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*BERTOLT BRECHT AND HIS PLAY
THE GOOD WOMAN OF SETZUAN*

by

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Bachelor of Arts, National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts, Beijing, China, 1991

Professional Paper

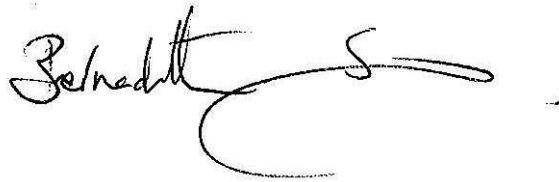
presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts
in Theatre

The University of Montana
Missoula, MT

December 2022

Approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bernadette Sweeney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dr. Bernadette Sweeney, Chair
School of Theatre and Dance

Director Deena Mansour
Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center

Associate Professor Michael Legg
School of Theatre and Dance & Montana Repertory Theatre

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE Bertolt Brecht's Life and Career
Germany, Exile and East Germany

These are three major periods in Brecht's life.

CHAPTER TWO Bertolt Brecht and Aristotle
The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre

The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre is a Brecht's important essay.

CHAPTER THREE Bertolt Brecht and Mei Lanfang
Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting

Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting is another Brecht's important essay.

CHAPTER FOUR Bertolt Brecht's Play
The Good Woman of Setzuan

Brecht wrote this play in the United States in 1941.

CHAPTER FIVE Dramaturgy
The Good Woman of Setzuan

The Good Woman of Setzuan is one of Brecht's masterpieces.

CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

My name is Min Sun. I am from China and am now a U.S. citizen. I was very lucky to have the opportunity to study in the Theatre and Dance department of the Graduate School at the University of Montana. In China, I studied Chinese Theatre, and received a B.A. in drama script writing at the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts, and an M.A. in drama theory at the Chinese National Academy of Art Graduate School.

When I was young, I often went to the theatre to watch Chinese opera performances with my mother, which made me familiar with Peking opera and local operas and plays, and gave me the foundation to enter the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts. Although I was studying Chinese theatre, I liked Western theater very much. When I was at university, although I mainly studied Chinese opera, simultaneously, I took Western theatre classes. In the Chinese National Academy of Art Graduate School, my final thesis was on famous Chinese dramatist Tian Han who studied in Japan in his early years. He was not only familiar with Chinese opera, but also translated and studied Western theatre. In reading Tian Han's complete works, I discovered that Bertolt Brecht was mentioned in his drama essays, which made me determined to learn more about Brecht's theatre theory and theatre creation. Before I came to the United States, I translated theatre reviews for the Lin Zhaohua Theatre Arts Festival. Lin is a well-known Chinese theatre director, and he invited world-renowned plays to perform on the Chinese stage every year. His purpose was to introduce to the Chinese great theatre from around the world. Among them were several works of the Berlin Theatre Festival. Through the German artists who attended the festival, it became clear how respected Brecht's art is.

In 2018, I moved to America and now live in Missoula, Montana with my family, which is a fantastic and beautiful place. I first took several Theatre classes at the University of Montana, and finally was very fortunate to have the opportunity to study in the Theatre and Dance department of the Graduate School at the University of Montana.

Studying Chinese theatre in China and Western theatre in the West has been my dream for many years. I have long appreciated Western theatre, but I wanted to know what made it so powerful.

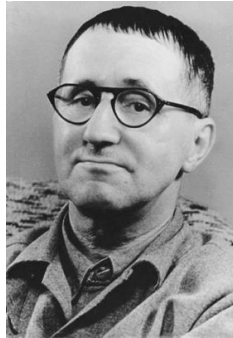
Through studying in the Theatre and Dance department, I have gained an understanding of just how fantastic Western theatre can be, especially American Musical Theatre. When I read the textbook *The Norton Anthology of Drama* in theatre history class, I rediscovered Brecht's play *The Good Woman of Setzuan* and for the first time read it in English. Brecht finished to write this play in the United States in 1941, and was translated into English in 1947. The play tells a simple but philosophical story about the good and evil of human nature, and Brecht's experience of Nazi Germany influenced his discussion of this theme. In the play, Setzuan (Sichuan) is a province of China, and Brecht's theories are somewhat inspired by Chinese opera. Therefore, it is my intention to write this thesis to better understand Brecht's theatrical theories through this play. This paper not only includes the Chinese theater that I have studied before, but also the Western theatre that I have studied at the University of Montana in the United States.

I am very grateful to the University of Montana, the University of Montana Graduate School, the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, and the Writing and Public Speaking Center, as well as all the professors of the Theatre and Dance Department for their help and support. Special thanks to Director and Professor of Theatre and Dance John Kenneth Deboer, as well as my advisor Professor Bernadette Sweeney who taught me so much in theatre theory and theatre practicum classes, in which I not only learned modern theatre and modern dance, but also American musical theatre. Erin McDaniel, from my application in China to the present, has given me so much valuable support and kind help. I would also like to thank the professors who have taught me great classes, Professor Michael Legg, Professor Mark Plonsky, and Professor Heidi Eggert. Finally, I would like to thank Director Deena Mansour in the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center, Professor Elizabeth Hubble in Women's Studies, and Dr. Catherine Filardi in Writing and Public Speaking Center, for all their help with my studies.

And finally, thanks so much to my parents, and to my family, Tiff and our daughter Ariana!

Chapter One

Bertolt Brecht's Life and Career – Germany, Exile and East Germany



Bertolt Brecht

OF POOR B.B.

1

I, Bertolt Brecht, came out of the black forests.
My mother moved me into the cities as I lay
Inside her body. And the coldness of the forests
Will be inside me till my dying day.

2

In the asphalt city I'm at home. From the very start
Provided with every last sacrament:
With newspapers. And tobacco. And brandy.
To the end mistrustful, lazy and content.

3

I'm polite and friendly to people. I put on
A hard hat because that's what they do.
I say: They are animals with a quite peculiar smell.
And I say: does it matter? I am too

.....

—*Bertolt Brecht, Translated by Michael Hamburger* (Brecht 2003, 31-35)

Harry Kessler, Gordon Craig's friend and patron, on first meeting Brecht in Berlin in October 1928, wrote in his diary: "Strikingly degenerate look, almost a criminal physiognomy, black hair and eyes, dark-skinned, a peculiarly suspicious expressing, very nearly a typical twister." (Gerould 2000, 444) And Brecht's brother Walter Brecht recalled, "(Brecht) ...rejects all expressions of emotion." (Knopf 2018, 34) From the descriptions of those who had met Brecht, one begins to feel that he had two characteristics: one is that he is not sentimental at all, the other is he never looks back to the past with regrets. As well, he was calm, profound, kept a low profile and was a somewhat ruthless person.

Eugen Berthold Friedrich Brecht (February 10, 1898 - August 14, 1956) also called Bertolt Brecht, was a German theatre practitioner, playwright, and poet. In his fifty-eight years of life, he wrote 48 plays and many theatrical theory essays, over 2300 poems, almost 200 short novels, 3 fictions, and participated in the production of four films. There was *The Complete Works of Bertolt Brecht*, published in 30 volumes in Germany in 2000. In *Conversation with Bert Brecht* in 1926, he said, "My poetry is more private... In my plays I don't just give my own private mood, but also the whole world's." (Willett 1957, 14) As early as 1918, Brecht published his first collection of poems *Songs with Guitar Accompaniment of Bertolt Brecht and his friends*, and in Brecht's 30-volume complete works, poems accounted for 5 volumes." The Critic Clifford James said, "For those who see art as a beautiful athletic rivalry, Rilke (Rainer Maria Rilke, 1875-1926) is vying with Brecht for the title of the greatest German-language poet of the twentieth century.'" (Brecht 2018, 3) Although Brecht's poetry was considered outstanding among the poets of his time in Germany, his main achievement was in the field of theatre. He created the theatre method of **Epic Theatre**, which Brecht defined as modern theatre; and put forward the theory of **alienation effect**, which Brecht thought should historicize and gesture. He was an explorer and innovator of theatre, and his unique theatrical theory earned him a worldwide reputation.

Brecht had a relatively short but fertile life, and experienced the transformation of five social systems in Germany. He was born and grew up in the German Empire (1871-1918), went to university, served in the army, entered the German theatre circle and became a famous reformer of theatre in the Weimar Republic (1918-1933), lived in exile in different countries during Nazi

Germany (1933-1945), and had his own theatre company - The Berliner Ensemble in East Germany (the German Democratic Republic, 1949-1990). It is a pity that he didn't see the vital moment in world history on November 9, 1989, when the Berlin Wall fell, and on October 3, 1990, the reunification of East and West Germany (the Federal Republic of Germany, 1949-1990).

On 10 February 1898, Brecht was born in Augsburg, Bavaria, German Empire. When he was a child, he was known as Eugen and suffered from heart disease. He had a younger brother named Walter Brecht (1900-1986), who later became a German scientist. His father was Berthold Friedrich Brecht (1869-1939), who first worked in a paper mill and later became a managing director. Brecht's family had a house that was near the factory, which made Brecht easily able to relate to the people at the bottom and gave him sympathy for the situation of the workers. His mother Sophie, née Brezing (1871-1920), was a housewife who got cancer at an early age. She was a devout Protestant, unlike her husband who was Catholic. Under the influence of his grandmother and mother, in his early years Brecht believed in Protestantism. He was very familiar with the Bible that was translated by Martin Luther (1483-1546), which he believed was the best book ever written and had a great influence over his whole life.

Western culture has three major sources: science, religion and a legal system. First was the ancient Greek civilization represented by Socrates (470-399 B.C.E) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E), which developed later into a scientific tradition, and it is also the root of rationality and Philosophy. Secondly, the ancient Hebrew civilization and Judaism which expressed a deep worship of God, gave rise to the idea of religious original sin, and it is like the heaven, earth and hell shown in Dante Alighieri (1265-1321)'s *Divine Comedy*. Finally, the ancient Roman legal system provided the sources for modern legal concepts, and it is the basis for the formation of constitutional ideas. The three major civilizations of humanity are gathered together in Christianity, written in the Bible, and built up into a huge Western cultural system in the form of religious belief. Although Brecht later became an idealist, he would occasionally mention Martin Luther's Bible to different people at different times and places. It can be seen that the Bible always had a strong influence on his thinking and creating. "In September 1928, Brecht was

interviewed by *Madam* magazine. The reporter asked: ‘What is the book that has influenced you the most?’ Brecht replied: ‘You may laugh, it is the Bible.’” (Knopf 2018, 15)

Brecht’s whole life was closely linked to the fate of Germany, and his artistic creation always focused on theatrical innovation. In 2012, German Brecht expert Jan Knopf published an important book titled *Bertolt Brecht: The Art of Living in the Dark Ages*. Here, Knopf pointed out that “From beginning to end, Brecht’s aim was to transcend the boundaries of art and to discover new diversity in art from their interaction.” (Knopf 2018, 1)

There are three significant periods in his theatrical career, including Germany, Exile and East Germany.

In the Germany Period (1898-1933), when Brecht was young, he entered Munich University studying medicine in 1917. While at university, he participated in Arthur Kutscher (1878-1960)’s drama seminars, and Kutscher had a great influence on Brecht’s literary creation, and he started writing his first play *Baal*, described a young poet in his confused life. During World War I, Brecht served as a medic in the army, but he soon became tired of the war and left the army. He began writing theatre reviews for Munich’s newspaper, while also continuing to write plays. *Baal* is Brecht’s debut play, and the first draft was created in 1918 and underwent several revisions, and many of Brecht’s friends supported the play. In 1920, Brecht discussed with the publishing house to publish the book *Baal*. In November 1923, the play began to be rehearsed and performed. During this time, Brecht finished writing *Drums in the Night* in 1920, about a young man’s hesitation while confronting social problems and it premiered in Munich on September 29, 1922, and then was performed in the Berlin theatre in the same year. The play was a huge success in Germany. Subsequently, he wrote *In the Jungle of Cities* that depicted the dissimilation of people in a big city. In early 1922, the play premiered at the Palace Theatre in Munich and was a success.

On November 13, 1922, the 24-year-old Brecht won the Kleist Prize. This is an important literary prize in Germany, and the reason for giving Brecht the award was described in this way: “Brecht portrayed the influence of man on others, thus avoiding useless lyricism on the one hand, and avoiding being confined to an isolated characteristic on the other hand. Brecht

obtained his intellectual background and idea from his stage experience alone.” (Knopf 2018, 115) After that, Brecht was appointed to a position as a dramaturgy and director by the Little Theatre in Munich. In September 1924, the famous director Max Reinhardt (1873-1943) invited Brecht to be a dramaturgy of the National Theatre of Germany, and he moved to Berlin. Brecht started to write the play *Man Equals Man*, with the theme of the relationship between the individual and society. In Brecht’s essay *Standard Questions for Judging Acting*, he wrote, “For the epic play *Man Equals Man* (1924-1926) staged at the National Theatre... I had seen all the rehearsals of the play... The actor of the epic theatre was different from the actor of the ordinary theatre... The actor Chaplin (Charlie Chaplin, 1889-1977) was in many ways closer to the acting requirements of the epic theatre.” (Brecht. Epic 2015, 69-75) In Berlin, Brecht met Erwin Piscator (1839-1966), who was the chief director of Berlin People Theatre at the time, and whose Epic theatre innovations proposed in 1924, had a wide-ranging impact. “When Piscator invited Brecht to join his theatre, Brecht chose to keep him at a distance.” (Knopf 2018, 182) But they collaborated on *The Good Soldier Schweik*, in which Brecht was one of the playwrights for adaptation. The play premiered on January 23, 1928 and was a success. Piscator’s experiment theatre had two main influences on Brecht, one was the understanding of the social function of theatre, and the other was theatre directing techniques and stage skills.

In Berlin, Brecht met actress Helene Weigel (1900-1971) who was from Austria, and she introduced Brecht to some books with new philosophical ideas and influenced Brecht’s theatre creation. Soon Brecht’s talent was recognized by the German theatre circle, and his theatrical concept of Epic Theatre was debated and discussed among those engaged in theatre, leading Brecht to a new level in his career. Brecht and his first wife Marianne Zoff (1893-1984) got married in 1922 in Munich, and in September 1927, they divorced. Zoff was an Austrian actress and opera singer, and they had a daughter Hanne Hiob (1923-2009) who was born in Munich and then grew up with her mother. In 1930 Brecht married Helene Weigel who became his second wife and artistic partner for his rest of his life. They had two children, a son Stefan Brecht (1924-2009) and a daughter Barbara Brecht-Schall (1930-2015), and they both later chose theatre as their lifelong careers.

Regarding Brecht’s theatre creations during this period, French writer and semiotician Roland Barthes (1915-1980) commented in his essay, *Brecht and Discourse: Some Thoughts on*

Discourse Studies, “There are two discourses in Brecht’s work, the first is an eschatological (anarchist) that speaks and creates destruction, and does not care what comes after, because it is what he does not want at all.” (Brecht. *Alienation* 2015, 201) This is characteristic of Brecht’s early theatre, such as *Baal* (1918), *Drums in the Night* (1920) and *In the Jungle of Cities* (1922), and he won the Kleist Prize for these masterpieces. “Then, there is an eschatological discourse, a criticism built to stop society from the fate of dissimulation, where the bad things in this world (war, exploitation) can be healed, or one can imagine the day when they can be healed.” (Brecht. *Alienation* 2015, 202) Brecht’s most important works of such discourse is *The Threepenny Opera* (1928). This is a play with music. Brecht adapted it from an 18th-century English ballad opera, *The Beggar’s Opera* by John Gay. Brecht depicts many people from the lower classes of society, and questions the absurdity of society. Tolerance and kindness to the weak represent a person’s humanity and self-cultivation. From this period onwards, poverty, misery and the state of human existence were the most important part of Brecht’s writing themes.

In Exile Period (1933-1948), during the Nazi era, Brecht left Germany and began his 15 years of exile life. Germany in 1933 was a dark time, and the sins of the Nazis were unspeakable. On January 30, Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) was appointed President of Germany, and a dictator was on the stage of history; on February 27, during the Reichstag fire, the Nazis purged other political parties, and a totalitarian state was formed. On May 10, during the Nazi book burnings, more than 5000 university students from the German student union burned the books of hundreds of German authors and the books of more than forty foreign authors in the Berlin Opera Square. As early as 1821, German poet Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) wrote a tragedy *Almansor*, and said, “This was a prelude only, wherever they burn books, they will also, in the end, burn human beings.” (Heine 2014, 245) Brecht’s name was on the list of authors whose books have been burned. Before the Nazis seized power, German intellectuals generally believed that the Nazis acted rudely and had a dark heart, and no one was willing to dine with them. Brecht had always opposed the Nazis; his wife was Jewish, and the day after the Reichstag fire, the family embarked on a journey of exile. Brecht’s citizenship was stripped by the Nazis on June 8, 1935. Two years later, the citizenships of his wife and children were also revoked. They had no passports for a long time. Brecht’s name and works disappeared in Germany for 16 years until 1949.

Brecht once wrote: “‘I still wanted to continue to study mankind progress and civilization, so I left the country and started a journey.’... The above quote is the note compiled by Brecht in the early days of his exile in Denmark.” (Knopf 2018, 300) The Brecht family first left Berlin via Prague to the house of his wife’s parents in Vienna in February 1933. Then from Vienna they went to Zurich and Paris. In June 1933, they arrived in Denmark and bought a house in Svendborg on the island of Funen. After six years, in 1939, they moved to Stockholm, Sweden for a year, and then in 1940, they lived in Helsinki, Finland for a year. Because of the full-scale outbreak of World War II (1939-1945) by the Nazis, Brecht decided to follow many other Europeans who went into exile in the United States. It was a long road of exile for Brecht and his family from Finland to America, and the family first traveled in the Soviet Union at the end of May 1941, from Leningrad to Moscow, and then took the express train from Moscow, crossing Siberia for ten days to Vladivostok. From here, they took a ship named S.S. Annie Johnson spending fourteen days at sea, before finally arriving in the United States on July 21, 1941. During the roughly six years of the war, the Brecht family lived in California, and Brecht worked for Hollywood, sometimes traveling across America. He has developed working relationships and friendships with many people from different countries. But in the end of October 1947, he left America because he was suspected of being a radical during the McCarthy era. “Brecht has not been very interested in politics and in the so-called motherland;” (Knopf 2018, 71) instead, he was just a talented artist. Brecht and his family had lived in the United States for more than six years; he had his own theatre career and friends in America, and he hoped to stay in America.

