one of the "must see" "sites" of China. Mei, however, had just withdrawn from public view and had canceled all his performances because of the fighting among different warlords especially around Tianjin that was also threatening nearby Peking. Upon hearing of the impending visit of the famous Denishawn Dancers and realizing the unique opportunity this offered, Mei Lanfang reversed himself, and this opened the door for one of the most fruitful encounters between Peking opera and modern dance. He graciously offered to give a special performance for the American dancers. This was arranged in the same theater after the performance of the Denishawn Dancers. (Fig. 10) They had a truly international audience, with many of the members of the Peking Fine Arts Society attending.

Fig. 10: Ruth St. Denis (left), Mei Lanfang (middle), and Ted Shawn (right) at the Pavilion Theater (Zhen guang juchang) after their performances. Photograph, 1925. Source: Mei Lanfang: Foremost Actor of China. *Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1929, p. 54.*

Mei Lanfang performed the role of Concubine Yu in *Hegemon King Bids Farewell to His Concubine*, Bawang bie ji. (Fig. 11) Ted Shawn noted on Mei's performance:

> In this dance the first movement was done with an enormous circular cape, and consisted largely of postures with the cape and soft graceful movements of the hands. After the cape was removed two swords came out of the sheath, trick swords in that they appeared to be one sword at first glance, but at a certain movement in the dance suddenly became two. As the dance grew livelier the foot work became evident for the first time. The actual steps were simple and limited in variety, not exceeding a few rapid turns executed with both feet on the ground and once or twice a movement that was similar to an inhibited *Jeté tour*. Toward the end of the dance the use of the two swords became very intricate and as the swords were polished silver he achieved an effect of a network of flashing light surrounding his entire body. The power and charm, however, seem to reside mainly in his own personality, for later, when we saw other young actors attempt the same style, we realized even more the vitalizing power which Mei Lan-Fang possesses.[43]

Fig. 11: Mei Lanfang in the role of Concubine Yu, in "Hegemon King Bids Farewell to His Concubine." Photograph, date unknown. Source: Mei Shaowu eds., Mei Lanfang ([Pictorial album] Mei Lanfang) *(Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997), p. 161.*

The fact that Ted Shawn recognized Peking opera as a form of dance was a triumph for Mei Lanfang's efforts to revitalize the genre. For the first time, Mei had successfully brought about the unity of song, dance, and acting in a rejection of what he had called the "stultified" and formulaic Peking opera tradition. Ted Shawn summarized Mei's motivation for change and the innovation he brought to the Chinese stage:

> The theatre as Mei Lan-Fang found it had almost died of dry rot. The drama was conventionalized to the last degree, becoming through centuries more and more divorced

> from real life and gradually losing its hold upon the public until its following was only from among the lower classes. Mr. Mei viewed the various foreign performances in the theaters of Shanghai and realized that the drama and dance of the American and European people were more vital, and more true to life. Very wisely, however, he did not attempt to copy foreign types of dancing, but went back into Chinese history to that period a thousand years ago when dancing was at its height. Thence by arduous study of books, pictures, manuscripts and music, he made a recreated dance which was truly Chinese dancing at its best.[44]

Hegemon King Bids Farewell to His Concubine was in fact a new work created for Mei by his mentor Qi Rushan. Based on a single scene in a 50-act *chuanqi* opera entitled *The Thousand Pieces of Gold* that dates back to the seventeenth century and tells the tragic story of the King of Chu, the farewell act (no. 37) was neither the centerpiece of the play nor was concubine Yu a chief protagonist. The new opera ends with Concubine Yu's suicide; by leaving out the succeeding story of the Hegemon King's own suicide, it transferred the central role to Concubine Yu. This momentous shift from an opera centered on the *laosheng*, or "old man" figure, to one centered on a single woman marked a pivotal and radically modern turn. With the new and innovative sword dance at its center, "Farewell to the Concubine" quickly became one of Mei Lanfang's signature pieces.

A newspaper review at the time about the Denishawn and Mei Lanfang's performances in front of a mixed Chinese and foreign audience compared their different dancing styles:

> This [Denishawn] company specializes in performing various new types of dance; the [dancers'] movements are completely naturalistic, the music is also very simple. This is because its purpose is to express the natural beauty of human life as well as of the human body. Whether moving or still, whether completely nude or with some minimal clothing, [their performance] altogether is based on the traces left by primitive man in age-old myths and imitates their appearance through dance steps, expressing through them a great variety of ideas. The scope of their movements is extremely wide; their leaps and jumps, bending over and arching are also not restricted to dances with the hands steps of the feet that are commonly seen. [Ted] Shawn and [Ruth] St. Denis had come to Beijing in admiration for Mei Lanfang and with the help of Mary Ferguson from the Peking Society of Fine Arts had prevailed on [the artist and former curator of the Imperial Museum] Mr. Kungpah King to make the connection with Mei Lanfang to allow them to see the true Chinese singing and dancing from Mei Lanfang and to give them a first-hand understanding of oriental arts. Mei Lanfang directly agreed … and performed the sword dance from *Hegemon bids Farewell* … Ruth St. Denis explained to the audience that that their Troupe had already for a long time the idea of an oriental tour, first, so as to make a concrete study of eastern performing art and, second, to once see for themselves the refined beauty of Mei Lanfang's art of which they had heard so much….[Although] most audience was much pleased with the performance, there were one or two features that were not satisfactory. Maybe this was because the stage was too small so that the movements could not be fully unfolded; or the dances were just too new and extraordinary and those more traditionally minded could not approve of them. Altogether the newly-created splendor of the dances were for the creators

> an example of eagerly striving for progress, while the audience time and again reacted with approval and rejection evenly split.

