

Where Should We Start and What Could We Do?: Asian Performance and Pedagogy

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Prelude

What does “Asian performance” embrace, on page and on stage? What are some of the effective—and less effective—pedagogical methods and practices? How may I better design course projects to stimulate and assess student academic progress? And why do this in the first place? Contemplating these questions while studying and teaching Asian performance in North America has been, though sometimes frustrating, always thought provoking and rewarding. Several critical incidents from my journey highlight the necessity of further reflection on these fundamental issues.

Scenario #1: A professional *kabuki* performer leading an acting workshop was teaching a dance sequence to students—I was one of them—at the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Hawai‘i. The artist asked us to imitate his movements in slow motion and paused occasionally to adjust student poses. Quickly, students began asking, “Which hand moves first?” “Should I point my fingers like this?” “Is my weight on the right foot?” Their constant inquiries puzzled the teacher so much that he commented in a very polite way afterwards, “They had many questions,” which, in my understanding, meant “Why did they ask (instead of watching)?” Some years later, while teaching *jingju* (Beijing/Peking opera) movement sequences, I found myself facing the same situation as my *kabuki* teacher, though at different schools—the Department of East Asian Studies at Bucknell University, the Asian Studies Program at Bates College, and the Centre for Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies at the University of Toronto. Students took the experience seriously and wanted to imitate well, but the task of visually grasping and physically embodying an unfamiliar style, to be manifested simultaneously with steps, eyes, hands, and body, seemed extremely daunting, and therefore they turned to verbal instruction for rescue. Pedagogically, a challenging moment like this offers a golden opportunity to discuss topics such as the significance of using observation for the teacher, student, and audience member; the reasons for repetitive imitation being an integral part of training; and the magnitude and dynamics of the master-disciple relationship in not only *kabuki* and *jingju*, but also many other Asian performance forms.

Scenario #2: For the course “Shakespeare in Contemporary Asia,” I find the most challenging objective is to nurture student aesthetic sensitivity in order to facilitate communication regarding cross-cultural adaptations in an academic context. The student assignment in which I had the least confidence for its practical component, but which later proved to be the most successful, was the “scene-replication and reflection paper.” Students worked in small groups and replicated a short section of a theatrical scene—mostly lasting for three to five minutes—from *Othello* (Dir. Kurita Yoshihiro), *Lear* (Dir. Ong Keng Sen), or *Romeo and Juliet* (Dir. Oh Tae-Suk). These short sections incorporate Asian performance materials and involve music, movement, and other vocal work but not spoken text. In their reflection papers and course reviews, many students identified this practice-

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based project, despite all their struggles with it, as the most beneficial assignment as it prompted them to reflect on such critical issues as originality and authenticity, internationalism and cultural identity, presentation and aesthetics, postcolonial modernity, and spectatorship.

Scenario #3: I once asked students at the University of Toronto about their expectations for the class “Theatre and the World.” One response was, “I hope that I will learn about not only Asia, but also performance in Australia, Brazil, and Africa.” Although the student’s curiosity regarding unfamiliar performing traditions in a global context was credible, the answer struck me for two reasons: 1) Asia and Africa were conflated as countries, while Australia and Brazil were identified discretely; and 2) the assumption seemed to be that a one-semester medley of “a little bit of everything apart from the Western tradition” *would* be feasible and *could* contribute as an effective complement to students’ Euro-centric learning experience. Granted, a course on “world theatre”—and it may span over more than one semester in some schools—is a common offering in many university-level educational institutions in North America; while the specific content depends on the instructor’s expertise, the course’s primary goal and value lies in the belief that it broadens student learning experience by covering theatre in places other than Europe and North America. This in itself might be taken as a justification for its academic legitimacy and pedagogical feasibility. And this cultural bracketing is not confined solely to North America. In the Academy of Chinese Traditional Theatre in Beijing, for students other than those in the Department of Dramatic Literature, the elective “Western Theatre” is often a one-semester, irregularly offered course covering “all” theatre in Europe and North America. And according to Jerri Daboo’s communication with her student, in a university in Thailand, ballet, tap, jazz, and modern dance are bracketed in the module for “Western Dance” (Daboo 2009, 126).

Revisiting “Asian Performance”: Concept and Scope

In the 2015 Annual Conference of the Association for Asian Performance (AAP) in Montréal, Canada, Jennifer Goodlander, an assistant professor in Theatre History, Theory, and Literature at Indiana University, and also a vice president of the AAP, hosted a roundtable discussion entitled “Defining the Field—What Is Asian Performance?” Goodlander (2015) proposed a series of fundamental inquiries in her initiative statement: What is Asian theatre? Who makes Asian performance? Where does Asian theatre take place? What kind of performances and artworks are considered Asian performance? Six participants joined Goodlander in addressing such critical issues as the primary disciplinary approaches involved—and more should have been included—in studies of Asian performance, the accomplishments and unfinished agenda of Asian performance’s historiography, the interrelationship between “studying a form” and “performing a form,” the magnitude of the effort to train students to perform Asian theatrical forms in educational and other contexts, the role of playwriting in studying Asian performance, and strategies to address pedagogical approaches in course titles and descriptions. With rich, inspiring, and diverse case studies from participants’ first-hand studying and teaching experience, the roundtable discussion challenged both presenters and audience members to revisit the concept and scope of “Asian performance,” a timely, courageous, and ambitious move. I call it ambitious simply because it seems to be an impossible task, given how fast this field has been expanding. A survey of a tiny portion of scholarship—those aiming at an introductory survey of Asian performance—may open a window to this growing discipline.

