

***Nora's Performance in China (1914-2010):
Inspiration, Communities and Political Theatre***

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Introduction

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) has been revered as the greatest dramatist since Shakespeare. The Swedish scholar Martin Lamm (1964) declared Ibsen to be the Rome of modern drama.¹ “All roads lead to Rome”. In Western countries, scholars would like to use this metaphor to praise Ibsen that all modern drama derived from Ibsen. Therefore, he has a cult as “the father of modern drama”.

In China, Ibsen was regarded as a great philosopher and ideological reformer, which influenced tremendously Chinese politics, society and culture. He was very popular for a long time, labeled as a great reformer and great thinker. Not only the dramatists who would like to become Chinese Ibsen, but also many modern authors would like to be Chinese Nora whatever they were men or women, which formed the splendid spectrums in China modern literature history. This modern thinker, whose ideas of individualism, feminism, iconoclasm expressed through the drama, has affected far-reaching impacts all over the world.

Performances have been more or less neglected by the researchers in the discussion of Ibsen’s influence in China. Even if mentioned partly, many only used it as a brief introduction to add backgrounds to the literary studies. They seldom just concentrate on Ibsen’s performances. Although there are a few people who have mentioned the problem, mainstream scholars still did not focus on it. Therefore, it is important to stress the importance of studying the performances of Ibsen’s plays in China.

The reception and influence of Ibsen in China has attracted critical attention both in China and abroad. There are about more than six doctoral dissertations concentrated on this topic: *Ibsen in China: reception and influence* by Tam Kwok-Kan; *China’s Ibsen: from Ibsen to Ibsenism*, by Elisabeth Eide; *Henrik Ibsen and Modern Chinese Drama*, by He Chengzhou; *Ibsen and China*, by Wan Xiaojun; *Ibsenism and its Influence to China Spoken Drama*, by Xue Xiaojin and “Nora” in

¹ Lamm, Martin 1964: *Det moderna dramat: 1830-1930*, Stockholm: Aldus/Bonnier

China: The Image-making of New Women and its Transformation (1900s – 1930s),
by Xu Huiqi.

Among of them, the former three are published in English; the other three are published in Chinese. But few of them focus on the performance. Even if they all mention the performances more or less, they always deal with them in comparison to the text. For example, Tam claims a panoramic view of the cultural, literary and social impact of Henrik Ibsen in China with a brief description of the performance up to the early 1980s. As she wrote in her book, Eide tries to demonstrate how the diverse backgrounds, schooling and attitudes of the transmitters transformed Ibsen into a European thinker, liberal reformer, or sinicized iconoclast². And her discussion is limited to a narrower period (1917-1935). He Chengzhou, Wan Xiaojun, Xue Xiaojin focused on Ibsen's influence on modern Chinese drama, but they did not base their discussion on the Ibsen's performances. Even if they mentioned performances, they just devoted to investigating and analyzing the similarities and parallels between Ibsen's plays and modern Chinese dramas on the basis of textual analysis. Performances mentioned by Xu Huiqi are most as a series of historical events, which helped the women movement in China to set up a model of the new women. In brief, these studies were limited to the texts and how the texts conveyed Ibsen's original intention or how Ibsen's texts influenced the new Chinese drama.

Researchers have seldom only focused on the performance, until now most people still give more attention on analysis the text than on performances. Ibsen's popularity in China not only relied on his philosophy conveyed through his plays, but also embedded in the performances, especially in the history of spoken drama's development.

In addition, media's impetus during the periods of the performance tours was also one of the elements of the success promoting the performance. For example, Nora Year in Chinese drama history and the big scandal about *Nora*'s performance in that year were great events; 2006 Eternal Ibsen International Festival invited the mass

² Eide, 1987, p11.

media to supply propaganda. Among the most international plays of Ibsen, *A Doll's House* is absolutely regarded as an extraordinary example.

Almost no any other country owned so many performances of *A Doll's House* as China, especially in the certain periods, for example, May Fourth Movement period and in 1930s, *A Doll's House* is performed in China more frequently than any other of Ibsen's plays and it impacts China's intellectuals profoundly. In contrast, now in China *A Doll's House* is almost completely forgotten. The performances of *A Doll's House* in China represented the reception and influence of Ibsen in China and also reflected the social development; therefore, my claim will be focused on the point that understanding Ibsen's play and its impacts should be embedded in its performances and the background. From this perspective, I will give an interpretation how Noraism formed an imagined community and how *Nora's* performance was active or declined on the China political arenas.

In contrast to the great influence of Nora as well as Ibsen in the earlier period, his plays did not gain more attention and emphasis on Ibsen in China today. Even in the 2006 Eternal Ibsen International Festival, which was supported both by Norwegian and Chinese governments, the influence was still very limited. Many scholars felt pity for the situation. If we criticized that Ibsen earlier have been over-interpreted and that *Ibsenism* once mislead the development of China's spoken drama, now we should reconsider the question: Is Nora as well as Ibsen outdated in current China?

It is well-known that Ibsen was so popular in China, mostly due to the great influence of one of his dramas – *A Doll's House*. In some senses, Nora was more popular than Ibsen at that time. And also because the first household name of *A Doll's House* in Chinese translation was *Nora* (in Chinese called Nala), here I prefer to use “*Nora's* performance” instead of the performance of *A Doll's House*. And if the adaption of *A Doll's House* had the very different name far from Nora, I will keep the Chinese name together with the name of *A Doll's House*.

By presenting and discussing the performance history of *A Doll's House* in China and the relation between society's development and performance, I will make up the

gap of the Ibsen studies in this perspective.

The reception of performances of Ibsen's plays is different in different periods of China. Before the revolution and especially in the 1920s and 1930s, *A Doll's House* was performed in amateurs' productions in closed societies, in schools and at universities. 1935 was named "Nora's year" and many students learned from Nora, and became "Nora". After the revolution, for a long time hardly any productions were staged in public, and most of the professional performances and even the majorities have been staged in Hong Kong and Taiwan. But in 2006, there came out at least four performances concerning about *A Doll's House* in mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan, including singing drama (a kind of opera), dance drama and spoken drama.

My basic questions will be: Why were Nora's performances so popular in China before the liberation, but after not so much as before? How did Noraism form different imagined communities? How did they affect societies and how did they foresee the coming revolution? Why did the echoes of Nora slamming the door die away in China? How did censorship affect the performance of Ibsen's plays in China? Is Nora as well as Ibsen outdated in today's China?

The model of explanation in the content is based on the general model of explaining theatre in history developed by Jon Nygaard in *Teatrets historie i Europa* and in "Hva hendte i Øst-Europa? Et teatervitenskapelig forsøk på svar": in the periods of historical turns or revolutions, when something new is created, theatre would be the first expression of the changes to come. What is later manifested as a political reality has already been expressed and established in and through the theatre.

Therefore, the claim of this topic will be that the performance history of *A Doll's House* in China is an example of a general model or hypothesis. During the revolution periods, Nora was popular in China mostly because Nora's performance represented the situation at that time and could arouse the progressive youth. Through performances and media's impetus, an imagined community was formed around the theatre. Thus, performance and theatre became political arenas, which attracted audiences and readers to imagine the new community. On the other hand, when the dynamic period of a turmoil or revolution is over, the theatre will lose its importance

as relation and interaction and be reduced to an attraction or more or less a formal experiment presented in front of spectators.

Before the revolution, Ibsen was politically important in China. This is in accordance with my model of explanation: Theatre is a kind of spontaneous art and will in a way open the minds and pave the way for the revolution to come.

Today, however, theatre is no longer important as a political arena. In the ultra modern China of today we are in a situation very similar to most countries in the west - and the theatre, also when they stage Ibsen, should no longer have a political implication. Theatre is first of all entertainment or a formal experiment.

The theoretical foundation will be also based on Fischer-Lichte's theory of performance. The performance is taking place between actors and spectators and would be brought forth by both parties. Therefore, the spectators are regarded as co-players, as participants.

The performance comes into existence by way of the resulting from the interaction between actors and performers. The rules according to which it is brought forth can be regarded as rules of a game which are negotiated by all participants — actors and performers alike — and which are complied with or violated.³

Fischer-Lichte also emphasized that “bodily co-presence implies a relationship of co-subjects.”⁴ In this sense, since a game is brought forth by both parties, then the game will be continued as long as each member can enjoy the opportunity to play. A performance is therefore also an expression of a joy or will to play or participate. We can accordingly interpret performances as indications of the participants' energy or as “seismographs” for change. It is therefore an important fact that in China, before the liberation, all the performances of *A Doll's House* were in closed societies, at the universities or in the schools, which formed left-wing intellectual communities, progressive students communities. Those communities' emergences indicate the coming revolution and immense social change.

For a performance to occur, it is necessary that actors and spectators assemble for

³ Fischer-Lichte, 2005, p 23.

⁴ Ibid 2.

a particular time span at a particular place and do something together.

The performance calls for a social community, since it is rooted in one, and, on the other hand, since in its course it brings forth a social community that unites actors and spectators. Theatre, thus, appears to be an important community-building institution.⁵

The performance is therefore always rooted in a local social community and brings forth a local social community that unites actors and spectators in “imagined communities” as Benedict Anderson supplied in his work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Theatre, thus, appears to be an important community-building institution and, according to Hannah Arendt, the most political of all forms of art.

A Doll's House, the most staged of Ibsen's plays in China, has been produced more than 30 times over the almost 100 year between 1914 and 2010.

My interest does not lie in describing the performances in details by themselves, but to analyze them as indications for revolution or social and political development and change. Embedding in Chinese spoken drama history, I will focus on interpreting how the performances form different communities during different periods through the same play, and why they worked well. Therefore, mass media are the important original materials, such as newspapers, magazines, presses, bookstores, city culture circles, elites, performances' posts, internet news, DVD, etc. Besides, I have established an inventory of all the productions of *A Doll's House* (Appendix).

In the following chapters, I will give an overview of Nora's performance in China through the periods in chronological order and try to embed Nora's performance in the history of Chinese drama history. I am going to pay more attention on some more important factors which influenced Nora's performance in China spoken drama history, for example, civilized drama, spoken drama, Spring Willow Drama society, Nara Theme Play, amateur drama societies, Nora Year, Ibsen Year and so on. The main outline of the thesis will be based on my pattern of analysis this topic,

⁵ Ibid 2,3.

which will not be in strict chronological order. In the first chapter (1914-1922), I will introduce the background of the Chinese Spoken Drama. Nora's first performance appeared in 1914, which became the special stressor of Chinese Spoken Drama. Through describing the relationship between Nora, civilized drama, Spring Willow Drama society and Chinese Nora theme's plays, I try to give the clue of the development of spoken drama. In the second chapter I will explain why Nora's Performances were active in the political arena (1923-1948). In May fourth period (1920s) Nora's performance formed the progressive student community and mainly appeared in limited amateur drama societies, which encouraged the students to depart from home and break away from the feudal system, and caused the national drama movement. In the 1930s, Nora Year and Nanjing Nora Event caused a famous performance scandal and Nora's performance attained its peak in the Chinese history, which not only led to a hot debate on the women's emancipation, but also improved spoken drama develop maturity by applying Stanislavsky's performance system. In the 1940s, Nora's performance started to fade from the stage, although there was one successful adaption, Nora was squeezed from the stage by the appearance of more and more anti-Japan theme dramas. In the fourth chapter, I will discuss how Ibsen and Nora were labeled by Ibsenism and why the hot of Ibsen's Nora was cooled down gradually. After 1949, Nora's performance was only showed off either by requirement of political diplomacy or experimental theatre, especially in the culture revolution, Nora was totally silent on the stage. In the last chapter, I will depict Nora's false revival in China after reform-open policy, especially in 2006 Ibsen Year.

Finally, through describing all of those, I will draw an outline of the context of Nora's performance in China and find out the subtle clue for the relationship between theatre and politic.

Chapter I

Nora as a Special Stressor of Spoken Drama in China (1914-1923)

In China drama society, the common consensus was that the influence of spoken drama's art form was imported mainly from two channels: one was from Japan through Spring Willow Society, which resulted in forming the south China spoken drama and regarded Shanghai as a fountainhead; another was from Europe and America through Nankai New Drama Troupe, which lead the north China spoken drama and regarded Tianjin as a source.⁶ If it was true, *Nora* was one of the important performances and stage figures in China, because it combined those two channels during the development of Chinese spoken drama.

Meeting the social requirement of that time, *Nora* (here, I referred to the drama's name), had played the very important role in forming Chinese spoken drama as a special stressor. Ibsen was also becoming famous in China and inspired the development of the spoken drama, and many directors would like to be a Chinese Ibsen.⁷ Many people would like to be a *Nora*. At that time, there came out lots of plays mocking Ibsen's style. And also many novels, where we could find one famous poem had similar *Nora*'s dialogue in Ibsen's play. However, afterwards Ibsen was ignored due to *Nora*'s great influence before in China. Because it had been connected with revolution with the label "freedom, progressive, attractive" since it was introduced to China, it was no wonder that *Nora* was forgotten after the China liberation and no one concerned more about Ibsen's other plays.

Hu Shi represented the mainstream ideas about introducing foreign literature. He thought it was wrong to translate and publish works of literature just for amusement and that should be served as educational purposes. The students emphasized the great significance on the role of literature to society and they also regarded their own roles in the literary revolution as important. By emphasizing the

⁶The Study on Nankai Spoken Drama, The Resources of Nankai Spoken Drama Movement, edited by Xia Jiashan, Cui Guoliang, Li Lizhong P17-18.

⁷ Hong Sheng, OuYang Yuqian and Tian Han all wanted to be Chinese Ibsen.

idea aspect, literature should play the important role. This was coincident to Chinese literature tradition, and also suited to performance. At the same time, literature and politics were closely interwoven in the May Fourth period. New performance was connected with the new drama (spoken drama) genre; therefore, it is unavoidable to be interwoven in the politics, whatever from the theatre experiments or from the contents.

This was a warlord period, and the whole society was in an unstable situation. According to the historical statistics, there were six governors (presidents or emperor) from 1914 to 1922. Because each of the warlords wanted to occupy the state power, China experienced frequent change of governments in this period. Since Yuan Shikai took over the power from Sun Yat-sen in 1912, he began to plot the dream of emperor. Finally he acted as a clown in history due to his ambition crashing.

In 1917, with the trend of advocating Democracy and Science, the New Literature Movement was applauded by new youth when it was launched. *New Youth*⁸, the formal magazine, as the main arena, became very popular in the whole country. In 1919, May Fourth movement broke out. In 1921, China Communist was founded in Shanghai, but mostly was active in Beijing. Because Beijing was still capital, which attracted all kinds of people, some of the most progressive periodicals moved to Beijing, such as *New Youth*.

Although this was the most tumultuous times, this was an important period in China Spoken Drama history. Since Spring Willow Society successfully performed the first spoken drama both in Japan (in 1907) and in Shanghai, Civilized Drama (at that time the term “Spoken Drama” was not used) was prevailed and spread to the main big cities, especially in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Jinan, Nanjing, Wuhan, Guangzhou, and etc. All kinds of troupes sprout out quickly like mushrooms, and some troupes even were controlled by businessman and became business troupes using the modern term “Civilized drama”. Therefore, it was understandable that civilized drama was so popular that someone misused it to meet the audiences’ curiosity.