Describing Mei Lanfang's performance, the comments were overwhelmingly positive:

> Mei was in the role of king's consort Lady Yu.... When it came to the sword dance, the [musical instrument] of the sheng, the flute, nine-rhyme gong and other [southern opera] instruments were added, therefore the aria 'deep is the night' was especially moving. When music picked up speed and the dance-step changed all of a sudden, the movements of the sword either piercing or striking were full of unpredictable variations. Even before the end of the piece, the audience burst out with applause and loud cheers, unable to hold back. This was a spontaneous emotional response. Judging by the response of the audience, for this evening performance, the popularity of Mei's dance and singing clearly surpassed that of the Western dance.[45]

To confirm this last point, the article ends with a translation of an appreciative "Western" comment on this evening from the English-language newspaper *Peking Leader*.

The review added two more relevant points for our discussion. It reported that Mei Lanfang, Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis had met for a talk in Mr. Kungpah King's house where they had agreed that "the efforts made by both sides during the last decade in the domain of the performing arts may be said to have pointed into the same direction and that their experiences had been by and large the same." The second point referred to the universal accessibility of the language of dance and music. Ending its report about audience reactions to Mei's dancing and singing, it said: "Evidently, superb dance and fine tunes are quite naturally able to move people, even foreigners unused to seeing Chinese drama, once they are faced with its true and wonderful form, are always able to get the taste of it and appreciate it."[46] Peking opera anchored in dance with its new musical instrumentation is now an art form that is ready for the international stage.

In the interview with Ted Shawn, Mei Lanfang acknowledged and discussed the changes he had brought about in the artistic practices of Peking opera, with dance being the real breakthrough. On stage, writes Shawn, "he [Mei] has brought the action of the drama up to a certain point and then interpolated an actual dance; that is to say, movements to music accompanied by his own singing voice, during which the narrative or plot is held in abeyance. This was something which did not exist in the theatre at the time of his coming. Naturally he stirred up a great deal of criticism and opposition among the fundamentalists of the Chinese theatre."[47]

In particular, Mei's development of new hand gestures for the *dan* role was part of his innovative program. In the past, Shawn reported,

> an actor playing a woman's part was not supposed to make any gestures with her hands whatsoever, but had to keep them crossed in front of her during her entire time on the stage. She wore sleeves which were fastened tightly at the wrists and very often long inner sleeves which came down over and hid her hands completely. Mr. Mei changed this using loose sleeves which fell back and displayed the bare arms as far up as the elbow, and then developed a system of hand and arm movements graceful and fascinating to a degree. He has without any question a pair of beautiful hands and uses them more exquisitely perhaps than any other man in the world.[48]

As part of the new dance program, Mei Lanfang also adjusted the theatrical costume so as to be able to move freely according to the requirements of dance. In the words of Shawn: "The theatrical costumes had grown so stiff with gold brocade and tinsel that the movements of the body were almost completely concealed, so [he] revived the use of soft and clinging silks to reveal the body line."[49] (Fig. 12)

The joint performance on November 9, 1925 marked one of the first direct and self-conscious artistic exchanges and collaborations between Peking opera and modern dance. Through his interaction with the Denishawn group, Mei saw that he was in sync with the modernist agenda of overcoming the calcified routines of the performing arts and creating new forms that carried the spirit of the time while drawing on resources found in the deep past and in other cultures.

The Denishawn group in its turn wasted no time to take up the Peking stimulus. While still on their tour of the Far East they went about improvising dance dramas based on Mei Lanfang's signature pieces in their formal aspect well as their themes. In addition to their version of *Hegemon King Bids Farewell to His Concubine*, which was now entitled *General Wu's Farewell to his Wife*,[50] these included *The Goddess Spreads Flowers* and *Daiyu Burying the Flowers*, which was based on a scene in the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*. When the group returned to Shanghai in October 1926, it performed what was advertised as its "new Chinese and Oriental" dances.