Asian performance entered North American theatre curricula during the decade immediately after the Second World War (Brandon 2011; Jortner 2011). Early academic endeavours were understandably efforts generated by single researchers, which was a challenge when presenting such a vast area as Asia, and a national—that is, country-based—practice was set from the very beginning. In *Theatre in the East: A Survey of Asian Dance and Drama* (1956), Faubion Bowers offers what he calls “essentially a journalist report on what dance and drama in Asia is like today, where it is found, and how to understand it from a practical and theatre point of view” (Bowers 1956, 361). Bowers’s book surveys fourteen “nationals,” including Hong Kong and Okinawa which were under the control of the UK and the US respectively, in an effort to briefly cover both traditional forms and modern theatre, introducing an array of performance forms including ritual dance, dance-drama, religious performance, social dancing, puppetry, and opera. Compared to *Theatre in the East*, A. C. Scott’s *The Theatre in Asia* (1972) offers more detailed empirical knowledge of Asian theatrical performance as total theatre, introducing the integration of music, movement, and poetry peculiar to these forms, and how they evolve with time. With significant detailed attention to performance practices, Scott covered fewer countries, focusing on India, China, and Japan and omitting those in Southeast Asia, but complemented that emphasis with a separate chapter on “the Islamic World” (Scott 1972, 79–125), acknowledging the influence of the religious doctrines of Islam and Islamic civilization.

The Cambridge Guide to World Theatre (1988) opened a new chapter of theatre studies in a global context; James R. Brandon pinpointed its significance: “One of its great values was its ecumenical placing of European, North and South American, African, Arab, Oceanic and Asian theatres side-by-side and page-by-page throughout that substantial volume. It made a forceful statement that Euro-American theatres could no longer be the standard by which other theatres of the world were to be judged” (Brandon 1993, vii). This groundbreaking volume was the foundation and starting point for *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre* (1993), edited by Brandon and “designed to provide, within the space constraints of a single volume, an overall description of the theatre that evolved in Asia and the Pacific over the course of 2000 years, and of the performances that exist in this region today [1993]” (Brandon 1993, vii). Brandon’s book follows the nation-based structure, but raises the study of Asian theatre to a higher level in many ways: in addition to the chapter on Oceania, it expands the coverage of Asia to nineteen countries (including Hong Kong which was under UK control in 1993); it contextualizes the current status of theatre in historical development, effectively linking past and present; it dedicates separate and specific entries to performance genres and performing artists, thereby offering a unique wealth of information; it lists important publications in this field and leads the reader to the best scholarship for further exploration; and it is a collective effort by leading scholars.

As the study of Asian performance became systematic, and as scholarship delved deeper into the study of performance in many individual countries,¹ thematic concerns in this field became increasingly important. The challenging balance between geographical and thematic concerns is accomplished in the *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre* (2016), edited by Siyuan Liu, which includes four parts. Part I surveys traditional theatre in India, China, Japan, and Indonesia. Part II explores dimensions of traditional Asian theatre, including dance, music, masks, puppets, costume and makeup, and architecture, with reference to those discussed in Part I, and their influence on other theatrical cultures. Part III surveys modern theatre in East, South, and Southeast Asia. And Part IV examines critical issues of modern and contemporary Asian theatre. Liu explains the structure of this study as follows. “It adopts a hybrid structure that seeks to balance country coverage with thematic discussion and cross-region comparison, give equal weight to spectacular traditional forms and vibrant modern and contemporary practices, and showcase recent scholarship” (Liu 2016, 2). This

handbook actually accomplishes much more. By contextualizing the relationship between classical performance and modern theatrical practice in critical thematic analysis of issues such as how spoken theatre uses traditional elements and how traditional theatre adapts to modern times, it presents a complex and intriguing picture that goes far beyond introducing the current situation of classical performance. By presenting—side by side—the historical context of national traditional performance and the thematic discussion of significant components of performance practices in multiple theatrical cultures, it concisely draws a larger picture of Asian performance aesthetics while combatting the homogenization of Asian performance traditions. Finally, by complementing the discussion of modern and contemporary Asian theatre with critical issues such as gender performance, colonialism and colonial modernity, intercultural theatre, and modern musicals in Asia, it successfully contextualizes Asian theatre studies within important scholarly disciplines such as gender studies, cultural studies, and post-colonial studies, among others.

From Bowers's *Theatre in the East* in 1956 to Liu's *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre* in 2016, the development of Asian performance studies during the past sixty years has been conspicuous and exciting. In this context, the challenges accompanying the concept and scope of "Asian performance" are also present. First, studies in Asian performance have been heavily focused on theatrical performance, while many other types of Asian folk performances such as folk dance, folk storytelling, and folk music demand closer academic attention. Second, Middle East performance has been a somewhat ambiguous component in the geographical scope of this field. Among the aforementioned survey scholarship, Scott's *The Theatre in Asia* (1972) has been the only one to include performance from the Islamic world. During his tenure as the president of the AAP (2011–2015), Siyuan Liu has been a passionate advocate for sponsoring paper panels for Arabic and Arabic-American theatre at the Association for Theatre in Higher Education conference, and he laments that the *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre* is confined to theatres in South, East, and Southeast Asia (Liu 2016, 2). Third, with increasing intercultural and international collaborations and with growing globalization, the concept of "Asia" in the context of Asian diaspora and Asian diasporic performance calls for further exploration.²

What Can I Do, In Class and In This Paper?