⁸ The original name was *Youth Magazine*, later changed the name to *New Youth*.

The Japan new drama followers were mainly inspired by the revolution which led by Sun Yat-sen secretly in Japan. At that time, China was still ruled under the Qing Dynasty. The corrupt government was declining rapidly. Meanwhile, the Occident new drama followers are mainly inspired by *New Youth* through which Hushi introduced Ibsen systematically for the first time with his famous article *Ibsenism*. As a progressive magazine, *New Youth* was the arena of New Culture Movement at that time. The drama reformer and new spoken drama advocators had launched a dispute between new spoken drama and traditional opera.

Just as most English commentators at that time, Chinese advocators were also more concerned about Ibsen as a social prophet than as a great dramatist. And this influenced the later acceptance of Ibsen in China. During that process, Nora, as a special term, played a significant role in understanding Ibsen. Most Chinese translations were influenced by English translations, and Hu Shi would have read Shaw's *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. Therefore, Hu Shi's translation mostly focused on Ibsen's thought expressed in the plays. Although Hushi's article *Ibsenism* was not completely similar to Shaw's, he followed the other interpreters of Shaw, even if it was misunderstanding. Actually, in some sense, Hu intended to make a big mistake. Later he expressed this idea in a reply letter:

Our purpose was through Ibsen to transport his thoughts which were embedded in those plays. If you were trying to read our *Ibsen Special Issue*, you would understand, the Ibsen what we noticed was not as an artist, but as a reformist.⁹

He had a PhD of philosophy, no wonder he was concerned more about Ibsen's opinions conveyed through the play than the drama itself. Therefore, Ibsen was equaled to Nora, Ibsenism and individualism, finally resulted into Noraism, since he was introduced and praised by Hushi.

But *Nora's* performance had not so much influence to Chinese spoken drama in this moment. In China, as a new genre, spoken drama grew with the introducing

⁹ Communication Column, *New Youth*, vol.6 no. 3, March, 1919.

Western democracy; developed by the communities which formed the main elites who had studies abroad and influenced by Western culture. Therefore, its process of growing was very unusual.

The earliest productions of *A Doll's House* in China followed two lines: one line was follow in Japan's acceptance of *Nora* and the most members of drama societies were students who came back from Japan; another one depended on the most of members who advocated New Culture Movement and came back from the Occident. In a word, the main performers who took part in the performance actively were amateurs. All the amateur drama societies were connected with the new thoughts and new trends at that time.

Because of the reasons mentioned above, *Nora's* performance was not so popular in this period. It was performed only once in Shanghai by Spring Willow Theater and kept silence for a long time before 1923. And even some scholars disagree on when was the first performance in China.¹⁰ But it played an important role in the spoken dramas' development. *Nora's* performance was a line between the traditional theater and modern theatre during the formation of spoken drama. *Nora* were introduced and performed, which influenced localization of spoken drama. And later the appearance of *The Greatest Event of Life*, which was the first original Chinese spoken drama, means spoken drama was started to be accepted in China. From then on, there were lots of similar theme spoken dramas published and problem plays gained more and more attention.

1 The Function of Traditional Theatre in China

Although China traditional theatre was attacked extremely by those who advocated Democracy during New Culture Movement, China traditional theatre has the old traditional function in the society, which is similar to the functions of spoken drama which the advocators defined, i.e. not only gives audience amusement, but also educates people through their performance.

¹⁰ Ying Xi, *When was Ibsen's Performance Started in China?*, *China Modern Literature Studies Series*, 2003, vol 2.

China has a long history of traditional drama, and already has such tradition, by using the performance to show the dissatisfactions to the government. In Tang and Song Dynasties, there was a kind of popular comic opera (Can Junxi), which two main roles usually used funny dialogues or actions to make audiences happy and laugh, sometimes also satire court politics or social phenomenon. It should be said that there were a little similar between this kind of opera and foreign drama. However, traditional Chinese drama is about to sing, read, make, play various styles of song and dance drama. This new play based on dialogues in order to constitute the basic form of play¹¹, and its birth was not the revival of the play, but a new genre transplanted from Western drama through Japan New play.

At the end of Yuan Dynasty, Guan Hanqing, who was the household playwright and actor, had attacked the dictator through his performances. He was not only a playwright, but also a director and actor performed on the stage. Although his works were all Chinese opera, he concerned more about the social realities and poor people's life, and used the language easily be understood by the common people at that time.

Even at the end of the Qing Dynasty, the great master of Confucian classics Yu Yue pointed, the more moved by watching, the more easily be accepted by heart. Therefore, even the best teacher or the great scholar could give better interpretation, however, if compared to the pop ballad, its influence could not touch the audiences deeply. Although the commands and instructions were published everywhere by the government authorities, they could not change audiences' mind quickly as Yuanben and Pinghua (both are kinds of Chinese drama genres).¹² Following the poem revolution, novel revolution and prose revolution, Liang Qichao published the legend "Repercussions Dream" in the first issue of *New People Clump of Newspaper* and showed the same position in the new drama reformer movement in 1902. He

¹¹ It was named as "Spoken Drama" in 1928 by Hong Sheng, which aimed to distinguish drama from opera, dance theatre. Later, this name was confirmed in the drama elites and continually used to current.

¹² YuYue, Yuliancun Quan Shan Zaju Xu, 俞樾:《余莲村劝善杂剧序》, 1898.《春在堂全书》重刊本, ZhongHua Shuju Press.

suggested that Chinese should use China theater to inform foreign events, in order to arouse people to support the political reform, which drew great attention.

As the first Chinese drama magazine, *The 20 Century Big Stage* (Er Shi Yi Shiji Da Wutai) was appeared in Beijing in 1904. Represented the main initiators, Chen Qubing and Wang Xiaonong expressed that the magazine aimed to help the audiences abandon the old evil customs , improve the wisdom, advocate the nationalism and arouse the national thought. Meanwhile, the famous poet Liu Yazhi, who also appreciated traditional Chinese opera very much, wrote the Periodical foreword and expressed the same idea.

Since Chinese traditional opera already had the educational function and accepted by the audiences for a long time, it was no wonder that both the old audiences and new audiences would like to involve in the new spoken drama when its function was continually spread. Even the advocators and the introducers who were so aggressive that they almost called on to abandon Chinese traditional opera, especially the sing part, which caused later fierce criticism, it was not their own faults to take advantage of the educational function of the theater. At that time, any methods which could be used to arouse people to reform the political system and save the country were welcome.

Even if some critics disagreed with it and advocated to focus more on art aspect of Ibsen's plays, no one paid more attention on the artist's effect for a long time. Because no more people would follow their suggestions, afterwards their proposals were silent gradually. Therefore, it is very important to give a review of the development of Chinese spoken drama from the beginning. I will discover how Nora's performance stimulated the development of spoken drama as a special stressor, how it pushed the spoken drama and how it influenced the writers to form different communities. In the following topic, I am not going to depict the whole story about how Chinese spoken drama was imported from the Western country. On the contrary, I would like to choose the latest period before spoken drama were built in China --from the Civilized drama to spoken drama --as my argument basis, and give the theatre background of *Nora's* performance premiere in China.

2 From Civilized Drama to Spoken Drama

In the winter of 1910, “The Evolution Group”(JinHuaTuan) was established in Shanghai, which was the first professional theatre troupe in China. The new drama activist Ren Tianzhi, together with other outstanding advocators who also devoted into the drama reform, such as Wang Zhongxian, Ouyang Yuqian, Chen Dabei, performed lost of civilized drama in the whole country. They gained striking success in the short time and drew great attention because they labeled “Tianzhi modern play” as the civilized drama.

After the 1911 Revolution, early spoken drama (Civilized drama) which was connected with the political protest began to decline gradually. Because the people, who were suffering during the continually turbulent wars and the constant regime changes, felt tired of watching those kind of play filled with revolution ideas, slogans, shouting and fighting. The ideal country which the advocators’ described through the play was still up in the air and the situation was not changed at all. People began to lose the interest in the theatres’ propaganda. Those civilized drama mixed the Chinese traditional opera stage conventions and western dramas’ ideas, which made the audience feel ridiculous, though the performers attached to ‘reform’ concept aimed to arouse the spectators’ political consciousness. In their eyes, after 1911 Revolution, the new government Zhonghua Minguo was finally dismissed, only left in name, and warlords were still controlled by the feudal class. By contrast, similar to some of Chinese traditional operas, civilized drama was discarded as a fragile new kind of China.

But in 1914 suddenly appeared so-called “Revive in Jiayan year” (Jiayan Zhongxing). As first modern metropolis, Shanghai became the civilized drama prosperous center; meanwhile the professional troupes and commercial troupes marked its prosperous. Only in the same year, with thousands professional actors and hundreds repertoire ,more than ten new professional troupes mushroomed in Shanghai. Even some merchants were involved in it and invested in those new troupes because they thought civilized drama was so popular that it could be profitable.

This false flourish did not last too long. However, it was like a flash in the pan. Due to some of performers' degeneration, the capitalist hoodlums seized the opportunity to control the theatrical troupe. For sake of making more money by taking advantage of performing the popular civilized drama, they compelled troupes to stage plays which would cater to the petty bourgeois' interest. Henceforth, civilized drama was despised by the spectators because of its evil reputation. Lu Xun had commented on this phenomenon: "just as 'New drama' (Xinxi) entering to 'X' world", undoubtedly it must become the civilized drama."¹³ (Note: there were some recreation halls controlled by some big hoodlums, such 'Big World', 'New World', 'Small World' and 'Deity World', etc.) Lu Xun suggested that once the modern drama entered these places, it could not do anything but degenerate. Meanwhile, the new drama troupes were pressed by the political power after Yuan Shikai tried to become a new emperor, and many troupes who had used civilized drama to spread revolution ideas were forced to dismiss.

Even in October, 1920, Bernard Shaw's famous play *Mrs Warren's Profession* (Hua Lun Furen de Zhiye) was staged in the New Stage Theater in the Shanghai, which finally turned out to be a complete commercial failure. Although it was the first time a Western play was performed in the China modern drama performance history, which was completely faithful to the original drama text. It was a serious performance, but it could not gain the audiences' support. The total box office receipts were only 300 Yuan, which even could not repay the investing capital. It was a big frustration for Wang Zhongxian, because he almost poured into the complete painstaking care and with high expectation, the performance had actually been encountered accident's defeat. By the contrast, the performance *The Live Ji Gong Living Buddha*(*Ji Gong Huo Fo*), which was performed on the same theater continuously two years, received more successful box office receipts (every day from 500 to 1400 Yuan).

For a very long time, performing foreign play was very difficult and almost no one would like to stage modern dramas written by foreign dramatists. The defeat on

¹³Lu Xun, "Funnily" *Example Solution*, Shen Bao, 26, Oct, 1933. Or in *Lu Xun Complete Collection. Vol Accurate Love affair Discuss*, Beijing, The People's Literature Publishing House, 1981.

the performance of *Mrs Warren's Profession* shocked the whole theatre circle, and brought about the “amateur play”, which claimed that theatre should be amateur and non-profitable.

In 1922, Beijing People's Art Theater School was founded, which aimed to train the professional theatre performers and made the theatre develop formally. As the first new theater school, it drew lots of attention. Pu Boying, Chen Dabei dealt with the daily teaching programmes, while Lu Xu, Zhou Zuoren and Liang Qichao were invited as consultants. Unfortunately it did not last too long and it was dismissed in 1924. But, the students later formed “The 26 Drama Society”, played the important role in Nora's performance history in China, and open a new page of the spoken drama.

In the May Fourth Eve, although a gloomy atmosphere covered China theatre circle as mentioned above, it also aroused the young youth to have ambitions in theatre reform. It was showed that the time might be ready for them to grasp the opportunity to reform modern drama. Thus, Ibsen together with Nora, took the “spoken drama” express, as a new genre, was warmly invited to China by Hushi through their arena *New Youth*. From then on, spoken drama began to take root in China. For the new audiences and new theatre practice, however, this was just prepared theoretically. Tam commented, “Although these student innovations were far from a complete revolution in drama, they helped clear the path for further experiments. A large number of actors and drama enthusiasts evolved from the student drama companies.”¹⁴

In my opinion, later this also helped to clear the path for the appearances of lots of amateur drama societies and Nora plays during the May fourth period.

Why did not so many performers dare to perform Ibsen's performance before May Fourth Period? Or in other word: why did Ibsen's performance meet Chinese audiences so much later than text translation, even after so many years that almost all Ibsen's famous plays were translated into Chinese? Why did the performance come to China so late?

¹⁴ Tam, *Ibsen in China: Reception and Influence*, 1984, p5

Undoubtedly, introducing Ibsen and Nora, especially using the special issue, and emphasizing its avocation, *New Youth* shocked Chinese intellectuals by the progressive ideas and stirred up the consequent zealous discussion. But after that, it was *Nora's* performance which was staged almost everywhere and influenced the most progressive new youth unexpectedly¹⁵.

3 Spring Willow Society, Nora and Spoken Drama

As the well-known the first spoken drama society, Spring Willow Society was regarded as the original of Chinese spoken drama. In winter in 1906, Spring Willow Society was founded in Tokyo in Japan. Its members were Chinese students who studied in Japan, including Li Shutong, Zeng Xiaogu, Ouyang Yuqian, Lu Jingruo and etc. It influenced China's spoken drama greatly through their activities in performances, especially in staging the western dramas. Many researchers have stressed the importance of appearing of Spring Willow Society and its effect on Chinese spoken drama. The year of 1906 was regarded as the appearance of original spoken drama in China, and confirmed by mainstream scholar in 2006, which launched a commemorative anniversary of China Spoken Drama (Jinian Zhongguo Huaju Bainian). According to Chinese scholar's consensus, from then on, spoken drama was recorded in the China theater history formally and was regarded as the first spoken drama society who introduced spoken drama into China

As the first famous drama society, it was usually divided into two periods. The former referred to the period from 1906 to 1912 in Japan; the later was the period from 1912 to the year when the main chief organizer Lu Jingruo was dead in September of 1915. At that time, many people tried to find the methods to save the corrupt country by studying progressive drama in Japan. They had staged *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Dumas' *Camille*, and their fame spread quickly both in Japan and in China.

The Japanese Xinpai (new school) drama first started as a medium of political

¹⁵ Chen Su, *May Fourth Movement and Women Liberation*, The Collections of rememorize of May Fourth Movement, vol.2, Hunan: China Social Science Press, 1979, p1020.

propaganda for liberal ideas. The actors were supported by those politicians who were in opposition to the government. From the beginning, Spring Willow Society was closely associated with Xinpai drama, which influenced their performance activities. After the new republic revolution, its members returned to China in succession and gathered in Shanghai. And in the beginning of 1912, Lu Jingruo reorganized a new drama society the New Drama Fellowship, for the purpose of professional performances. However, they still kept the main claims and traditions of the former Spring Willow Society.