These photographs offer a glimpse into the inner workings of transcultural interaction and highlight the basic idea that cultures live and renew themselves by interacting with others. Regarding the dynamics of cultural borrowing/ appropriation/recreation, Gabriele Brandstetter points in her discussion on the wave of exoticism that swept Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century: "European performers of exoticism, such as Mata Hari, Adorée Willany, and Ruth St. Denis, however, never truly adopted or only hinted at those typical oriental movements that were perceived as especially erotic."[51]

These photographs offer a glimpse into the inner workings of transcultural interaction and highlight the basic idea that cultures live and renew themselves by interacting with others. Regarding the dynamics of cultural borrowing/ appropriation/recreation, Gabriele Brandstetter points in her discussion on the wave of exoticism that swept Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century: "European

performers of exoticism, such as Mata Hari, Adorée Willany, and Ruth St. Denis, however, never truly adopted or only hinted at those typical oriental movements that were perceived as especially erotic."[52]

Fig. 12: Mei Lanfang in the role of Yang Guifei in Legend of Taizhen. The photograph shows the new costume Mei designed that reveals the bare arms of the character when dancing. Photograph, 1920s. Source: Mei Lanfang Foremost Actor of China*:. Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1929, p. 37.*

In other words, the Denishawn dancers were not trying to reproduce the dances they saw in Mei's and other Chinese actors' performances (which were indeed seen by contemporaries as highly erotic) as they clearly followed their own aesthetic system. Rather, they took these dances as inspirations. In creating their own version of the Peking opera dances, they derived artistic stimulus from maintaining the alien nature of the dance and by adopting some of the outwardly identifiable dance movements of Mei Lanfang, but achieved artistic consistency by inserting these into their own aesthetic system.

November 9, 1925 was not the end of this process. In 1930, Mei Lanfang made a triumphant tour in the United States, and many among the cultural avant-garde were inspired by his performances, which in this way exerted lasting effects on "Western" stage art. In 1935, Mei performed in Moscow, with the dramatist Bertolt Brecht, the stage director Stanislavski, and the film director Eisenstein (who had been alerted by Charlie Chaplin not to miss out on Mei) in the audience. Brecht's formulation of non-realistic "alienated" acting was the direct result.

Fig. 13: Edith James Long performing the silk sash dance, inspired by Mei Lanfang Mei Lanfang's "The Heavenly Maiden Showering Flowers," Shanghai (?), 1926. (Unpublished photograph. Source: Denishawn collection*, 1926; courtesy of Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).*

Fig. 14: Edith James Long, member of the Denishawn dance group improvising— "Daiyu Burying the Flowers," Shanghai (?), 1926. (Unpublished photograph. Source: Denishawn collection*, 1926; courtesy of Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).*

Conclusions

During the first decades of the twentieth century, dance became one of the most vibrant forms of cultural communication and transmission of ideas as well as a major artistic stimulus for other art forms such as the motion picture. Through movement, imagery, music and in some cases with the help of technology, wonders were created,

emotions stirred, and ideas transmitted. Dance proved itself to be a transcultural language capable of securing communication between artists as well as between artists and audiences from very different cultural and language backgrounds. As a consequence, dance gained a new status on the global stage. The insertion of dance in Peking opera changed and "modernized" the genre while making it accessible to international audiences as both high art and accessible entertainment.

On the global stage, dance supported by music and singing helped lift the relative importance of the visual in theater aesthetics at the expense of the spoken word.

The artistic innovation in Peking opera during the 1910s-20s can only be fully understood and appraised in the context of global cultural interaction, and in particular the trans-cultural impact of the concept of dance. By the end of the nineteenth century, we see modern dance becoming in international cultural centers in Europe the privileged new venue and the new international language for performance art as it spearheaded the exploration of the modern expression of subjectivity with its rejection of the traditional "stultifying" art form of ballet. The rise of dance in the hierarchy of performance arts fits into the shift to the visual (as opposed to the purely verbal) as the primary medium for cultural mass communication in a world that was rapidly increasing and accelerating cross-cultural exchanges and was developing the technologies facilitating them. With its expressive potential modern dance reflected a new and modern view of the human personality that made its presence into one of the accepted feature by which to recognize a state and society whose culture that matched what in the sphere of international law was referred to at the time as the "standard of civilization." The historical actors from different places were very much aware that they were moving into a similar direction, and assured each other of this common agenda.

Mei Lanfang's artistic innovations were part of this global quest for a new artistic system of expression. They share much of the transcultural agenda of the modernist movement in dance while at the same time showing the same strenuous effort in evidence elsewhere to secure visible cultural authenticity by drawing on elements from the – in this case China's – forgotten past. The efforts of Mei and his entourage to renovate Peking opera were explicitly geared to make the genre understandable and appreciated by global audiences, and his success in this domain greatly contributed to overcome the association of Peking opera with China's rejected past among modernizing elites and to secure acceptance within China itself. While much has been written about the impact of the new Peking opera especially among the avant-garde in the performing arts, this study has tried to demonstrate the circular process in which Peking opera reform took inspiration from the world stage only to end up making its own substantial contribution. The tension between transculturally inspired innovation and cultural authenticity characteristic for the new Peking opera was constantly renegotiated. In the end the new Chinese state imposed – with Mei

Lanfang's patriotic cooperation – its own modernization by restoring a frozen "authentic" Peking opera and eliminating the most stimulating innovations while abolishing the role of the female impersonator as unsuitable to truly modern ethics.