The period of exile was Brecht's most prolific, and he wrote his important works at this time. When he lived in Svendborg, his German friend Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) visited the island for two summers, 1934 and 1938. Benjamin wrote his famous article about a discussion with Brecht titled *Conversation with Brecht*. On August 3 1938, He recorded Brecht telling him, “They (Nazis) didn’t just take away my house, fish pond and car, they also took away my stage and audience, as a matter of principle, from where I stand today, I can’t admit that Shakespeare’s talent is greater than mine, but Shakespeare can’t just write for his drawer, while I can.” (Brecht. Epic 2015, 199) Brecht’s main drawer works included *Life of Galileo* (1938), *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939), *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1941). They discussed respectively what is truth, war and human nature, and they all contained Brecht’s ideas of Epic Theatre - he

wrote “The modern theatre is the epic theatre...” (Gerould 2000, 446) as well as the stage technology of alienation effect - he wrote “The alienation effect is historicize...” (Brecht 1990, 63)

Life of Galileo was written by Brecht in 1938 when he lived in a small village in Svendborg, Denmark. He spent three weeks finishing writing this play but later edited it many times, and it wasn't until 1943 that it was first produced in Switzerland. When Brecht wrote *Life of Galileo*, “From October 28th to November 4th, 1938, the American writer Ferdinand Reyher (1891-1967) came to Copenhagen... Brecht had known him in Berlin (1927) and met him many times since then.” (Knopf 2018, 384) Reyher was the first person to encourage Brecht to create this play. Brecht wrote an essay *Explanation and Rehearsal Instructions on the Life of Galileo*, which described the creative process of writing this play in detail. He wrote,

Life of Galileo was written in the dark days of the last months of 1938. At the time, many people believed that the advance of fascism was unstoppable and that the total collapse of Western civilization had arrived. The great era of natural science, which brought prosperity to the world, and the new arts of music and theatre is indeed on the eve of its end. Almost all believed in the beginning of a barbaric and ‘eternal’ age.

(Brecht 1990, 345)

Regarding the role of Galileo, Brecht wrote, “Galileo, by looking at the world around him in 1600 years ago, like a stranger, thus expresses the extraordinary and noticeable character of this historical figure. He was studying this world, the world was peculiar, antiquated, and needs to be explained.” (Brecht 1990, 358) In the play, Brecht discussed a general attitude of truth through the life of the famous scientist Galileo: how people respond when they face the truth.

Mother Courage and Her Children was written by Brecht in a red painted wooden house in Stockholm, Sweden in 1939. The play was first produced by Leopold Lindtberg at the Zurich Schauspielhaus in 1941, and Brecht directed this play for the Berliner Ensemble on January 11, 1949, with Helene Weigel acting as Mother Courage. The play is considered the most famous anti-war play, and it is set in the 17th century in Europe. Brecht wrote an essay *From the Mother Courage Model*, in which he wrote,

After the great war life still goes on in our ruined cities, but it is a different life, the life of different or differently composed circles, guided or handicapped by a new environment whose newness consists in its degree of destruction.” (Willett 1957, 215)

The play describes the story of Mother Courage and her three children who live by selling simple goods to the army. In Brecht’s essay *Two Methods to Acting in Mother Courage*, he thought of Mother Courage as a contradictory person, and “this contradiction devastates and damages her to the point of being beyond recognition.” (Brecht 1990, 100) The play revealed the cruelty of war and the fragility of human nature. Brecht’s attitude towards the war was similar to his attitude towards the Nazis: ironic and contemptuous. And he was sympathetic and felt pity towards those who suffered in the war. The French author Roland Barthes wrote in *Comments on Mother Courage*, “A reminder of memories, misery and war, Brecht’s material is full of ideas without being entirely material.” (Brecht. Alienation 2015, 185)

The Good Woman of Setzuan was finished by Brecht in Los Angeles, America in 1941. Earlier in 1930, when Brecht was still in Berlin, he had already started to consider how to write this play. The original title of the play, *The Product Love*, had two meanings: one was to describe love as like a commodity, and the other instead meant *true love*, with the two meanings having the same pronunciation in German. However, in the end, Brecht chose the title *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. The play tells a simple but philosophical story about the good and evil of human nature, and Brecht’s experience of Nazi Germany influenced his discussion of this theme. In the play, Brecht depicted Shen Te as someone who wanted to be a good person, but because she encountered many troubles, must choose to be an evil person to support herself. Brecht also discussed human nature through the shaping of characters, and told the audience whether one is a good person or bad person depends on one’s personal choice. The main role of Shen Te was not the focus, but instead her situation was the focus, and the play implies that good and evil exist in human nature at the same time.

The three plays represent the peak of Brecht’s theatre creation; until today, they are also the most performed repertoire in the world. Brecht had planned to write articles dedicated to each place he lived in exile, but his plan for writing was not fully achieved. Poverty and suffering in exile gave

Brecht abundant artistic inspiration and brought about his profound thinking on the fate of mankind.

During the East Germany Period (1948—1956), on November 1, 1947, Brecht, his wife and their daughter arrived in Paris from Washington D.C, while their 23 years old son Stefan Brecht chose to stay in the United States. In fact, Stefan had always been an American at heart. He received a doctorate in philosophy at Harvard, and then he taught philosophy at the University of Miami. In 1966, he and his wife moved to New York City, and he became a theatre artist and writer. He wrote several books including *Queer Theatre* and *The Theatre of Visions: Robert Wilson*. Both books were published in 1978.

When Brecht returned to Europe, he considered which country would be the best place for his family to live and give him space for theatrical practice. In Paris, Brecht found that the most talked about in theatre circles were: Camus (Albert Camus 1913-1960)'s *The Plague* (1947) which described the different choices of people in a small village in France when the plague prevailed; Sartre (Jean-Paul Sartre 1905-1980)'s *The Death without Burial* (1946), which depicted the story of members of the French Resistance being imprisoned by the Nazis; and Genet (Jean Genet 1910-1986)'s *The Maids* (1946), which describes a maid who pretended to be a hostess to find meaning in her existence. At the same time, many people were talking about existential philosophy, but few people knew about Brecht's works and Epic Theatre theory. In Europe at the time existential theatre and traditional theatre dominated the stage. Brecht needed a different stage that he could control himself, to present his innovative form of theatre.

From November 5, 1947 to October in 1948, Brecht lived in Zurich, Switzerland for almost a year, and then moved to East Berlin and established his theatre company - the Berliner Ensemble on February 16, 1949. However, Brecht's relationship with East Germany was very complicated because East Germany was not recognized by the West and West Germany until 1972.

According to Klaus Volker's *Brecht Almanac*, Brecht was well aware that in order to develop his theatre art in the world, he had to have another residence and another passport outside of East Germany.

When East Germany decided to build up Brecht's troupe, with his wife Helene Weigel as the artistic director in the Berliner Ensemble, just six days later, from February 22 to 24, 1949, Brecht traveled from East Germany via Prague to Zurich. He dealt with the complex residency matters, and he kept his Swiss house, which was his residence outside of East Germany. Since leaving Nazi Germany, Brecht had been stateless without a passport. German Brecht expert Jan Knopf wrote, "Brecht had applied for U.S. citizenship in Los Angeles on December 8, 1941," (Knopf 2018, 449-450) but had no success. In May 1949, Brecht started to apply for an Austrian passport because Brecht's wife was Austrian. American Brecht expert Philip Glahn wrote, "Brecht had applied for and in 1950 received an Austrian passport, leading to a major scandal that rocked the cultural scene of the Alpine nation and resulting in a concerted anti- Brecht campaign in Vienna... To some, Brecht's foundation of the Berlin Ensemble on East German soil..." (Glahn 2014, 190)

Brecht's representative plays- his drawer plays, were staged during this period, including *Life of Galileo*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. He revised and directed many theatrical works and created new stage forms with the Berliner Ensemble. And at the same time, he wrote many articles introducing his theatre theory, with Epic Theatre and alienation effect becoming more and more familiar and practiced in the theatres. However, he wrote few plays at this time. In 1949, Brecht wrote a script *Days of the Paris Commune*. It tells the story of the uprising of the Paris Commune in France in 1871, but the play was rarely staged.

In 1954, Brecht was awarded the World Peace Council Peace in East Germany (later renamed the Lenin Peace Prize). He deposited the award of 160 thousand Rubles in a Swiss bank instead of an East German bank, and this showed his complicated relationship with East Germany. On May 25, 1955, Brecht received the Stalin Peace Prize in Moscow, and he became globally recognized.

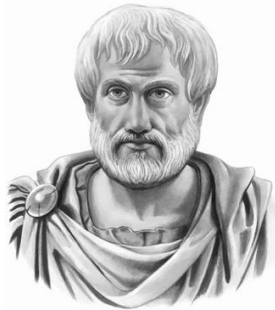
Notably, Brecht also wrote about Russian dramatist Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938) on theatre in his *Working Diary*; he analyzed in detail the theatrical methods of Stanislavsky, Yevgeny Vakhtangov (1883-1922) and Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940). In fact, it can be shown that some of Brecht and Meyerhold's theories and methods of theatre were very similar. He mentioned the stage methods of Meyerhold, "he objected to personal factors on

stage; emphasized superb stagecraft; valued movement and its technology; and chose abstraction of the setting.” (Brecht. Epic 2015, 127) Because Brecht feared the Soviet Union and East Germany, he tried to avoid publicly talking about Meyerhold. Finally, he told a reporter in private during the year he died, “Meyerhold was murdered by horrific Stalinism!” (Brecht. Epic 2015, 128)

Brecht died of a heart attack on 14 August 1956, at the age 58, while studying the play of Irish-French dramatist Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), *Waiting for Godot*. He was buried at the Dorotheenstadt Cemetery on Chausseestraße Berlin, Germany which was beside the residence he shared with his second wife Helene Weigel.

Chapter Two

Bertolt Brecht and Aristotle – The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre



Aristotle



Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin

ON READING A RECENT GREEK POET

After the wailing had already begun
along the walls, their ruin certain,
the Trojans fidgeted with bits of wood
in the three-ply doors, itsy-bitsy
pieces of wood, fussing with them.
And began to get their nerve back and feel hopeful.

—*Bertolt Brecht* (Brecht 2012, 36)

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) was the first person to introduce Brecht's Epic Theatre in 1931. Epic Theatre theory is the crucial theatre innovation in the 20th century. There are two key essays that give a detailed explanation: one is *The Modern Theatre is Epic Theatre* by Bertolt Brecht in 1930, in which he talked about the transformation of opera into Epic Theatre through his play *Mahagonny* (1930); the other is *What is Epic Theatre* by Walter Benjamin, which he wrote in 1931 and published in 1939. In it he explained Epic Theatre in detail through eight elements; this is a relatively comprehensive theoretical exposition of Epic Theatre.

In fact, from the 1920s in Germany, a debate rose in theatrical practitioners. An article titled *New People and Old People* appeared in a Berlin newspaper at the end of 1922. It was difficult for some theatrical practitioners to understand the style of Brecht's theatre innovation. Benjamin was notable for explaining Brecht's Epic Theatre and supporting the artistic revolution in the theatre. He wrote, "The concept of the epic theatre, originated by Brecht as the theoretician of his poetic practice, indicates above all that this theatre desires an audience that is relaxed and follows the action without strain." (Benjamin 1968, 147) Benjamin and Brecht had a long-term friendship, and they also understood and supported each other in artistic creation; with Benjamin's appreciation of literature and art, he was the best one able to comprehend and explain Brecht's Epic Theatre. As well as, in Benjamin's essay *What is Epic Theatre*, he offered a systematic explanation for Brecht's Epic Theatre.

Benjamin was born in Berlin Germany on July 15, 1892 into a wealthy Jewish family. He was a German cultural critic, writer and translator. He studied at the University of Bern, and earned his PhD on the concept of art criticism in German romanticism. In Benjamin's book *Illuminations* his essay *What is Epic Theatre* was included. German-American philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) wrote a long introduction for him:

...he was a born writer, but his greatest ambition was to produce a work consisting entirely of quotations; he was the first German to translate Proust (together with Franz Hessel) and St.-John Perse, and before that he had translated Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens*, but he was no translator; he reviewed books and wrote a number of essays on living and dead writers, but he was no literary critic; he wrote a book about the German baroque and left behind a huge unfinished study of the French nineteenth century, but he was no historian, literary or otherwise; I shall try to show that he thought poetically, but he was neither a poet nor a philosopher.

(Benjamin 1968, 4)

Hannah Arendt's first husband was Benjamin's cousin, so she understood him deeply, and Arendt praised him as the last intellectual in Europe. In order to avoid persecution in the Nazi concentration camps, "On September 16, 1940, Walter Benjamin, who was about to emigrate to

America, took his life at the Franco-Spanish border.” (Benjamin 1968, 17) Arendt organized and published his posthumous manuscripts in New York later.

In June 1929, Benjamin wrote a letter to his close friend German-born Israeli philosopher and historian Gershom Scholem (1897-1982) who was in Jerusalem.

You will be interested to know that a very friendly relationship between Bert Brecht and me has recently developed, based less upon what he has produced (I know only *The Threepenny Opera* and his ballads), than on the well-founded interest one must take in his present plans.

(Wizisla 2009, 1)

Benjamin and Brecht had met each other in Berlin five years earlier in November 1924, when Benjamin’s girlfriend Asja Lacis (1891-1979) introduced them. Lacis was a Latvian actress and director, and Benjamin’s book *One-Way Street* is dedicated to her. In Lacis’s book *Revolutionary by Profession*, she recollected:

[Benjamin] asked me several times to introduce him to Brecht. Once I was going to a restaurant with Brecht... Then I told him that Benjamin wanted to meet him. This time Brecht agreed. The meeting took place in the Pension VoB, where I was living at the time. Brecht was very reserved and they rarely met after that.

(Wizisla 2009, 25)

Brecht and Benjamin’s character were very different, Brecht was decisive, while Benjamin was sensitive, but they became close friends in their later life. Benjamin was attracted by Brecht’s theatre theory, and he thought that Brecht was an elusive phenomenon and an important existence in the theatre. In Benjamin’s other book *One-Way Street*, American writer Susan Sontag (1933-2004) wrote a long introduction, in her writing, she wrote about the relationship between Brecht and Benjamin:

Brecht, with the little wooden donkey near his desk from whose neck hung the sign “I, too, must understand it”, represented for Benjamin an admirer of esoteric religious texts, the possibly more potent ruse of reducing complexity, of making everything clear. Benjamin’s ‘masochistic’ (the word is Siegfried Kracauer’s, 1889-1966) relation to Brecht, which most of his friends deplored, shows the extent to which he was fascinated by this possibility.

(Benjamin 1979, 18)

According to records from *Conversation with Bert Brecht* in 1926, this explained that Epic Theatre is very close to the “New matter of fact” German movement: “This was the sober, functional aesthetic associated with Bauhaus, with painters like Grosz (George Grosz, 1893-1959), Schlichter (Rudolf Schlichter 1890-1955) and Beckmann (Max Beckmann 1884-1950), with Hindemith’s (Paul Hindemith 1895-1963) early music, with reportage and documentary and (in typography) with the abolition of upper-case letters”. (Willett 1957, 17) Brecht wrote in his essay *Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction*,

A few years back, anybody talking about the modern theatre meant the theatre in Moscow, New York and Berlin... Russian, American and German theatres differed widely from one another, but were alike in being modern, that is to say in introducing technical and artistic innovations. In a sense they even achieved a certain stylistic resemblance, probably because technology is international (not just that part which is directly applied to the stage but also that which influences it, the film for instance), ... the Berlin theatre that seemed for late to be in the lead. For a period all that is common to the modern theatre received its strongest and (so far) matures expression there... The Berlin theatre’s last phase was the so-called epic theatre, and it showed the modern theatre’s trend of development in its purest form.

(Willett 1957, 69-70)

There are three words in Brecht’s essay that he has always thought and pursued- modern, innovation and Epic Theatre. As Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957) commented on Brecht: he proved to you what was modernity, and he proved to you what was ancient form. If you studied

him, you would understand that the ultimate pursuit of Epic Theatre was to develop drama from the classical to modernity.

Ancient Greek and Roman theatres are the foundations of Western theatre, and it was an important part of European theatre history, laying a solid foundation for the theatre art of later European countries. The plot and structure of ancient Greek theatre had an impact on European civilization. Most Greek plays had strong visual effects and ingenious plots, and were presented on the stage in the form of poetry, singing by a chorus, and performed by actors, creating a strong spatial image. Ancient Greek theatre was usually divided into three categories, including tragedy, comedy and satyr. Most ancient Greeks believed that tragedy was sublime comedy was vulgar, and satyr was a short and fun related to both tragedy and comedy.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.D) the Greek Philosopher, polymath and drama critic was of this period. His famous artistic works were *Poetics* (355 B.C.D), including twenty-six chapters, and *Art of Rhetoric* (4th C. B.C), including three volumes. Ancient Greek biographer Diogenes Laertius (180-240 B.C.D) wrote *Lives of the Philosophers* to introduce about 82 Greek philosophers from the 6th century B.C. to the 3rd century A.D., and one of them was Aristotle, who “when he gave his lectures on poetry in the afternoon, was always meticulously attired... His personal appearance was foppish, not to say eccentric, ... Numerous rings sparkled on his fingers.” (Gerould 2000, 43) Aristotle was born in the city of Stagira in Northern Greece. His father was the personal physician to King Amyntas of Macedon and died when Aristotle was very young. Aristotle joined the Plato (429-347 B.C.D) Academy in Athens when he was eighteen years old, and lived there almost twenty years. Later in 343 B.C.D, he became the tutor to Philip II of Macedon’s son- Alexander the Great. By 335 B.C.D, Aristotle established his own academy to teach students in Athens. Aristotle is the founder of Western philosophy, aesthetics, literature, drama criticism and the natural sciences. In his book *Poetics*, Aristotle defined tragedy in this way:

Tragedy, then is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several

kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotion.

(S. H. Butcher 1907, 23)

In the same chapter, Aristotle analyzed the Greek plays and pointed out that there are six important elements that make up a great play: “Plot- the arrangement of dramatic incidents; Characters- the people represented in the play; Thought or theme- the ideas explored; Language- the dialogue and poetry, Music (-chorus), and Spectacle- scenery and other visual elements.” (Wilson and Goldfarb 2018, 47)

German dramaturg G. E. Lessing (1729-1781) wrote 104 theatre reviews in his famous book *Hamburg Dramaturgy* from May 1, 1767 to April 19, 1768. It recorded the performances of German theatres at that time and specific comments on the performances, and all theatre reviews based on Aristotle’s theories of theatre, He wrote:

Now Aristotle has long ago decided how far the tragic poet need regard historical accuracy: not farther than it resembles a well-constructed fable where with he can combine his intentions. He does not make use of an event because it really happened, but because it happened in such a manner as he will scarcely be able to invent more fitly for his present purpose.

(Lessing 1968, 51)

At the same period, in the appendix of this book, he included his reading notes on *Poetics* titled *Aristotle and Tragedy*. He explained and analyzed Aristotle's theory of tragedy for every chapter and in the sixth chapter, wrote his reflections on Aristotle’s six elements that make up a great play. In his view, “Aristotle’s *Poetics* had a textbook quality for theatrical practitioners” (Lessing 2017, 493) and he believed that Aristotle's theatre theory was the basis for the construction of European theater.

From Aristotle’s *Poetics* to Brecht’s Epic Theatre - one representing the classical and the other the modern - the history of mankind has spanned more than two thousand years. With the

progress of human civilization and the development of theatre theory, they are the manifestations of stage in theatre. Brecht read Aristotle very deeply, and in his later years read and reread *The Art of Poetry* (19 B.C.D) by Horace (65 - 8 B.C.D). In his essay *Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics*, he wrote, Epic Theatre “must be distinguished from Aristotelian theatre and defined by it.” (Brecht 1990, 91) In his *Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction*, he explained “People started from Aristotle, and thought that the epic works and Epic Theatre form of expressing a certain story were quite different.” (Brecht 1990, 68) Brecht believed that the singing of Homer (9-8 B.C.D)’s epics and medieval folk singers were also dramatic performances. There are dramas in epic works, and there were also epic elements in drama works. In Brecht’s other essay *The Playwright’s Play*, he talked about Piscator’s influence, “The theory of Epic Theatre and the means of strengthening alienation effect was built by the playwright (Brecht)... But Piscator also used a lot of alienation, all on his own.” (Brecht 1990, 166) As well as, “Brecht mentioned many times that Epic Theatre was not his invention, it had already existed in classical theatre, and he just re-emphasized this theatre form and added new content.” (Brecht 1990, 4) Epic Theatre is developed on the basis of Aristotle’s theatre theory and the modern theatre is from classical theatre.