In March of 1914, they bought an old small theatre and put up the signboard of Spring Willow Theatre. It was said that the first performance of *A Doll's House* in China appeared there. According to the recollection of some of the members, although many audiences did not know Ibsen and his drama at all, more than 500 seats and balconies occupied by the audience who admired Spring Willow Society with great passion.¹⁶ But someone suspected the fact that Spring Willow Society really performed *A Doll's House* in 1914 due to Lu Jingruo's early death. Unluckily, Spring Willow Society was dismissed automatically due to Lu Jingruo's dead.¹⁷

It was said that Lu Jingruo preferred to stage *Nora* and *The Wild Duck*, and some other members suggested performing Hedda Gabler. They thought it would be very exciting and attractive, considering the conflict of the play when Hedda used the pistol. But they did not have enough time to prepare the new play with more acts and long dialogues. On the one hand, they had to change the new play every night in order to attract the audience and guarantee the box office; on the other hand, they wondered if the audiences could understand Ibsen properly, since Ibsen was very new to them. Therefore, although Lu Jingruo could not give up performing Ibsen's play, it seemed they did not perform any other of Ibsen's plays.¹⁸ I checked the repertoires of that time, which Spring Willow Society advertised on the Shengbao, and I didn't find any

¹⁶ Ge Yi Hong 葛一虹, *Ibsen is the Connection between Norwegian and Chinese* 《易卜生是联系中挪人民的纽带》, *Ibsen Studies Colletion* 《易卜生研究论文集》, China Literature Press 中国文学出版社, 1995.

¹⁷ Ibid p10.

¹⁸ Ou Yang Yuqian, *Since I Performed the Drama*, China Drama Press, 1959, p56, 67.

Ibsen's play in the list.

The organizer and director was Lu Jingruo, who just came back from Japan after many years studies there. He had the ambition to set up a sample of modern theatre and endeavored to experimental spoken drama, according to his knowledge taken from Japan New theatre. Therefore, European drama was their most favorites.

In 1914, Lu Jingruo published *Ibsen's play* in *Paiyou Magezine*, and praised Ibsen as a "famous author", "the most powerful competitor of Shakespeare", "the strong drama reformer" and commented his play "its styles' vigor was sufficient to deserve that people handed it down to the next generation". He also introduced eleven Ibsen's plays (written after Ibsen was fifties) with high spirit.¹⁹

Similar to Lu Jinruo's early death; Spring Willow Society was also short-lived. They did not gain the support by the governments and audiences, who still could not accept spoken drama as a new style theatre performance. The government was busy in dealing with the oppositions both from the abroad and the country insides. Therefore, the first performance of *A Doll's House* did not initially affect China greatly. Lu Jingruo reorganized the New Drama Fellowship, because he kept on the passion on acting new drama which inspired in Japan.

Whatever, it was not unusual that Nora was connected with Spring Willow Society. Chinese spoken drama transplanted from Western countries, it was not directly but through Japan, at least from the performance aspect. Spring Willow Society organized in Japan, and learned from Japan. At that time, Nora and Ibsen was in the season in Japan.

In a sense, I would like to say that Lu Jingruo together with Spring Willow Society exploited an experimental way to develop spoken drama in early China. From the beginning they did not narrowly see Ibsen's play as a simple education utensil and tried to root the drama theory in the stage. Unfortunately, these deep insights to the drama reform did not sustain and develop.

Whenever people discussed Chinese spoken drama history, Spring Willow Society was never be neglected. However, although it was said they had performed

¹⁹ A Ying, *Ibsen's Work in China*, Art News Paper (Wen Yi Bao), 1956, p17.

Nora (if it was true, it should be the first time for staging Nora in China), its impact was not so profound and did not cause too much attention. Therefore, Nora would be only acted as a special stressor of spoken drama in China.

It was important that after the “Ibsen special issue” appeared in *New Youth* magazine in 1918, more and more readers and audiences began to know Ibsen and Nora. In 1922, Hong Shen returned from America, Cai Qinggan, who was also on the same ship and asked him: Do you want to be a popular opera actor, or to be as Shakespeare? He replied: If possible, I want to be an Ibsen.²⁰ Coincidentally, in the same year Tian Han also expressed the similar idea: I want to be China’s future Ibsen. It can be seen that Ibsen’s drama had a major impact on Chinese-style realist drama. Subsequently, by advocating Hushi’s *Ibsenism* and flaunting the spirit of Ibsen, Nora became the hot topic on the political arena.

In 1921 and 1922, influenced by *Ibsenism*, two drama societies were founded: Shanghai People’s Drama Society and Shanghai Drama Association Society, which foresaw that the next period of revival of spoken drama, and prepared the new era’s coming, not only from the audiences’ aspect, but also from the theater theory aspect. Nora gained reputation by this foresight.

There is another reason for Ibsen’s importance in the China drama history during the May Fourth period, which not only based on the thought expressed in his play but also due to the requirement of building new drama. Spoken drama is an exotic genre.²¹ In 1917 and 1918, and there was a “debate” about reform traditional opera. Finally it turned to a progressive campaign to abolish traditional opera. Besides this, due to encouraging writing in vernacular Chinese, *New Youth* began to advocate translating foreign spoken drama. Qian Xuanton attacked traditional opera strongly, and he criticized it “no ideals, no logic”²², and suggested “should wipe it out

²⁰ Hong Shen, Was My Period of Stricking Drama Past? The Collection of Historical Drama Movement in Fifty Years of China 中国话剧运动五十年史料, China Drama Press, 中国戏剧出版社, 1958, p109.

²¹ Zhang Zhongliang, *Literature Translation in May Fourth period*, Showwe Technology Limited, 2005, p200.

²² *The Letter from Qian Xuanton to Chen Duxiu*, *New Youth*, vol.3, no.1, March of 1917.

completely and turned it over” in order to construct “ western spoken drama”²³; Zhou Zuoren and Fu Sinian also supported him and claimed that Chinese drama should be westernized. Liu Bannong admitted that Chinese traditional opera should be reformed to meet the drama development trends on the one hand; on the other hand, he thought transitional opera should have the same position in the art history and Chinese transitional opera should be replaced by western spoken drama. ²⁴Although Ouyang Yuqian did not attack it so fiercely, he pointed out that “Chinese traditional drama doesn’t mean should be abolished, only should remove its bad habit and routines”. His most important idea was that Chinese spoken drama reform should start from drama text. Therefore, he said “translate more and more foreign drama text as the models and try to rewrite. Don’t have to pretend to profound and difficult to understand. It is valuable to use the words that people can easy to understand, which aim to develop good ideal”.²⁵

These proposals are a powerful attack to the traditional opera, especially for those praising feudal institutions and expressing vulgar interest in drama, and also cultivating the conditions which helped to carry out more and more spoken drama activities later. Some of them brought about the negative effects at that time and afterwards. The relationship between spoken drama and traditional drama were interrupted in a long period, therefore, spoken drama could not be acceptable for the mass audiences. However, more and more foreign drama and theatre theory were pouring into China under the advocating trend.

Among this movement, *Ibsen Special Issue* was more influential than any others. In 1918, *New Youth* 4 Volume 6 launched “*Ibsen Special Issue*”, Hu Shi and his supporters vigorously recommended Ibsen, who was cult of European modern drama. By emphasizing Ibsenism, they claimed to emancipate the mind and personality from the old traditions and advocated a true reflection of reality and the long-standing problem of “Ibsenism”:

In June of 1918, *New Youth* suddenly published a special issue of Ibsen. It

²³ *The Eighteenth Sui Gan Lu, New Youth*, vol.5, no.1, July, 1918.

²⁴ *My View on Literature Reform, New Youth*, vol.3, no.3, May, 1917.

²⁵ *My Opinion on Drama Reform, New Youth*, vol.5, no.4, Oct, 1918.

was a warning alarm for literature revolutionary armed forces to attack the defense of traditional drama. That battle was based on General Hu “Ibsenism” as a pioneer due to the translation of *Nora* (to the third act) by Lo Jialun and Hu Shi, together with Tao Lv Gong’s translation of *An Enemy of the People* and Wu Ruonan’s translation of Little Yof (both published only one Act) for the main army, and Yuan Zhenying’s *Ibsen Biography* at the end of the army. Then they started off bravely. This action was on the order of battles, according to the plan; they would attack the traditional drama definitely. But the reasons for their success was achieved so easily and unexpectedly lie in the current situation , when Kunqu was suddenly embraced by the audiences in Beijing and the literature revolutionary force thought it was time to resist it and grab people’s attention.²⁶

The growth and development of spoken drama in the May Fourth period and the New Culture Movement are linked closely. But its growth was not so successful that it experienced many changes. First, the advocators focused on advocacy of theoretical practice and translation foreign drama, and they were not so concerned about the performance on the stage. Later when foreign drama began to be staged in the theatre, they simply imitated the foreign script or adapted the original drama text, and even they created their own scripts rooted in China social life. They were short of experience in staging spoken drama and experienced the process from simple performances to the formal stages with more professional treatment. Whatever, after going through the difficulties, spoken drama was accepted gradually by the audiences and became the new genre rooted in China.

After some research on Western drama, Hu Shi thought it necessarily to use Western drama as a model of developing Chinese drama. In April of 1918 , he gave such comment :

In the recent sixty years, European prose drama was changed quickly and its genres were also more developed than ancient times. And it was more important that there were lots of different drama, for example, “problem play” focus on a variety of important social problems; “symbolism play” is skilled in the method of using subject symbols to convey the complex ideas; “psychological drama” describes a variety of complex statement of the mind and aims to a very sophisticated anatomy. All in all, if we really want to learn

²⁶ LuXun, *Benliu Prologue*, *Lu Xun Collections*, vol.7, The People’s Literature Publishing House, Beijing, 1989, p162-163.

the methods for the literary development, why not translate Western famous literature as soon as possible, since it can be used as our model.²⁷

And he also said “Therefore, only absorbing the new concept, new method, new form of the Western literature those developed in recent century, can China spoken drama be hoped to reform and progress²⁸ .

However, the intellectuals just constructed the frame of the drama’s future which based on the theoretical drama, not so much on the stage. Even the dramas on the paper were Western, and adaption and localization were rare. For a new genre, it was no wonder that audiences responded so coldly and did not cheer for it, partly because audiences were still not so familiar with spoken drama. Wang Youyou complained:

Now we cannot say that there are few people advocating completely new drama, but when we open those new books on drama, we will find that they either talk about new the ‘-ism’ in a play is or discuss how superb the idea of a certain play is. No one talks about how to stage the play. In other words, we have only theoretical drama on stage. Most of the essays are about ‘drama’, but none about ‘theatre’. If we allow the situation to remain like this, in the future China will only have drama on paper, and never on stage.²⁹

Therefore, it was natural for the advocators to begin to carry out another plan: writing the Chinese spoken drama and staging the Western spoken drama.

4 *The Greatest Event in Life* — the First Chinese “Nora Theme Play”

Before describing Nora theme play in China, it should be mentioned Nora’s introduction. Nora, first appeared as a drama text in the *New Youth*, and then many other imitation of Nora’s play created both in the literature field and stage, later became the popular play in the amateur theater (I will analysis in Chapter Two later), finally became a symbol of individualism, Noraism, feminism, departure, etc.

We can draw a conclusion that Ibsen was well-known in China, we also can confirm that Nora was the most popular play in China and Nora’s performance had a

²⁷ *Constructive Literature Revolution, Hun Shi Literature*, 1926, vol.1,p94-95.

²⁸ Hu Shi, *The Concept of Literature Revolution and Drama Reform, Hun Shi Literature*, 1926, vol.1, p 210-211.

²⁹ quoted by Hong Shen, ed. *A Comprehensive Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature:1917-1927 (drama)* zhonghuo xin wenxue daxi. P28.

strong influence on China society. This was a very unusual phenomenon in the theatre history. No any other country in the world as China came out so many Nora's translations, adoptions, performances and Nora theme play. Hu Shi recalled: In that period, Ibsen and Nora were introduced purposefully, and Lu Xu described the situation by citing Japanese author's words; Mao Dun even thought Ibsen could be compared to today's Marx.

I mentioned previously, when the elites realized that developing Chinese spoken drama not only needed to translate the foreign text, but also should be carried out on the stage, which means more real spoken drama could be performed in the theatre, they began to create the plays by themselves. Therefore, influenced by Nora, numerous Ibsen-style plays mushroomed out afterwards, which dealt with discussing the social problems, such as morality, education, marriage. They were called "Social problem play or "Nora theme play". Mostly because they focus on the women's status and education, thus, they were as popular as Nora theme plays later.

The most well-known plays are *The Greatest Event* (Hushi,1919), *A Shrew* (Pofu,1922), *After Coming Home*(Huijia Yi Hou,1922) by Ouyang Yuqian; *Wang Zhaojun* and *Zhuo Wenjun* (Guo Moruo,1923,1924); *Mutiny* (Bingbian,1925) by Yu Shangyuan; *Life of New People* (*Xinren de Shenghuo*)by Xiong Foxi; *The Dream of Youth* (*Qingchun de Meng*,1927), by Zhang Wentian; *Break out of the Ghost Tower* (*Dachu Youling Ta*,1928) by Bai Wei; *Good Son*(*Hao Erzi*) by Wang Youyou; *Abandoned Wife* (Qi Fu), *Revived Rose* (Fu Huo de Meigui) by Hou Yao; and *Miss You Lan* (*You Lan Nushi*) by Chen Dabei, etc.

Among of them, *The Greatest Event in Life* was the first and the most important one, although it was still very coarse whatever in drama plot or language. He Chengzhou praised it as follows:

Hu Shi's play had a tremendous impact on the social as well as the literary life in China. Subsequently, Chinese dramatists have received Ibsen's influence both directly and indirectly via Hu Shi's play. The pioneering effort Hu Shi made should by no means be underestimated. The significance of *The Greatest Event in Life* can be further illuminated by a brief comparison with the traditional Chinese drama. Hu Shi's play follows the Western realistic aesthetics of mimesis, with the purpose of

creating an illusion of reality.

In all, Hu Shi's play revolutionized Chinese drama. It marked the beginning of a new era³⁰.

The Greatest Event in Life was initially written in English. One day, as the member of American University Alumni Association, some of Hu's friends who had studied in America were going to hold a party in Beijing. They came to visit Hu Shi and asked him if he could adapt a short English play, which could be staged in the party. So, he wrote out a one-act play only in one day, which was the first edition of *The Greatest Event in Life*. Unfortunately, his friends did not find any women who would act in the play and finally the performance was given up. Then, his friend published the English version in the English newspaper Beijing Daobao. Later a school for females were prepared to stage this play, so Hu Shi translated it into Chinese and later published in *New Youth* in 1919. However, they still did not perform this play due to no one dared to act the play as the heroine (Tian Yamen). It was said because they were frightened by Yamen's brave action in the ending and they also thought it was immoral to escape from the family to pursue happy marriage life.