The accomplishments in Asian performance studies and the challenges accompanying the endeavours to define its concept and scope only prove that, as with other courses in higher education, what an instructor can do best may be to introduce students to appropriate knowledge and experience so that they sense what they do not know, to nurture their curiosity about the unknown, and to equip them with the academic and intellectual tools with which to explore further on their own. Although writings on pedagogy in this field have been limited in contrast to the wealth of excellent scholarship on Asian performance, they raise thought-provoking questions. For example, Jerri Daboo discusses Asian forms of bodymind training, established by Phillip Zarrilli, at the University of Exeter's Department of Drama. Contextualizing the discussion within both Paul Ramsden's notion of "a deep approach to learning" (Daboo 2009, 121) and her first-hand teaching experience, Daboo reflects on questions related to "exoticism, mysticism and appropriation" (Daboo 2009, 126), highlights challenges of training time and space, offers insights into ethical issues, and questions the marginal location of Asian performance forms in the curricula. Stacey Prickett examines the master-disciple tradition in South Asian dance in the current global context, within the two primary locations of India and Britain (Prickett 2007). Based on an analysis of teacher-student interaction modes, curricular construction, and assessment methods, among other

issues, Prickett presents a picture of the complex and continuously evolving interactions between traditional and contemporary training approaches to South Asian dance in both India and Britain.

In this paper, I offer further reflections on the challenges and strategies involved in teaching Asian performance to non-conservatory students in North America based on my experience teaching both undergraduate and graduate courses, and in both Asian studies programs and theatre departments. In the four schools where I have studied and taught, the demographics of student bodies are palpably different. However, according to my experience, students in mid-Pennsylvania (Bucknell University) and southern Maine (Bates College) are not necessarily less open-minded than those in metropolitan schools (the University of Hawai'i and the University of Toronto). Furthermore, students' majors do not seem to play a significant role in their learning experience in this field—those majoring in Asian Studies, East Asian Studies, Japanese, or Chinese, though with less experience onstage, are more familiar with Asian civilizations and the cultural settings of Asian performance; theatre majors, on the other hand, though often joining the class with no previous exposure to Asian cultures, are more comfortable talking about and participating in performance practices.

With specific case studies drawn from courses that I have taught, I discuss pedagogical approaches in three areas: 1) strategies of using interaction among the multiple aspects of language, musicality, costumes, scenery, and use of space to nurture student awareness of foreign aesthetics in both visual and aural dimensions; 2) evolvment of project design that takes advantage of textual analysis to foster critical thinking in dealing with foreign ideology; and 3) challenges and strategies to strengthen students' oral communicative skills with regard to Asian performance in an academic context.

The Power of Hands-On

In teaching Asian performance, aesthetic concepts are often challenging, because the sense of beauty and the communication of this sense are culture-specific. For example, verbal explanations of “stylization” in Chinese classical performance—even with audio and visual sources—are often abstract to apprehend. When an instructor's language is the only medium to assist students' audio and visual experience, it does not break the barrier between students—as spectators—and the concepts in discussion. In this case, I have found that the most effective pedagogy is to integrate practice into theoretical and aesthetic studies. While introducing the key concept of “stylization” in Chinese traditional theatre, I use *jingju* as the case study and design multiple one-hour-workshops with small projects to assist students' cognitive experience.

I use William Dolby's translation of *Hegemon King Says Farewell to His Queen* as the class reading for *jingju*,³ and all workshops involve performance practices in the most important scene, which features Queen Yu's sword dance with song. I begin with a movement workshop, which introduces students to fundamental stage-steps, basic gestures for hands/palms, fingers, and fists, and a simple movement sequence. In choreographing the movement sequence, I integrate some basic poses from Queen Yu's dance so that students will gain physical familiarity with the body language as used onstage. During the workshop, we work on co-ordination, paying close attention to how eyes follow hands, how this leads to the torso's subtle movements, and how the core should control the entire body.

The movement workshop is followed by a voice workshop in which students experience specific techniques regarding breathing, vocal placement, and resonating cavities. I use Queen Yu's set-the-scene poem, also her self-introduction, to showcase the musicality in speech. Students receive the four-line speech in Romanized Chinese verse with English translation and are encouraged to take notes, using self-invented signs to denote intonations. After some initial surprise, hesitation, and embarrassment, most students are able to focus on vocal imitation. And following this experience, in the second half of the workshop, we learn Queen Yu's aria, which accompanies her dance. Students receive the music of the aria, with Romanized Chinese lyrics and English translation, and the association between lyrics and movements is revealed. At the end of the voice workshop, I demonstrate Queen Yu's dance with song and invite students to join me in whichever way they feel comfortable. Even though some students do not physically imitate what I do, after the experience of the two workshops, they are able to identify some of the salient performance elements in this scene and therefore begin to understand a bit more about *jingju* performance from the inside.