Brecht questioned the theatre of Aristotle, and he called it dramatic theatre. In his article *The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre*, he wrote: “For some time past there has been a move to renovate the opera.” (Gerould 2000, 446) Then he wrote: “Our existing opera is a culinary opera. It was a means of pleasure long before it turned into merchandise. It furthers pleasure even where it requires, or promotes, a certain degree of education, for the education in question is an education in taste.” (Gerould 2000, 448) This shows that Brecht placed more emphasis on the educational role of theatre. No matter what era, the most important thing in theatre is the relationship between the actors and the audience, and the actor’s acting and the function of the theatre. Aristotle’s dramatic theatre “... with person performing the action rather than through narrative carrying to completion, through a course of events involving pity and fear, the purification of those painful or fatal acts which have that quality.” (Wilson and Goldfarb 2018, 47)

In Walter Benjamin's essay *What is Epic Theatre*, he systematically summarizes Brecht's theatrical theory of Epic Theatre. On the basis of Aristotle's six elements of tragedy, he developed eight essential elements of Epic Theatre, including The Relaxed Audience- Make the audience realize that they are watching a play; The Plot- Put familiar events in a historical period; The Untragic Hero- Let the thinker, wise men and ordinary people be the protagonist of the play; The Interruption- Do not reproduce the circumstance but reveal one; The Quotable Gesture- Develop the action of the character; The Didactic Play- Let actors communicate with audience; The Actor-Actors keep their distance from the character they play; and Theater on a Dais- The educational function. If one takes Aristotle's theatre theory and six elements of tragedy as the basis, one can see the development and innovation of Epic theatre theory in these aspects.

The plot, most of the plots of ancient Greek tragedies are drawn from the great myths before the Athenian period, and a few tragedies are drawn from major historical events. When Aristotle expounded on the plot, he wrote: "Again, Tragedy is the imitation of an action; and an action implies personal agents, who necessarily possess certain distinctive qualities both of character and thought; ... for by plot I here mean the arrangement of the incidents. ... But most important of all is the structure of the incidents. For Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not quality..." (S. H. Butcher 1907, 27-29) "Aristotle suggests that Greek tragedy usually focuses on one major plot without bringing in subplots or unrelated secondary concerns, though some plays do have subplots." (Wilson and Goldfarb 2018, 47)

While Benjamin wrote in the chapter- *The Plot*, "The epic theatre purposes to 'deprive the stage of its sensation derived from subject matter.' Thus an old story will often do more for it than a new one. Brecht has considered the question of whether the incidents that are presented by the epic theatre should not already be familiar. ... This is how the Chinese theatre actually proceed. In his essay 'The Fourth Wall of China', Brecht states what he owes to this theater. If the theater is to cast about for familiar events, 'historical incidents would be the most suitable.' Their epic extension through the style of acting, the placards and captions, is intended to purge them of the sensational." (Benjamin 1968, 148)

Aristotle's tragedy emphasizes the imitation of an action, and this action represents a story, and the story of reversal and discovery of the tragic plot is an effective creative method; Brecht's Epic theatre is to place the story in the distant past, and historicization is the unique feature of Epic Theatre. In fact, in *Art of Rhetoric* of Aristotle, third volume, he talked about style and wrote, "Indeed as regards style, men feel the same as they do in regard to strangers and fellow citizens. Thus we should give our language a somewhat unfamiliar air; for men admire what is remote, and what excites admiration is pleasant." (Aristotle 2020, 353) Actually, on this point, Aristotle and Brecht seem to have the same view. They both felt that the plot set in a remote, historical place, would prompt imagination and contemplation.

The characters, in Greek tragedies, characters are mostly gods or kings. Aristotle wrote, "By Character I mean that in virtue of which we ascribe certain qualities to the agents... The Plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy. Character holds the second place... Thus Tragedy is the imitation of an action, and of the agents mainly with a view to the action... Character is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoid." (S. H. Butcher 1907, 27-29)

While Benjamin wrote in the chapter- *The Untragic Hero*, "The French classical theatre made room in the midst of the players for persons of rank, who had their armchairs on the open stage. To us this seems inappropriate... One can go even further and say that Brecht made an attempt to make the thinker, or even the wise man, the hero of the drama... But in the secular drama of the West, too, the search for the untragic hero has never ceased." (Benjamin 1968, 149)

According to the linear development of Western theatre history, from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (429 B.C), to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1601), to Ibsen's *A Doll's house* (1879), until the theatre of today, the character's identity has evolved in the theatre. In Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric*, second volume, he described the character traits of various people, studied and imitated by theatrical practitioners in the world. In *Poetics*, Aristotle mentioned *Oedipus Rex* six times to explain what was the best tragedy, and the tragic character Aristotle admired most was Oedipus; Brecht worked on writing *Life of Galileo* for many years and attempted to create a wise man- Galileo, but the two characters on the stage seemed similar in some way, which showed that the tragic hero and untragic hero share the same tragic spirit.

The thought, Aristotle considers that thought belongs to the category of rhetoric, and many of his theories about it are written in *Art of Rhetoric*. In *Poetics*, he wrote, “Thought is required wherever a statement is proved, or, it may be, a general truth enunciated... Third in order is Thought, ---that it, the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances.” (S. H. Butcher 1907, 25-29) and then he wrote, “Under Thought is included every effect which has to be produced by speech, the subdivisions being, ---proof and refutation; the excitation of the feelings, such as pity, fear, anger, and the like; the suggestion of importance or its opposite.” (S. H. Butcher 1907, 69-71)

For his part, Benjamin wrote in the chapters- *The Relaxed Audience* and *Theatre on A Dais*, “The first is the action; it has to be such that the audience can keep a check on it at crucial places on the basis of its own experience. The second is the performance; it should be mounted artistically in a pellucid manner.” And “The aim of the epic theatre can be defined more easily in terms of the stage than of a new drama... The stage is still raised, but it no longer rises from an unfathomable depth; it has become a dais. The didactic play and the epic theatre are attempts to sit down on a dais.” (Benjamin 1968, 147-152)

Aristotle deems that the power of thought can inspire emotion and action from tragedy into spectators, and his theory of purification in tragedy involves pity and fear of the audience. Actors performed on stage, and audience watched, “through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotion.” (S. H. Butcher 1907, 23) And in fact, Aristotle also mentioned that in this way, the effect of thought arises from action. The key words of Aristotle’s tragic theory- imitation, purification and action - constitute tragedy theatre from ancient Greece to the present.

According to Theatre Theory Theatre, “The magical effect of stage illusion, Brecht argued, hypnotized spectators and put them into a state of trance. By leading the audience to identify with the characters and accept their fate rather than calling it into question, what Brecht called Aristotelian drama served to perpetuate passivity and reinforce the status quo.” (Gerould 2000, 445) Aristotle first proposed the aesthetic theory of theatre and the relationship between the actor and the audience in the theatre, while expounding the theory that pity and fear purify the emotions of the audience, and also can cause the audience to take action, which is thinking and commenting. Therefore, the audience’s illusion and passive acceptance of fate can only be an

assumption, and the ancient Greek theatre could accommodate thousands of people, and it is impossible for the audience to be completely hypnotized. In addition, unlike the theatre on a dais, the Greek theatre is not a raised platform, but a circular flat field, which represents the earliest democratic system of mankind.

The Language, Aristotle appreciates beautifully poetic language, poetic scenes, but he also mentions action. He wrote, “Fourth among the elements enumerated comes is Diction; by which I mean, as has been already said, the expression of the meaning in words; and its essence is the same both in verse and prose.” (S. H. Butcher 1907, 29) And “... in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.” (Wilson and Goldfarb 2018, 47)

Likewise, Epic Theatre combines language and action on stage, and as Benjamin wrote in the chapters- *The Quotable Gesture* and *The Interruption*, “In one of his didactic poems on dramatic art Brecht says: ‘The effect of every sentence was waited for and laid bare. And the waiting lasted until the crowd had carefully weighed our sentence.’ In short, the play was interrupted. One can go even further and remember that interruption is one of the fundamental devices of all structuring... ‘Making gestures quotable’ is one of the substantial achievements of the epic theatre... For the more frequently we interrupt someone in the act of acting, the more gestures result.” And “This discovery (alienation) of conditions takes place through the interruption of happenings.” (Benjamin 1968, 150-151) Gesture and interruption are two important techniques of developing language in Epic Theatre.

According to *Living Theatre*, “An important element of Greek theatre was the kind of space in which plays were presented... were offered at religious festival, huge theatres were necessary: the classical Greek theatre probably accommodated 15,000 to 17, 000 spectators... The most noted of the classical Greek theatres was the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens... Greek theatres were outdoor amphitheatres with illumination provided by the sun, and the Greeks relied on natural lighting in their dramas.” (Wilson and Goldfarb 2018, 56) There was only one actor on stage playing different roles, which later developed into three, and a chorus of 13 to 15 who

could sing and dance. All actors are male and play female or different roles depending on the masks and costumes. Ancient Greek plays were long poems or poetic expressions by famous authors. When performing in such a huge space, in order for all the audience to hear and see the play clearly, the actors were required to have a loud voice and a large range of gestures. The expression of the combination of language and action came from the stage of ancient Greece. Moreover, Aristotle proposed the reversal and discovery of the plot; if imagined with action, it should be an interruption.

The Music, Aristotle deemed that beautiful language should be full of rhythm and tone, and language was song. He wrote, “Of the remaining elements Song holds the chief place among the embellishments.” (Butcher 1907, 29) and he wrote, “The Chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole, and share in the action...” (S. H. Butcher 1907, 69) Greek theatre had a choral ode performed by the chorus. “Music and dance were always important elements of classical Greek theatre... The most common instrument used was the aulos, a reed instrument. The flute, the Lyre, and percussion may have also been employed.” (Wilson and Goldfarb 2018, 62)

In Benjamin’s essay, he doesn’t mention music, but writes in a chapter- *The actor* - quoting Brecht: “The actor must show his subject, and he must show himself. Of course, he shows his subject by showing himself, and he shows himself by showing his subject.” (Benjamin 1968, 153) Brecht wrote in his essay *On Music*: “With the introduction of music on stage, the conventions of theatre were broken, the script became less dull and more elegant, and the performance became artistry... At the same time, the music has brought the long-lost poetic theatre back on the stage.” (Brecht 1990, 309)

In Greek theatre, the chorus is an important part and Aristotle described the chorus as an actor. It is a narrative facing the audience, evaluating stories and characters, and engaging in dialogue with the protagonist and audience, accompanied by singing and dancing, and these create the whole performance that is beautiful and poetic. “All the Greek playwrights of the fifth century B. C. E, included a chorus in their plays. In fact, the chorus, which sang and danced as well as recited, was an integral and unique feature of classical drama.” (Wilson and Goldfarb 2018, 45)

Music is a special feature of Epic Theatre, and almost every important play of Brecht is inseparable from music. At first, he composed music by himself, then he asked friends to write it, and then he invited famous composers to create music and songs in his plays. A contemporary German-French film critic Lotte H Eisner (1896-1983) recalled, “When Brecht and Weill (Kurt Weill, 1900-1950) were working on *The Threepenny Opera*, I often visited unexpectedly. Brecht would wind instrument in a disjointed raspy way, or play some notes on the piano, and he puts a lot of emphasis on the beat...” (Knopf 2018, 228) Emphasized on the role of music in the theatre, which was also a way to bring ancient Greek theatre into modern theatre.

The Spectacle, in the Greek theatre, the stage is an almost circular flat field, not a raised platform, but the auditorium was built into the hillside. And there are some simple mechanics on stage. “The two most popular special-effects devices were the *Mechane*, or ‘machine’, and *Ekkyklema*, literally translated as a ‘roll-out’ machine... (*Mechane*) was used to effect the entrance of the actor playing the god or goddess in such a way as to suggest a descent from the heavens... (*Ekkyklema*), which was then rolled out from behind the scenes into the full view of the audience.” (Wilson and Goldfarb 2018, 61) Aristotle wrote, “The Spectacle has, indeed, an emotional attraction of its own, but, of all the parts, it is the least artistic, and connected least with the art of poetry. For this power of Tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors. Besides, the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet.” (S. H. Butcher 1907, 29-31)

Benjamin wrote in the chapters- *The Didactic Play*, “In Every instance, the epic theatre is meant for the actors as much as for the spectators. The didactic play is a special case largely because it facilitates and suggests the interchange between audience and actors and vice versa through the extreme paucity of the mechanical equipment. (Benjamin 1968, 152) Brecht wrote: “Showing independent works of art as part of a theatrical performance is a new departure. Neher’s projection adopt an attitude towards the events on the stage, as when the real glutton sits in front of the glutton whom Neher has drawn. In the same way the stage unreels the events that are fixed on the screen. The projections of Neher’s are quite as much an independent component of the opera as are Weill’s music and the text.....They provide its visual aids.” (Gerould 2000, 450-451)

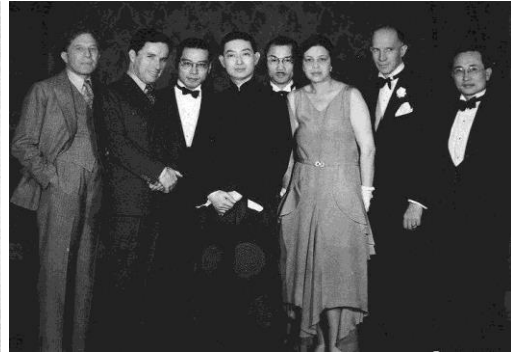
The Greek theatre could already create magical visuals, with gods descending from the sky and actors rolling out of the backstage through mechanics on stage, and these provide the audience with an artistic effect that could astound them. In Epic theatre, this magical and astounding effect and the visual elements were replaced by words, pictures, banners and films... With the advancement of technology and development of arts, the visual elements of theatre must be more abundant, not just these techniques that Brecht mentioned. However, Aristotle thought that the spectacle could evoke emotions in the viewer, but “For the power of Tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors.” (S. H. Butcher 1907, 29) Aristotle almost went in a circle from the end to the beginning- The plot. Because the effect of tragic art did not rely on machines, Aristotle emphasized more the artistic and poetic text, and the spectacle belongs to the category of the artist. The ancient Greek tragic plays have survived for more than two thousand years because of their rich artistry and universal values, which was the power of tragedy that Aristotle described.

Chapter Three

Bertolt Brecht and Mei Lanfang – Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting



Bertolt Brecht



Mei Lanfang and American Artists

ON A CHINESE CARVING OF A LION

The bad fear your claws.

The good enjoy your elegance.

This

I would like to hear said

Of my verse

—*Bertolt Brecht, Team Translation* (Brecht 2003, 119)

Mei Lanfang (1894-1961) met Bertolt Brecht on April 14, 1935 in Moscow, when Mei was invited to perform Peking opera there. At that time, Mei was already a famous artist of Peking opera, with his own Mei Opera Troupe in China and successful performances in Japan in 1919 and 1925, as well as the United States in 1930. While Mei was forty-one years old, Brecht was thirty-seven, and had just gotten recognition in Germany, before falling into an exile's life. They had only met once, twice at most, because Mei didn't remember him. According to the *Full Biography of Mei Lanfang*, after 1949, the Chinese dramatist Tian Han told Mei, "... now Brecht became famous in Germany, and he was influential in the European theatre. In his article, he repeatedly mentioned watching Mei Lanfang's performance in Moscow." (Li 2001, 440) Mei

Lanfang was known as the "Queen of Peking Opera, "the most renowned modern performer of Peking opera, preserved and expanded its traditions. He was acclaimed throughout the world for his portrayal of female characters and was one of the first Asian theatre artists to influence the development of Western theatre." (Wilson and Goldfarb 2018, 474)

In the beginning of 1935, Mei Lanfang had originally planned to perform in Europe, but at the time, the Foreign Cultural Association of Moscow invited the Mei Opera Troupe to tour, promising to bear all the expenses, and organized a reception committee for Mei Lanfang. The committee was composed of well-known figures from drama, film, literature, and diplomacy, including Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938), Vladimir Danchenko (1858-1943), Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940), Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948) and others. So on February 21, Mei boarded a ship named The North that took him to Moscow, where he performed and traveled for a month and a half. During this time, on March 29, 1935, the director Eisenstein filmed a movie of Mei's performance of Peking opera - *The Enchanter from the pear Garden* (also called *Hauni Pass*). Mei spent a long time in Europe before he returned to Hong Kong on August 1, and two days later, went back to Shanghai.

During this period, Brecht's itinerary was as follows: on March 14 of the same year, when Mei was already in Moscow, according to Jan Knopf's book *Bertolt Brecht: The Art of Living in the Dark Ages*, Brecht and Margarete Steffin (1908-1941), who was a secretary and Russian translator for Brecht, arrived in Moscow from Denmark. This was the second time that both of them had been to Moscow, the first being in May 1932. This time, in March 1935, they planned to stay for a longer time to organize a magazine of German exiles - *Speech*. Later from June 21 to 25, 1935 when Brecht was in Paris, he attended the first International Congress of Writers; invited as a famous German playwright and poet, he was one of more than 250 writers from 27 countries. Brecht then went to New York and stayed from October 7 to February 16 of the following year. While he was in the United States, he rehearsed and staged *The Mother* by Maxim Gorky (1868-1936). "But the performance in New York was so unsuccessful that Brecht had to write a letter to comfort the novelist." (Knopf 2018, 355) After the show ended in November, when Brecht had little to do, he started going to the cinema almost every day to watch movies, studying American films until he returned to Denmark.

In Moscow, Mei Lanfang's performances were warmly received, for which he held several symposia. On April 14, 1935 Brecht met Mei. That day Mei had two important events. First was in the daytime, an artistic symposium hosted by the dramatist Danchenko in the auditorium of the Moscow Foreign Culture Association, in which there was a discussion on Chinese opera and comments were made on Mei's performance. The second was when Mei invited artists to dinner at the Metropolitan hotel at the late hour of 11 pm to thank them for supporting his performance. Because Brecht's Moscow friend, Sergei Tretyakov (1892-1937), who was also a translator of Brecht's works in Russian, was one of the organizers of Mei's performance, they attended that event together, but it was not known whether it was daytime, or at night, or both. In short, Brecht not only saw Mei, but also saw his Peking opera performance.

Mei Lanfang was born into a family of Peking opera players on October 22, 1894 in Beijing, and his father passed away when he was four years old. He received training in Peking opera at age eight. At age ten, he made his stage debut. After five years, his mother also died. Although he lost his parents, his uncle still took care of him. When he was young, he already started to become a famous actor in China, especially in the cities of Beijing and Shanghai. Peking Opera actors not only needed to have a beautiful appearance, smooth movements, and soft voices on the stage, but also required a pair of flexible eyes. Mei had been practicing hard since he was a child. In order to exercise his eyes so they could move flexibly, he had raised 150 pairs of pigeons in ten years. One who keeps pigeons has to get up early, look for the pigeons to the distance, and wave one's arms to direct them. This also allowed Mei to practice his voice every morning for more than ten years, giving Mei different eyes, dancing style and a beautiful singing voice different from other Peking Opera actors. At the same time, Mei had a kind personality and was charismatic, and many people were willing to help him in his success.