When *A Doll's House* was staged in Copenhagen in 1879 for the first time, someone put a notice "Please don't talk about *A Doll's House* in the party" in order to keep the atmosphere of the party peaceful. In Germany and Britain, it was almost the same situation. Either the theatre was forced to change the ending or was rejected and attacked by the audiences and performers. One time the actress who would act as Nora even refused to perform according to the original drama text.

But why the performance of *The Greatest Event in Life* in China had the same fate as that of *A Doll's House* in Europe, no one dared to perform?

Obviously Hu Shi borrowed both progressive thought and drama plot from Ibsen's social problem play. It was also criticized as an imitation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.

It was a one-act play written in vernacular and the story was very simple, but the conflict was very intense. The heroine called Tian Yamei was born in a middle class

³⁰ He, Chengzhou, *Henrik Ibsen and Modern Chinese Drama*, 2004, p148.

family. She got know her boyfriend Mr. Chen very when they studied abroad and they had been good friends for many years. They fell in love without the family's permission. However, after they came back to China, their relationship was rejected by Yamei's parents. Yamei's mother had met Mr. Chen and recognized that he would be loyal to marriage, but she still went to temple to ask for Buddha's help and invited the blind man to foretell her daughter's marriage. Unfortunately, the blind foreteller and Buddha suggested that such marriage would be bad fortune. So she was strongly against her daughter's choice. Although Yamei's father didn't trust the foreteller and Buddha's suggestion and also liked Mr. Chen very much, he still prohibited Yamei and Mr. Chen's marriage. His reasons were even more ridiculous, because he obeyed the traditional customs that people should not marry each other when they have the same surnames. In coincidence, according to his research, the surname "Tian" and "Chen" belonged to the same family 2500 years ago. Whatever, just because they could not overcome the ridiculous feudal superstition and stubborn traditional customs, Yamei's parents prevented their daughter's marriage despite both of them liked Mr. Chen. Therefore, Hu Shi gave the decision of Yamei. She bravely escaped from her parents' home and only left a note to her parents: "This is the greatest event in my life. I should make my own decisions."³¹

Contrast to Nora left her eight-year marriage aimed to find individual freedom, Yamei departed her parents' family in order to gain the freedom of marriage. And also because the author Hushi had introduced Nora, it was reasonable to make the connection between Nora and Tian Yamei. Accordingly, it was no wonder that *The Greatest Event in Life* was regarded as the imitation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* which Hu Shi appraised before. Therefore, it was called the first Chinese problem drama or Nora theme play and Tian Yamer was regarded as the first Nora in China.

The important proposals of New Culture Movement were calling for a new morality while opposing to the old morality and advocating individual liberation while protesting against the feudal ethics. They attacked the old doctrine of Confucius fiercely. Those new proposals were associated with two main themes: emancipation of

³¹ Hu Shi, *New Youth*, vol. 6 no. 3, March, 1919.

women and individuality liberation. *The Greatest Event in Life* was created under such circumstance in the May Fourth period. Hu Shi's proposals raised in his Ibsenism about the family issues were also conveyed through this play. Hu Shi created a typical Chinese Nora who fought for her freedom and had encouraged to revolt the traditional Chinese patriarchy which was based on the authority of father or husband. Therefore, when the female student read about the ending, she did not dare to act as Tian Yamei. This showed how powerful of the traditional authorities, how large the difficulties the progressive students faced. In this sense, the situation in China at that time was similar to the situation *A Doll's House* appeared in Europe.

In consequence, such kind of social problem drama became a fashion in the May Fourth period and were called "Nora theme play", "Social problem play" or "Departure theme play". He Chengzhou explained why those plays were called "Nora theme play" and why they were so popular in that period:

In the 1920s, a number of modern plays were published, in which a rebellious brave woman is the heroine who finally becomes aware of her individuality and is determined to win her independence. These modern Chinese plays usually end with the heroine leaving home and were therefore grouped as Chinese 'Nora Plays', [...] The departure of the heroines in these plays means a daring rebellion against the old conventions that suppressed women at that time.³²

Although these dramas were learned Ibsen's style ending from *A Doll's House* and also the image who would like to departure from their own situation, it did not mean that the first batch of Chinese spoken drama were just copied from Ibsen, both characteristics and the plot. I would like to say that was the first step of spoken drama localization in China, even though the clue of imitation could be easily found. Through these immature works' experiment and effort, more and more successful spoken drama came out and gained the applause both in the literature and on the stage.

The first performance of *The Greatest Event in Life* happened in 1923. The audiences weren't accustomed to watching new spoken drama, and the performance

³² He Chengzhou, *Henrik Ibsen and Modern Chinese Drama*, 2004, P29.

system was not formalized. Only after Hong Shen (I will introduce him properly later) came back from America, could such plays be staged formally. The public responded to this play with great enthusiasm and Tian Yamei became a rebellious model. Hong Shen, who directed it for the first time, called it the first Chinese 'Nora' later in his book³³.

Summary

Ibsen had great impact to Chinese spoken drama, and no any other Western dramatists as him had affected the development of Chinese spoken drama. Almost all the earlier famous modern Chinese dramatists were influenced by him directly or indirectly. Ouyan Yuqian not only translated *A Doll's House*, but also adapted and staged *Nora*. Hong Shen and TianHai expressed that they would like to be a Chinese Ibsen.

Among Ibsen's plays, *Nora* had the most impact in China. Although it was uncertain whether Spring Willow Society staged *A Doll's House* or not, *Nora* was closely connected with Spring Willow Society before its total translation appeared in *New Youth* in 1918. Spring Willow Society was regarded as the origin of Chinese spoken drama and since Spring Willow Society had planned to stage *Nora*, Lu Jingruo had devoted himself to introducing Ibsen. Therefore, *Nora* was very special in Chinese drama history.

The growth and development of Chinese spoken drama emerged to meet the social change and reform. It also accompanied the revolution from its birth.

First, at the end of the Qing Dynasty, to meet the requirements of reform the corruption feudal institution aimed to make the corrupt dynasty strong enough to protest the invasion of imperialism, civilized drama were introduced to broadcast the new ideas. This was influenced by Liang Qichao, who had launched the New Novel Field Revolution and New Poem Field Revolution. Secondly, during the periods of 1911 Revolution, the students and patriots who studied in Japan began to borrow the

³³ Hong Shen, *Introduction* (Zhongguo Xinwenxue Daxi Xiju Pian Daoyan), *Collected Works of Chinese New Literature, Drama Volume*, 1980.

Japan new drama technical to propaganda revolution ideas. Thus, civilized drama was popular in the certain time, which mixed with Chinese opera juxtaposed on the stage at the same time. They just used the new fashionable costumes on the stage while still use the traditional drama plot and singing. Civilized drama was not the real spoken drama. However, it faded the history after the failure of 1911 Revolution due to degeneration of its topics and the disgusting state of the performances. Finally, under the direction of New Culture Movement, advocators launched a debate on the topic that Chinese opera should be abolished or not. And they began to take pains to advocating Western drama. From the *New Youth's* Ibsen special Issue, Ibsen together with Nora, widen a new horizon of spoken drama and opened a new page of Chinese drama history.

It was not coincidence that Ibsen and Nora were popular at that time. The elites realized that it should be introduce more and more Western plays to China. Hu Shi said only through this way to injected in some fresh blood abstracted from Western play could help reform the new spoken drama. Because he confirmed that Chinese traditional opera was outdated and could meet the social change. Ibsen was popular in the Western countries and Japan, and his social problem plays were famous for concerning about the social issues, which met China's situation. Not only his brave thoughts expressed in the plays but also his drama plots embedded in the daily ordinary life were suited to Chinese requirements. Compared to Shakespeare, Ibsen was more close to the modern life and easily staged³⁴.

When *The Greatest Event of Life* were created and moved to the stage and also brought out "Nora Theme Plays" in Chinese spoken drama history, Nora's performances were expressed by another method. Although in this period, *A Doll's House* was only staged one time, it laid a solid foundation for the prospering of Nora's performances later.

Afterwards, some students who had studied in the West and Japan returned back to China and they began to stage the spoken drama according to the stage experiences

³⁴ Zhang Zhongliang, *Literature Translation in May Fourth period*, Taiwan, Showwe Technology Limited, 2005, p200.

and methods which applied in Western drama stage. Hu Shi and others made efforts in advocating the reform of drama by introducing Ibsen and Nora; they even issued “Ibsen Special Issue” for the first time in the history of Chinese magazine and the history of *New Youth* as a double-monthly (afterwards it was changed to monthly).

Later when they realized that the abstract drama theory and scripts were not enough to help construct the new drama, Hu Shi himself wrote the first spoken drama in the vernacular, which caused lots of Nora Theme Plays to appear. All of these helped to cultivate the audience’s theatre taste and expectations. From then on, spoken drama was not an unfamiliar genre, which began to perform on the stage as a new kind of art. Thus, accompanying with the acceptance of new drama genre and spoken drama rooted in China, Nora’s performances bloomed later in the May Fourth period. If there were no propaganda of the new intellectuals during the May Fourth period, especially Hushi and *New Youth*’s efforts, it could not be imagined that Nora would become so popular in China. “Consequently, the historical significance of the Chinese ‘Problem play’ should not be underestimated. On one hand, it served the purpose of spreading new ideas in an era of rapid social changes; on the other hand, it revolutionized Chinese drama. Ever since, modern drama has played a significant role in Chinese theatrical life”³⁵.

³⁵ He Chengzhou, 2004, p159.

Chapter II

Noraism and its Communities: *Nora's* Performances were Active in the Political Arena (1923-1948)

After Hushi and *New Youth's* efforts, from 1923 (in that year appeared the first important performance of *Nora*) on, influenced by May Fourth Movement and New Culture Movement, more and more *Nora's* performances emerged in big cities and caused more attention than before. Until 1948, *Nora's* performance was still staged in Chongqing, which was the temporary capital of the government of Kuomintang.

In this period, *Nora's* performance was the hit of the season and was at the peak of its history in China. *Nora's* performance was unimaginably both in the school, at the university and in the drama society, even on the newspapers. No any other foreign plays were performed so frequency as *Nora* in China at this period. It would say there were almost no other countries had so many different *Noras* (including the imitation *Nora* in Chinese *Nora* theme plays) on the stage in such short period, especially during the period from 1923 to 1935. Almost no other country sustained *A Doll's House* obsession for such a long time.

First *Nora's* performance was collected by the schools and universities, only performed in the limited space and limited time. Then, directed by the amateur theatre theory, some amateur drama societies tried to use *Nora's* performance to correct the shallow traditional theatre theory, which aimed to turn the political theatre to art theatre by advocating the amateur drama and emphasizing the theatre's aesthetic. Finally, most drama societies did not break away from the political arenas, but more focused on the political theme, although they were staged more professionally than before and were more concerned about expressing the political ideas through their performance techniques, stage setting, costumes, and etc.

In the May Fourth period, *Nora's* performance was everywhere, especially concentrated in the high school, college, university of the big cities. Just as He

Chengzhou said in his dissertation:

In particular, little is known about early performances, because it was mainly amateur drama groups, very often students, who staged Ibsen in the beginning. Today, one has to rely on the recollections of the people involved as well as reports and reviews in newspapers to construct a vague picture of those early productions.³⁶

Even in 1935 Nora's performance drew forth enthusiastic applause in Shanghai while lead to a big scandal later---Nanjing Nala Event, during which the actress who acted as Nora was driven out from her teacher's position in the primary school, by the convicting her behavior (acted as Nora) as unfit for a teacher.

However, due to the empathic discussion on the newspaper and public's favorites, more and more Nora's performances grew in the main big cities in the same year. Nora was turned into Noraism and rooted in Chinese intellectuals' heart, especially women who were called on to take active part in the mission of women's liberation.

Benedict Anderson expressed his ideas about how political communities formed a new nation by imagining:

In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. [...] communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. [...] the nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations [...] finally, it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship³⁷.

In this chapter, I will be trying to analyse how *A Doll's House* transformed from Ibsenism into Noraism through Nora's performance, and how it helped to form the different communities during the Chinese revolution, how it improved the Chinese

³⁶ He Chengzhou, 2004, p101.

³⁷ Benedict Anderson, 1991, p5-6.

people's image of the nation through the Nora's performance staged actively in the political arena. Therefore, I will focus on the progressive student communities and amateur drama societies.

1 Progressive Student Community: Nora's performance was everywhere

In the May Fourth period (mostly referred to 1923-1926), Nora's performance was everywhere. It seemed Nora united the most progressive students at that time; like a ritual uniting the people who devoted to the religion or some special ceremonies.

Fischer-Lichte's theory about the ritual and theatre depicted:

The political community which comes into being by and in the sacrificial meal can be equated to the theatrical community that comes into existence in the course of the performance. Bodily acts and actions that had been previously held to be insignificant- only receiving any kind of meaning from being related to the myth or to the dramatic text- were accorded meaning to the extent that they were thought able to constitute a meaningful structure such as a community.³⁸

Therefore, Nora's performance brought forth the opportunity to form a community, by sharing the experience of watching or performing the performance. In this sense, Nora became the symbol of women liberation, individual emancipation, which encouraged progressive students to wake up and find the new way to form a new nation.

The first important performance of *A Doll's House* should be traced to May 5, 1923, in Peking. An experimental production of *A Doll's House* in Xinmin Theatre (Chen Su) was staged by students of Physics and Chemistry Department of Peking Normal College for Women (Beijing Nügaoshi). Some said it was a big success while others criticized the performance as a failure³⁹. Although there was no agreement on the performance's success, it drew lots of attention. After that, more and more Nora's performances were staged in the school, college and university, which became the favorite play that progressive students preferred to organize.

³⁸ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre*, London: Routledge, 2005, p32.

³⁹ Fang Xin 芳信, *My Scattered Feelings After Watching Nora 看了娜拉后的零碎感想*, *Morning Post Supplement 晨报副刊*, May 12, 1923.



Beijing Xinming Great Theater

It was said that the performance aimed to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the May Fourth Movement as well as raising money. It was very common that they used the public performance, which combined the traditional magic, low comedy with amateur drama presented by students, for both the entrainment and raising money. Their presentation lasted two nights in Beijing Xinming Great Theater⁴⁰. Actually the Nora's performance was only the main focus on the first night and it was faded on the second day. Therefore, some critics gave applauses to the performance for its faith to the original translation while some critics cursed the audiences and thought they were not fit for watching such a great play.