When time allows, I include two other workshops: *jingju* percussive music patterns, and *jingju* costumes. In the former, students are introduced to basic methods of vocalizing the percussive instruments in *jingju* orchestra and learn three to four important patterns used in Queen Yu's scene. In the latter, they put on standard robes used for refined female characters in *jingju* and review the movement sequence we practised earlier. Although Queen Yu does not wear a standard robe in this particular scene, this experience is important for students to understand the interrelationship between *jingju* costumes and *jingju* body language.

This sequence of workshops serves as a solid foundation for further in-class discussions during which students approach *jingju*'s style already aware of the interactions among its multiple aspects: from the intonation patterns in stage language to the conventions in speech and principles for melodic embellishments in song; from the coordination between vocal and physical performance to the cooperation between performers and orchestra; from the challenges in body control to the costumes and scenery required by this type of acting; and from the pursuit of well-rounded acting to aesthetics in visual and aural dimensions. This workshop sequence introduces students to the inside experience of the performance tradition. Although it appears overwhelming to first-time participants, the concept of how major artistic aspects are intricately linked to each other—the key stylization of *jingju*—is made clear through hands-on activities.

Being Critical vs. Being Disapproving

I consider critical thinking an integral part of a liberating education we offer students. My definition of critical thinking in arts and humanities encompasses four skills: the ability to pinpoint the question at issue; the competence to identify the hidden assumptions of an argument; the capability of delineating one's reasoning from evidence to arguments, and then to conclusions; and the capacity to reflect on diverse perspectives when analyzing an issue. I find my role of cultivating critical thinking, especially in classes addressing artistic creation in the context of ideological issues, both a pedagogical challenge and a valuable resource for the students.

Students often enter the first class meeting of "Theatre and Politics in China" with such keywords as "propaganda" and "censorship" dominating their thoughts. This oversimplified perception severely limits their critical thinking activities: some assume that the course is about the chronicles of artists being prosecuted under prevalent ideology. For students having this assumption, "being critical" and

“being disapproving” become indistinguishable, and this positioning actually compromises their analytical capabilities with regard to what really takes place in the realm of drama, theatre, and performance in China.

To facilitate a more sophisticated methodology of student inquiry, I have been polishing a pedagogy that combines critical reading, textual analysis, and in-class discussion during the early phase of the semester to set the tone of the class. This project focuses on Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art,” the primary text for this course. This text, delivered in 1942, set the foundation for the Chinese Communist Party’s ideological interpretation of literature and art, and their relationship to politics, thus prescribing all cultural policies of the People’s Republic of China. My pedagogical goal is to lead students to an in-depth examination of CCP leaders’ vision for the new culture, the major components of this vision, and the reasons for this vision. In other words, it is critical to understand how the CCP makes sense of culture before determining whether their assessment makes sense to us.

The project design has evolved through three major versions. In the first phase, I described the assignment via one paragraph on the syllabus: “Paper #1 (5–8 pages) should provide an original, thoughtful, detailed, and well-written analysis of Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art.” Paper #1 is due on Jan. 31. Paper should be typed, paginated, double-spaced, with one-inch margins all around, and with proper footnotes and bibliographic entries. Follow standard MLA style in your writing.” I quickly realized that this instruction was inadequate, because about half of the students appeared to be distracted by Mao’s authoritative, and sometimes aggressive, rhetorical style, several students only discussed the first half of the talks, and most of the class rephrased Mao’s arguments instead of analyzing his points.

I made two adjustments in the course’s second iteration: I worked out guidelines for this assignment (see Appendix 1) and assigned a chapter in *The Search for Modern China* as background reading. With five proposed questions as a suggested point of departure and with some background knowledge of the CCP during WWII from the reading, most students were able to focus on the content of Mao’s talks and address its major arguments. But I felt further guidance was necessary because some students offered subjective reactions instead of objective analysis, and the majority of the class tried to cover more than one major argument and did not delve deeply into analysis.

Based on these observations, I further revised the assignment (see Appendix 2). Students are now required to focus on the first three questions proposed in the previous phase and analyze only one major argument in Mao’s talks. Also, I clarified important expectations and emphasized objectivity, fairness, and awareness of context. In addition, I used about half an hour of class time for a brief lecture on the Rectification Movement in Yan’an and the specific historical context for Mao’s talks, and I introduced important interpretations contributed by Mark Selden, Merle Goldman, and David Holm as the academic context for this project. From student papers, I feel that the third version of the assignment helps students focus on the substance of Mao’s talks, and the historical and academic contexts make it easier to orient their analytical activities for this paper.

Depending on the length of the semester, the paper is submitted during the second or third week of class, and we use an entire session for in-class discussion of the text. With their writing assignment accomplished, most students bring to class a general knowledge of the major arguments in Mao’s talks and have conducted an acceptably thorough analysis of one argument. This allows me to organize the discussion around two tasks: in-depth analysis and reasoning. During the first half of

class, I invite students to group themselves around one argument of their choice and, after ten minutes of discussion and note-taking, each group reports to the class, focusing on their understanding of the deeper meaning of the argument. For example, addressing Mao's argument that "the new literature and art should be for the proletariat," a student group might explain what it means for a literary and artistic piece to be "for the proletariat." With guidance, students are often able to examine layers of meanings contained in an argument, the inner structure of these different layers, and how a particular argument relates to Mao's vision for the new culture in China. I spend the second half of class on a discussion of the flaws in Mao's talks, focusing on identifying hidden assumptions of his arguments. In building on their work for the writing assignment and the in-depth discussion just finished, it is easier for many students to address the reasoning in Mao's argumentation and move beyond the level of (dis)agreement with his opinions. We wrap up the session with a reflective discussion on critical thinking activities involved in our understanding of this dense text.