Endnotes

[1] For a detailed study on Benjamin March and Mei Lanfang see Catherine Yeh, "China, a Man in the Guise of an Upright Female: Photography, the Art of the Hands, and Mei Lanfang's 1930 Visit to the United States." In: Christian Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh (eds.), *History in Images: Pictures and Public Place in Modern China*. Berkeley, Cal.: China Research Monograph 66, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 81-110.

[2] Many studies have been devoted to the early Chinese spoken drama and its transcultural context for which the link was mostly provided by students returning from study abroad. They generally agree that despite its markers of modernity and the commitment of quite a number of reformers to this genre, it failed to gain public appeal.

[3] According to Qi's records, he was in Paris first in 1908-1909, but did not go much to the theater; then both in 1911 and in 1913 he spent quite a lot of time in various theaters in Paris, mentioning in particular the Paris Opera. Because the business company he represented was considered "international" he received promotional tickets from various theaters. See "Qi Rushan, *Qi Rushan huiyilu* (Memoirs of Qi Rushan)." (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2005), 72-73, 81-82, 86-87.

[4] Qi Rushan, *Shuo xi* 說戲 (On opera), Qi Rushan*, Qi Rushan wenji*. Vol. 1. (Collected works of Qi Rushan), (Liang Yan ed. Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2010), 3.

[5] Qi Rushan, *Zhongguo xiju zhi zuzhi* 中國戲劇之組織(On the [aesthetic principles upon which] Chinese theater arts is organized). Vol. 1 (originally published in 1928) (Qi Rushan: *Qi Rushan wenji, 1928*), 98.

[6] The new opera created by Qi Rushan and Mei Lanfang would be based on Qi's theory of the necessary "unity of song and dance" 歌舞并作 in Peking opera; see Qi Rushan, *Zhongguo xiju zhi zuzhi* (On the [aesthetic principles upon which] Chinese theater arts is organized). Vol. 1 (originally published in 1928) (*Qi Rushan wenji*,), 98-107.

[7] For scholarship on the Ballets Russes, see for example Boris Kochno, *Diaghilev et les Ballets Russes*. English translation, (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); Nancy Van Norman Baer, *The Art of Enchantment: Diaghilev's Ballets Russes 1909 -1929*. (SanFrancisco: The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Universe Books, 1989). For recent studies on Loïe Fuller, see Ann Cooper Albright, *Traces: Absence and Presence in the Work of Loïe Fuller*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007); Rhonda K. Garelick, *Electric Salome: Loïe Fuller's Performance of Modernism, (*Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[8] The company was initially in residence at the Théâtre Mogador and Théâtre du Châtelet before moving over to Garnier (Paris Opera). Archives Nationales, Archives du Théâtre National de l'Opéra AJ13 1 a 1466, inventaire par Brigitte Labat. Poussin, Paris 1977; Spire Pitou, *The Paris Opera, an Encyclopedia of Opera, Ballets, Composers and Performers,* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 1440-1459.

[9] Baer, *The Art of Enchantment*, 38.

[10] Baer, *The Art of Enchantment*, 38-39.

[11] Gabriele Brandstetter, *Poetics of Dance: Body, Image, and Space in the Historical Avant-Gardes*. Published first in 1995, translated from German by Elena Polzer with Mark Franko. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 107.

[12] The Lumière brothers' sensational silent films of Loïe Fuller's Serpentine dance and Fire dance were widely shown in major Chinese cities including Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin and Hong Kong during the late nineteenth century to huge acclaim among Chinese audiences. For Loïe Fuller's Serpentine Dance film first shown in Shanghai (Tian Hua Tea Garden), Peking and Tianjing, and Hong Kong to foreign and Chinese audience in 1898, see Law kar, Frank Bren, Sam Ho, *Hong Kong Cinema*. (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press), 12-18.

[13] Frank Kermode, "Poet and Dancer Before Diaghilev," *Salmagundi Magazine*, 33-34 (Spring-summer 1976), 23, 31.

[14] Qi Rushan*, Qi Rushan huiyilu*, 116.

[15] Ryūkyo Nojo 龍居之助, "Chugoku gigeki kokumei to meirei Mei Ran-fan" 中國戲劇革命與名伶梅蘭芳, *Yōkyokukai* 謠曲界 9.4 (1918), 54.

[16] Catherine Yeh, "Refined Beauty, New Woman, Dynamic Heroine, or Fighter for the Nation? Perceptions of China in the Programme Selection for Mei Lanfang's Performances in Japan (1919), the United States (1930) and the Soviet Union (1935)", *European Journal of East Asian Studies*. Vol. 6.1 (2007): 75-102; Catherine Yeh, "Politics, Art and Eroticism: The Female Impersonator as the National Cultural Symbol of Republican China" In: Doris Croissant, Catherine Yeh, Joshua S. Mostow (eds.), *Performing the 'Nation': Gender Politics in Literature, Theatre and the Visual Arts of China and Japan, 1880-1940*. (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 219-236.

[17] Qi Rushan, *Qi Rushang huiyilu*, 127.