Using the *Morning Post Supplement* as an arena, they launched a dispute on the how to construct new drama in China. According to the report on the newspapers, one of the spectators, Ren Tuo, said that he was very satisfied with the Nora's performance:

I believe that what China needs most is "art for life's sake." With regard to drama, "problem plays" are especially needed. I wish, for instance, that Ibsen's *A Doll's House* could be performed every day. On the fifth of this month, *A Doll's House* was finally presented by the Peking Normal College for Women. I was

⁴⁰ This one was built on 23th January, 1919. It was 1914-1919 also another theatre called Xinming Xi Yuan.

eager to see it. My conclusion is that it was a successful performance. The actors were faithful to the play. I brought along Pan Jiaxun's translation to check the performance. I found that on the whole it was highly faithful. This is why I was satisfied. My words seem rather strange. However, I always have the feeling that our art standards are still immature. Even in our own works, we still have to take Ibsen as a model. When we perform his play, we of course have to be faithful to the original. It is inadvisable to make changes; otherwise we will only "turn gold into iron." [...] Among the actresses, the one who played Nora was the best in capturing the atmosphere of the play. Her expressions and movements were able to show the resolute character of Nora. For example, in the second half of the third act, which is the most important scene of the play, her acting was marvelous.⁴¹

Here, he mentioned "what China needs most is 'art for life's sake'" and "Ibsen's *A Doll's House* could be performed every day", which suggested us that he concerned about the social situation expressed through spoken drama, as the mainstreams' claim. The word "finally" "eager" in "*A Doll's House* was finally presented by the Peking Normal College for Women. I was eager to see it" showed that Nora's concept was already rooted in some progressive students' heart. They watched the performance before they read the translation as he mentioned that he "brought along Pan Jiaxun's translation to check the performance." However, he did not limit his comment just on the ideas expressed through the performance; and he thought "that our art standards are still immature. Even in our own works, we still have to take Ibsen as a model."

He Yigong agreed with Ren Tuo's idea that the performance was successful. In his article, he analyzed the dramatic effect of the play by using the concept "tragedy":

A Doll's House is not a comedy, nor is it a historical drama. It is a serious tragedy. Its plot is that of love without a happy ending, and also the sorrow of a wife leaving home. The structure fits exactly into a tragedy and is meant to be powerful. It is really a first-rate tragedy.

In a word, Ibsen knows the secret of drama. He knows where to put his force so as to bring forth a complex and inexhaustible idea... Therefore I hope that everyone who sees an Ibsen play should give up the mechanical way of judgments.⁴²

⁴¹ Ren Tuo, *Some Thoughts After Watching the Two-night Performances of the Peking Normal College for Women* 看了女高师两天演出后的感想 1923.5.11 *Morning Post Supplement* 晨报副刊,p4.

⁴² Tam, 1984, p167-168.

He praised the actress who played Nora and called her as a ‘creative artist’, especially her perfect performance techniques. He was also satisfied with the advanced theatrical equipment and the stage setting.

Maybe their comments were so personal with bias that we could not believe completely. Therefore, the following comment in the same newspaper would be suggested us some other aspects of the same performance. This article mostly focused on criticizing the audiences who left earlier:

They all talk about that any performance of such plays as *Nora* before today’s Chinese audiences would be doomed to failure. Was this performance really a failure?

Yes, it was!

The cursed vulgar Chinese audiences!

The pitiful Chinese women!

Some people may not agree with my comments on the audience. But why did some people pick up their hats and shawls and left at the second act of the play? When Nora was arguing with Torvald, there only left quite a few spectators. Did the actors fail, or did the audiences know that they did not deserve to watch the play? ⁴³

Actually such comment can also be found in Rentuo’s article. He wrote that lots of audiences left before the ending of the second act of Nora’s performance, and scolded them that they really did not deserve to watch such a valuable play.

Earlier before this performance, using *Morning Post Supplements* as an arena, a heated debate between New Drama circles and intellectuals as Xu Zhimo (who is a famous poet) and Chen Xiying (who is famous intellectual and writer) broke out in the same year. Coincidentally Xu Zhimo and Chen Xiying left the theatre before the ending of second act of the performance.

Therefore, after these criticisms were pointed to them, they wrote respectful responses to the articles. 24th May in 1923, two articles titled with “What Should We Watch When We Go to Theatre?” and “Watching New Drama and Learning Modern”

⁴³ Fang Xin 芳信, *My Scattered Feelings After Watching Nora* 看了娜拉后的零碎感想, *Morning Post Supplement* 晨报副刊, May 12, 1923.

published at the same time in *Morning Post Supplement*. Both of them not only explained the reason why they left earlier (due to the structures of the theater, which made audiences, could not hear clearly), but also criticized that the performance was not as successful as professional performance.

Xu Zhimo's article emphasized on the aesthetics of the play:

The immortal value of Ibsen's play depend neither on his morality expressed through the play nor the ending about discussing whether Nora gained liberty or not, but rely on his unsurpassed art. Nora became immortal Nora, just because of his art.⁴⁴

Chen Xiying also supported Xu Zhimo's view and focused on the importance of drama art itself:

Those people, who scolded the audiences who did not sit in the theater until the Nora's ending finished, did not understand problems and showed that they mostly scolded Ibsen who was not a great artist!⁴⁵

And he also explained that "only the greatest artist can dissolve the isms and problems in the drama, which would bring forth the greatest art."⁴⁶ Part of the reasons was maybe really because the civic audiences were not familiar with the new style drama. In today's eyes, these two comments would be still valuable and pertinent.

From those points depicted in the article I mentioned above, Ibsen's Nora was not just used as a voice of progressive ideas. In my opinion, I don't agree with the comment who later criticized the first Ibsen introducers that they misunderstood Ibsen or distorted Ibsen's original intention. It was not because the introducers' proposals based on the misunderstanding, but because Nora's performance was fitted for the special social and political situations. If anyone insisted that Nora was misunderstood by Chinese early intellectuals, I would point out that was their deliberate choice. It was audiences together with advocators who chosen the aspects which they most liked to accept. Even so, those comments and discussion helped broadcast *Nora's*

⁴⁴ Xu Zhimo 徐志摩, *What Should We Watch When We Go to Theatre? Morning Post Supplement 晨报副刊*, May 23, 1923.

⁴⁵ Chen Xiying 陈西莹 *Watching New Drama and Learning Modern, Morning Post Supplement 晨报副刊*, May 23, 1923.

⁴⁶ Ibid 45.

performance.

Another influence performance of *Nora* in Beijing happened in the following year. On 19 December in 1924, 26 Drama Society (Ershiliu Jushe) staged *Nora* and even caused the police to issue a warning. However, it is no wonder that the presentation of *Nora* touched the nerves of the government, even if 26 Drama Society only was an amateur society, formed by 26 dropout students. Because of the play's revolutionary character, it was interrupted by the police during rehearsals with the excuse that it was immoral to have actresses together with actors on the same stage.

When 26 Drama Society were preparing to stage *Nora* in the YMCA, the police rushed into the theatre and tried to prohibit the performance. Facing protests from the audiences, who were mostly university students, the police finally gave in and reluctantly allowed only one act of the performance to be staged. However, the performance was completely finished because the police did not know where an act ended. Because they did not know *Nora* did not need any change of scenery, comparison to traditional Chinese drama. One of audiences wrote an article "How Clever Beijing Police!" to tease the stupid police.

Although they cheated the police successfully at that time, *Nora*'s performance would not perform publicly as those two times. After that, *Nora* was moved to Shanghai and Tianjin or other cities; and according to my research, there is not so many record of the *Nora*'s performance in Beijing. *Nora* did not appear in a Beijing's theatre until 1956, even though in 1931 Tsinghua University staged one time, which was just limited to the campus.

This should be ascribed to the complex political situation in Peking. Peking is the capital of Qing Dynasty and also the capital of warlords' government. In this period, many warlords controlled the power of the country. Although the republic ideas had been planted deep in the people's hearts, the republic country as Su Zhongshan depicted in the *China Republic Temporary Constitution* had not continued due to his loss of power to control the government. Therefore, the progressive intellectual and university students still participated secretly in the coming revolution by all kinds of means.

Peking Normal College for women was famous for its progressive thoughts at that time. Together with Peking University it is the origin of New Culture Movement, which gathered lots of progressive intellectuals both back from Occident and Japan. It was called the cradle of democracy and science during the period of May Fourth (1915-1926) in China.

Peking University did not perform Nora; no one knows why. Since this university was famous for the progressive ideas and was an arena of progressive intellectuals, which was also both the origin of New Culture Movement and origin of May Fourth Movement, Nora should have been performed there. However, according to my research, I did not find any documents to show they had performed Nora. Maybe it is related to Hu Shi's personal proposal that he did not encourage students to perform Ibsen.

Peking Normal College for Women was another arena of progressive intellectuals, which was always active in the progressive movements, whether attacking the stubborn and harsh principal Yang Yinyu⁴⁷ or abolishing old customs, especially in responding to New Culture Movement and taking part in the May Fourth Movement aspects. Lu Xun, the great Chinese writer, was teaching there, and he wrote the article "what's about Nora after her departure?" which brought about lots of discussion.

The same situation arose in Tianjin, another big Westernized city, close to Beijing. Because it also gathered lots of progressive intellectuals and revolutionary members, Tianjin was one of the most important origins of spoken drama.

On 17th, 20th of October in 1928, in celebration of the Nankai Middle School's anniversary, Cao Yu (who is the famous dramatist influenced by Ibsen in China, especially his contributions to spoken drama) played Nora in the performance of *A Doll's House*. According to the report on the school magazine, the performance successfully attracted plenty of audiences. Cao Yu remembered the details clearly that "Nora's performance in Tianjin was a great event at that time, especially caused the

⁴⁷ who compromised with the government controlled by landlords and repressed students who attended the progressive activities.

great attention in the educational circles. One after another comments on the performance appeared in the newspaper after the performance, which gained the audiences and spectators' applause with great enthusiasms."⁴⁸ Earlier than these, Nankai Middle School had performed *Nora* at least twice in 1925 and again in 1926.

If we can say that Tianjing was the original arena of spoken drama in North China, it would be right to call Shanghai was the arena of spoken drama in South China. In the May, 1925, Drama Association Society published the advertisement in the newspaper *National News Weekly* (*Guowen Zhoubao*) before the formal performance and introduced Ouyang Yuqian's new adoption of *A Doll's House*. Hong Shen was the director, who just came back from America where he had studied drama and accumulated lots of stage experience in Columbia University. Therefore, the performances of the *A Doll's House* in 1925 also gained great success. According to Cao Juren's comment, the famous actress was very successful in reenacting the character of *Nora*. The spectators were so deeply impressed by her lines that almost everyone left the theatre with the words "the miracle of miracles" echoing in their ears.⁴⁹

On 23, 24th of October, in 1926, Alumni Association of Shanghai Wuben Nüxue (Shanghai Wuben School for Women) performed *A Doll's House* on the twenty-fifth anniversary. It was reported in *Shanghai News* 26th October with the abstract of the play. It also showed audiences were enjoying in the performance. In 1928, it was Ibsen's one-hundred year anniversary; Shanghai Laodong Daxue (Shanghai Labour University) also staged *A Doll's House* in order to commemorate the great dramatist.

Whatever, almost all the *Nora*'s performances were staged by amateur drama societies and scattered in schools and universities, especially in women's schools. However, progressive student community has double meaning. On the one hand, progressive means this community's emergence and works foresee the coming social revolution; on the other hand, student community means this community included

⁴⁸ Xu Huiqi, "Nora" in *China: The Image-making of New Women and its Transformation (1900s~1930s)*, 2001, p116-118.

⁴⁹ Cao Juren, *The Miracle of Miracle*, *Shanghai News* (*Shenbao*), 10, July 1935.

both male and female students and directed by the schools and universities. Related to Nora, progressive student community has doubly profound influence. On the one hand, they used Nora as a propaganda media to claim their proposals in order to encourage the social revolution, especially expressed through staged Nora, whether Nora's "First of all, I am a human being." or "I will see what the world really is." On the other hand, they not only encouraged the women to depart from their traditional families to pursue personal development, but also persuaded the men who were struggling with the patriarchy feudal system to break away from the bond which constrained them. Just as Xiaomei Chen's analysis:

Some dramatic works of the May Fourth period are gender-ambiguous: these works were initiated and dominated by male playwrights who nonetheless perceived in women's problems a source of inspiration for their anti-official discourse against the established Confucian traditional culture and its implied truth. In the very beginning of the formation of modern Chinese drama, therefore, several male playwrights considered writing about women's issues an important political and ideological strategy in their formation of a counter tradition and a counter canon.⁵⁰

In contrast to the Western feminist accounts of drama as a public form hardly open to women's participation, the story of the rise of a modern Chinese drama is closely tied to the development of a specific kind of women's theatre, in which male playwrights spoke for women and in the name of women in order to free Others—including themselves—from a burden of an ancient and oppressive tradition. This political content of early modern Chinese drama helps account for its rapid formal development based on the models of Ibsen's plays into a full-fledged genre in a relatively short period of time⁵¹.

In this sense, all the performances of *A Doll's House* were more or less of an amateur nature. From the following discussion, written by Xiong Fuoxi, a renowned playwright and director, we can get some ideas about Ibsen's play:

Although now we have some Chinese dramatists who are influenced by Ibsen, his plays have never been formally presented on the Chinese stage; therefore most people still do not have an opportunity to see his plays.⁵²

⁵⁰ Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism*, 2002, p123.

⁵¹ Ibid 50.

⁵² *Ibsen as a Social Reformer and as a Dramatist*(Shehui Gaigejia de Yipusheng yu Xijujia de Yipusheng), *World Benefit Daily*(Tianjin Yishi Bao), November 21,1929.

Actually this period is also called “Amateur Drama Period” in Chinese drama history. Many of the amateur drama societies mushroomed in this situation, such as Shanghai Drama Association Society, Nankai New Drama Society, Shanghai Amateur Actor Association, Windmill Society and etc. Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin, Nanjin, Jinan, Chengdu were scattered metropolises. Amateur drama societies just gathered in those cities. Therefore, I will analysis how amateur drama societies developed *Nora* and helped to form the professional performances.

2 Amateur Drama Societies and Nora

Following the mushrooming of amateur drama societies, *Nora*'s performance showed the new appearance. For the first time, *Nora*'s performance became more professional and more and more spectators began to support the performance in this period. Part of the reasons was that the proposal claimed by the Amateur Drama Movement (Aimei Ju Yundong) and National Drama Movement (Guo Ju Yundong) , and part was because those amateur drama societies were devoted to introducing the drama theory and carrying out the experimental theatre system, which enhanced the level of performance. Among of them, Shanghai Peoples' Drama Society (Shanghai Minzhong Jushe), Shanghai Drama Association Society(Shanghai Xiju Xieshe, Qinghua University Drama Society (Qinghua Xuexiao Jushe) and Tianjin Nankai New Drama Society (Tianjing Nankai Jutun) were outstanding. Although Shanghai Peoples' Drama Society did not stage *A Doll's House*, it was devoted to advocating drama education and improving the experimental stage, which influenced *Nora*'s more professional performances.

However, it was very strange that not many amateur drama societies organized in Beijing although both Amateur Drama Movement and National Drama Movement were launched in Beijing. Similar to how *Nora*'s performance was not so popular in Beijing after 1924, amateur drama societies did not appear in Beijing for a long time. In contrast, amateur drama societies emerged in Tianjin and Shanghai one after

another.