How to Learn What to Ask

Assisting students to develop oral communicative skills in the academic context of Asian performance studies has been a long-term challenge in my teaching. To nurture a substantive in-class discussion is not easy for any classroom, but when the topics are related to an unfamiliar culture and/or ideology, it can be especially difficult. During the last several years, I have been polishing the pedagogy of training students as discussion leaders and have found this process both frustrating and inspiring.

I apply different approaches to graduates and undergraduates. In my graduate seminar on "Theatre and Politics in China," each student conducts a presentation on a specific script, a production, or a practitioner; on the day of presentation, they lead the in-class discussion of that day's reading assignment, which is closely related to their presentation topic. All students are requested to propose at least one discussion question on Blackboard, our online portal; it is the discussion leader's responsibility to organize questions proposed by other class members, to propose their own or add additional questions if necessary, and to guide in-class communication. With the double responsibility of presenter and discussion leader, students are able to bring to class a more in-depth comprehension of discussion topics, and this often enables them to organize a discussion more effectively. In the next phase of this ongoing process, I plan to revise three aspects of the project, with the goal of helping both the class and the discussion leaders to be better prepared for their in-class communication: 1) I will request the class, often consisting of ten to fifteen students, to respond to one online question proposed by a peer, so that their conversation will be ongoing before the class takes place; 2) discussion leaders will conduct a five-minute commentary on the discussion forum on Blackboard, offering his/her academic observations, so that the class will be familiar with what their peers may bring to the discussion; and 3) I will invite discussion leaders to recommend two to three titles that they have found particularly helpful for their own research and explain their choices.

In my pedagogical experiments, undergraduates need more carefully designed instruction. Part of the challenge is class size: I often have twenty to thirty students in the undergraduate course "Asian Performance." The size of this class precludes a productive class discussion, so my strategy is to conduct breakout sessions. I assign five to six discussion leaders to a particular day, and each of them leads a small-group discussion with four to five students based on questions they each bring to

class. After the breakout sessions, discussion leaders report to the class in a roundtable discussion (see Appendix 3).⁴

Students were immensely enthusiastic about this format. However, while the majority of the group could readily engage their peers, they needed guidance on proposing quality questions for discussion. Some students, when not sure how to make sense of Asian performance practices, tended to resort to superficial comparisons such as “Do we have a similar practice like this in the West?” Some students, with a passion for the unknown, tended to ask questions out of curiosity—“Why do you think the art of *bunraku* uses three puppeteers?”⁵—though no one in their group had the knowledge to further the discussion. And other students turned to assessment before delving into important concepts, with questions such as “Do you think *rasa* is a good way to describe performances?”⁶

Based on these observations, during the second round of pedagogical experimentation, I made two major adjustments: I now request discussion questions in advance and work with discussion leaders for one round of revision and, after the discussions, leaders are required to compose a reflection paper (see Appendix 4).⁷ By facilitating at least one round of question revision, I have the opportunity to encourage students to design open-ended questions; I can remind students of the differences between “what I would like to know” and “what may lead all of us to a deeper understanding of it”; and I can challenge students to shift attention to the performance in discussion, rather than to focus on how we feel about them. With some guidance, some students are able to revise “Do we have similar practice like this in the West?” into “What are some similarities and differences between practice X in Malaysia and practice Y in the US? And how does this relate to their cultural contexts?” The reflection paper allows discussion leaders to further consider the entire process, thus offering another opportunity for students to engage critically with their learning experience. Towards the end of the semester, the class collectively reflects on the qualities of productive discussion questions, and their list often indicates an awareness of such important characteristics as open-endedness, consideration of context, self-evaluation of assumptions, and correlation of different perspectives.

Coda

I turn to my dilemma at the end of this reflection, because this journey—with exciting experiments and rewarding pedagogies—also presents intriguing, open-ended questions. After some years of teaching Asian performance in North America, I begin to realize that time is my biggest challenge. I say this for three reasons. First, many Asian performance forms, especially classical performance, have a history easily lasting for hundreds of years. These traditions came into being over a long period, and they are still developing. Is it necessary for students to understand this? I strongly believe so. But I have not yet found an effective strategy—simply to notify them of numbers and years does not offer insight into the meaning of time. Second, the experience of going through performance time is an integral part of many traditions in Asia, but it causes a pedagogical dilemma because our semester does not allow ample time to live it through. For example, the climactic moment of Atsumori dropping his sword at the end of a *nob* performance would only make sense if the class watches the entire performance in order to understand the meaning of every minute in this process, during which the tempo gradually builds through the ninety-minute piece.⁸ A fast-metre section of a long aria in *jingju* would sound nothing but rushed if the class does not listen to its free-metre prelude, which is followed by multiple sections in other metres, in order to understand the power of acceleration in conveying emotions in melodic composition. The final night performance

of a *kuttiyatam* performance would appear simply as a show with a cast⁹ if students do not have the experience of watching multiple nights of solo performance, allowing them to grasp the significance of the cumulative event after characters have been introduced one by one in advance. And last, the concepts of “traditional,” “modern,” and “contemporary” in interpreting Asian performance are troublesome. For many practitioners of Asian performance, “now” is part of tradition, and tradition lives through consecutive moments of “now.”