[18] Yoshida Yoshida 吉田登志子, *Mei Lanfang 1919, 1924 nian lai Ri gongyan de baogao – Jinian mei xiansheng danchen 90 zhounian* 梅蘭芳 1919, 1924 年來日公演的報告 —— 紀念梅先生誕辰 90 週年" (A study on Mei Lanfang's 1919 and 1924 visit and public performances in Japan – in celebration of Mr. Mei's nineteenth birthday); Zhongguo Mei Lanfang jianjiuhui ed., *Mei Lanfang yishupinglun* 梅蘭芳藝術評論 (Comments on the art of Mei Lanfang). (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1990), 646–648.

[19] Yoshida Yoshida, *Mei Lanfang 1919, 1924 nian lai Ri gongyan de baogao – Jinian Mei xiansheng danchen 90 zhounian*, 649; Min Tian, *Mei Lanfang and the Twentieth Century International Stage: Chinese Theatre Placed and Displaced*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 26-32.

[20] Mei Lanfang discussed this with Ted Shawn in an interview conducted in 1925 when Ted Shawn together with Ruth St. Denis and their Denishawn dance company visited Beijing; see Ted Shawn, *Gods Who Dance* (New York: E. P. Dutton. 1929), 51-52; also for Japanese contemporaries reaction on this issue see Yoshida Yoshida, "Mei Lanfang 1919, 1924 nian lai Ri gongyan de baogao – Jinian Mei xiansheng danchen 90 zhounian,", 656, 664-665.

[21] Reported in the *Miyako shinbun*, April 28, 1919.

[22] As Tsubouchi Shōyō played a similar role in the New Kabuki as Qi Rushan did in Peking opera reform, I will come back to him.

[23] In 1921 Nakamura Utaemon put out a special collection of plays called *Yodogimi shū*. It included *Paulownia Leaf*, Kiri Hitoha 桐一葉, the first of such new Kabuki plays. *The Sinking Moon* and *Paulownia Leaf* remained his two most frequently performed roles.

[24] Kanda Hakuryū 神田伯龍, "Yurakō sengen chōja 由良港千軒長者"." (Ōsaka: Nakagawa Gyokuseidō, 1912). A fine description of the dance and the history of its performance will be found at the kabuki21 website http://www.kabuki21.com/sagi_musume.php. Accessed July 24, 2016.

[25] For Mei Lanfang's discussion of his harvest from attending performances at the Kabuki-za, Meiji-za and Shintomi-za theaters, see Yoshida Yoshida, "Mei Lanfang 1919, 1924 nian lai Ri gongyan de baogao – Jinian Mei xiansheng danchen 90 zhounian," 655. Mei Lanfang's own memoir in manuscript form of his visit to Japan was lost during the Cultural Revolution. Later a record was put together based on Mei's own memoirs as well as comments by people who had accompanied him on his Japan visit in 1919. See Anon., *Mei Lanfang abroad* 梅蘭芳在國外", http://hk.huaxia.com/wh/jjjc/zt/00047391.html, accessed July 24, 2016.

[26] Benito Ortolani, *The Japanese Theater: From shamanistic ritual to contemporary pluralism*. Handbuch der Orientalistik V.2,1. (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 176.

[27] After seeing Mei's performances, Tsubouchi *Shōyō* wrote three articles discussing Mei Lanfang's art, the Japanese public reaction and the fate of onagata in Japan. For a detailed discussion see Min Tian, *Mei Lanfang and the TwentiethCentury International Stage: Chinese Theatre Placed and Displaced*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 41-46.

[28] Yanagida, Izumi, "Pioneers of Modern Japan: Tsubouchi *Shōyō*", *Japan Quarterly*, 11(3) (July 1964), 1964, 352.

[29] On Tsubouchi *Shōyō*'s ideas regarding the New Kabuki see ibid, 355-356.

[30] *Engeki jin: Tsubouchi Shōyō* (A theater person: Tsubouchi *Shōyō*). (Tokyo: Waseda University Tsubouchi *Shōyō* Memorial Theater Museum, 2007), 16; Kuniyoshi Kazuko, *Yume no ishō kioku no tsubo: buyō to modanizumu* (The clothes of dreams and the jar of memories: dance and modernism). (Tokyo: Shinshokan, 2002), 10.

[31] Yanagida, Izumi, *Pioneers of Modern Japan: Tsubouchi Shōyō*, 357.

[32] According to the Meiji period Kabuki actor Ichikawa Danjurō IX (1838-1903), empty gesturing and declamation, which he claimed was all too common, was the hallmark of a stifling tradition that had to be overcome. His opinion that the stylized and abstract movements had to be the external

outgrowth of an inner emotion, or else they would be empty gestures devoid of meaning, was much quoted by later actors as their guideline. For his attitude, see "Interview with Ichikawa Danjurō IX (1838-1903), conducted by the British author and critic Osman Edwards during his six month visit to Japan in 1898-1899". In: Osman Edwards, *Japanese Plays and Playfellows*, (New York: Lane, 1901), 263-271. On *kimochi*, see also Samuel L. Leiter, Bando Tsurunosuke, Ichimura Takenojo, Bando Mitsugoro VIII, Onoe Baiko and Nakamura Utaemon VI, "Four Interviews with Kabuki Actors," *Educational Theatre Journal*. 18.4, Special International Theatre Issue (Dec. 1966), 391-392.