Among these people was Qi Rushan (1877-1962), a Chinese dramatic scholar who met Mei in 1913 when he was 19 years old, and Qi was 19 years older than Mei. Qi was born into a famous Chinese family and received a good education. He studied German and French from when he was young, and traveled to many countries in Europe, as well as watched many performances in different places. After returning to China, he was a professor of literature at Imperial University

of Peking and Women's Liberal Arts College in Beijing. Mei's acting on the stage attracted Qi, and they became close friends. Qi began to select and modify the traditional scripts of Peking opera for Mei, combining them with the performance methods of traditional European drama. Qi proposed the well-known dramatic theory that the essence of Chinese Peking Opera was singing and dancing. He assisted Mei in improving and reforming Peking Opera performances, costumes, and stage sets. It can be said that he was the first to introduce the concept of Western directing into the Peking Opera. With Qi's help, Mei became the most outstanding actor on the stage of Chinese Peking Opera.

In 1925, American theatre scholar A. E. Zucker published a book *The Chinese Theater*, in which he described Peking Opera theatre in Beijing during 1920s, and interviewed Mei. He wrote:

Your menial (servant) has been enjoying an afternoon's work by grabbing a good seat in the almost empty theatre at one o'clock and warming it until five-thirty, at the sometime drinking tea, chewing water-melon seeds, smoking cigarettes, gossiping blandly with his neighbors, and occasionally watching the actors on the stage. Now comes the hour for the star...

(Zucker 1925, 176)

He also analyzed several famous plays performed by Mei, such as *Chang-O's Flight to the Moon*, *Burying the Blossoms* and *Yang Kuei-fei* etc. "Among Mei Lanfang's plays the latter is best illustrated by the play "MuLan", the name of a girl who goes to war in place of her father because the latter is too old to undertake a heavy campaign." (Zucker 1925, 185) And Zucker continue to explain:

I considered myself very lucky when after some negotiations I secured an interview with him in the typical Chinese fashion through some friends of some friends of his friends... For many years Mei Lanfang was known as the faithful husband of one wife... His voice is high, gentle, and soft; in fact, it sounds very much like that of one of his heroines on the stage. All in all Mei gives the impression of a youthful scholar rather than of an actor... He is very fond of Western music, and hopes ultimately to win over

his audiences to an appreciation of the piano and the violin, which would give him an immensely richer field for his musical repertoire... With great pride he showed me his extensive library, lingering long over a neatly written text of a play copied by his grandfather, who had been musician to the great actor T'an ... Mei Lanfang's greatness lies in the fact that he is able to introduce bold reforms in the theater without cutting himself off from the tradition.

(Zucker 1925, 186-189)

From January 18 to August in 1930, Mei Lanfang visited and performed in the United States. According to Qi RuShan's book *Mei Lanfang travels to America* that was published in 1932 in Beijing, "The U.S. Ambassador to China Paul Reinsch (1869-1923) suggested at a banquet that in order to strengthen the relationship between the two peoples, it was best to invite Mei Lanfang to the United States." (Qi 2005, 2) Qi Rushan encouraged Mei Lanfang to accept the invitation, and Dr. John Stuart (1876-1963), the American president of Peking University at the time, was very supportive of Mei's visit to America and introduced some friends to help him. Mei Lanfang's visit to America was an important event in his artistic career, for which he and Qi had been preparing for seven or eight years. In Mei Lanfang's book *40 Lives Annually on the stage*, he always maintained a humble attitude, not mentioning much the success of the performance in the United States, only noting some personnel changes in his troupe. He wrote, "Before I went to the United States, some actors were reluctant to go, Mr. Xiao (a master of Peking Opera) proposed to let Liu Lianrong (a famous actor of Peking Opera) join me as a member of the United States." (Mei 1987, 650) But in Qi Rushan's book, the first sentence says that, "Mei Lanfang's trip to the United States this time was a great success." (Qi 2005, 1) On January 31, 1930, the Mei Opera Troupe arrived in Seattle. They performed in many places for more than a half year in the United States, including Seattle, Chicago, Washington D.C, New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Honolulu and other places. Mei Lanfang filmed his performance of Peking Opera- *Killing the Tiger General* (also called *Bitter Life and Death*) by Paramount Pictures Corporation in Hollywood, and also communicated with some American artists, such as Douglas Fairbanks (1883-1939), Mary Pickford (1892-1979) and Charlie Chaplin (1889-1977). On these occasions, they all talked cordially with Mei, praised his art, and took precious group photos. At the same time, "University of Southern California (in May 1930) and Pomona College

(on May 28, 1930) both conferred on him honorary doctorates (of literature) in recognition of his highly accomplished theatrical skill and the effort he put into introducing an art of the Orient to the West.” (Wu, Huang and Mei 1981, 52)

Mei Lanfang’s performance in Moscow left a deep impression on Brecht. This would be the first time Brecht saw one of China’s most famous artists performing traditional Peking Opera on the stage. In Asia, India, China and Japan all have their own ancient performing art forms: India has Sanskrit Drama and Kathakali (Dance); China has Chinese Opera; and Japan has Noh and Kabuki... Although there was no direct connection between these arts, as artists exchanged ideas with each other they discovered some indirect similarities including the literariness of the libretto and the melodious singing and music, and the fact that the actors all pay attention to facial makeup, flexible eyes, and different postures of hands and feet, which together can form a beautiful dance. However, actors from the three countries are highly distinguishable in terms of their character modeling and costumes. Moreover, the performance methods, musical instruments, and stage design of the three theatres are also very different. These arts are cultures that have been passed down for thousands of years, and can still be appreciated on the stage today, and they have promoted exchanges and ideas between different cultures. After Brecht saw Peking opera performed by Mei, he wrote two essays about Chinese theatre. One is *Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting* in 1935, the other is *On Chinese Traditional Theatre*.

The distance of cultures can also bring artists rich artistic imagination and creativity. In the history of theatre, Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940) discovered Italian Commedia dell’ arte theatre, Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) discovered the Indonesian Balinese theatre, Bertolt Brecht discovered Chinese opera theatre, and later, Eugenio Barba (1936-) discovered Indian and Japanese theatre. Brecht and Artaud were contemporaries, Artaud was in France, Brecht was in Germany. In 1931, in Artaud’s *On Balinese Theatre*, he wrote: “The first Balinese Theatre show derived from dance, singing, mime and music- but extraordinarily little from psychological theatre such as we understand it in Europe.” (Artaud 1977, 36)

This constantly mirrored interplay, passing from a colour to a gesture, from cries to movements, endlessly leads us along rough paths that are difficult for the mind, pitching us into that uncertainty, that indescribably anxious state most suited to poetry.

(Artaud 1977, 45)

And in December, 1935, in the other essay *Oriental and Western Theatre*, he wrote: “The Balinese Theatre was not a revelation of a verbal but a physical idea of theatre where drama is encompassed within the limits of everything that can happen on stage, independently of a written script.” (Artaud 1977, 50) and “... but as the fiery projection of all the objective results of gestures, words, sounds, music or their combinations.” (Artaud 1977, 54)

It was in 1931 when Artaud wrote his Balinese theatre, while Brecht wrote his Chinese theatre in 1935. With Artaud’s pioneering influence in French theatre circles (he published his collection of essays titled *The Theatre and its Double* in 1938), and Brecht’s reputation for innovation in the Epic Theatre in Germany, he must have known and read Artaud’s essays. According to *Living Theatre*, the ancient traditional arts of Asia are slowly being recognized by theatre people.

In Western drama, for instance, the canon would begin with the plays of Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.E), Sophocles (496-406 B.C.E), and Euripides (480-406 B.C.E) continue through those of Shakespeare (1564-1616) and Moliere (1623-1673), on to works by Ibsen (1828-1906), Strindberg (1849-1912), and Chekhov (1860-1904), and into the twentieth century. One could, no doubt, also develop a canon of Asian and Far Eastern drama featuring widely recognized plays from India, China, Japan and South east Asia.

(Wilson and Goldfarb 2018, 26)

Brecht’s *On Chinese Traditional Theatre*, which is divided into five parts, commented on Chinese Theatre from the perspective of an audience. He first discussed *Style and Nature*, and thought “Artificial things are always unnatural to art.” (Brecht. *Alienation* 2015, 22-29) In Chinese opera, many movements are stylized and look different from natural movements, but these gestures are extracted from life, artistically processed and then put on the stage. Secondly, *Action Passed from Generation to Generation*, he points out that “The habit of the Chinese

theatre stage, the certain movement and postures of the characters on the stage have been preserved through many actors, which at first glance seems very conservative.” (Brecht. *Alienation* 2015, 23) The education of Chinese opera is the traditional relationship between masters and disciples. If the master does not pursue changes in movements, the disciple won't dare to change, because it is difficult for audiences to accept many changes in the actors on the stage. Thirdly, in *A Detail About Chinese Theatre*, he wrote, “The actor portrayed women on stage, but he was not an actress, and reported Dr. Mei Lanfang was a man, a good father, and even said he was a banker... This allowed us to clearly see two figures, one performing and the other being performed.” (Brecht. *Alienation* 2015, 27) In the earliest tradition of Chinese Peking Opera men disguise themselves as women, but now there are many actresses on the stage. In the theatre of Chinese Opera, especially in Dr. Mei's time, audiences entered the theatre not just to watch the play, but most of the time came to see famous actors too. The double performance Brecht refers to is a cultural re-recognition for Chinese. Fourthly, in *The Double Performance* he wrote “What Chinese actors perform is not only a personal standpoint, but also an actor's standpoint.” (Brecht. *Alienation* 2015, 27) In Peking Opera performances, there are many stylized repetitive movements, many of which are symbolic, and from the perspective of semiotics, it represents multiple meaning in performance. On the stage, the actor will pay attention to the audience's reaction while performing, which forms an invisible communication between the actor and the audience. Fifthly, in *The art of viewing*, he wrote that “if the spectator has no knowledge, no ability to distinguish the performance, no understanding of the laws of this art, he will seldom get full enjoyment from this art.” (Brecht. *Alienation* 2015, 29) Brecht's words are very accurate, and audiences in Chinese theatre also have this problem, especially nowadays; if one doesn't appreciate ancient tunes, classical Chinese lyrics, and slow movements, it's hard for one to accept this art. However, the charm of Peking Opera lies in these tunes, poems and dances, a theatre full of abundant artistry and poetry.

In another of Brecht's essays, *Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting*, he puts forward the important conception of Epic Theatre- *Alienation Effects*, through the description of Mei's Peking opera performance, combined with his German theatre experience and Erwin Piscator (1893-1966)'s plays. He questions the psychological action of Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938)'s experiential acting. This is a significant essay, although Brecht himself said that neither the Epic

Theatre nor Alienation Effect were proposed by him for the first time, but instead came from the development of previous theatre experience. Still, Brecht's theory is an innovation and experiment that is crucial to the theatre of the twentieth century.

Brecht wrote, "The following is intended to refer briefly to use of the alienation effect in traditional Chinese acting." (Willett 1957, 91) Then he describes Mei's Peking opera performances in two places in the essay.

In the first place where Mei's performance is mentioned in Brecht's essay, he wrote:

These problems are unknown to the Chinese performer, for he rejects complete conversion. He limits himself from the start to simply quoting the character played. But with what art he does this! He only needs a minimum of illusion. What he has to show is worth seeing even for a man in his right mind. What Western actor of the old sort (apart from one or two comedians) could demonstrate the elements of his art like the Chinese actor Mei Lanfang, without special lighting and wearing a dinner jacket in an ordinary room full of specialists?

(Willett 1957, 94)

Mei's performance as described by Brecht was called unaccompanied solo in Peking opera. In this form of performance, the actor will express emotions in the libretto, accompanied by some stylized actions, but it is different from the performance on the stage. There is no coherence to the characters' emotions, and there is no way to shape the characters in depth. However, in the art of Peking opera, this also represents the excellent skill of an actor. It shows how without the cooperation of music, costumes, stage scenery, and other actors, the beauty of the actor's voice and the accuracy of the movements will be even further amplified. This form creates a distance from the role the actor plays, but it still expresses the role. Therefore, Brecht wrote, "Traditional Chinese acting also knows the alienation effect, and applies it most subtly. It is well known that the Chinese theatre uses a lot of symbols." (Willett 1957, 91) "The artist's object is to appear strange and even surprising to the audience." (Willett 1957, 92) "The Chinese artist's performance often strikes the Western actor as cold." (Willett 1957, 93) "The Chinese performer

gets his A-effect by association with magic.” (Willett 1957, 96) and “He will take up the attitude of somebody wondering, will apply the A-effect.” (Willett 1957, 96)

The second place where Mei’s performance is mentioned in Brecht’s essay, he wrote,

The Chinese performer is in no trance, He can be interrupted at any moment. He won’t have to ‘come round’. After an interruption he will go on with his exposition from that point. We are not disturbing him at the “mystic moment of creation’, when he steps on to the stage before us the process of creation is already over. He does not mind if the setting is changed around him as he plays. Busy hands quite openly pass him what he needs for his performance. When Mei Lanfang was playing a death scene a spectator sitting next me exclaimed with astonishment at one of his gestures.

(Willett 1957, 95)

The play Brecht mentioned must be *Killing the Tiger General*, performed by Mei Lanfang and Liu Lianrong. This is an ancient story, and Mei performed it many times. When Mei visited the United States in 1930, the play was filmed by Hollywood. Brecht’s comments illustrate the stylization of Peking opera from another angle. The actor’s shaping of the role comes from years of practice, which is a traditional method of performance training. Mei had practiced playing this girl for many years and performed it on the stage many times. Mei was familiar with this role and playing her became a habit, to where any interruption still wouldn’t affect the performance. This is the reason why Brecht wrote, “The actors openly choose those positions which will best show them off to the audience, ...” (Willett 1957, 92) “Above all, the Chinese artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him.” (Willett 1957, 91-92) It should be said that breaking the fourth wall is the iconic context of Brecht’s Epic Theatre, which requires theatrical acting skills that use the alienation effect.

Brecht also analyzes the condition of German theatre. He took Piscator’s two theatres as examples: one is *The Good Soldier Schweik* written by the Czech writer Jaroslav Hasek (1883-1923), and the other is *An American Tragedy*, which is about a young girl who leaves home to work in a big city. For *The Good Soldier Schweik* (1928), Brecht wrote, “Schweik’s three-day-and -night march to a front which he oddly enough never gets to was seen from a completely

historic point of view, as no less noteworthy a phenomenon...” (Willett 1957, 92) Brecht explained that the Epic Theatre technique used here is not only gives a sense of history, but also an alienation effect. The performance of the actors surprises the audience, but the audience can understand it. This is the convention between the actors and the audience, and it is a fictitious stage method. For *An American Tragedy* (1936), Brecht wrote, “... in such way that it is understood as a historic dictum? This can only be achieved if the A-effect is brought out.” (Willett 1957, 97) At this point, Brecht asked the actors to have a distance from the characters they played. This alienation effect came from the study of the script and found the unique tones and action when the actor spoke their lines and expressed them with action. He concluded, “The A-effect was achieved in the German epic theatre not only by the actor, but also by the music (choruses, songs) and the setting (placards, film etc.). It was principally designed to historicize the incidents portrayed.” (Willett 1957, 96)

Finally, Brecht understood Stanislavsky’s acting system well, and Stanislavsky’s acting theory emphasized the integration of actors and characters, and the psychological analysis of characters. Brecht offered his view in the essay:

Stanislavsky puts forward a series of means- a complete system- by which what he calls ‘creative mood’ can repeatedly be manufactured afresh at ever performance. For the actor cannot usually manage to feel very long on end that he really is the other person; he soon gets exhausted...

(Willett 1957, 93)

Brecht pointed out that Stanislavsky’s *psychological action* will be very difficult for actors to perform. An actor can perform successfully on stage, but repeating the same psychological actions will make actors lose the persistence of creating a role. In fact, Brecht and Stanislavsky made different demands on actors. Stanislavsky hoped that the actors would be sensual, immersed in the characters of the script, truly listening, seeing and feeling, integrating themselves with the characters, arousing true feelings, making the performance coherent, with inner emotions not interrupted. By contrast, Brecht hoped that the actor would be rational and the actor and the character have a distance where they would not blend together. Instead, the actor

controls the role, and finds external expression that shows the change in the character's inner world, and the actor's acting can be interrupted at any time.

As to the views of Stanislavsky's theory proposed by Brecht, Stanislavsky's students also raised them, including Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940), Michael Chekhov (1891-1955), and others. They all followed and studied with Stanislavsky, and later, they all began to practice their own acting method based on Stanislavsky's system at different times and in different places. Meyerhold was an avant-garde director in Russian theatre, and he created his theatre theory- *Biomechanics and hypothetical* theatre. He developed physical action on the basis of psychological action, and advocated that theatre should be hypothetical and innovative. In 1931, Meyerhold published his book, *On Theatre*, and introduced his theatre theory. In 1938, Stanislavsky's dying wish was "Take care of Meyerhold; he is my sole heir in the theatre - here or anywhere else." (Braun 1986, 267) "At the end of Stanislavsky's artistic career, he had new thoughts on his system. He proposed the *Method of Physical Actions*, and wanted to correct the bias of the system's overemphasis on *psychological action*." (Barba 2018, Foreword) From 1922 to 1931, Meyerhold owned the Meyerhold Theatre, and he directed many avant-garde plays. But in 1940, due to his radical artistic concepts, his theatre was closed and he was arrested, tortured and executed.

Brecht once wrote a short essay, *The Playwright's Play*, introducing himself and his theatre, and this essay can be regarded as his biography. Brecht described himself as both dramatist and playwright in it, and he wrote, "A dramatist, he was studying medicine in southern Germany as a young man when World War I ended. Two writers and a pop comedian were his greatest influences." (Brecht 1990, 166) The two German writers were Georg Buchner (1813-1837), whose masterpiece was *Woyzech* (1837) and Frank Wedekind (1864-1918) who wrote *The Awakening of the Spring* (1891), and the comedian was Karl Valentin (1882-1948). Brecht continued writing,

During these years, works written by Buchner in the 1930s were staged for the first time. The playwright has seen his incomplete play- *Woyzech*. In addition, he has seen the writer Wedekind performed his own works, and his style was formed in Cabaret.

Wedekind used to be a street rap artist, he played the lute and sang ballads. But the playwright learned most from the comedian Valentin in the beer bar.

(Brecht 1990, 166)

From these descriptions of Brecht, we can understand why he chose the epic opera *The Threepenny Opera*, with his friend the composer Kurt Weill (1900-1950) in 1928. The opera was made into a movie in 1932, becoming the best movie of the year. The play was adapted into an 18th century British popular musical, also known as the narrative opera *The Beggar's Opera* (1728). Its book and lyrics were by John Gay (1685-1732) and its music was by Johann Christian.

According to *A History of The American Musical Theatre*,

The Beggar's Opera is the first ballad opera, which became a tremendously popular musical theatre form. It was a satirical response to the incredible success and popularity of Italian opera. Ballad opera contains satirical and racy spoken dialog in English in between short songs, usually just a stanza or two, also in English.

(Hurwitz 2014, 10)

The successful performance of this play contributed to the formation and development of the original British commercial musical, and played an important role in the history of musical theatre. According to *Anything Goes A History of American Musical Theatre*,

Were there American story musicals in these very early years? Historians cite a surprising number of them, such as *The Archers* (1776), on the William Tell saga; or *The Seven Sisters* (1860) ... And that brings us to what is generally thought of as the first American musical, *The Black Crook* (1866) ...