Amateur drama societies' emergence and popularity was influenced by Chen Dabei's proposals. Once he was one of the members of Spring Willow Society. His *You Lan Lady* (Youlan Nushi) was one of the Nora Theme Plays. He wrote a book named *Amateur Theater*, which was a most popular theater theory book at that time. And according to the pronunciation, Chen Dabei translated "Amateur Theater" into Chinese "Ai Mei de Xiju". In winter of 1922, he and Pu Boying set up a new theater private school (Beijing People's Theater Special School), and carried out the Amateur Theatre Movement. He took part in the activities in Shanghai People's Drama Society and Beijing Experiment Drama Society.

There was another reason which pushed the booming of amateur drama societies in this period. In 1920, Wang Youyou invested lots of money and devoted a long time to performing Bernard Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession*. However, it was ultimately a tragic failure. The drama circles began to discuss the case and tried to find the best way in which they could lighten the depressing mood surrounding Chinese modern theatre. Due to civilized drama having spoiled the audiences' taste; they also began to reconsider the development of spoken drama and modern stage. Finally, they found support from the Western amateur theater, which concentrated on drama art by resisting pursuing purely business profit.

Wang Youyou was the first advocator of amateur drama society after May Fourth Movement. Due to his failure of the performance of *Mrs Warren's Profession*. He learned the lessons from the performance's disaster: "we carried out the popular education by the performance, in order that we could teach those common people. But if we only performed such elegant plays and scared them away; and only left some elites appraising the performance, we should think again."

He was also thinking about that they should take advantage of both Occident amateur and Japan stage experiences to form an independent troupe, which could break away from the capitalists' constrictions and with drama studies together with experienced performers. After that, he decided the later principles that

“[...] the performance should just meet neither social psychology nor only seeking to make the intellectuals’ satisfactions. We should mix the new and very easy to understand ideas with the interesting plot, in order to adopt the script successfully which could attract the audiences to look forwards to watching.”⁵³

In March of 1921, Shanghai People’s Drama Society was formed and Wang Youyou was one of the most important organizers. People’s Drama Society named by Shen Yanbing (Mao Dun), and borrowed the concept which Roman Rolland proposed about People’s Theater And Shen was also one of the funders of Literature Studies Society’s (Wenxue Yanjiu Hun). Therefore, their declarations were close to Literature Studies Society’s claim about literature should serve for the human being and Roman Rolland’s proposal about People’s Theater:

Bernard Shaw had said: “The theatre is a place for propagating isms.” Although it is not really true, we can at least say like the following: the age in which drama was regarded as pure entertainment has already outdated. The theatre plays a significant role in modern society, which is a wheel pushing the society development and is also X-ray to detect the origin of social diseases: it is a faithful mirror, in which the cultural standards of a people will be reflected nakedly [...]. We can only follow the footprints of the English dramatists and express our ideas through drama publicly.⁵⁴

In May of the same year, People’s Drama Society issued the *Drama Monthly* (Xi Ju) which was the first specialized magazine in the China spoken drama history. The supporter were Wang Zhongxian (his other name is Wang Shen Yanbing), He Yicen, Cheng Dabei, Xu Banmei, Xiong Fuoxi, Ouyang Yuqian, Zheng Zhenduo, etc.

Although Wang Youyou dreamed of forming an amateur troupe, finally People’s Drama Society didn’t stage any dramas in his short life. It was the only famous drama society which didn’t carry out any presentation plans. In this sense, it was just a theory society. However, its contribution to the Chinese spoken drama was to point the direction of the theater and drama theory. They published many articles on the theatre theory and practice of drama and theatre; especially they introduced a great deal of Western dramatic theory together with many different European dramatists,

⁵³ YouYou Drama Comment(Youyou Shi Jutan) , *Morning Post*, November 1,1920.

⁵⁴ *Declaration of People’s Drama Society, Drama Monthly*, 1921, 5 May, vol 1, 1 issue.

such as Zola, Ibsen, Shaw, Baker, etc.

Concerning about the problem about “Drama should be served for life” and “problem play”, Wen Yiduo pointed out:

What we objected is not the problems expressed through the performance, If we can write play randomly just because of a social problem, then the play would be unvalued. What we need is performance, which is not limited in which type.

You can write the play just for expressing your ideas, but if you really do so, I am afraid that what you have written was not performance, but only ideas. Look at the dramas written in recent years! Actually, there were not really without problems, philosophy, lessons and complaint, but they could not bear to perform. What are you going to deal with? What’s more, even expressing the thoughts by this means, it could not express exactly.

Now maybe we realized that, except the function of reform society, we should know even Ibsen’s plays could have another more pure art value.⁵⁵

Such tendency on the history of spoken drama damaged the development of drama, since the basic requirements of spoken drama were art elements. “Only realities, no art”, such distortion on performance not only could not bring out the great drama as Ibsen’s play, but also held back the development of spoken drama. Therefore, National Drama Movement wanted to correct this bias by emphasizing the characteristics of drama. As an aestheticism poet, Xu Zhimo represented that the most important part of drama was art of life:

Which art genre could compare to drama, which could mock or criticize the life intensively and generally? The art as drama is a kind of magic, which can inspire or endow with spirituality. What kind of art could compare to drama, which can have such powerful influence? The unimportant influence even could shock the personality spirituality, let alone the important influence, which could shake the national spirit.⁵⁶

Drawing on the experience of world theatre movement, they recommended that drama reform should not follow the old way; only influenced by Ibsen’s ideas expressed in the play, and not noticing its esthetic achievements. In avoiding the distortion of studying Ibsen, they claimed to let drama return to art world and created more and more realism plays rooted in Chinese national theater culture.

⁵⁵ Wen Yiduo, *Drama’s Misleading*, 1993, p147-150.

⁵⁶ Ibid 44.

After People's Drama Society faded from the history, another drama society emerged. That was the famous Shanghai Drama Association Society, which meant it was not only because it staged lots famous Western Drama, but also depended on Hong Shen and Ouyang Yuqian's efforts to endeavor to modern theatre reform. In addition, Ouyang Yuqian adapted *A Doll's House*, which was the first localization one named *Puppet's Home* (Kuilei zhi Jiating). According to the professional standards by borrowing from European and American theatre system, for the first time, Hong Shen built a set of formal theater performance system.

Shanghai Drama Association Society was a society with the longest history among most of the earlier drama societies, which survived from the winter of 1921 to the fall of 1933. It aimed to introduce Western dramas to China. Due to Ouyang Yuqian and Hong Shen's joining in, the society became more famous. Hong Shen (1894-1955) had studied drama in America while Ouyang Yuqian had studied in Japan and had been one member of Spring Willow Society.

Shanghai Drama Association Society influenced the amateur drama societies and amateur students greatly. They had staged Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* successfully and gained audiences' attention. In 1923, Hong Shen also directed Hu Shi's *The Greatest Event of Life*. For the first time, he applied the American director-dominated theater system in China. From then on, China spoken drama theatre began to apply this system. In this system, Hong Shen emphasized not only the importance of drama script, but also the authority of the director, and the suitable stage setting.

On the other hand, Hong Shen abolished the old custom of "heroine acted by male actor". On the condition that civilized drama were all performed by male actors and actress were very rare even after May Fourth Movement, Hong Shen intently arranged two performances at the same time in order to guide the audiences and performers recognized the necessary of abandoning the old custom of "heroine acted by male actor". By contrasting the two performances, both spectators and performers admitted that it was time to abolish that old male-dominated system.

In 1924, the successful performance of *The Young Lady's Fan* (Shaonainai de Shanzi) marked that the emergence of successful modern theater director system. This

play was a very loose adaption of Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Although mostly it was according to the original script, Hong Shen localized the time, place, main characteristics and plot. The performers also took efforts to perform naturally. Additionally, the stage setting was also very new and realistic. Therefore, spectators were fascinated with it. In contrast, a faithful production of Bernard Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession*, for example, was a complete failure. The new modern theatre system was set up and began to influence later performances. This success was a model for the advocators who were devoted to the modern theater reform. It was well-known that the successful performance of *The Young Lady's Fan* was regarded as a landmark which proved that spoken drama was accepted by Chinese spectators.

The successful performance of *The Young Lady's Fan* helped the Drama Association Society gain a good reputation and also encouraged the members to perform more Western plays and gave impetus to the development of spoken drama in China. Their performance of *A Doll's House* won the wide appraisal. The text for the performance was a new adaptation by Ouyang Yuqian. Before the premiere, they published an advertisement in National Weekly (Guowen Zhoubao) to cater for the audience to discuss it before watching the play:

Anyone who watched Yang Lady's Fan was looking forwards to watching a few more Western famous plays performed by Drama Association Society. Expected for a long time, finally *Puppet's Home* was decided to perform in May publicly. This play's script was Norwegian Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, which was already well-known in the whole globe, and now was adapted by OuYang Yuqian. Anyone who took up with drama studies or family problems could study it before the premiere.⁵⁷

After the premiere of *Puppet's Home*, a comment with the title comment on *Puppet's Home* was appeared in the same newspaper.

Unfortunately, the discussion was interrupted by the May Thirtieth Massacre Event. After that, China was involved in a more chaotic period. First, on 12 April in 1927, Chiang Kai-shek began to arrest the progressive youth and secret Communists and killed many of them publicly in Shanghai; then Wang Jingwei kept up with Jiang

⁵⁷ *Guowen Weekly* (Guowen Zhoubao), April 19, 1925, no. 14 issue.

and launched another massacre event in Wu Han (capital of Hubei province); finally Chiang Kai-shek established a government based on the Kuomintang with Nanjing as the capital. And from then on, this government had controlled China for about 22 years (before the People's Republic of China was founded), even though they did not gain the support from most of the public and most places were occupied by Communists. China experienced continual wars in the following years, whether Sino-Japanese war or Chinese civil war. Everything was uncertain, and society was in a period of great turbulence.

Being much more westernized than the other cities, lots of progressive intellectuals gathered in Shanghai with all kinds of progressive magazines and newspapers, Shanghai did not reject Ibsen performances. Therefore, *A Doll's House* was staged several times by Drama Association Society in Shanghai.

Similar to Shanghai, Tianjian was another modern city which contributed to China spoken drama, especially its contribution to perform Ibsen's dramas. And also it brought out a very famous Chinese spoken dramatist, Cao Yu, who admitted that he was influenced by Ibsen. He was not only performed Ibsen's *A Doll' House*, *An Enemy of the People*, but also wrote out his virgin play *Thunderstorm* (Leiyu), which was regarded the first successful spoken drama in China. Therefore, anyone who mentioned Chinese spoken drama could not avoid talking about Nankai New Drama Society.

Nankai School was one of the Westernized schools whose education idea was greatly influenced by Western liberalism. The principal of the school was Zhang Boling. He thought that new drama can be better used to educate people. Therefore, Nankai New Drama Society was founded in November, 1914. For the school's anniversaries or graduation ceremonies, Nankai Middle School built a tradition of celebrating by staging new dramas. In the students' eyes, new drama was the symbol of democracy and science.

The director was Zhang Pengchun, who returned from America and advocated new drama. He studied education and theatre in Columbia University and Yale University where he had read many of Ibsen's plays. He said it was Ibsen that made a

philosophy student such as him change into a student more interested in drama than in philosophy. From this, we could figure out that he was more concerned about Ibsen's achievement in drama than philosophy depicted through drama. He was different from Hu Shi who was also a philosophy student when he studied in America.

In contrast to Hong Shen, who carried out the director-supervised theatre system in 1922, Zhang Pengchun practiced the system of director-supervised in the training of the performers earlier in 1916. Because he started his director career almost six years earlier than Hong Shen, and also because Hong Shen is adored as the first spoken drama director; some people have recently argued that Zhang Pengchun should be regarded as the first one.⁵⁸ Thus, new spoken drama and modern theater bloomed in these two big modern cities. Maybe it was not so important to argue who should be the first director in the Chinese spoken drama history. However, their activities were very significant, which influenced the acceptance and development of Chinese spoken drama.

In the history of *Nora's* performance, Nankai New Drama Society also played leading roles, especially among the amateur drama society in the school or at the university, which also led to many schools or universities mocked and organized new drama society later. Maybe this also helped *Nora's* influence spread so quickly and become staged so frequently by students. Relating to the literature I found, Nankai New Drama Society performed at least four times in 1925, 1926, 1928 and 1945 respectively. In 1945, Zhang Pengchun staged *A Doll's House* again in Chongqing Nankai Middle School during his vacation from America. At that time, he already left Nankan and worked as a diplomat. Because of the civil war, many universities and schools were moved to the liberated areas controlled by Communists. It was so unbelievable that no other schools or universities or more professional drama society performed so frequently and last so long time. It witnessed almost the entire ebb and flow of *Nora's* performance in China.

When Nankai New Drama Society staged *A Doll's House*, Zhang Pengchun was very strict with the performers during the rehearsals. Before the first rehearsal, he

⁵⁸ Long Fei, *The First Director Zhang Pengchun*, Tianjin Daliy, May10, 2009.

organized all the members to study Ibsen's script, and he even wrote the Ibsen's background on the blackboard, in order to all of them could understand more about Ibsen and his play. When they began to perform in the rehearsal, he demanded them to perform with passion same as in real life. Therefore, *Nora's* performance was one of the best performances in Nankai New Drama Society. The school newspaper reported after the performance, "in the evening of 17th October, 1928, New Drama Society staged Ibsen's famous play *Nora*, and the theatre was so full that audiences were almost difficult to put feet in the theatre."[] This performance had profound meaning and the performers were also very fit for the play's characters. The best actors are Mr. Wan Jiabao (Cao Yu's original name and he acted as Nora) Mr. Zhang Pingqun (who acted as Helmer). They gained lots of applause.

Later Lu Ren (who became a famous director) recalled Nora's performance and believed that were the best performance of Nora, even after many years no one could not compare to their performance:

The Nora performed by Cao Yu is eternal in my brain, which influenced me so much. At that time, I played an unimportant role in the Nankai New Drama Society and had time to watch their rehearsal, thus, I could remember very clearly. I dared to say: even now no other people could perform so perfect as them. I thought Cao Yu's talent firstly should be as an actor, then as a dramatist. You could draw such conclusion as mine and others who did not watch that performance also could not declare as me. Only the one who watched the performance as me could draw such honest conclusion. [...] He expressed Nora's feelings and the emotion with her husband. The expression was so delicate and subtle that no one could resist its attraction.⁵⁹

Cao Yu also recalled this:

October in 1928 we staged Ibsen's famous *Nora*, I acted as Nora, Zhang Qunping acted as Nora's Helmer. We both studied and were in rehearsals. We took efforts to perform in rehearsal every time. At that time, *Nora's* performance was a significant event in Tianjin, especially in education circles. After performance, newspapers published the comments one after another, and audiences welcomed warmly.⁶⁰

It was true that Nankai New Drama Society was very active in the modern stage.

⁵⁹ Qian Benxiang, *Cao Yu Biography*, Beijing: Beijing October Arts & Literature Publishing House, 1988, p87.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

They even had a very modern Ruiting Auditorium in the school⁶¹. Lots of famous figures benefited from Nankai New Drama Society, such as Zhou Enlai, the first Premier of the People's Republic of China (who had written an article commending the drama's function in the school newspaper.); Huang Zongjiang, one of the most famous actors; Lu Ren, who became a famous director; Cao Yu, who became the famous spoken dramatist.; and etc. Later, when Cao Yu studied in Qinghua University and attended Qinghua Drama Society, there he performed *A Doll's House* again in 1931.