[33] *Ōsaka Asahi Shimbun,* May 27, 1919; quoted from Yoshida Yoshida, *Mei Lanfang 1919, 1924 nian lai Ri gongyan de baogao – Jinian Mei xiansheng danchen 90 zhounian*, 664.

[34] Yoshida Yoshida, *Mei Lanfang 1919, 1924 nian lai Ri gongyan de baogao – Jinian Mei xiansheng danchen 90 zhounian*, 664.

[35] James R. Brandon, "Japanese performing arts", *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Accessed July 25, 2016.

[36] These are techniques employed by the actor for interpreting certain emotional passages in the plays. Samuel L. Leiter et al., "*Four Interviews*", 400, footnote 18.

[37] *Gidayu* is the vocal style used by the chanter-narrator of the Japanese puppet theatre. Samuel L. Leiter et al., "Four Interviews", 393, footnote 8.

[38] Ibid. 400.

[39] Ibid. 401.

[40] Kataoka Yasuko 片岡康子, “Nihon no gendai buyō no seiritsu katei - Denishōn buyōdan no Nihon kōen o chūshin to shite -” 日本の現代舞踊の成立過程 ーデニショーン舞踊団の日本公演を中心としてー (A historical study of the formation of Japanese modern dance – centering on the performance tour of the Denishawn Company in Japan), *Ochanomizu University Studies in Arts and Culture*. 38 (March 1985): 93-95.

[41] "*Shin bunka shiryō*" (Historical materials on New Culture), in *Engeki shijo* (December, 1925), Chinese trans. Jin Fengji, "Mei xin yuanliu yinghua guo – 1924 nian Riben *Yanju xinchao* yaoqing zhuming xijujia wei Mei Lanfang quxing zuotanhui (sujigao)," in *Xin wenhua shiliao* 1 (1996), 53–59.

[42] Christena L. Schlundt, "A Chronology of the Professional Appearances of the American Dancers Ruth St Denis and Ted Shawn 1906-1932", *Bulletin of New York Public Library*, (January 1962), 150. Ted Shawn interviews during this tour with many actors and dancers are recorded in his *Gods Who Dance* (New York: E. P. Dutton. 1929).

[43] Ted Shawn, *Gods Who Dance*. (New York: E. P. Dutton. 1929), 51-54.

[44] Ibid. 50-51.

[45] Shesheng 攝生, "Zhongxi zhi wu: Dannasong tiaowutuan yu Mei Lanfang zhi Bawang bieji" 中西之舞：丹納宋跳舞團與梅蘭芳之“霸王別姬”(Chinese and Western dance: Denishawn dance company and Mei Lanfang’s "Hegemon King Bids Farewell to His Concubine"), *Chen bao xingqi huabao*, 1925, no. 11, 1.

[46] Shesheng, "Zhongxi zhi wu: Dannasong tiaowutuan yu Mei Lanfang zhi Bawang bieji".

[47] Ted Shawn, 51.

[48] Ted Shawn, 51-52. Ruth St Denis wrote that "I have never seen such marvelous hands as Mei Lanfang’s, nor such grace and beauty as his dancing, nor such exotic poignancy as his acting." Ruth St. Denis, *An unfinished life: An Autobiography*. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), 276; Jane Sherman, "The Drama Of Denishawn Dance". (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1976), 146.

[49] Ted Shawn, 51.

[50] In Jane Sherman’s *The Drama Of Denishawn Dance*, "General Wu’s Farewell to his Wife" was listed as: "Choreographed by Mei-Ian Fan, arranged by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, 1926 Music by Clifford Vaughan First performance July 15,1926, at the Victoria Theatre, Singapore. Listed on the programs of the Far East tour, 1926; the U.S. tour, 1926-1927. Danced by Charles Weidman, Ann Douglas, George Steares, Ernestine Day, and company." See Jane Sherman, *The Drama Of Denishawn Dance*. (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1976), 145 - 148.

[51] Gabriele Brandstetter, *Poetics of Dance: Body, Image, and space in the Historical Avant-Gardes*, 172.

[52] ibid.

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1: Mei Lanfang in the role of the Goddess in "The Goddess Spreads Flowers" 天女散花 (Tiannü sanhua), 1917. In: Mei Shaowu 梅紹武 eds., *Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳* ([Pictorial album] Mei Lanfang) (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997), 49.

Fig. 2: One of the primary areas in which the Ballets Russes excelled, leaving and indelible impression on the development of twentieth century theater were costume and stage design. An example of Ballets Russes's production, costumes, stage design and dancers, in this case Bronislava Nijinska and Vera Fokina. Léon Bakst, "Nijinska and Fokina in 'Narcisse'." Pencil, watercolor, gouache, and gold and silver on paper. Dance Collection, The New York Public Library.