(Mordden 2013, 12)

It also concerns the history of musical theatre, according to *Live Theatre*,

The stories of musical comedies were usually inconsequential. However, beginning with *Show Boat* (1927)- By Oscar Hammerstein II (1895-1960) and Jerome Kern- music, song, and dance were more carefully integrated with plot and character development... During this period, there were also notable comedies by Philip Barry (1896-1949), George S. Kaufman (1889-1961), and Moss hart (1904-1961).

(Wilson and Goldfarb 2018, 460)

The most influential figure in the history of American musicals should be Oscar Hammerstein II (1895-1960). He was born in a musical family in New York. When he was young, he studied at Columbia University Law School in 1912, and met his future music partner Richard Rogers at Columbia. Hammerstein began to write scripts and lyrics, and Rogers composed music. In 1917, he left the university to become a professional musician. He worked in musical theatre for almost 40 years and won eight Tony Awards and two Academy Awards. His most famous musical works were *Show Boat* (1927), *The King and I* (1951) and *The Sound of Music* (1959). It can be said that he has integrated various European and American musical forms, such as opera, operetta, ballad, jazz, and so on, creating a unique American musical theatre.

The development of American theatre took two paths, commercial and noncommercial theatre. “A number of commentators have pointed out that the popular musical is the one original theatrical form America has contributed to world theatre.” (Wilson and Goldfarb 2018, 501) American musicals have moving stories, poetic lyrics, beautiful music, modern dances, contemporary rhythm and fantastic stage sets. Moreover, the actors of American musical theatres can sing, dance and act together. Throughout the performance of the repertoire, the audience will be impressed by the excellent artistic level of the performers. “... Broadway theatre located on the West Side of midtown Manhattan in New York City...” (Wilson and Goldfarb 2018, 501) With the theatres of London’s West End, it forms the world’s most eye-catching arts center. From *Show Boat* (1927), to *Porgy and Bess* (1935), *My Fair Lady* (1956), *Chicago* (1975), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1987), *Les Miserables* (1987), to *The Lion King* (1997), *Hamilton* (2008), these excellent repertoires are not only commercially successful, but also artistically innovative.

The creation of these excellent musicals in the United States is inseparable from the innovation and experimentation of outstanding American artists. American noncommercial theatre is a base for these artists, which includes The Little Theatre, The Group Theatre, Regional Theatre, College and University Theatre, Shakespeare Festivals, Off-Broadway and Off-Off Broadway. Moreover, there are various excellent artists' workshops in the United States, which provide theatre actors with training acting, physical and voice.

Among these workshops, the Michael Chekhov Acting Studio is distinctive. Chekhov focused on actors expressing their inner feelings through actions. When Moscow's most important newspaper called Stanislavsky's best student Michael Chekhov a "sick artist," he chose to leave, first to Europe and then to the United States. Chekhov is an excellent actor in the Moscow Art Theatre, he is the nephew of the famous playwright Anton Chekhov (1860-1904), and his dream was to have his own studio. Chekhov used the *psychological action* of Stanislavsky to perform on stage for many years, which caused him mental strain, and Stanislavsky helped him find doctors for hypnosis and psychotherapy treatment. Chekhov also studied reincarnation and Indian yoga, which helped him consider more effective acting methods. In America, Chekhov could experiment with his *Psychological Gesture*. He thought that "energy is one key that opens the door to acting, and imagination is another." (Petit 2018, 5) He created an imaginative center of inspiration and beauty that had seven Psychological Gestures for actors to express common human moods on stage, including being bossy, rabid, introverted, egotistic, rebellious, weak and alone. In 1953, he wrote the book *To The Actor, On the Technique of Acting*. "Chekhov was ahead of his time, and he certainly knew it, for his spoke of 'the future of the theatre' and 'the future of the actor.'" (Petit 2018, 4) Nowadays, the Michael Chekhov Acting Studio founded by Chekhov is still in existence in New York City.

After Brecht, outstanding American artists continue to explore and experiment with the many possibilities available to modern theatre, and especially so in American musical theatre. The director of Broadway's most popular musical *The Lion King* (1997) is Julie Taymor (1952-), who is an American director and writer for theatre and film. When Taymor was young, she went to study theatre in France in 1968. In Paris, she studied mime with Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999) in the L' Ecole International de Theatre Jacques Lecoq. Lecoq was an explorer of physical theatre

and a teacher who could inspire students in his class. Lecoq published the book *The Moving Body: Teaching Creative Theatre* in 1997, and he wrote, “Students we train acquire and understanding of acting and develop their imaginations. This allows them either to invent their own theatre or to interpret written texts, if they so desire, but in new ways. Interpretation is the extension of an act of creation.” (Lecoq 2001, 18) From 1970 to 1974, Taymor studied mythology and folklore at Oberlin College in Ohio, America. While studying, she participated in many theatre performances and productions. In 1970s, Taymor went to Japan to study Bunraku and went to Indonesia to study mask and dance. Bunraku is a traditional and professional Japanese puppet theatre that developed in the 17th and 18th centuries. There are four classic theatre forms in Japan, besides Bunraku, the other three are Noh, Kabuki and Kyogen. In Indonesia, she created her own troupe- Teatr Loh, a mask and dance company, with actors from many different countries, Western and Eastern. Through these backgrounds, the theatre atmosphere she creates is unique; by combining the ancient art of the East and the modern art of the West, she created the contemporary experimental stage. Therefore, the great success of *The Lion King* on Broadway and around the world is not accidental, it is rooted in the accumulated artistic literacy and uninterrupted spirit of exploration by American artists over many years. Before directing *The Lion King*, Taymor had collaborated with the famous Japanese conductor Seiji Ozawa (1935-) in Igor Stravinsky’s (1882-1971) opera *Oedipus Rex* (1992), and the opera attracted widespread attention around the world. Subsequently, she directed several art films, including a film about the life of a Mexican female painter *Frida* (2002), and a film about the Beatles *Across the Universe* (2007). *The Lion King* was nominated for 11 Tony Awards, and Taymor won the best director. The musical has toured in many countries and regions around the world, creating huge commercial value and gaining cultural and artistic recognition. Together with other excellent Broadway plays, it illustrates to the world the greatness of American musical theatre.

When Brecht met Mei Lanfang in 1935, he thought that the ancient art of Peking Opera in the East was a distant existence. However, as time goes on today, the great artists in the world are using various cultural and art heritages of mankind, combined new theatrical techniques to create the modern theatre. We see this particularly, for example, in American musical theatre, from *Show Boat* (1927) to *The Lion King* (1997).

Chapter Four

Bertolt Brecht's Play – *The Good Woman of Setzuan*



Bertolt Brecht



The Good Woman of Setzuan

THE PLAYWRIGHT'S SONG

I am a playwright, I show
What I have seen, In the man markets
I have seen how men are traded, That
I show, I, the playwright.

.....

— *Bertolt Brecht, Translated by John Willett (Brecht 2003, 85-91)*

The Good Woman of Setzuan - Bertolt Brecht finished writing this play in 1941 in Los Angeles, California in the United States. The play is Brecht's famous drawer work: during Brecht's exile period, he lost the possibility of staging his works, and he could only write for the drawer. But because there was no pressure to perform it, he took a long time to write it. He could write whatever he wanted, while creating and practicing his theatre aesthetics. Brecht put the story into the historical setting- Setzuan, scattered the narrative plot, set a self-introduction of character at the prologue of the script, created a main role who had dual characters, added music and songs in several scenes, and wrote the language to take many forms. The characteristics of the script provided creative space for his Epic Theatre's practice.

The Good Woman of Setzuan was conceived in Germany in 1930, began to be written in Denmark during Brecht's exile period, and finally finished in the United States. The story is set in the time between World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945) and includes a prologue, an epilogue, ten scenes, and seven main songs. The English version was translated by American writer Eric Bentley, and titled *Parables for the Theatre: Two Plays by Bertolt Brecht*, published in 1947. The book included two plays, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1938-1940) and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944-1945), and they were written by Brecht and his collaborators, German writer and actress Margarete Steffin (1908- 1941), and Danish writer, actress and photographer Ruth Berlau (1906- 1974). The play was first performed in German in Switzerland in 1943, and its music and songs were composed by Swiss composer Huldreich Georg Fruh. From 1947 to 1948, German musician Paul Dessau composed the music and songs for this play. As was true with other works of Brecht including, "*Man Equals Man*, *Mahagonny*, and *The Threepenny Opera*- as well as many subsequent works, including *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1943)- were conceived as musical plays." (Gainor, Garner JR and Puchner 2018, 917)

In an interview with Brecht titled *Interview with an Exile*, he said, "I don't know of any modern style of playwrights. I've heard of one or two playwrights but not of any that count. The major talents aren't concerned to write for the theatre. The whole thing is stationary; we're stuck where we are." (Willett 1957, 65) According to Jan Knopf's biography of Brecht, there were many experimental factors in Brecht's creation of *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, at the same time, he also hoped to maintain his previous creativity during his exile period.

Working in Berlin in 1930, Brecht began to prepare for this play with the title *The product Love*. He wrote in his notes, it can be used to "develop narrative technique" and "eventually return to a certain level", While in exile, his reason for writing the play was that "writing for the drawer does not require permission", and he wanted to use this play as an opportunity to continue to be successful as same as his creation in the Weimar Republic period. Because there was no possibility of performance, it can be bold and innovative... The allegorical form of *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, which was not commonly understood, may provide the possibility of experiments.

(Knopf 2018, 392-393)

The original title of the play, *The Product Love*, had two meanings: one was to describe love like a commodity, and the other meant *true love*, and the two meanings have the same pronunciation in German. However, in the end, Brecht chose the title *The Good Woman of Setzuan*.

Brecht set the play in Setzuan province of China, not only because of his Epic Theatre technique to historicize, but also because of Brecht's interest in Chinese poetry and drama. Brecht early on "came into contact with the most popular Chinese poetry collection *The Chinese Flute* (1907), which was translated into German by Hans Bethge (1876-1946) at that time, and read Li Taibai (701-762)'s poems in *The Chinese poetry* (1920), which was translated by Swiss Otto Hauser (1874-1932) ... In 1938, when Brecht was in his exile period, he translated seven ancient Chinese poems... and published in the 8th issue of the German exile magazine- *Speech*; these seven poems were based on the English author Arthur Waley (1889-1966)'s *A hundred and Seventy Chinese poems* (1918), and Brecht translated them into German." (Brecht. *Alienation* 2015, 1-2) In the mid-1920s while visiting a friend, Brecht found and read the German translation of the ancient Chinese philosopher *Lao Zi* (571-470 BC). Later, he studied another ancient Chinese philosopher *Mo Zi* (468-376 BC) and then wrote some prose, "Brecht wrote the Me-ti texts from 1934 to 1955, mostly between 1934 and 1937. Occasionalist in character, they deal with recurring topics, though there are not systematically structures." (Brecht 2016, 10) These were integrated into a book, published in Germany in 1988, and in the United States in 2016.

Brecht read Chinese poetry, as well as read drama scripts. In 1929, the first Asian-American movie star Anna May Wong (1905-1961) who once studied Peking Opera performance from Mei Lanfang in Beijing, left Hollywood to develop her acting career in Europe. With English actor Lawrence Olivier (1907-1989), she performed *The Chalk Circle* (1929) in the theatre, which was adapted by English author James Laver (1899-1975), from the original, written by a Chinese author and *zaju* dramatist Li Qianfu (in the Yuan Dynasty). Wong and Olivier's *The Chalk Circle* achieved success in the British theatre. In Germany in 1925, four years before Wong and Olivier's performance, Brecht's friend, the German writer Alfred Henschke (1890-1928) had adapted this play, also called *The Chalk Circle* (1925). The scenery designer was Brecht's friend Caspar Neher (1897-1962). The play was staged first in Meissen and later in Berlin with great success. At this time Brecht was exploring Epic Theatre in Germany, but he later adapted the

same play- *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in 1944. “According to the recollection of Brecht’s friend, before he created *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, for a period of time, accompanied by a Chinese friend, he went to a Cantonese theatre in Chinatown of New York City to watch Chinese opera almost every night.” (Brecht. *Alienation* 2015, 20) Brecht’s *The Good Woman of Setzuan* also was inspired by *zaju*, the ancient Chinese playwright Guan Hanqing (1245-1322)’s play *Saving the Dusty-windy*. Guan Hanqing was a famous Chinese playwright, poet and actor in the Yuan Dynasty in China, and he wrote more than sixty works in his life, eighteen of which were extant. His main works included *Snow in Midsummer*, *Looking-river Pavilion* and *Saving the Dusty-windy*. “Guan Hanqing... was a prolific writer during a pivotal historical era whose writing have been accorded unrivaled cultural status. While the critical reputations of his contemporaries have waxed and waned over centuries, Guan’s literary and theatrical standing remains unchallenged even today.” (Gainor, Garner JR and Puchner 2018, 244)

Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) in China was the period under the rule of the Mongols, and it was also the most prosperous period for drama, and Yuan *zaju* (Northern variety drama) was the most important script form in this era. Its structure mainly consisted of four sequences (acts) and one wedge (prologue) with singing, dancing and dialogue. Such a script structure included an introduction, elucidation of the theme, transition to another viewpoint and summing up, the four steps in the composition of a Yuan *zaju*. And through the absorption of Mongolian music, the content and form of music were quite rich and varied. According to Chinese opera expert Yan Changke’s book- *Chinese Opera Culture*,

Yuan *zaju* can add one or two scenes of singing one or two tunes based on the plot, which was called wedge (prologue). The songs of the whole play were sung by the main actor or by the main actress, and the other actors only use narration and funny acting... Yuan *zaju* matured amongst the people and reached a high level as a singing art. (Yan 1993, 40) ...People have always regarded Yuan Qu (poetries in *zaju*) as the symbol of a generation of literature... The achievement of Yuan *zaju* is the result of harmonious cooperation between playwrights and actors.

(Yan 1993, 42)

The first person to introduce Yuan *zaju* to the world was the Italian Venetian merchant and explorer Marco Polo (1254-1324). In his book *The Travels of Marco Polo*, The Venetian (1298-1299) Book two- Of Kublai-Kaan, Cathay, Manji and Thebet, he recorded:

This ceremony being concluded, ... and the grand khan has cast his eyes upon them, the tables are prepared for the feast, ... Upon the removal of the victuals, the musicians and theatrical performers exhibit for the amusement of the court, ...

(Polo 1948, 140)

His travel notes were translated into many languages in Europe, and they were the original material for Europeans to get to know Asia in the Medieval period. Simultaneously, these texts also retain Marco Polo's visual impression of Yuan *zaju*. These texts should provide Brecht with the earliest reference to Yuan *zaju*. When Brecht wrote *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, his writing was somewhat influenced by *zaju*.

In the process of writing *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, Brecht's collaborators were Margarete Steffin (1908-1941) and Ruth Berlau (1906-1974). Steffin was a writer and actress in the German theatre, and she met Brecht through taking a diction class from his wife Weigel in October 1931. At that time Brecht was already conceiving *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. Steffin's first impression of Brecht was,

While we were rehearsing, a man in a battered suit came in, and it was noticeable that his hair was cut so short... He did not take his hat off... I thought, this is Brecht? Well, he didn't look like he was doing well, and probably spent all the money he made on *The Threepenny Opera*."

(Knopf 2018, 279)

Later, Brecht asked her to act in the play *The Mother* (1931). Finally, Steffin became Brecht's secretary and Russian translator. She went into exile with Brecht's family. In Denmark, Brecht wrote *The Good Woman of Setzuan* with her, and they also collaborated on *Threepenny Novel*. But on June 4, 1941, Steffin died of tuberculosis in Moscow, on her way to emigrate the United

States. Berlau and Steffin were roommates for about three months in Denmark from the end of 1933. Berlau was a Danish writer, actress and photographer, and soon she became Brecht's secretary and Danish translator. She followed Brecht's family into exile and arrived the United States. Finally, Brecht and Berlau completed *The Good Woman of Setzuan* in 1941, and cooperated to finish *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in 1944 in America.

Paul Dessau (1894- 1979) was a composer of *The Good Woman of Setzuan*; he first met with Brecht in 1943 in America, when during that same year, he married Elisabeth Hauptmann (1897-1973) who was Brecht's former secretary and English translator. Hauptmann's father was a German doctor and her mother was an American. While in Berlin in 1924, "Hauptmann met Brecht at a party, and Brecht immediately recognized her literary talent and sought cooperation." (Knopf 2018, 162) The most successful play they collaborated on was *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), translated by Hauptmann, adapted by Brecht, and composed by Kurt Weill (1900-1950) who was a German-American composer. After the Nazi era, Weill emigrated to the United States, and *The Threepenny Opera* premiered on Broadway on April 13, 1933, all together having thirteen performances. Weill became a relatively successful German composer on Broadway. In 1942, he reunited with Brecht in Hollywood, and at one point wanted to compose *The Good Woman of Setzuan* and perform it on Broadway. But in the end, Dessau composed the music for *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. Dessau was born in a musical family in Hamburg in Germany. From 1909, he studied violin and conducting. In 1933 he first went to France, and then moved to the United States in 1939, living in New York at first, and then in California in 1943. Dessau and Hauptmann returned to Europe and stayed in East Berlin during 1948. He became a long-term musical collaborator of Brecht's plays, including *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1946-1949), *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1953-1954) and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1947-1948).

The Good Woman of Setzuan was translated into English in 1947 by Eric Bentley (1916- 2020), who was a British-born American, theater critic and translator. Bentley met Brecht at the University of California, Los Angeles in 1942 when he was young. In 1938, Bentley graduated from Oxford University in England, and then studied at Yale University in America, where he received his PhD in 1941. After Bentley met Brecht, he first assisted him editing the English issues for Grove Press, mostly Brecht's poetries. Later he translated and wrote the introduction

for some of Brecht's plays and poems. Bentley was recognized as a great Bertolt Brecht expert in the United States.

According to Jan Knopf's Bertolt Brecht biography, "In terms of artistic achievements, 1948 was a fruitful year for Brecht, his three plays were performed on American versions including *Life of Galileo* (1938), *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* (1935) and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944). In addition, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1941) was performed three times." (Knopf 2018, 534) When Brecht wrote this play, it was not for performance, but mainly for experimentation. "And if he gave up the stage, he could let his imagination of a future theatre fly free with little consideration for his real situation. The basic idea was to use natural theatre techniques to shape the characters who can go out of the drama and appear in front of the audience." (Knopf 2018, 393)

The Good Woman of Setzuan told a simple but philosophical story about the good and evil of human nature, and Brecht's experience of Nazi Germany influenced his discussion of this theme. Three gods went down from heaven to look for a good person in the world. They found Shen Te and gave her a sum of money so that she could help the poor. Shen Te opened a tobacco shop, and the poor flocked to it, almost causing her to lose everything she owned. She found it difficult to be a good person. So she made up an imaginary cousin Shui Ta, and she disguised herself as him- a villain who was evil. This character was very likely based on Brecht's own experience with Nazis. In the end, the three gods judged the case in the courtroom, whether Shen Te was a good person or a bad person. Brecht left this final question to the audience to find the answer.