Overall, my strategy for the challenge of time is to have faith in the time that is available to me. It involves carefully designed plans for the use of class time. For example, when it is difficult to dedicate a big portion of one class meeting to listen to a long *jingju* aria consisting of an array of metrical types, it is often possible to prepare the student by inserting a brief reference, with a short soundtrack or a section of one, to specific metrical types in prior class sessions on other topics, such as singing, dance-acting, and orchestra. With this exposure, it is much easier for students to tune into the world of musical composition, even with abridged versions of those long arias. Ultimately, this faith in time is about making peace with contributing to the curriculum only within the space that it allows. I join other colleagues’ lamentation regarding Asian performance being placed at the margin of the curricula.¹⁰ On the other hand, given that theatre did not become an independent academic subject—that is, acknowledged as worthy of department standing in a higher educational institute—in the US until 1914 (Kindelan 2012, 55), the growing prosperity of Asian performance in theatre curricula construction in North America is palpable and encouraging.

In 1965, the American Educational Theatre Association refused to recognize an interest group of Asian theatre or African and African-American theatre; the deal was to form a joint “Afro-Asian Theatre Project.” Recalling this segment of history, James R. Brandon lamented that the two groups of scholars, teachers, and performers were turned down for similar reasons: being too small and unimportant—in the AETA officers’ eyes, of course (Brandon 2011, 283). This “Afro-Asian” connection always reminds me of my student’s expectations for the course “Theatre and the World”: “I hope that I will learn about not only Asia, but also performance in Australia, Brazil, and Africa.” But a major difference between the two reactions to Asian performance, fifty years apart, is that, though being unfamiliar with the subject matter, the student indicated a strong desire to study. Perhaps this is where we should start and continue to do what we can.

Notes

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1. For example, the field of Chinese theatre studies has contributed excellent scholarship for which it is impossible to compile an exclusive list of monographs, not even including numerous journal articles. But the following titles may serve as a point of departure for the reader. For historiography, see *Chinese Theater: From Its Origins to the Present Day*, edited by Colin Mackerras (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, c1983), Joshua Goldstein’s *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-Creation of Peking Opera, 1870–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c2007), Andrea S. Goldman’s *Opera and the City: The Politics of Culture in Beijing, 1770–1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), Siyuan Liu’s *Performing Hybridity in Colonial-Modern China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), Ye Xiaoqing’s *Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas: Drama and the Qing Imperial*

Court (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, c2012), and Paul Clark's *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For performance practices of particular performing genres, see Elizabeth Wichmann's *Listening to Theatre: The Aural Dimension of Beijing Opera* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, c1991), Alexandra B. Bonds' *Beijing Opera Costumes: The Visual Communication of Character and Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, c2008), Jin Jiang's *Women Playing Men: Yue Opera and Social Change in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), and Bell Yung's *Cantonese Opera: Performance As Creative Process* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, c1989). For performers, see Li Ruru's *The Soul of Beijing Opera: Theatrical Creativity and Continuity in the Changing World* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, c2010), Min Tian's *Mei Lanfang and the Twentieth-Century International Stage: Chinese Theatre Placed and Displaced* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), and Ying Ruocheng and Claire Conceison's *Voices Carry: Behind Bars and Backstage During China's Revolution and Reform* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, c2009). For dramatic literature in translation, see *Eight Chinese Plays from the Thirteenth Century to the Present*, translated by William Dolby (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), *Monks, Bandits, Lovers, and Immortals: Eleven Early Chinese Plays*, translated by Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2010)—among many other translations by Idema and West—, *The Columbia Anthology of Yuan Drama*, edited by C. T. Hsia et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), *The Peony Pavilion*, translated by Cyril Birch (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, c1980), and *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Drama*, edited by Xiaomei Chen (New York: Columbia University Press, c2010). For political theatre and theatre during the Cultural Revolution, see Xiaomei Chen's *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, c2002), Barbara Mittler's *A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, c2012), and Rosemary A. Roberts' *Maoist Model Theatre: The Semiotics of Gender and Sexuality in the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966–1976)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). For intercultural performance, see Alexander C. Y. Huang's *Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* (New York: Columbia University Press, c2009). It is important to note that many of these titles cover more than one primary topic, for example Andrea S. Goldman's *Opera and the City* also contributes to urban studies and genre studies, Li Ruru's *The Soul of Beijing Opera* weaves practitioners' personal careers into a narrative of Beijing opera historiography, and Rosemary A. Roberts' *Maoist Model Theatre* associates performance studies with semiotics, just to mention a few. Furthermore, see “Modern Chinese Drama in English: A Selective Bibliography” compiled by Siyuan Liu and Kevin J. Wetmore Jr., *Asian Theatre Journal* 26, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 320–51, for further reference for translations of modern Chinese dramatic literature.

2. The connotation of “Asia” to Asian diaspora, Asian diasporic performance practices, and their reflections on self-identification through performativity are beyond the scope of this paper. But geography of performance is a valid perspective from which to examine the concept and scope of “Asian performance.” For further discussions on the concept of “Asia” in the context of transnationalism, see Amanda Sanders' *Performing Asian Transnationalism: Theatre, Identity and the Geographies of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2015) and Haiping Yan's “Other Transnationals: An Introductory Essay” *Modern Drama* 48 (2005): 225–48.