Fig. 3: A. Harlingue, "Loïe Fuller in Costume. Photography, around 1909," in *Loïe Fuller: Getanzter Jugendstil*, ed. Jo-Anne Banzker (München and New York: Prestel, 1995), 88.

Fig. 4: Nakamura Utaemon as Lady Yoda in *The Sinking Moon over the Lonely Castle Where the Cuckoo Cries*. The photographs depict the different psychological states of Lady Yoda as she turns mad. Photograph, 1914, from a performance at the Kabuki-za. In: Photo album, Kaigyoku Utaemon 魁玉歌右衛門"(Nakamura Utaemon V Photos), Yutaka Abe, ed; supervisor: Nakamura Utaemon. (Tokyo: Kōbunsha publishing house, 1936), 72.

Fig. 5: Mei Lanfang in the role of Zhoa Yanrong, the daughter of the Prime Minster of the Qin dynasty. When her father tried to force her to marry the Emperor although she was a married woman, she fought back by pretending to be mad. (Photograph, 1950s? source: In: Mei Shaowu, *Mei Lanfang* ([Pictorial album] Mei Lanfang) (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997), 290.

Fig. 6: Mei Lanfang, exercise of glance, undated. In: *Mei Lanfang* ([Pictorial album] Mei Lanfang)*, ed.* Mei Shaowu (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997), 184.

Fig. 7: Tsubouchi *Shōyō* and Nakamura Utaemon V working on the production of *A Paulownia Leaf* (Kiri Hitoha). Photograph, date unclear. In: *Engeki jin: Tsubouchi Shōyō* (A theater person: Tsubouchi *Shōyō*). (Tokyo: Waseda University Tsubouchi *Shōyō* Memorial Theater Museum, 2007), 10.

Fig. 8: New dance movement created by Tsubouchi *Shōyō* for his dance drama *Long live new Urashima* Photograph, 1922? In ibid, 18.

Fig. 9: Nakamura Utaemon V at the Kabuki-za, 1920 in the role of "Celestial maiden" 天津乙女 in the 1898 Kabuki dance drama *Hagoromo* 羽衣 (Feather robe). Photograph, 1920. In *Photo album, Kaigyoku Utaemon 魁玉歌右衛門* (Nakamura Utaemon V Photos), ed. Yutaka Abe; supervisor: Nakamura Utaemon. (Tokyo: Kōbunsha Publishers, 1936), xx.

Fig. 10: Ruth St. Denis (left), Mei Lanfang (middle), and Ted Shawn (right) at the Pavilion Theater (Zhen guang juchang) after their performances. Photograph, 1925. Source: *Mei Lanfang: Foremost Actor of China*. (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1929), 54.

Fig. 11: Mei Lanfang in the role of Concubine Yu, in "Hegemon King Bids Farewell to His Concubine." Photograph, date unknown. In *Mei Lanfang* ([Pictorial album] Mei Lanfang), ed. Mei Shaowu (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997), 161.

Fig. 12: Mei Lanfang in the role of Yang Guifei in *Legend of Taizhen*. The photograph shows the new costume Mei designed that reveals the bare arms of the character when dancing. Photograph, 190s. In *Mei Lanfang: Foremost Actor of China*. (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1929), 37.

Fig. 13: Edith James Long performing the silk sash dance, inspired by Mei Lanfang's "The Heavenly Maiden Showering Flowers," Shanghai (?), 1926. (Unpublished photograph. Source: Denishawn collection, 1926; courtesy of Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).

Fig. 14: Edith James Long, member of the Denishawn dance group improvising— "Daiyu Burying the Flowers," Shanghai (?), 1926. (Unpublished photograph. Source: Denishawn collection, 1926; courtesy of Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).

References

"Interview with Ichikawa Danjurō IX (1838-1903), conducted by the British author and critic Osman Edwards during his six month visit to Japan in 1898-1899," in Osman Edwards, *Japanese Plays and Playfellows*, (New York: Lane, 1901), 263-271.

"Shin bunka shiryō" (Historical materials on New Culture), *Engeki shijo*, December, 1925. Chinese translation by Jin Fengji, "Mei xin yuanliu yinghua guo – 1924 nian Riben *Yanju xinchao* yaoqing zhuming xijujia wei Mei Lanfang quxing zuotanhui (sujigao)" (Mei Lanfang's fame spread to Japan – 1924 [the journal] *New Wave Theater* held a forum between famous [Japanese] dramatist and Mei Lanfang [shorthand notes]), *Xin wenhua shiliao* 1 (1996).

Albright, Ann Cooper Traces, *Absence and Presence in the Work of Loïe Fuller*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007).

Anon., "Mei Lanfang abroad" **梅蘭芳在國外**, http://hk.huaxia.com/wh/jjjc/zt/00047391.html , accessed July 24, 2016.