At that time, Beijing University, Qinghua University, Yanjing University, Nankai University and some schools carried out the Amateur Drama Movement. And campus troupes mushroomed, which formed the great view of spoken drama in the May Fourth period.

Qinghua Drama Society was not as active in performance as Nankai New Drama Society, but they contributed to drama education. Both Hong Shen and Cao Yu had studied there and showed their talent in drama. Zhang Pengchun and Yu Shanyuan worked there as professors. Besides Hong Shen and Cao Yu, a group of famous drama scholars and performers grew up there.

In a word, although *Nora's* performances were almost limited in amateur drama societies, and also limited in modern schools, universities in big cities; amateur drama societies pushed forward *Nora* and spoken drama to root in China. During the process of imputes, new spoken drama stage system were set up and new ideas spread further, which foresaw the later local spoken drama's prosperous and profound reform of Confusion system.

He Chengzhou expressed the same idea: "The school performances of Ibsen played an intricate part in spreading new ideas and ideals. They also provided training opportunities for a number of future dramatists, actors and directors."⁶²

3 Nora Year and Nanjing Nora Performance Scandal: unexpected shock

⁶¹ In 1934, Zhang Ruiting contributed the money to build this auditorium. It includes two stories and has 1700 seats together with a dressing room on the side. Da Gongbao appraised it as the first Chinese spoken drama stage.

⁶² He Chengzhou, 2004, p102.

In this part, I will try to find which year should be called the Nora Year in Chinese drama history and discuss Nora's performances in this year. In 1935, Nora's performances mushroomed in the big cities and attained to the peak of the Nora's performances in China modern stage. Among the many performances, I will choose two very special performances which formed the main views of Nora Year. One was performed by Grinding Wind Society (Mofeng Ju She) in Nanjing, which finally caused a big performance scandal; another one took place in Shanghai by Shanghai Amateur Actor Association (one year later changed its name to Shanghai Yeyu Juren Xiehui), which gained plenty of discussions (support) in different media, including newspapers and magazines.

Although these performances were still performed by amateur theatre societies, they became more professional and gained more attention. In this period, some drama societies gradually became professional drama societies, which influenced the spoken drama in the future.

In Nora Year, Nora's performance attained the peak of its effect on the Chinese stage. At least four troupes staged the same play in different cities, including Shanghai, Nanjing, and Jinan. (For the details can see the Appendix I). The most important thing was that they began to try Stanislavski's system on the spoken drama stage and connect with the coming revolution. Almost all the performers later became the mainstreams of spoken drama and attended the revolution either directly or secretly. From the art aspect of performance, I will analyse how the Stanislavski system helped Nora's performance become so popular at that time and how spoken drama stage gradually turned into more professional theatre. On the other hand, I will focus on how performance affected the public and helped them form a political community, from the aspect of performance's function.

Both He Chengzhou and Tam Kwok-Kan regarded the year of 1934 as the Nora Year and wrote it in their dissertations. Tam (p174): "A significant event in the history of Ibsen performance in China occurred in 1934 when a presentation of *A Doll's House* took place in Shanghai. That year was named the "Year of Nora" in Chinese theatre history" – and He (p104.): "During 1934 and 1935, *A Doll's House* was staged

frequently in China, particularly in Shanghai and Nanjing. From June 27 to July 3 in 1934, Yeyu Ju Ren Xieshe (the Amateur Dramatists Association) staged the play in Shanghai". Some other literature also mentioned that in 1934, Nora's performance bloomed suddenly in Shanghai, Tianjing, Jinan and other cities. Common sense indicates that first Shanghai Amateur Actor Association staged Nora in 1934, then in the second year, influenced by Shanghai's big success; Grinding Wind Society began to start performing Nora in Nanjing. Even Ge Yihong wrote "both years 1934 and 1935 have been referred to by theatre historians as "Year of Nora" in the history of modern Chinese theatre."⁶³ But according to two of Jiangqin's biographies, Lan Ping (Jiangqin's former name, who played Nora in the Shanghai Amateur Actor Association) was put in the prison for a while in 1934. She was not set free until October in the same year. What both He Chengzhou and Tam Kwok-Kan described – that Lan Ping acted as Nora in Shanghai's performance in June or July of 1934 – would be impossible. Xu Huiqi also suspected that it would be wrong if one admitted the year 1934 was Nora year. Actually both Shanghai Amateur Actor Association and Nanjing Grinding Wind Society performed Nora in 1935. Therefore, the year of 1934 just contained lots of debates in the newspapers about Nora based on women's emancipation. According to the literature I found, Nora Year should not be the year 1934, but the year of 1935.

Shanghai Amateur Actor Association were preparing for staging Nora early in 1934. Zhao Dan recalled:

In spring in 1934, Zhang Min, accompanied by Jin Shan, came to visit me and invited me to perform in Ibsen's Nora. They said at the beginning: we should not stop on such performance level by the shouting some slogans and flushing some tears, we should improve the performance skills in Left-wing's drama. And we should build our own drama art.⁶⁴

I could not find the original news report about Nora's performance performed by Shanghai Amateur Actor Association in 1934. However, much literature suggested

⁶³ Tam, *Ibsen in China(1908-1997) : A Critical-Annotated Bibliography of Criticism, Translation and Performance* ,2001,p28.

⁶⁴ Zhao Dan, Zhang Min Directs "Nora" and "Big Thunderstorm", *The Door of the Hell* ,2005, p39.

that Shanghai Amateur Actor Association staged *Nora* in June of 1935.⁶⁵ Lan Ping also talked about her experience when she gained the first success on the stage:

The spring, in 1935.

I could not forget it forever! That was the blue day which was same to my feeling. I left the lovely capital and abandoned the thing which was most valuable and never could gain again, for Shanghai and for acting *Nora*.⁶⁶

According to Shanghai theatre collage professor Cao Shujun's definition, Shanghai Yeyu Juren Xiehui changed its name. This maybe can explain the mistakes. Shanghai Yeyu Juren Xiehui, built in June in 1935, was one of the important drama societies lead by China Communist in the Left-wing drama period. In 1935, the national crisis became serious due to Japan's invasion. China's Communists devoted to developing and improving the direction of the revolutionary literature and drama movement through forming Anti-Japanese War National United Union. In order to make the revolutionary drama survive the White Terror massacres, China Left-wing Drama Associations decided to oppose the Kuomintang Authorities' Culture Surrender by concealing theater performance, and by having surprise performance. Therefore, they united well-known people from movie and theater circles to form an amateur organization (Shanghai Yeyu Juren Xiehui, ie. Shanghai Drama Association), and it carried out the activities of the revolutionary drama. The activities of the Association divided into two periods: from the June 1935 to early 1937 was the former period. The main managers were Zhang Min, Zheng Junli, Chen Liting and etc. Zhao Dan, Jin Shan, Zhang Geng were the main members. During this period, they staged drama publicly three times, especially the one in June 1935 Premiere of Ibsen's *Nora*, gained big successes, director Zhang Min, Zhao Dan, Jinshan, Wu Heling, Lan Ping, Wu Mei as the leading actors. From April to August in 1937 was the late period. The Shanghai Amateur Theater Association changed into professional theater, with the new name "Shanghai Experimental Theater Amateur", presided over by Zhang Min, Ying Weiyun, Zheng Junli, Chen Liting.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Lan Ping's Reports, *Nora's Actors Nora's stage photos*, Minbao, June 21, 1935.

⁶⁶ Lan Ping, *From Nora to Big Thunderstorm*, April 5, 1937, Xinxue Shi, vol.1, No.5 issue.

⁶⁷ Cao Shujun <http://www.chinabaike.com/article/baike/1049/2008/200808061575576.html>.

If what I mentioned above is true, the focus of Nora's year should be turned to Nanjing. Nanjing Grinding Wind Society (Mo Feng She) presented *A Doll's House* in Tao Tao Grand Theatre (Taotao Dajuyuan) from January 1st to the third in 1935. I emphasized the importance of those performances was not only because they staged *Nora* earlier than Shanghai Amateur Drama Association, but also because of the big performance scandal and the effect of the scandal, which led to the spread of Nora's influence. In a certain sense, Nora's year originated in Nanjing, although these two performances were directed by the same director- Zhang Min and they planned it earlier in Shanghai.

To understand the performance scandal, first I will give an analysis of Grinding Wind Society and the social situation in China at that time.

October in 1933, Shanghai Left-wing Drama United Union sent Chen Liting and Song Zhidi (Both were members of Shanghai Drama Association) to Nanjing for developing Communists' power and studying the social situation. At that time, Nanjing was the capital of Kuomintang and covered with White Terror. Massacres of Communists and progressive people happened almost every day. However, revolutionary activities together with the progressive circles were never stopped. Nanjing No.1 Middle School was one of them.

The Grinding Wind Society was organized by more than ten progressive students (including Shui Hua, Shu Qiang, Wang Ping and etc.) and it caused Chen Liting and Song Zhidi's attention. They recognized that Nanjing No.1 Middle School was one of the places that underground Communist party carried out revolutionary activities. Actually, the Grinding Wind Society was also part of a secret Communists party organization. Representing the Left-wing Drama United Union, Chen Liting and Song Zhidi conducted that the Grinding Wind Society as a whole joined the Left-wing Drama United Union in order to lead the revolutionary activities in Nanjing. The Grinding Wind Society was famous in China drama history not only because of *Nora*, but also due to the popular performances of *Put down Your Whip* and *Sanjiang Good* which became household names during the Sino-Japanese war period.

Nora Year originated from the Nanjing Nora Event and spread to the whole country quickly afterwards. In the year of 1935, from January 1 to 3,⁶⁸ three-day performances of Nora in Nanjing gained big success with crowded audiences each time. Zhang Min served as the director, Wang Ping (who was a primary school teacher and a member of Grinding Wind Society, later became the first female director in China Film history) played Nora, Lu Fu acted as Helmer, Shui Hua acted as Doctor Rank, Shu Qiang acted as Krogstad.



Nanjing Nora stage photo. Actress: Wan Ping, 1935

Their performance shocked the whole city. Nanjing University, Central University, Southeast University and other universities were going to invite the troupe to perform at the campus separately. Unfortunately, the leading actress Wang Ping was dismissed by the headmaster of the primary school which she worked for. The excuse was that the Nanjing Board of Education regarded Wang's participation in acting Nora was not suitable for a teacher's behavior. And the performance was abruptly terminated after three days.

Finally the event became a national scandal when it was reported in newspapers. Before *Nora* was staged for the public, Wang Ping, who acted as Nora in the

⁶⁸ *Youth Troupe : Grinding Wind Society* 《青年剧团 磨风艺社》, Shanghai, *China Daily* 中华日报, March 10, 1935,p266.

performance, received the notification of dismissal with the excuse of “bad teaching” and “inadequate effort”. Other actresses who acted in the same play were also punished by the schools; either fired or warned about her behavior and threatened with dismissal. (Zhang Zhizhong, *The sacrifice for art — Nora Wang Guangzheng was dismissed before and afterwards*, Shanghai, *Big Evening (Da Wanbao)*, 1935, 2,16). Although the headmaster Ma Shiwu wrote to *New People’s Newspaper (Xinmin Bao)* to explain that the dismissal of Wang Ping was nothing to do with her performance of Nora, people could not believe it was not so coincidence that all of the female school teachers who took part in the *Nora’s* performance were punished at the same time. On 28th, January, Bu Shaofu used the pseudonym Xia Lai published an article *Nora was Dismissed* in *Zhao Bao*, and caused the attention from all aspects of the people.

Wang Ping described her situation on the newspaper:

I am disappointed and hesitant. I cried sorrowfull [...] but actually this just small personal problem, after all, my family economic situation can accept my temporary unemployment. Therefore, unemployment is not the main reason that I feel sorrow. I felt sorrowful because I could understand why the people who worked for education were so shallow and cruel. Why does the society still so conservative and regards drama as a boring and nasty thing? Why is the primary school principal so ignorant who was managed by the Kuomintang government’s Three Principles of the People? What conflict is between education and drama? Why should primary school teacher not perform the drama? Why are educationists going to destroy the weak China drama movement? I also think, maybe the principal would say that dismissing me is not because I performed, as a real educationist ought not to do such stupid thing. But the report he gave the social bureau said that my valuation of teaching was “c” and added to “didn’t try my best”. But, now I am thinking it over, from which point to define “didn’t try my best”? Without asking for leave, reevaluated home works timely and I never waste teacher duties, what should I do could be called “tried my best”? I think these comments were just excuses. So I feel more sorrow and depressed, I feel the merciless of the society, the harm of the society. I am expecting truth and sympathy [...] Concerned on this event, I hope society will not only support me, but also arouse the social activities’ attention and useful depute, in order to push the whole drama movement and culture movement.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ *When can She have the Light Road: Nora Lose Job Because of Performing the Spoken Drama*, Nanjing, *New People*, February 2, 1935.

After this article published on the newspaper, more and more media reported this event one after another, which aroused public indignation. The debate on this topic lasted for a long time. In the history, this event was known as the “Nanjing Nala event”. During this time, at least more than seven newspapers reported this scandal, including Nanjing’s newspaper New People(Xinmin Bao), Morning (zhaobao) and Shanghai’s Shen Bao, news Xinwenbao, dawanbao, zhonghua daily, social daily, etc.⁷⁰ The literary organizations protested against the barbarous action of the city government, the performance gained the great attention spontaneously. People began to discuss Nora based on the performance, not only focused on the debate about whether Nora should stay at home or leave, but also developed into lots of other questions about social progress, women emancipation, revolting against the feudal Confucian idea and women’s rights, and so on.

In this period, China society was still doomed. Progressive elites didn’t see the expectation which they suggested in the May Fourth period. *Three Principles of the People* which Kuomintang government had boosted didn’t bring democracy to China, and more and more people were in the even worse situation. Nora, who was encouraged to leave home during in the May Fourth period, could not find the right way to live independently in society. All the questions which were raised during the May 4th period were still up in the air. Under the pressure of Kuomintang government’s White Terror, the Communist party was still active secretly in order to find the chance to carry out the coming revolution.

Influenced by the Nanjing Nala event and also pressed by the White Terror in Nanjing, Nora’s performance could not staged in Nanjing afterwards, but was performed in Shanghai by another group, also connected to the Communist party.

In the same year, from June 27th to 3rd July, Shanghai Amateur Dramatists Association successfully put on Nora in the theatre, which made Nora became a household name even more famous than before. Even later no other Nora performances have had such influence in China as this one.

⁷⁰ Xu Huiqi, p268.



Lan Ping stage photo, acted as Nora, 1935.