3. *Hegemon King Says Farewell to His Queen* is set in the war between Xiang Yu—the Hegemon King—and Liu Bang for the control of China during approximately 206 BC to 202 BC. In *jingju*, it used to be a play featuring male characters. In the early 1920s, the legendary master *jingju* performer Mei Lanfang (1894–1961) staged a revised version which features Hegemon King's Queen Yu as the female lead. The production highlights the couple's tragic romance at the end of the war. Realizing that they are trapped and not willing to be the Hegemon King's burden, Queen Yu dances for him for the last time and commits suicide. The scene with Queen Yu's dance and suicide, as performed by Mei Lanfang, has been the standard version of this production and among *jingju*'s most popular repertory.

4. I thank Heather Fitzsimmons Frey and Natalia Esling, my teaching assistants, for suggestions and contributions to instructions on discussion facilitation.

5. *Bunraku* is a puppetry performance tradition in Japan. Major characters/puppets are manipulated by three puppeteers: the chief puppeteer controls the head and the right hand/arm, the second puppeteer manipulates the left hand/arm, and the third one the feet. This practice was formalized during the 1720s and 1730s.

6. *Rasa* is an aesthetic concept discussed in *The Natyasastra*, the Indian treatise on Sanskrit theatre. *Rasa* refers to the sentiments, or “flavour,” that sensitive spectators may experience, or taste, in well presented performance. *The Natyasastra* offers a detailed discussion of the *rasa* theory, including major types of *rasa*, how they are related to psychological states that performers present onstage, and how to successfully present psychological states through acting, music, language, etc. *Rasa* theory has a profound influence on performance traditions in India and has attracted academic attention in other fields, including cognitive experience with other forms of literature and art.
7. I thank Heather Fitzsimmons Frey and Natalia Esling, my teaching assistants, for suggestions and contributions to instructions on discussion facilitation and reflection composition.
8. Atsumori is the protagonist of the *nob* masterpiece *Atsumori*, by Zeami (1363–1443). The play tells the story of Atsumori, a renowned musician and brave warrior, who was killed during the battles in the twelfth century. Towards the end, the ghost of Atsumori recounts the battle in which he was slain; at the climactic moment of dropping his sword, he delivers the important message that enemies will “be reborn together on a single lotus petal” (Brazell 1998, 142), thus emphasizing the profound theme that “opposites are equivalents; enemies indeed are friends” (*ibid.*, 127). This translation is based on the Kita school’s performance; in the Kanze school’s performance, Atsumori drops his sword a bit earlier, but the message is the same.
9. *Kuttiyatam* performances often last for multiple nights: characters in a particular repertory often perform together only on the last night; each of the previous nights often features an elaborate introduction of each character.
10. One strong voice is cast in Jerri Daboo’s “To Learn Through the Body: Teaching Asian Forms of Training and Performance in Higher Education,” *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 29, no. 2 (2009): 121–31. Although Daboo’s discussion focuses on higher education in the UK, it is, to a great extent, also applicable to North America.

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Appendix I: Guidelines for Paper #1

Write an analytical essay on Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art."

Of the Chinese Communist Party's cultural and artistic doctrines before 1949, Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art" is the most influential. In fact, during the following decades, the "Talks" not only remained in service as official policy itself, but also set the framework for the CCP's related policies on literature and art, as well as providing the foundation for prescriptive theories for artistic creations. Therefore it is imperative that we read it carefully and analytically.

Please use the following questions as a point of departure in your analysis.

- What are the major arguments in these talks?
- What is the deeper meaning of AT LEAST ONE of these major arguments?
- What were Mao Zedong's visions of the new culture in the new nation?
- Are there any flaws in Mao Zedong's argumentation?
- What do you think about the significance of these talks in our study?

Notes:

- The "only correct way of interpretation" does not exist. Feel free to elaborate on your opinions, but please provide sound evidence from the text to support your arguments.
- Feel free to discuss this text with other colleagues in this class, but WRITE YOUR OWN ESSAY IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

Appendix 2: Guidelines for Paper #1 (Revised)

Topic and Questions:

Write an analytical essay on Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art." In your analysis, please make sure to discuss the following issues:

- What are the major arguments in these talks? (What did Mao argue for and against?)

- What is the deeper meaning of ONE of these major arguments? (Make sure to support your analysis with evidence from the text.)
- What were Mao Zedong’s visions of the new culture in the new nation?

If you have more energy and passion, please feel free to include further analysis. The following two questions may serve as a point of departure:

- Are there any flaws in Mao Zedong’s argumentation? (Is the reasoning sound?)
- What do you think about the significance of these talks in our study?

Background to This Assignment:

Of the Chinese Communist Party’s cultural and artistic doctrines before 1949, Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art” is the most influential. In fact, during the following decades, the “Talks” not only remained in service as official policy itself, but also set the framework for the CCP’s related policies on literature and art, as well as providing the foundation for prescriptive theories for artistic creations. Therefore it is imperative that we read it carefully and analytically.