Brecht was a playwright as well as a director of theatre. When he wrote this play, he left room for the second creation of the stage- for his directing. *The Good Woman of Setzuan* was a classic Epic Theatre script. In the process of writing, Brecht realized the exploration of the Epic Theatre through the text. As the British drama theorist William Archer (1856-1924) wrote in the first sentence to *Play Making, A Manual of Craftsmanship*, "There are no rules for writing a play." (Archer 1912, 3) Archer was an important figure who introduced and translated Ibsen's plays to the British stage. In his book, he discussed in detail how to write a good play. The book was divided into five chapters, prologue, the beginning, the middle, the end and epilogue. Once Brecht wrote an essay *Different Structure of Plays*, in which he considered, "To achieve a great

plot, it is necessary to study the play structure methods of classic writers, especially Shakespeare's play structure methods." (Brecht 1990, 150) Regarding Epic Theatre, "Brecht himself used the term for the first time in print in May 16 (1927) issue of *New Way* magazine, in which he noted 'the creation of great epic theatre and documentary theatre fit for our time.'" (Brecht. Epic 2015, 75) In another of Brecht's essay *Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction*, he wrote, "Stylistically speaking, there is nothing all that new about the epic theatre. Its expository character and its emphasis on virtuosity bring it close to the old Asiatic theatre." (Willett 1957, 75) Brecht's script- *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, developed the unique techniques of Epic theatre while maintaining the fundamental principles of playwriting. Brecht's special writing techniques in the scripts include the following six points.

Firstly, put the story into the historical setting- Setzuan. In the *Prologue*, Brecht wrote that the prompt is "At the gates of the half-Westernized city of Setzuan." (Brecht 1947, 9) The translator Eric Bentley made note in *Setzuan*, "Thus the first MS of the play. Brecht later learned that Setzuan is not a city but a province, and changed the script accordingly. But, as often, the solecism seems more appropriate than the fact." (Brecht 1947, 9) A note on Setzuan in another book- *The Norton Anthology of Drama*, "The 'city of Setzuan' is Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan (Setzuan), a province in Western China. However, the Chinese setting of this play is drawn largely from Brecht's imagination, not from historical or geographical fact. (Gainor, Garner JR and Puchner 2018, 922) Setzuan is a province in China, and Chengdu is its capital, which is a rich place with many ancient temples and legends of immortals. Brecht set the drama story in Setzuan, which is an Epic Theatre's technique that it can create historicized strangeness. In *On Experimental Theatre* by Brecht, he pointed out:

Alienation effect is historicization, that is, to represent these events and character as historical and temporary. Likewise, this approach can be applied to contemporary, whose positions can also appear to be time-related, historical and temporary.

(Brecht 1990, 63)

Secondly, scattered the narrative plot, also called fragmented plot. *The Good Woman of Setzuan* is somewhat related to Yuan *zaju*. "Brecht drew on the story framework of Guan Hanqing's

Saving the Dusty-windy, and created *The Good Woman of Setzuan*... He put aside dramatic conflicts and dramatic climaxes... Absorbed Yuan *zaju* has twists and turn, ups and downs...” (Brecht. *Alienation* 2015, 14-17) *Saving the Dusty-windy* is Guan’s comedy *zaju*, and it depicted two young women, brave Zhao Paner and naive Song Yinzhang, their friendship and their different attitudes to marriage. In conservative Chinese society, Guan showed his concern about the fate of women through his writing. And Brecht also wrote, “Every part of the layout... must have its own unique structure, forming a small play in the whole play.” (Brecht 1990, 35) This can also be understood as the dramatic stream of consciousness, movie montage, and story fragmentation used by Epic Theatre to describe the plot and create a narrative atmosphere. In the script, Brecht wrote at the beginning and end that three gods descended from the sky to the land, and then returned to heaven. In the last scene, the god said, “Our cloud has landed now in yonder field, From which it will transport us back to heaven, Farewell, Shen Te...” (Gainor, Garner JR and Puchner 2018, 973) Brecht has such imaginative plots in many places in the script, which seem to be scattered, but leave room for stage creation for Epic Theatre, where documents, slides, pictures, movie clips and other auxiliary means can be added.

Thirdly, set a self-introduction of character at the prologue of the script. “The self-introduction in the structure of Yuan *zaju* is also a technique often used in the creation of Brecht’s Epic Theatre. This technique is usually not used in traditional theatre, it is considered unreal.” (Brecht. *Alienation* 2015, 18) In *Prologue*, Brecht wrote,

Evening Wong the water seller introduces himself to the audience.

Wong said: “I sell water here in the city of Setzuan. It isn’t easy. When water is scarce, I have long distance to go in search of it, and when it is plentiful, I have no income. But in our part of the world there is nothing unusual about poverty. Many people think only the gods can save the situation.”

(Brecht 1947, 9)

Brecht pointed out in his essay *The Small Tools of Theatre* that “some people, hundreds of years ago, coincidentally in different countries, carried out some kind of experiment, which they hope to reveal the secrets of nature.” (Brecht 1990, 10) Brecht skillfully borrowed from the stage

performance techniques of Chinese opera, which after an actor takes the stage, one will tell the audience the character's name, family affairs and basic situation in a spoken way. Brecht used this form in the beginning of script, which is very novel and unique in the theatre.

Fourthly, created a main role who had dual characters. In the play, the main role of Shen Te was not the focus, but her situation was the focus and it allowed her to stand on the stage with dual characters. Shen Te was fictional by Brecht, and Shen Te also was fictional her cousin Shui Ta on the stage. This double fiction strengthened the drama of the script. Brecht depicted Shen Te as a good woman, and Shui Ta as an evil man, but they were the same person; Shui Ta was disguised by Shen Te. It is like an actor using a mask on the stage, created a double mirror effect, real and illusive. Brecht once wrote in his essay *The Small Tools of Theatre*, "Classical and medieval theatre made the alienation effect for its characters with masks of men and beasts, and Asian theatre still employs the alienation effect on music and mime today." (Brecht 1990, 22) The mask can expand the space for actor's performances and audience's imagination. It also makes the actors keep a distance from the characters, and the audience is very clear that they are watching a play. And these are exactly the techniques and desired effects that Epic theatre used. At the same time, Brecht also discussed human nature through the shaping of characters, and told the audience whether one is a good person or bad person depends on one's personal choice. Shen Te chooses to be a good person and she helps everyone who she meets but finally she realizes that she is making everyone happy except herself; she by contrast encounters many troubles and loses almost everything: love, property and dignity. Good and evil exist in human nature at the same time. When Shen Te changed into Shui Ta, it was to represent the evil side of human nature. Shui Ta's character is cold, vulgar and avaricious, and he enjoys his power and comfortable life. He lacks sympathy and expresses a dark force. At the end of the script, Brecht wrote, "It is for you to find a way, my friends, To help good men arrive at happy ends. You write the happy ending to the play! There must, there must, there's got to be a way!" (Gainor, Garner JR and Puchner 2018, 974) It can be seen from this that Brecht is calling for the good side of human nature to come out in the world.

Fifthly, added music and songs in several scenes. *The Good Woman of Setzuan* was considered to be a musical, and Brecht finished this play in the United States. Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* was performed on Broadway in April 1933, and the play's composer was Kurt Weill

(1900-1950). In addition, *The Mother* was performed in New York in November 1935, and the play's composer was Hanns Eisler (1901-1956). It should be said that Brecht was familiar with American musical theatre. During the Nazi period, Brecht's Germany composer friends, Kurt Weill, Hanns Eisler and Paul Dessau (1894- 1979), all went into exile one after another in the United States. Weill was most successful, working on Broadway, and creating several musicals. The thriving American musical theatre would definitely affect the writing of Brecht's Epic musical theatre. Brecht wrote in *On Music*, "With the introduction of music in theatre, the conventions of the theatre are broken." (Brecht 1990, 22) In *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, Brecht wrote seven main songs in the script, as well as some short poems, which can be composed or spoken, such as *Song of the smoke* in scene 1, *The Song of the water seller in the rain* in scene 3, and *Song of the Eighth Elephant* in scene 8. In Epic Theatre, added music into the play, singing and music, all can act as interruptions, allowing the audience to realize that a performance is taking place. It can be said, "Introducing singing elements, Brecht's Epic Theatre creation is always inseparable from the cooperation of musicians, which is a characteristic that is different from many playwrights." (Brecht. Alienation 2015, 17) Like Weill and Dessau, they are not only Brecht's collaborators in theatre and music, but also his long-term friends.

Sixthly, wrote the language to take many forms. In Brecht's Epic Theatre, beyond the lines from the characters daily life, the language also extends the original words, and from the word to the action, it carries the various expressions of the theatre in the form of various symbols. In Brecht's article *Summary of a Letter to an Actor*, he wrote, "The language of the stage must keep it developing, colorful, and lively. The people speak in dialects. They formed their inner expressions in their dialect." (Brecht. Alienation 2015, 75) In Brecht's *A Brief Introduction To The New Techniques of Performing Arts That Produce Alienation Effect*, he wrote, "Everything that is emotional must be expressed, that is to say, turn into action... The particular grace, power, and attractive of movement can have an alienation effect." (Brecht. Alienation 2015, 35) These two intentions of Brecht express his subjective wishes when writing the script. In *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, he seldom wrote lengthy lines, but he used telegraph-like ideographic language, daily life language and slang. This is to reserve space for the actions of the actors on the stage, and create three-dimensional language written by Brecht. Moreover, When Brecht directed in the theatre, he would turn the words in his script into slides, placards, slogan,

pictures, or subtitles, and so on. All these techniques lent themselves to minimalism, semiotics and alienation on the stage, which were the main features of Epic theatre. In the play, when Shen Te got into trouble at the tobacco shop, Brecht wrote, “WIFE (whispering to SHEN TE.) That relative: make it a cousin.” (Brecht 1947, 18) The German expert on Brecht, Jan Knopf, appreciates this sentence and this detail. He deems that “this incident clearly took place in the form of an ‘prompter’, that is, by whispering lines, which is traditionally done off-stage when the awkward silence happened on the stage, which was carried out quietly in the box. Brecht moved this technique to the stage and used it as part of the play to show how Shen Te chose this way out with great hesitation.” (Knopf 2018, 534)

At the end of *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, Brecht wrote an open ending, and used the form of *The Chalk Circle’s* courtroom to settle the case that let the gods understand Shen Te’s difficulties. He wrote:

SHEN TE: There’ll be a child. And he’ll have to be fed. I can’t stay here. Where shall I go?

FIRST GOD: Continue to be good, good woman of Setzuan!

SHEN TE: I need my bad cousin!

FIRST GOD: But not very often!

SHEN TE: Once a week at least!

FIRST GOD: Once a month will be quite enough!

(Brecht 1947, 95)

In 1933, Brecht wrote in *Working Diary*, “In a few days, a woman becomes a man in the same way that a man has forged himself to become a man for thousands of years, through the process of production.” (Knopf 2018, 393) Brecht gave the role the name Shen Te, to sound like a Chinese name and that in Chinese characters would be written thus: 沈黛 . But she may not actually be any one nationality at all, and people can find examples like her on stages around the

world. White, black, red, yellow and brown female performers and male performers have all performed as her, while speaking different languages to express her thoughts and words, and attracting audiences to judge her behavior. For a long time, the Epic Theatre has wanted to break the fourth wall, Brecht explained, “The place where the audience sit is the fourth wall... We don’t perform in the theatre for ordinary people who buy tickets, but for art.” (Brecht 1990, 181-182)

Brecht and his own dramas’ characters were included in the play written and directed on the stage by Italian-Norwegian dramatist Eugenio Barba (October 29,1936) in March 1980. Barba wrote the dramaturgy for and directed the experimental play *Brecht’s Ashes* (1980) and *Brecht Ashes 2* (1984).

In the production the deliberate conflation of biographical details with the dramatic reality of Brecht’s plays was achieved entirely through the use of images composed in this way. Brecht decides to flee Berlin, for instance, after seeing the Cook from *Mother Courage* burn books in her frying pan. It is Arturo Ui who murders Walter Benjamin and then dances screaming through a set littered with coffee table to an up-beat jazz rhythm hammered out on an organ.”

(Mitter and Shevtsova 2005, 132)

Over a four-year period, *Brecht’s Ashes* were staged 166 performances in various countries, including Denmark, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Colombia, Mexico and the United States.

Barba was born in Italy, when he was young, he emigrated to Norway in 1954, and he studied French and Norwegian literature and religious history at Oslo University. Later, he moved to Warsaw, Poland in 1961, and he attended the state Theatre School to study theatre directing, but after one year, he gave up studying. Then he participated in Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999)’s Poor Theatre for about three years which had an important impact on his artistic concept and theatre aesthetics. After that, he traveled to India and he first encountered the Indian dance- Kathakali, leaving a deep impression on him. On October 1, 1964, he returned to Oslo and founded the Odin Teatret (Theatre), and then based it in Holstebro, Denmark. In 1979, the International

School of Theatre Anthropology was created by Barba, located at the same place; it is an international school with students from all over the world. Barba worked with students in the theatre, and developed a new field of theatre study- the Theatre Anthropology. During this time, Barba wrote a series of books on theatre theory and theatre performance, including *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer* (1991), *The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theatre Anthropology* (1993), and *On Directing and Dramaturgy: Burning the House* (2009), as well as directed nearly eighty productions. In Jane Turner's *Eugenio Barba*, she wrote:

Even in their early stages, Barba referred to the company as a 'little society', what he now refers to as their 'small tradition' or 'Third Theatre'. By 'Third Theatre' he means that their theatre is neither what might be called avant-garde or experimental, nor traditional, that is, part of a cultural institution.

(Turner 2004, 16)

Barba allowed his students to travel around the world to learn different performance styles of theatre in the form of theatre exchanges. At the same time, he would also invite theatre masters from different countries to give lectures at the school. He proposed a conception, Pre-expressivity. He believed that the performers in the world are connected in terms of Elan, Energy, Dilation, and Presence. The performers, whether from east or west and in any theatre, involve all four of these aspects when performing. In the book *The Routledge Companion to Studio Performance Practice*, it explained Barba's method that "The first key ideas [...] were the words 'energy' and 'action'". (Chamberlain and Sweeney 2022, 438)

Barba and the Odin Teatret seemed to be always moving to a new place, and the members of the theatre were mostly foreigners (for Denmark), therefore Barba said the theatre resembled a kind of immigration... *Brecht's Ashes* was a reaction to the immigration. This play is Barba's mature masterpiece, which weaved Brecht's life into the characters in his plays. It experimented by combining the techniques of writing modern poetry and documents with the methods of film making. Different meanings and different scenes changed quickly, resulting in strong visual effects and emotional impact.

(Cao 2002, 84-85)

When *Brecht's Ashes* by Barba was performed at La Mama Theatre in New York, America in May 1984, *The New York Times'* theatre critic Mel Gussow wrote,

... (The play) is a critical examination of the world of Brecht through the work of Brecht... The story moves from Berlin in the 1930's to America in the 40's... After a visceral 90 minutes, we are left with a portrait of Brecht as an artist harassed but unyielding. More than anything one is aware of the indomitability of his creativity, as expressed by the following exchange: 'In a time of darkness, will one still sing? Yes, one will sing of the time of darkness.

(Gussow 1984, Online)

Although on Odin Teatret's web page it was written, "(in 1980), After Brecht's heirs withdrew their permission to use the texts, Barba set to work to compose a new montage which, instead of using Brecht's verses..." (Odin Teatret 1980, Online) But in Barba's *The Paper Canoe* (1993), he still wrote:

Those few we call rebels, heretics or reformers of the theatre (Stanislavski and Meyerhold, Craig, Copeau, Artaud, Brecht and Grotowski) are the creators of a theatre of transition. Their productions have shattered the ways of seeing and doing theatre and have obliged us to reflect on the pass and present with an entirely different awareness.

(Barba 1995, 5)

The influence of Brecht's plays in China can be divided into three periods. First, in 1929, when Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* (1928) was successful in Germany, Chinese dramatist Zhao Jingshen (1902-1985) wrote an article titled *Recent German Theatre Troupe* for the *New North* magazine in China, introducing Brecht and his plays. Zhao was a professor of literature at Fudan University in Shanghai at the time, and had a good relationship with other Chinese dramatists. This may be the first time that Brecht's name appeared in the Chinese media. Second, in 1935, Brecht met the Chinese Peking Opera artist Mei Lanfang in Moscow. Third, in 1936, Chinese dramatist Huang Zuolin (1906-1994) studied Shakespeare for his master's degree at the University of Cambridge in England and read Brecht's essay *Alienation Effects in Chinese*

Acting (1935). He began to introduce Brecht and his theatre to Chinese people. In October 1959, Huang directed *Mother Courage and her Children* in Chinese stage, and he was also the first one to direct Brecht's play in China. After that, he wrote many articles about Brecht and his theatre concept. Subsequently, Brecht became a famous German dramatist in China, and his plays, poems and theatre essays were translated into Chinese, and have also been performed in Chinese theatre many times. Among them, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* was not only in the form of modern spoken Chinese drama, but also adapted into Chinese Opera, including Sichuan Opera and Yue Opera, and has been continually performed on stage, being well received by the local audience.

In China, There are many kinds of local operas but there are five main genres, including Peking Opera, Yue Opera, Huangmei Opera, Ping Opera and Henan Opera, and there are five types of roles in every local opera- sheng (male role), dan (female role), jing (painted face), mo (support male role) and Chou (clown). "Because of the characteristics of Chinese opera 'telling stories with songs and dances', the structure of the script is inseparable from the structure of the music." (Yan 2008, 273) Sichuan opera originated from Sichuan province, and affected Guizhou and Yunnan provinces. It is sung in Sichuan dialect with high-pitched tunes, rich voice changes and dance. The most distinctive performance method is Sichuan opera traditional face changing. In 2001, a famous Sichuan playwright Wei Minglun (1941-), adapted Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. In the play, Shen Te used the traditional face changing technique of Sichuan opera. Wei's adaptation focuses on the discussion of human nature. He believes that there is no eternal good person, and there is no static bad person. He made Shen Te appear with two faces, that of an angel and a devil, as a way to explore how human nature is changeable and has multifaceted desires. In 2018, Wei adapted *The Good Woman of Setzuan* for the second time, titled *The Good Woman, The Bad Woman*, and rewrote the libretto to speed up the rhythm of the play. But the theme did not change. It still explored how women survive in this world, what kind of woman is good, and what kind of woman is bad – showing how sometimes kindness and evil are in one's mind at the same time. Wei not only made the play poetic, but also philosophically reflective.

In 2013, a famous Chinese Yue opera actress Mao Weitao (1962-) performed an adapted version of Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, titled *Good Soul Of South Yangtze*, which was a new

concept Yue Opera, and the director was her husband Guo Xiaonan. Yue Opera originated from Zhejiang in the south of China and flourished in Shanghai. It is the second genre of Chinese opera besides Peking Opera and is more popular in the south of China. The difference between Yue Opera and Sichuan Opera is mainly the singing. Yue Opera is mellow and graceful, and the costumes and dances are also very particular and picturesque. In the early years, Yue Opera was all male performers, but later it changed to all female performers. Now both male and female actors are allowed. Mao learned to sing male roles in Yue Opera from an early age, and she has the title of “the first male role in Yue opera” in China. This time, she played Shen Te in the play, which was her first attempt to play a female role on the stage. Therefore, the focus of this play is on Shen Te and Sui Ta’s female and male role-changing performance techniques, and the music, costumes, set design, lighting, and transitions all show new reforms in the traditional theatre concept and performance of Yue Opera.