Brandstetter, Gabriele, *Poetics of Dance: Body, Image, and Space in the Historical Avant-Gardes*. Published first in 1995, translated from German by Elena Polzer with Mark Franko. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Christena L. Schlundt, "A Chronology of the Professional Appearances of the American Dancers Ruth St Denis and Ted Shawn 1906-1932", *Bulletin of New York Public Library*, (January 1962): .

Garelick, Rhonda K., "*Electric Salome: Loïe Fuller's Performance of Modernism*", (Princeton: NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007)..

James R. Brandon, "Japanese performing arts", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2016. Accessed July 25, 2016.

Kanda Hakuryū 神田伯龍, "Yurakō sengen chōja" 由良港千軒長者. (Ōsaka: Nakagawa Gyokuseidō, 1912).

Kataoka Yasuko 片岡康子, "Nihon no gendai buyō no seiritsu katei - Denishōn buyōdan no Nihon kōen o chūshin to shite -" 日本の現代舞踊の成立過程 ーデニショーン舞踊団の日本公演を中心としてー (A historical study of the formation of Japanese modern dance -- centering on the performance tour of the Denishawn Company in Japan), *Ochanomizu University Studies in Arts and Culture*. 38 (March 1985).

Kermode, Frank, "Poet and Dancer Before Diaghilev", *Salmagundi Magazine*. 33-34 (Spring-summer 1976).

Kochno, Boris, "Diaghilev et les Ballets Russes". English translate on, (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

Law Kar, Frank Bren, Sam Ho, *Hong Kong Cinema* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1970).

Leiter, Samuel L. Bando Tsurunosuke, Ichimura Takenojo, Bando Mitsugoro VIII, Onoe Baiko and Nakamura Utaemon VI, "Four Interviews with Kabuki Actors", *Educational Theatre Journal*. Special International Theatre Issue. 18.4 (December 1966).

Min Tian, *Mei Lanfang and the Twentieth Century International Stage: Chinese Theatre Placed and Displaced*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Norman Baer, Nancy Van, *The Art of Enchantment: Diaghilev's Ballets Russes 1909 -1929* (San Francisco: Universe Books, 1989).

Pitou, Spire, *The Paris Opera, an Encyclopedia of Opera, Ballets, Composers and Performers* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990)..

Qi, Rushan, *Qi Rushan huiyilu (Memoirs of Qi Rushan)* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1990).

Rushan wenji (Collected works of Qi Rushan), ed. Liang Yan (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2010, vol. 1.)

Ryūkyo Nojo 龍居之助, "Chugoku gigeki kokumei to meirei Mei Ran-fan" 中國戲劇革命與名伶梅蘭芳," *Yōkyokukai* 謠曲界 9.4 (1918).

Sherman, Jane, *The Drama Of Denishawn Dance* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1976).

Shesheng **攝生**, "Zhongxi zhi wu: Dannasong tiaowutuan yu Mei Lanfang zhi Bawang bieji" **中西之舞**：**丹納宋跳舞團與梅蘭芳之**"**霸王別姬**"(Chinese and Western dance: Denishawn dance company and Mei Lanfang's "Hegemon King Bids Farewell to His Concubine"), *Chen bao xingqi huabao*, 11.1 (1925).

St. Denis, Ruth, *An unfinished life: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939).

Ted Shawn, *Gods Who Dance* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1929).

Yanagida, Izumi, "Pioneers of Modern Japan: Tsubouchi Shōyō", *Japan Quarterly*, 11.3, Jul 1 (1964).

Yeh, Catherine, "Refined Beauty, New Woman, Dynamic Heroine, or Fighter for the Nation? Perceptions of China in the Programme Selection for Mei Lanfang's Performances in Japan (1919), the United States (1930) and the Soviet Union (1935)", *European Journal of East Asian Studies*. 6.1 (2007): 75–102.

_____ "China, a Man in the Guise of an Upright Female: Photography, the Art of the Hands, and Mei Lanfang's 1930 Visit to the United States." In *History in Images: Pictures and Public Place in Modern China* (Berkeley: China Research Monograph 66), edited by Christian Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh ((Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 81-110.

_____ "Politics, Art and Eroticism: The Female Impersonator as the National Cultural Symbol of Republican China". In *Performing the 'Nation': Gender Politics in Literature, Theatre and the Visual Arts of China and Japan, 1880-1940*, edited by Doris Croissant, Catherine Yeh, Joshua S. Mostow (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 219-236.

Yoshida Yoshida, *Mei Lanfang 1919, 1924 nian lai Ri gongyan de baogao – Jinian Mei xiansheng danchen 90 zhounian*. (A study on Mei Lanfang's 1919 and 1924 visit and public performances in Japan – in celebration of Mr. Mei's nineteenth birthday); Zhongguo Mei Lanfang jianjiuhui ed., *Mei Lanfang yishupinglun* 梅蘭芳藝術評論(Comments on the art of Mei Lanfang). (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1990).

Zhongguo Mei Lanfang yanjiu xuehui and Mei Lanfang jinianguan eds., *Mei Lanfang yishupinglun* 梅蘭芳藝術評論(Comments on the art of Mei Lanfang). (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1990).