Important Expectations:

- This essay is about critical analysis, instead of subjective reactions. In other words, it is about what the text/message is, instead of how it makes us feel.
- Reasoning—The “only correct way of interpretation” does not exist. Feel free to elaborate on your opinions, but please provide sound evidence from the text to support your arguments.
- Fairness—pay attention to the context of the details that you decide to use.
- Clarity—present your arguments, including the issues that confuse you, in a logical fashion.
- Feel free to discuss this text with other colleagues in this class, but **WRITE YOUR OWN ESSAY IN YOUR OWN WORDS.**

Appendix 3: Guidelines for Leading a Small-Group Discussion and Participating in a Roundtable Discussion

Small-group discussion: approximately 25–30 minutes.

Roundtable discussion: approximately 20–25 minutes.

Important Expectations:

- Initiate discussion with original, thought-provoking, and well-written questions.
- Nurture an interactive, collective learning experience that leads your group to a deeper understanding of readings.
- Report to class on your discussion, with reflections on your experience, and respond to peer questions.

About Generating Discussion Questions:

- Please note that the purpose of our discussions is to develop deeper understanding of the readings, not to exchange ideas about how we feel about the readings.
- Be aware of context and (hidden) assumptions.

- Try to include at least one question that requires analysis.
- See if you may generate a question that embraces counter-arguments.
- Prepare at least 3 questions, and it is always good to have an additional, backup question.

About Facilitating a Discussion:

- There is no “the only right way” to do it. Design and try to find a way with which you are comfortable. Below are some strategies for your reference:
 - Have one-minute writing exercises to help participants collect thoughts;
 - Have a brain-storming exercise;
 - Create a visual schema with participants, like a mind-map, to encourage participants to see connections / contrasts / surprises;
 - Plan a moment for participants to articulate their major “take away” from your discussion, or from one of your questions;
 - Plan a strategy to make sure that you heard from all discussion participants.
- Do not be afraid of silence; good questions are often sophisticated, and your colleagues need time to collect their thoughts.
- Do not let good comments/arguments lapse quickly; ask follow-up questions.
- Help the class build connections among different opinions, and among readings and topics.
- Take notes.

About Participating in a Reflective Roundtable Discussion:

- Please note that your participation should be based on critical reflections on your experience; it is inadequate to simply narrate what happened, or what you talked about, in your group.
- Support your peer with constructive questions and suggestions.
- Think before responding.
- We will experiment with different reflective pedagogies; follow instructions in class.

Appendix 4: Guidelines for Discussion Leadership, Report, and Reflection

Due Dates:

- First draft of discussion questions is due at noon two days before class. Email them to xxx@xxxx.xxx.
- Final draft of discussion questions is due at noon the day before class. Email them to xxx@xxxx.xxx.
- Reflection paper is due at the end of the Sunday after discussion. Email it to xxx@xxxx.xxx, with a copy to yourself.

Important Expectations:

- Initiate discussion with original, thought-provoking, and well-written questions.
- Nurture an interactive, collective learning experience that leads your group to a deeper understanding of readings and topics; 30 minutes per discussion.
- Report to class on your discussion, highlighting the most interesting part.
- Compose a thoughtful 3-pager reflection on your experience.

About Generating Discussion Questions:

- Please note that the purpose of our discussions is to develop a deeper understanding of the readings, not to exchange ideas about how we feel about the readings.
- Try to cover all readings of the week, but do not limit your design by addressing each reading by a separate question.
- Prepare at least 3 questions, and it is always good to have an additional, backup question.
- It is fine to ask long questions, but be clear.
- Be aware of context and (hidden) assumptions.
- Try to include at least one question that requires analysis.
- See if you may generate a question that embraces counter-arguments.

About Facilitating a Discussion:

- There is no “the only right way” to do it. Design and try to find a way with which you are comfortable. Below are some strategies for your reference:
 - Have one-minute writing exercises to help participants collect thoughts;
 - Have a brain-storming exercise;
 - Create a visual schema with participants, like a mind-map, to encourage participants to see connections/contrasts/surprises;
 - Plan a moment for participants to articulate their major “take away” from your discussion, or from one of your questions;
 - Plan a strategy to make sure that you hear from all discussion participants.
- Do not be afraid of silence; good questions are often sophisticated, and your colleagues need time to collect their thoughts.
- Do not let good comments/arguments lapse quickly; ask follow-up questions.
- Help the class build connections among different opinions, and among readings and topics.
- Take notes.

About Reporting to Class on Your Discussion:

- Approximately 3 minutes for each report.
- Please note that your report should be based on critical reflections on your experience; it is inadequate to simply narrate what happened, or what you talked about, in your group.
- Highlight the most inspiring/exciting/confusing part of your group discussion.

About Reflection:

- Three pages, double spaced, please email to xxx@xxxx.xxx, with a copy to yourself.
- Please note that this should present your further critical engagement with your work during the entire process; this is not a diary or log.
- Do elaborate on what you have learned through process with concise and rich account of what worked or did not work. Below are some questions that may be helpful.
 - What went well during your discussion? In what ways did your planning, listening, and reading help to enhance the discussion?
 - What were particularly interesting/complicated/uncomfortable moment(s) in the discussion? How did you handle them?
 - What did participating in the discussion enable you to learn about the material?
Assess what you learned about leadership from this discussion experience.

- If asked to lead another seminar-type discussion group, how would you do things differently? Why?
- If things did not go according to your plan, why do you think that was and was your discussion productive anyway?