Brecht’s *The Good Woman of Setzuan* was adapted into Sichuan Opera in Setzuan and Yue Opera in Yangtze. Chinese audiences deeply appreciate Brecht’s exploration of human nature in this play, especially through the character Shen Dai. China is a relatively traditional society, and there has always been a lack of independent female voices. Brecht’s *The Good Woman of Setzuan* represents Western theatre in China. Women’s independent voices are amplified on the stage, and women have the same power as men. This has had a feminist influence on Chinese theatrical critics and audiences.

At the same time, the development of the ancient Chinese opera art has also been debated, and is a long-term and complex issue, with three main opinions on it in China. First, As early as 1919, famous Chinese intellectuals studying abroad, represented by Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), Hu Shi (1891-1962) and Qian Xuantong (1887-1939), published articles in the magazine *New Youth*, which led to the debate between new drama (Western Theatre) and old drama (Chinese Opera). Qian wrote, “If there are real dramas in China, they will naturally be those of the Western theatre, not those of the ‘facial design’ theatre.”(Yu 1993, 314) The ‘facial design’ described Peking Opera. Second, the Chinese opera expert Yan Changke, who is a co-chief writer of *General History of Chinese Operas* and the deputy editor-in-chief of *Encyclopedia of China-Chinese Opera Volume*, wrote in his book *Thesis on Chinese Opera Literature*,

Tradition is a conservative force, the inertia of history... When dealing with traditional opera, we still need to adopt an analytical attitude... Tradition has its obsolete and backward aspects, as well as its advantages that cannot be ignored and obliterated... The innovation of art is inseparable from the foundation of tradition, and tradition is not static. The tradition of Chinese opera art is the result of innovations from generation to generation. The innovations of today's people will also be condensed into future traditions after being eliminated and selected by time.

(Yan 2008, 310-313)

The last point of view is that Chinese opera should be like Japanese Noh, that can be preserved as a kind of museum art, which will not disappear and does not need to be developed. And on the future of Chinese opera, discussions still continue in China, these three viewpoints represent Chinese people's different attitudes towards Chinese opera.

The western theatrical master Peter Brook wrote, "The most influential of modern writers, Brecht, wrote full and rich texts, but the real conviction of his plays is inseparable from the imagery of his own productions." (Brook 1968, 49) *The Good Woman of Setzuan* became Brecht's masterpiece as a playwright, and there are several important production versions in its production history. The earliest production was in 1943, performed in Zurich, Switzerland, in German language, with music and songs composed by Swiss composer Huldreich Georg Fruh. The second time when Brecht cooperated with the German composer Paul Dessau from 1947-1948, Dessau wrote another version of the music, which was performed three times in the United States in 1948. And the first English version of *The Good Woman of Setzuan* was performed in British in 1953. After Brecht passed away in August 1956, the Berliner Ensemble produced this play again in 1957, which was also a classic version in the history of the production of *The Good Woman of Setzuan*.

In recent years, in both England and America, there were productions of Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* in 2008 and in 2016, but they used different theatre techniques and expressed the themes from different angles. In May 2008, the British director Richard Jones and writer

David Harrower, who earlier performed Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936)'s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* together in 2000, led the team, performed the play in the same place- The Young Vic Theatre in London. This time, they titled the play *The Good Soul of Szechuan*, and Jane Horrocks acted as Shen Te. "... has reunited to present a fresh take on Brecht's parable, using not the familiar text but what is known as the Santa Monica version, completed in 1943. This 2¾ hour look at whether goodness can exist in modern society presents a supremely bleak world view." (Fisher 2008, Online) The whole play used several Chinese elements, red lanterns, red lotus candles, and Chinese words on the cement bags in the cement factory. In the theatre review of *The Guardian*, Michael Billington wrote:

Visually, the evening is extraordinary. The audience enters through the dust and grime of a cement factory where sweating workers despatch heavy bags towards a travelling chute. This instantly establishes a context of capitalist toil: ideal for a play about the difficulty of doing good in a wicked world... Jane Horrocks, all doe-eyed, child-like trustfulness, plays this perfectly. She is also quirkily eccentric: when, told by John Marquez's double-dealing pilot that she is not much fun, she replies: 'I can play the zither a bit'... But this is typical of a production whose visual resourcefulness overcomes the limitations of Brecht's world-view.

(Billington 2008, Online)

In August 2016, American director Ernie Nolan produced *The Good Person of Szechwan* in The Cor Theatre in Chicago, Tony Kushner's translation was used, and the male actor Will Von Vogt acted as Shen Te and Shui Ta. The Chicago Theatre Review wrote, "Reset in a very contemporary Chicago ghetto, where the poor prey on each other and the rich reap the divide-and-conquer profits, Cor's *The Good Person of Szechwan* only pays lip service to the Chinese folk tale that fuels its 1941 source. Energized with uncredited, pop-up rap anthems that deliver cynical messages... The two hours that follow center on the Jekyll / Hyde split personality of Will Von Vogt's gender-bending Shen Te: Indulging in rapid-fire costume changes, Von Vogt creditably distinguishes his kind-hearted Shen Te with the cut-throat-competitive Shui Ta, a male predator to balance the female nurturer." (Bommer 2016, Online) The production of the whole play was energetic and provocative, and incorporates the hip-hop dance and music. In *the Chicago Critic*, Tom Williams wrote:

Ernie Nolan's production of *The Good Person of Szechwan* could be a pivotal point for Cor Theatre. The young company, which claims as its mission to tell stories about courage... Brecht also believed in using songs to illustrate his play's points, and the most significant localization of this production is the use of rap to directly express the characters' frustration about being transformed into base people who are hurting and hurtful. Elsewhere Tony Kushner's translation makes the characters feel very familiar, and like Shen Te, exaggerated, without Brecht's reliance on allusion.

(Williams 2016, Online)

In the United States, Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (Sichuan) is included in *The Norton Anthology of Drama* that is a textbook for many University theatre departments. The play has been put on the stage many times in universities. One example is that of an American artist named Liza Bielby (Chinese name 白灵芝), she was born in a small town in Michigan, on the shores of Lake Superior, and studied theatre and human ecology at Kalamazoo college in 1997. Bielby's Professor, Edmenta translated and rehearsed Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* in 1999. In the play, Bielby acted as one of the three gods, and from then on became interested in Sichuan. After graduating from university, Bielby applied for an American art fund to support her to study Chinese in Beijing first, and then travel to the Sichuan Chuanju Academy (now Sichuan Vocational College of Art) in Mianyang city, Sichuan province, to learn Sichuan Opera. From 2002 to 2005, after three years of studying, she not only learned the four performing techniques of traditional Sichuan opera- singing, reciting, acting and martial arts, but also participated in two Chinese opera performance competitions. She was the first foreigner to take part in the competition and won special prizes in both. She acted in different roles using Sichuan Opera on the Chinese stage, in particular, she played a role in the Sichuan opera play *Chinese Princess Turandot* in July 2004, written by Wei Minglun, which led to her appearing in many Chinese media and becoming a foreign star of Sichuan opera. After 2005, Bielby returned to America and began her graduate study in theatre at the Dell's Arte International School of Physical Theatre. After that, she became a board member of the Bangla School of Music, a professor of movement at Wayne State University Maggie Allesee Department of Theatre and Dance, and Co-Director of The Hinterlands Theatre in Detroit. According to The Hinterlands, which was formed in 2009 by Richard Newman and Liza Bielby,

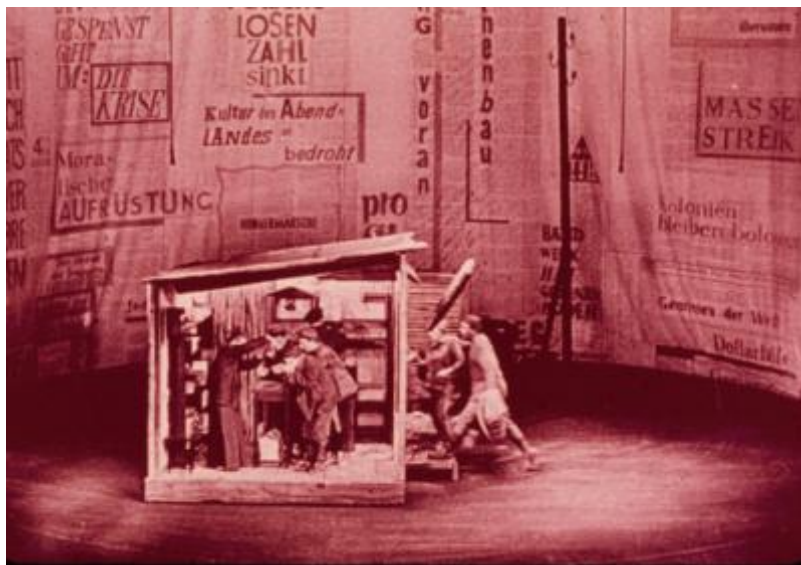
THE HINTERLANDS is a Detroit-based company creating performances and public events that are highly irrational and deeply American. From our original touring pieces to the events we curate in our Detroit neighborhood, our work is built around pressing into the unknown areas of our personal and collective history with fearless physicality and a sense of humor.

(The Hinterlands 2009, Online)

From the introduction on the website and from my interviews with Bielby on Zoom during the 2022 New Year, one learns that most of their works are experimental plays that have been seen at Shanghai Biennale, the Berlinale, Alverno Presents, Flynn Center, The Detroit Institute of Arts, Charlestown Working Theatre, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit among others. They also have a studio named Play House, where is a rehearsal space and small performance venue in Detroit, with two resident organizations, The Hinterlands and the Bangla School of Music. Bielby has rich performance experience in both Western and Chinese theatre, and she has read many books on Eastern and Western theatre. In addition, she has translated several Sichuan opera scripts into English, which are to be published soon. The focus of her current stage creation is to create Western theatre using various stage techniques.

Brecht wrote the play *The Good Woman of Setzuan* and from its conception in Germany in 1930 to its premiere in Switzerland in 1943, it took more than ten years. During this period, he encountered exile, and traveled around Europe, finally staying in the United States. He likely did not anticipate the profound impact this play would have on world theatre and the individual.

Chapter Five
Dramaturgy – *The Good Woman of Setzuan*



The Berliner Ensemble production in 1957

The Good Woman of Setzuan

Bertolt Brecht

Translated by Eric Bentley

PLAY GUIDE

By Min Sun

PAGE 3

PLAY: THE GOOD WOMAN OF SETZUAN
GUAN HANQING AND SAVING THE DUSTY-WINDY

PAGE 4

PLAYWRIGHT: EUGEN BERTHOLT FRIEDRICH BRECHT

PAGE 5

BERTOLT BRECHT'S MAIN WORKS

PAGE 6

TRANSLATOR: ERIC BENTLEY
COMPOSER: PAUL DESSAU

PAGE 7

COLLABORATOR: MARGARETE STEFFIN AND RUTH BERLAU
THEME

PAGE 8

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

PAGE 9

THE MAIN CHARACTERS

PAGE 10

SETTING

PAGE 11

GLOSSARY

PAGE 12 - 13

THE MODERN THEATRE IS THE EPIC THEATRE (1930)

PAGE 14

ALIENATION EFFECTS IN CHINESE ACTING (1935)

PAGE 15 - 17

PRODUCTION
THE UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES
SICHUAN OPERA, YUE OPERA

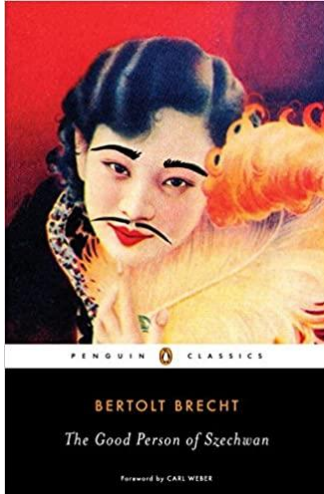
PAGE 18

THE PAPER CANOE: A GUIDE TO THEATRE ANTHROPOGY (1993)
EUGENIO BARBA

PAGE 19 - 20

ASIAN MODERN THEATR

- *All pictures are from Google*



The Good Women of Setzuan

PLAY: THE GOOD WOMAN OF SETZUAN
(German: Der gute Mensch von Sezuan)

This is a play written by the German dramatist Bertolt Brecht, and it was begun in 1930, but not finished until 1941, during the time Brecht was in exile in the United States.

The play was first performed in Switzerland in 1943, and its music and songs were composed by Swiss composer Huldreich Georg Fruh. Today, the better-known version is the one that has German Paul Dessau's composition of the songs from 1947-1948.

The play represents Brecht's theory- Epic Theatre. It is a parable set in one of the Chinese cities of Setzuan, and the content is inspired by ancient Chinese playwright Guan Hanqing's Yuan *zaju* play *Saving the Dusty-windy*.



Guan Hanqing



Saving the Dusty-Windy

GUAN HANQING
(ca. 1245 - ca. 1322)

He was a famous Chinese playwright, poet and actor in the Yuan Dynasty.

Saving the Dusty-Windy is Guan's comedy *zaju* play, and there are four acts and one prologue. It depicts two young women, brave Zhao Paner and naïve Song Yin Zhang, their friendship and their different attitudes to marriage. In conservative Chinese society, Guan showed his concern about the fate of women through his writing.



The play, *Saving the Dusty-Windy*, 2019

SAVING THE DUSTY-WINDY IN CHINA

In May 2019, French comparative literature professor Ivan Ruvditch who studied Chinese in France and worked in China over 10 years, led his French team to adapt and design this play, and collaborated with Chinese young performers together performing the play on the theatre of Shanghai.

He expressed a kind of Chinese classic culture according to his understanding, through the recounting of the story, its elegant vision, its exquisite costumes and the modern aesthetic it expresses through global eyes. This is a fresh exploration that combines Eastern and Western theatre.

**PLAYWRIGHT:
EUGEN BERTHOLT FRIEDRICH BRECHT**
(February 10, 1898 - August 14, 1956)



BERTOLT BRECHT

Of Poor B.B.

1

I, Bertolt Brecht, come from the black forests.
My mother carried me into the cities
When I was in her belly. And the chill of the forests
Will be in me till my dying day.

2

The asphalt city is my home. Furnished
From the outset with every sacramental perquisite:
With newspapers. And tobacco. And brandy.
Distrustful and idle and contented to the end.

3

I am friendly to people. I put on
A top hat because that's what they do.
I tell myself: They are animals with a particular smell.
And I tell myself: What of it, so am I.

Bertolt Brecht was a German theatre practitioner, playwright, and poet. He wrote 48 plays and over 2300 poems in his fifty-eight years of life.

There are three important periods in his theatrical career, including Germany, Exile and East Germany.



Bertolt Brecht and Helene Weigel



Bertolt Brecht



Bertolt Brecht

Germany Period (1898 - 1933)

Brecht was born in 1898 in Augsburg, Germany. When he was young, he entered Munich University studying medicine. Later he lived in Munich and started to write his articles and plays. He won the Kleist Prize in 1922, and he moved to Berlin becoming a dramaturgy and director in 1924. In 1930 he married actress Helene Weigel who became his second wife and partner.

Exile Period (1933 - 1948)

During the Nazi era, Brecht left Germany and began his exile life. He briefly stayed in Prague, Zurich and Paris before moving to Denmark. In 1939 he moved to Sweden for a year, and finally he passed through Moscow before arriving in America in 1941. During the war years, he wrote his important works, but in 1947 he left America because he was accused of being radical in the McCarthy era.

East Germany Period (1948 - 1956)

After Brecht returned to Europe, he lived in Zurich, Switzerland for a year, and then moved to East Berlin and established his theatre company – the Berliner Ensemble in 1949. He continued to explore his Epic theatre with his theatre company, and at the same time, he wrote many articles outlining his theatre theory. In 1954 he received the Stalin Peace Prize, and became globally recognized. Brecht died in 1956 of a heart attack while studying the play *Waiting for Godot*.

BERTOLT BRECHT'S MAIN WORKS



The Threepenny Opera (1928)

This is a play with music. Brecht adapted it from an 18th-century English ballad opera, *The Beggar's Opera* by John Gay. Brecht depicts many people from the lower classes of society, and questions the absurdity of the society. *The Threepenny Opera*, the right photo.



Life of Galileo (1938)

Brecht wrote this play in 1938 when he was in exile and lived in a small village. He spent three weeks to finish writing this play but later edited it many times, and it wasn't until 1943 that it was first produced in Switzerland. Brecht discusses a general attitude of truth through the life of the famous scientist Galileo: how people respond when they face the truth. *Life of Galileo*, the left photo.

Mother Courage and Her Children (1939)

Brecht wrote and directed this play from 1939 to 1952, and it is considered one of the greatest plays of the 20th century, and the greatest anti-war play of all time. The play is set in the 17th century in Europe, and describes the story of Mother Courage and her children, and in doing so reveals Brecht's attitudes towards war and towards human nature. *Mother Courage and Her Children*, the right photo.



The Good Woman of Setzuan (1941)

Brecht wanted to call the play "*The Product Love*", expressing "love as a commodity". A young woman Shen Te struggles to lead her life by choosing to be "good" or "evil". The play implies that good and evil exist in human nature at the same time. *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, the left photo.

TRANSLATOR: ERIC BENTLEY (1916 - 2020)



Bertolt Brecht and Eric Bentley

The Good Woman of Setzuan was translated into English in 1947 by Eric Bentley (1916- 2020), who was a British-born American theater critic and translator. Bentley met Brecht at the University of California, Los Angeles in 1942 when he was young. In 1938, Bentley graduated from Oxford University in England, and then studied at Yale University in America, where he received his PhD in 1941. After Bentley met Brecht, he first assisted him editing the English issues for Grove Press. Later he translated and wrote the introduction for some of Brecht's plays and poems. Bentley was recognized as a great Bertolt Brecht expert in the United States.

COMPOSER: PAUL DESSAU (1894 - 1979)

Paul Dessau was born in a musical family in Hamburg in Germany. From 1909, he studied violin and conducting. In 1933 he first went to France, and then moved to the United States in 1939, living in New York at first, and then in California in 1943.

Dessau first met with Brecht in 1943 in America, when during that same year, he married Elisabeth Hauptmann (1897- 1973) who was Brecht's former secretary and English translator. Dessau and Hauptmann returned to Europe and stayed in East Berlin during 1948. He became a long-term musical collaborator of Brecht's plays, including *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1946-1949), *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1953-1954) and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1947-1948).



Bertolt Brecht and Paul Dessau



COLLABORATOR: MARGARETE STEFFIN AND RUTH BERLAU



Margarete Steffin
(1908 – 1941)

She was a writer and actress in the German theatre, and she met Brecht through taking a diction class from his wife Weigel in October 1931. Later, she became Brecht's secretary and Russian translator.



Ruth Berlau
(1906 – 1974)

Berlau was a Danish writer, actress and photographer. She and Steffin were roommates for about three months in Denmark from the end of 1933, and soon she became Brecht's secretary and Danish translator.

THEME

The Good Woman of Setzuan was conceived in Germany in 1930, begun to be written in Denmark during Brecht's exile period, and finally finished in the United States. The story set the time between World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945) and there was one prologue, one epilogue, ten scenes, and seven main songs. The English version was translated by Eric Bentley, and titled *Parables for the Theatre: Two Plays by Bertolt Brecht*, published in 1947. The book included two plays, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1938-1940) and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944-1945), written in collaboration with German writer Margarete Steffin and Danish writer Ruth Berlau.

The Good Woman of Setzuan told a simple but philosophical story about the good and evil of human nature. In the play, Brecht depicted Shen Te as someone who wants to be a good person, but because she encountered many troubles, must choose to be an evil person to support herself. Brecht also discussed human nature through the shaping of characters, and told the audience whether one is a good person or bad person depends on one's personal choice. The main role of Shen Te was not the focus, but her situation was the focus, and the play implies that good and evil exist in human nature at the same time.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES —The Good Woman of Setzuan



Time: Between World War I and World War II

Place: Setzuan of China

Prologue. *At the gates of the city of Setzuan*

The water seller Wang is waiting for the arrival of three gods who want to find a good person in Setzuan who can offer them a place to stay for the night. Wang will help them find shelter.

Scene 1. *A small tobacco shop*

The three gods meet a good person who is a prostitute named Shen Te. She helps the gods who reward her with money to open a small tobacco shop. Soon a series of people arrive to ask her for help making Shen Te feel bad.

Scene 2. *Shui Ta appears in the tobacco shop*

Shen Te protects herself by disguising herself to look like a crude man and tells others she is Shui Ta, her cousin. In this way she solves every problem in the tobacco shop.

Scene 3. *Evening in the municipal park*

Shen Te meets the unemployed pilot Yang Sun, and they fall in love in the rain.

Scene 4. *The square in front of the tobacco shop*

The barber Shu Fu is attracted by Shen Te. Yang Sun's mother begs Shen Te to give the money to her son so that he might buy a position as a pilot.

Scene 5. *Shen Te's Tobacco shop*

Yang Sun comes to the shop to meet Shen Te to demand money for his job position in Peking. Under the guise of Shui Ta, Shen Te finds out that Yang Sun wants to go to Peking alone, and she feels sad.

Scene 6. *The private dining room in a cheap restaurant*

Yang Sun and Shen Te are planning a wedding party. Yang Sun and his mother want to wait for Shui Ta to come because then he can give money to them. But Shui Ta never appears and they all feel disappointed.

Scene 7. *The yard behind Shen Te's shop*

Shen Te prepares to sell her shop to pay off her debt, and finds she has become pregnant. Her workers ask her to find Shui Ta because they are sure he can save the shop.

Scene 8. *Shen Te's shop*

In a shack that belongs to Shu Fu, Shui Ta has set up a small tobacco factory where he employs several workers including Yang Sun.

Scene 9. *Shen Te's tobacco factory in Shu Fu's shack*

As Shen Te becomes bigger and bigger because of her pregnancy, it becomes harder to maintain her disguise as Shui Ta. Many people miss Shen Te and start to suspect that Shui Ta murdered Shen Te.

For the last time, the gods appear in the water seller Wang's dream. They have changed a lot after their experience of long travel.....

Scene 10. *Courtroom*

Many people come to the courtroom, and they want to know where Shen Te is. The gods put Shui Ta on trial for disappearing Shen Te. At last, Shui Ta reveals the disguise: Shui Ta and Shen Te are one person.

"It is for you to find a way, my friends, To help good men arrive at happy ends."

THE MAIN CHARACTERS



Shen Te

Shen Te sounds like a Chinese name and in Chinese characters would be written thus: 沈黛 . But she may not actually be any one nationality at all. She is a young woman and people can find examples like her on stages around the world. White, black, red, yellow and brown actresses and actors have all performed as her, while speaking different languages to express her thoughts and words, and attracting audiences to judge her behavior.

Whether one is a good person or bad person depends on one's personal choice. Shen Te chooses to be a good person and she helps everyone she meets. Finally, she realizes that she is making everyone happy except herself; she by contrast encounters many troubles and loses almost everything: love, property and dignity. Then she chooses to be a bad cousin, which implies that good and evil exist in human nature at the same time.

Shui Ta

Good and evil exist in human nature at the same time. Shui Ta represents the evil side of human nature. His character is cold, vulgar and avaricious. As the boss of a small factory, he bullies workers and enjoys his power and comfortable life. He lacks sympathy and expresses a dark force.

Yang Sun

What is love? Does Yang Sun love Shen Te or not? In the play, he is selfish and only loves himself, and his love represents a commodity that may be utilized and exchanged. He wants to be a pilot and is eager to fly over the city and escape his real and dark life.

Shu Fu

He is a barber, and he belongs to a lower class in society. He fights with the water seller Wang and he likes Shen Te and would like to help her. His emotions are made up of little hates and loves and so he represents general human nature and most people.

SETTING

Setzuan ——四川(Sichuan) is a southwestern Chinese province that is beautiful and affluent. It has six famous places certified as World Heritage Sites.



1. Mount Emei + Leshan Giant Buddha (峨眉山+乐山大佛)



2. Jiuzhaigou (九寨沟)

3. Huanglong (黄龙)



4. Qingcheng Mountain + Dujiangyan irrigation system (青城山+都江堰)



5. Dongfeng Weir (东风堰)



6. The Sichuan Giant Panda Sanctuaries

GLOSSARY

Water sellers

“WONG: I sell water here in the city of Sztzuan. It isn’t easy. When water is scarce, I have long distance to go in search of it, and when it is plentiful, I have no income...” (P. 922)



Western God
Chinese Gods painting —
Tang Dynasty. Wu daozi

“FIRST GOD: Oh come, we might run into a good person any minute.”(P. 923)



A German small shop
A Sichuan small shop-
Antique building

“SHEN TE: I bought a tobacco shop with the money, ... “ (p. 926)



Wedding dress

Western woman wears white for weddings, while Chinese women usually wear red dresses.

“... SHEN TE in her wedding clothes, on the way to her wedding.” (P. 952)

The plane

The plane shows that the play is set between World War I and World War II.

“YANG SUN: ... Think they know what a machine is? ... Try one of them out sometime, ‘Go up to two thousand feet,’ tell him ‘then let it fall, then pick it up again with a flick of the wrist at the last moment.’ ...” (P. 938)



THE MODERN THEATRE IS THE EPIC THEATRE (1930)



Brecht has two characteristics: one is that he is not sentimental at all, the other is he never looks back to the past with regrets. He focused on innovating in his theatre and wrote many articles about **Epic theatre**. Brecht wrote *The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre* in 1930, explaining below:

Dramatic Theatre	Epic Theatre
plot	narrative
implicates the spectator in a stage situation	turns the spectator into an observer but
wears down his capacity for action	arouses his capacity for action
provides him with sensations	forces him to take decisions
experience	picture of the world
the spectator is involved in something	he is made to face something
suggestion	argument
instinctive feelings are preserved	brought to the point of recognition
the spectator is in the thick of it, shares the experience	the spectator stands outside, studies
the human being is taken for granted	the human being is the object of the inquiry
he is unalterable	he is alterable and able to alter
eyes on the finish	eyes on the course
one scene makes another	each scene for itself
growth	montage
linear development	in curves
evolutionary determinism	jumps
man as a fixed point	man as a process
thought determines being	social being determines thought
feeling	reason

“Words, music and setting must become more independent of one another”

(a) Music

For the music, the change of emphasis proved to be as follows:

Dramatic Opera	Epic Opera
The music dishes up	The music communicates
music which heightens the text	music which sets forth the text
music which proclaims the text	music which takes the text for granted
music which illustrates	which takes up a position
music which paints the psychological situation	which gives the attitude

Music plays the chief part in our thesis.

(b) Text

We had to make something straightforward and instructive of our fun, if it was not to be irrational and nothing more. The form employed was that of the moral tableau. The tableau is performed by the characters in the play. The text had to be neither moralizing nor sentimental, but to put morals and sentimentality on view. Equally important was the spoken word and the written word (of the titles). Reading seems to encourage the audience to adopt the most natural attitude towards the work.

(C) Setting

Showing independent works of art as part of a theatrical performance is a new departure. Neher’s projection adopt an attitude towards the events on the stage, as when the real glutton sits in front of the glutton whom Neher has drawn. In the same way the stage unreels the events that are fixed on the screen. The projections of Neher’s are quite as much an independent component of the opera as are Weill’s music and the text.

They provide its visual aids.

Of course, such innovations also demand a new attitude on the part of the audiences who frequent opera houses.



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ALIENATION EFFECTS IN CHINESE ACTING (1935)



Bertolt Brecht

Mei Lanfang and Artists

In 1935, Brecht watched Chinese artist Mei Lanfang's performance in Moscow, and then he wrote *Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting*, he pointed out:

- Traditional Chinese acting also knows the alienation effect, and applies it most subtly. It is well known that the Chinese theatre uses a lot of symbols.
- Above all, the Chinese artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him.
- The actors openly choose those positions which will best show them off to the audience, ...
- The artist's object is to appear strange and even surprising to the audience.
- The Chinese artist's performance often strikes the Western actor as cold.
- These problems are unknown to the Chinese performer, for he rejects complete conversion. He limits himself from the start to simply quoting the character played. But with what art he does this! He only needs a minimum of illusion.
- The Chinese performer is in no trance, He can be interrupted at any moment.
- The Chinese performer gets his A-effect by association with magic.
- He will take up the attitude of somebody wondering, will apply the A-effect.
- The A-effect was achieved in the German epic theatre not only by the actor, but also by the music (choruses, songs) and the setting (placards, film etc.). It was principally designed to historicize the incidents portrayed.

According to *Living Theatre: A History of Theatre* by Wilson, Edwin, and Goldfarb, Alvin, Brecht "usually deal with history or fictional lands, cover a long period of time, shift locale frequently, have intricate plots, and include many characters."

Epic Techniques:

(It can make audience pause, examine, reflect and criticize)

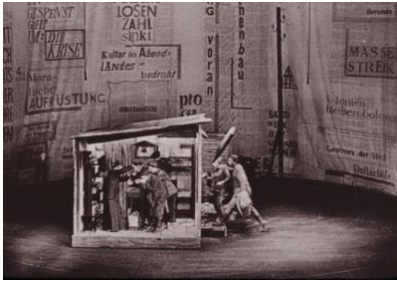
Historicize / Gesture / Breaking the fourth wall / Exposing stage devices/

Opening titles / Placard / Music / Songs / Dancing / Mask / Puppet/

Unique action / Language / Film / Picture / Lights /

PRODUCTION HISTORY

- In 1943, the play was first performed in German in Switzerland, and its music and songs were composed by Swiss composer Huldreich Georg Fruh.
- 1947-1948, Brecht and German composer Paul Dessau worked together on another version.
- In 1953, the first English-language performance was given in Britain.



- In 1957, the Berliner Ensemble performed in East Berlin.

- In 1975-1978, the Great Jones Repertory Company produced in off-off –Broadway NYC. Director is Andrei Serban and composer is Elizabeth Swados, and they took the production on tour in Europe in 1976.
- In 1985, the full-length musical version was produced by Michael Rice and Eric Bentley. This version was subsequently licensed through Samuel French.



- In 2008, David Harrower created a new translation entitled *The Good Soul of Szechuan*, with June Horrocks as Shen Te. It was performed at the Young Vic theatre in London.



- In 2009, Indian theatre director Arvind Gaur directed a reinterpreted version with famous activist and performer Mallika Sarabhai. Arvind Gaur produced an Indian adaptation of this play by the National School of Drama in 1996.

- In 2016, Ernie Nolan directed the play at the Cor Theater in Chicago, and Shen Te/ Shui Ta was played by a male actor.

ENGLAND

The Good Soul of Szechuan The Young Vic Theatre in London, 2008

Richard Jones- Director, David Harrower- Translation, Jane Horrocks-Shen Te

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOypUxo9qw>



AMERICA

The Good Person of Szechwan The Cor Theatre in Chicago, 2016

Ernie Nolan- Director, Tony Kushner-translation

Will Von Vogt (male actor)- Shen Te /Shui Ta

<https://cortheatre.org/productions/good-person-of-szechwan/>



SICHUAN OPERA (川剧): *The Good Woman of Setzuan* 《四川好人》 2001
 Sichuan Opera: *The Good Woman, The Bad Woman* 《好女人，坏女人》 2018
 Playwright: Wei Minglun 魏明伦 (1941-) Director: Xie Pingan. Ren Tingfang
<https://v.qq.com/x/page/e08850vysu5.html>



YUE OPERA (越剧): *Good Soul Of South Yangtze* 《江南好人》 2013
 Actress: Mao Weitao 茅威涛 (1962-), Director: Guo Xiaonan
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQDS02HHwKM>



THE PAPER CANOE: A GUIDE TO THEATRE ANTHROPOGY (1993)



In March 1980, Italian-Norwegian dramatist Eugenio Barba wrote a dramaturgy and directed an experimental play *Brecht's Ashes* (1980) and *Brecht Ashes 2* (1984), with his Odin Teatret. The play staged 166 performances in various countries.

Eugenio Barba

(born 29 October 1936 in Italy)

Barba was born in Italy, when he was young, he emigrated to Norway in 1954, and he studied French, Norwegian literature and religious history at Oslo University. Later, he moved to Warsaw, Poland in 1961, and he attended the state Theatre School to study theatre directing, but after one year, he gave up studying. Then he participated in Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999)'s Poor Theatre for about three years.

Barba wrote a series of books on theatre theory and theatre performance, including *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer* (1991), *The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theatre Anthropology* (1993), and *On Directing and Dramaturgy: Burning the House* (2009), as well as, he directed nearly eighty productions.



The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theatre Anthropology (1993)

Eugenio Barba
The Paper Canoe:
a Guide to Theatre Anthropology
London; New York: Routledge, 1995. x, 187p.
ISBN 0-415-11674-0.

The canoe of the book's title is a metaphor for theatre craft in three interrelated senses: it refers to craft as technical skill, as energy or *kraft* (Norwegian for 'force', 'power'), and as the personal and professional identity forged from skill and *kraft*. This canoe 'is gripped by the currents' created by the memories and experiences of Barba's named 'ancestors', which include the pantheon of so-called 'South Pole' European innovators (Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Craig, Copeau, Brecht, Artaud, Decroux, Grotowski) and the 'North Pole' of codified Asian traditions.

Paradoxically, the canoe has a perilous fragility yet 'twists and turns . . . according to a method'. However, this method is based not so much on any one of the 'South Pole' rehearsal systems or 'North Pole' traditions, but on the 'extra-daily' principles of 'pre-expressive scenic behaviour upon which [those] different genres, styles, roles, and personal or collective traditions are all based'.

These 'recurring principles' (in essence: altered balance, dynamic opposition, consistent inconsistency, reduction, and equivalence) are investigated with precise reference to the metaphors and technical vocabulary of several 'North' and 'South Pole' practices. Barba's argument is that the principles of pre-expressivity enable one, so to speak, to find one's *kraft* in one's craft; to negotiate and articulate that experience in terms of 'the books of the rebels, the reformers, the visionaries of the theatre'; and therefore to claim those 'ancestors' as one's own, thus forming a professional identity.

Barba's project, in other words, is a revitalized historiography, based upon fresh empirical knowledge ('*what I know*') of the recurring principles of 'past masters', rather than received generalizing formulas or theoretical paradigms not necessarily relevant to the questions of theatre practice ('*what is known*').

The book occasionally reworks passages from *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* (Routledge, 1991), but as it progresses Barba opens up new ground. His discussion of the pre-expressive 'as a cognitive fiction which allows for effective interventions' in the rehearsal process, the relation of pre-expressivity to 'the body-mind totality', the importance of working on subtle nuances rather than extremes within pre-determined continua (*animus/anima, keras/manis, flame/ice*, and so on) are particularly welcome.

The book concludes with an edited transcription from a week working with dancers and choreographers in Mexico in 1985. Like the book as a whole, it is exemplary in its demonstration of the way in which quasi-scientific principles and evocative poetic language commingle in Barba's exacting practice.

Inevitably this book will provide shooting practice for those who claim that theatre can only be understood in terms of its expressive socio-cultural particularities, but here, for the first time, Barba includes a robust apologia of theatre anthropology in anticipation of those who would accuse him of psychobiological universalism or of writing a 'grand narrative'.

This stalwart and exciting book – pragmatic and philosophic, intransigent and wise – is essential reading not just for any student of dance and physical theatre, and twentieth-century theatrical innovation and rehearsal methodology, but for anyone concerned with issues of identity, history, and performance.

NIGEL STEWART

ASIAN MODERN THEATRE

Some Asian directors have explored modern theatre in their works.

Japan: Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki (鈴木忠志) presented *Dionysus* in Japanese at the Great Wall Theatre in Beijing in October 2015. He added Noh elements to his play.



China: Chinese director Wang Xiaoying (王晓鹰) presented *Richard III* in Chinese at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London in July 2015. He added Peking Opera elements to his play.





India: Indian director Ratan Thiyam presented *Macbeth* in Manipuri at Chorus Repertory Theatre in Imphal in April 2018. He added Kathakali elements to his play.



CONCLUSION

Eugen Berthold Friedrich Brecht (February 10, 1898 - August 14, 1956) also called Bertolt Brecht, was a German theatre practitioner, playwright, and poet. In his fifty-eight years of life, he wrote 48 plays and many theatrical theory essays, over 2300 poems, almost 200 short novels, 3 fictions, and participated in the production of four films. *The Complete Works of Bertolt Brecht*, was published in 30 volumes in Germany in 2000. Although Brecht's poetry was considered outstanding among the poets of his time in Germany, his main achievement was in the field of theatre. He created the theatre method of Epic Theatre, and put forward the theory of alienation effect. He was an explorer and innovator of theatre, and his unique theatrical theory earned him a worldwide reputation.

In 1930, Brecht wrote *The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre*, in which he labeled Aristotle's theatre a dramatic theatre. From Aristotle's *Poetics* to Brecht's Epic Theatre - one representing the classical and the other the modern - the history of mankind has spanned more than two thousand years. With the progress of human civilization and the development of theatre theory, they are the manifestations of stage in theatre. Epic Theatre was not Brecht's invention. He mentioned many times in many places that Epic theatre had already long existed in classical theatre, and that he had just re-emphasized this theatre form, as well as added new contents. Epic Theatre is developed on the basis of Aristotle's theatre theory and modern theatre is from classical theatre.

In 1935, Brecht watched Chinese artist Mei Lanfang's performance in Moscow, and then he wrote *Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting*. When Brecht met Mei Lanfang in 1935, he thought that the ancient art of Peking Opera in the East had a distant existence. However, as time goes on and we reach today, the great artists in the world are using various cultural and art heritages of mankind, combined new theatrical techniques to create modern theatre. We see this particularly, for example, in American musical theatre, from *Show Boat* (1927) to *The Lion King* (1997).

The Good Woman of Setzuan - Bertolt Brecht finished writing this play in 1941 in Los Angeles, California in the United States. The play is Brecht's famous drawer work: during Brecht's exile

period, he lost the possibility of staging his works, and he could only write for the drawer. But because there was no pressure to perform, he took a long time to write it. He could write whatever he wanted, while creating and practicing his theatre aesthetics. Brecht wanted to call the play “*The Product Love*”, expressing “love as a commodity”. A young woman Shen Te struggles to lead her life by choosing to be “good” or “evil”. The play implies that good and evil exist in human nature at the same time. Brecht wrote the play *The Good Woman of Setzuan* and from its conception in Germany in 1930 to its premiere in Switzerland in 1943, it took more than ten years. During this period, he encountered exile, and traveled around Europe, finally staying in the United States. He likely did not anticipate the profound impact this play would have on world theatre and the individual.

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