The second day after staging Nora, an article commented on *Mingbao* :

The roles in the performance were perfect and they performed also perfectly. We should remember Lan Ping, Jin Shan, Wei Heling, Wu Mei, Zhao Dan, whose characteristics in the performance were created, and their spoken dialogues were perfect. Especially in the second act, Lan Ping performed very hard. Her action and emotion was followed the melody' rhyme, which was touching. When she was dancing Spanish dance with tears, the melody was touched the climax, which caused audiences experienced that all the human being's selfishness and innocent were pressed on her, which made her the poorest one.⁷¹

Not only the actors were famous, but also because the director began to apply Stanislavski system in the performance practices. But the most important thing of this performance was they used it not only as a weapon to broadcast the progressive idea, but also regarded drama as an art. Instead of speaking out the slogan on the stage, both the director and the actors were very strict with themselves during the rehearsals;

⁷¹ Hai Shi 海士, *After Watched Nora's Performance* 看过“娜拉”以后, *Minbao* 民报, June 28, 1935.

they tried to perform the successful theatre figures to express the main idea naturally. Earlier in 1934, they were preparing for staging *Nora*. Zhao Dan recalled:

In spring in 1934, Zhang Min, accompanied by Jin Shan, came to visit me and invited me to perform Ibsen's *Nora*. They said at the beginning: we should not stop on such performance level by shouting some slogans and flushing some tears, we should improve the performance skills in Left-wing's drama. And we should build our own drama art.⁷²

Later, Zhao also mentioned it in *The Door of Hell*: when they started to perform *Nora* and *Big Thunderstorm*, Jinshan and he treated the figures in the script negatively. They were used to labeling the figures good or bad according to classical classification, and tried to use very unnatural actions to smear the figure, which led to the very disappointed result, at the end of it turned out "the more rehearsals, the more empty the figures. The more analyzed, the more abstract and shriveled figures". But after Zhangmin introduced the Stanislavski system, they learned to how to enrich the characteristics of the figures and tried to experience the figures' emotions, found the reasonable actions to represent the spirited figure. Finally, they rectified the conceptualization and vulgar sociological creative methods; restore the roles to their true colors, thus reversing into the correct realism direction.⁷³

Although we can not declare that *Nora*'s success was totally due to the Stanislavski system, it really helped *Nora*'s performance attain its peak on the Chinese stage. The Stanislavski system is rich with experimental theatre methods, and its impact is multi-faceted. Most importantly, unlike the former experimental performances, it established human beings' dominant position in drama, which liberated the issue of realism from the abstract arguments and circumstances of the romance to life, experience, and emphasis that theatre's most import thing lies in the performers' action. And from that point on, *Nora*'s stage performance started to become more professional.

Compared to *Civilization* play, amateur plays' loose actions and random

⁷² Ibid 60.

⁷³ Zhao Dan, *The Door of the Hell*, Shanghai, Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, 1980, p28.

dialogues, this time they were stricter with themselves. Nora's performer, Lan Ping also recalled the situation when she was preparing for performance:

When I was preparing for Nora's rehearsal, I was working very hard with fearing of losing. I still remember, I was sleepless because of reading the drama script. When the tailor's snoring sound instead of the annoying machine's noise from the next door, I always groped under my pillow to find out the Ibsen collections, and use the subtle voice to read each dialogue patiently [...]⁷⁴

Hong Shen didn't direct this performance, but obviously he gave some advices to the performers. He not only recommended Lan Ping to Cui Wanqiu, but also visited the performance rehearsal site. He was very familiar to the whole performer's group, except the main director Zhan Min. Therefore, even this performance was directed by Zhang Min, it was combined the drama circle elites' main ideas, who came back from the America, Russia and Japan.

Encouraged by the success of Nanjing's performance, apparently the presentation in Shanghai was more fortunate than that in Nanjing. Lan Ping, Nora's performer, who wrote the articles to introduce the special experience:

When I first read *Nora*, I was still a young girl who had not so much experience of the world. But Nora became my heroine unconsciously. I enthusiastically admired her and I wished all women who were treated as playthings would become Nora one day.

Soon I also left my family, though in a different situation from that of Nora. But I took Nora's words: "I must try to become a real human being!"

Maybe someone would say: it is better to come back to home! No! We could never retreat back to home, and were distorted without voices and noises. We should try more! But we must make a clear target: this is not a personal problem, but a serious social problem! We should follow Nora's spirit by leaving the home, and stick out our chests to pursue the unchangeable social position.⁷⁵

And especially it showed the appreciation to Zhao Dan and Lan Ping:

Zhao Dan, he is a young artist. He is not a talent artist, without standard beautiful form, without super voice. But, he is working hard and honest. He tried his best to experience the character's characteristics, thoughts, and emotions. From the art aspect, he is willing to work hard to exercise. In *Nora*, he performed

⁷⁴ *Nora and I 我与娜拉*, Zhongguo Yitan Huabao 中国艺坛画报, September 13, 1939.

⁷⁵ Ibid 70.

Nora's husband Mr. Helmer. He can depict a figure as Helmer, who is a hero of the family and a utilitarian gentleman with considerable status in society. From Ibsen's epoch to nowadays China, no one knows how many Helmers existed. Therefore, in the Nora's performance, Helmer could be one of the most difficult roles. However, Zhao Dan performed successfully and easily.

On the other hand, I should write my new findings. Concerned about Nora's performer--Lan Ping, I was surprised of her talent in performance and spoken dialogue on the stage. I found no any other one could compare to her, whose spoken dialogue was so fluent ("Fluent" doesn't mean speaking fast). She performed so excellent from the beginning to the end, only with little defect, for example, sometime she walked too much and with too high spirits; sometime she spoke so fast that she forgot expressing emotion.⁷⁶

These depictions were reliable, and lots of other newspapers reported this production, even in the *News Daily* they published *New Shanghai Nora Special Issue* with Nora's performer Lan Ping's big stage photos. There was another report about comment on this production, which showed the effect of the performance:

It is difficult to experience such a hypnotic state entirely except facing the really sincere art. However, Nora made me experienced it. For me, that is a miracle since I started to watch the spoken drama. When I walked out the theatre, I was so moved that I had to say: What a valuable good drama!⁷⁷

Only performance can achieve such success, through the cooperation between the audiences and actors, which can help the both part of them form a comparatively solid community. "It is conceived as a physical process, set in motion by participating in the event, by perceiving not only through the eyes and the ears, but through bodily sensations which affect the whole body."⁷⁸

First because of the performance's efficacy just met the audience (the special communities in China history) (history background, women's emancipation, revolution), secondly, taking advantage of media's power to exaggerate performance's efficacy. These two factors worked together, which formed the magnificent view in the history of Nora's performance in China. From here, we also can see that media began to play the important role in the broadcasting new ideas.

⁷⁶ Su Ling 苏灵, *Watching Nora's Performance 观<娜拉>演出*, *Shanghai Morning*《晨报》July2, 1935.

⁷⁷ Chen Liting, *Comment on Nora's Performance*, *Shanghai Minbao*, June29 to July1, 1935.

⁷⁸ Erika Fischer-Lichte, 2005, p26.

After Nanjing Nora Event and Nora Year's broadcasting by the mass media, Nora became a household name in China. It was through Nora's performance that Lan Ping became popular star in Shanghai, later she joined the famous movie company and worked as an actress. The year was also a period of higher tensions, during which the Communists established their headquarters in Yan An (1936) and Nanjing was invaded by the Japanese. After that, many revolutionary people flowed into Yan An and joined the Communists. Lan Ping also came to Yan An and changed her name to Jiang Qing. There she met Chairman Mao and later became his fourth wife.

Some other progressive youth, they stayed in the Kuomintang controlled areas to continue revolutionary activities. Performing spoken drama was their favorite way to revolutionize the public, and the public was used to accepting the radical ideas through watching spoken drama. Although the professionalization of spoken drama helped the development of Chinese spoken drama, later spoken drama began to turn it into a weapon to propagate ideas, gradually losing its art. It seemed spoken drama developed unusually. From its birth to growing up, experienced mature, but finally returning to the original image, which still focused on shouting slogans and expressing different -isms rather than innovating the performance techniques, stage settings, etc. No wonder Ibsen's play almost disappeared under the strict censorship system after China's liberation, since spoken drama was connected with revolutionary ideas and Ibsen was the first fuse. In the new China Helmer did not exist.

I remembered, when I acted as Nora, I performed very naturally, which seemed there was no distance between Nora and I. I regarded what Nora had said as mine and regarded my emotion as Nora's. Nothing to be worried about, everything was performed naturally seemed as flowing water.⁷⁹

From Nora's professional performance, Chinese spoken drama performers accumulated the experience to stage more aggressive plays during the coming revolutionary times. Just as the following depiction:

By watching the performance, they are no longer simply isolated individuals but form a community together. Thus, they acquire a new status and a new identity.

⁷⁹ Ibid 70.

Here, theatre appeared to be capable of transforming individuals into members of a community, albeit only temporarily, by focusing on the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators, on the physical acts of the actors and their capacity to ‘infect’ the spectators as well as on the ‘contagion’ occurring among the spectators.⁸⁰

The professional performance had more influence than before, and attracted more audiences, especially more and more progressive youth was moved and called on to devote to revolution. “In the course of the performance, energy is exchanged, forces are unleashed, activities triggered.”⁸¹ Chinese spoken drama became the bridge which connected revolutionary ideas and progressive youth; even encouraged women to leave their homes and walk out to the broad fields and become active in society later in the second Sino-Japanese war and civil war.

4 Fade from the History (1937-1948)

As I mentioned above, Nora’s performance was at peak in 1930s in China. After that, Nora gradually faded from history. The influence of Nora’s performance in Nora Year was mostly about how to resist feudalism and how to help awaken youth to find the way to break away from their old fashion family, which was attack of Jianjieshi’s propaganda of advocating and rebirth feudalism. However, in the following period, Nora’s performances were far away from Ibsen’s original script, even if they were still called Nora’s performances, they should be called Nora’s rewritten or adaptation. Performers just used the Ibsen’s plot and kept the skeleton of *A Doll’s House*. In the Nora’s performance, names and story were totally changed, in order to meet the requirement of current situation and arouse audience’s passion to involve in the national defense movement.

In this period, Nora was staged only a couple of times. Compared to the blooming of national defense plays, Nora’s influence was not so strong as before. After the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War (1937), many big cities were controlled by Japan. China was in a national crisis, progressive youth and comrades

⁸⁰ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre*, 2005, p30.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p27.

started to change their main revolution goals from the overturn of feudalism to against Japan's invasion. Patriotism and nationalism became the most important mainstream. The drama societies, especially some drama societies in Shanghai were united by Left wing Drama Union, and directed by the underground communist party. Their guiding principles aimed to call for national defense; accordingly, staging spoken drama was mainly used for same purpose to encourage the public fighting against Japan and protecting the nation.

In 1939, against such a difficult wartime background, Zhou Yibai used his pseudonym Yi Qiao to adapt *A Doll's House* into *Nuxing de Jiefang (Female Emancipation)*, in which Nora was transformed into a Chinese soldier fighting for the nation. Although later Zhou Yibai confessed that he altered Nora too much, the performance was successful according to the comments and reviews published in that year⁸².

Female Emancipation was presented by the YMCA in Shanghai in 1939, and it was sponsored by the Literary Society and Christian Fellowship at the Shanghai River University (Hujiang Daxue). Yi Qiao was both adaptor and director, while Ping Ku acted as the figure of Ye Anna (Nora's role). Any audiences who had read Ibsen's Nora would easily recognize the names in the original drama by the Chinese names. The rewritten dialogues also mocked Ibsen's style.

Considered according to the strict rules, it should not be called a Nora's performance. It was a totally different drama, maybe it could be classified into *Nora Theme Play*, as Hu Shi's *The Great Event in Life*. It is well-known that due to the open ending in Ibsen's script of *A Doll's House*, many directors found the excuse to change it to meet the local certain audiences' expectation. When Europe critics started to discuss Ibsen's unique technique in the play, Chinese people were still in the stage of debating about Nora's future. This point just was satisfied Chinese traditional drama audiences' habit, which liked to know the drama's distinct ending, whatever happy or tragic. In the play, as Tam pointed out, "It was exactly for this reason that Yi Qiao revised the play and, as he confesses, added a 'bright tail' to it, meaning a bright

⁸² *Theatre Magazine*, 3 November, 1939.

but mechanical ending.”⁸³ Not only this play had such defect, but also most other dramas in the same times had such bright ending and mechanical dialogues. This was just the reflection of the social situation. Even later, Yi Qiao did not mention *Female Emancipation* and depicted any spoken dramas when he wrote the *China History of Drama* later. It is no wonder that someone suspected that he felt spoken drama deviated from the normal direction and degenerated into propaganda tools.

In 1941, Peidu Jushe (Chongqing Drama Society) staged Nora’s another adaptation in Chengdu by Ouyang Hongying acting as the leading role. But reviewers and comments on this performance were limited, let alone to talk about its influence.

In 1945, Nora’s performance staged by Zhang Pengchun was an exceptional case. Same as the performance in 1941, there are fewer literature recorded the details about the special performance. I only found a few words mentioned that Nankai Drama Society staged Nora again after they moved to Chong Qing, which was the temporary capital of China. Emphasized in Zhang Pengchun’s biography and Nankai History, it was the last time that Zhang Pengchun directed *A Doll’s House*, which was also the last time Zhang worked for the spoken drama. After the second Sino-Japan war, Zhang Pengchun changed his position and worked as an ambassador to help China government cooperate with European countries. He just took advantage of the holiday in Chong Qing and redirected Nora in 1945. Although the record is rare and the performance was limited to the school, I guess the performance would be very successful and audiences would be very satisfied with it. Zhang Pengchun, as I introduced before, had graduated from Columbia University and was good at applying the European drama system. He focused more on the art than the abstract idea of the spoken drama. It was reported that he missed his teaching career in Nankai Middle School and the career of leading the Nankai Drama Society. In 1945, he visited Nankai Middle School and was very happy to direct Nora to celebrate the opening ceremony of the school.⁸⁴ He was never involved in spoken drama activates after that. He famously attended the drafting of the *Human Right Declaration* at the United

⁸³ Tam, p181,1984.

⁸⁴ Long Fei, *The First Director Zhang Pengchun*, *Tianjin Daliy*, May10, 2009.

Nations in San Francisco.

In 1948, another Nora's performance appeared in Chong Qing. Wang Laitian was the director and the leader of the Peidu Drama Society. Peidu Drama Society was one of the anti-Japan propaganda drama societies. The directing secretary of the drama group, Cheng Qianmou, was a underground communist, later was arrested and later died in prison. Most of the members transferred from the occupied city of Shanghai. Therefore, they continued their performance styles and stage experiences.

During the period of anti-Japan war, Chongqing was the temporary capital for five years. "The Fog Season Public Performance" ran continually from October of 1941 to June of 1945. Most drama groups, including traditional drama troupes, ethnic opera troupes, and new spoken drama societies which escaped to south China, attended the famous "Chongqing Fog Season Public Performance". Although those groups performed different types of drama, they had same ambition with their performances, which aimed to call on people who were struggling in the areas occupied by Japan to fight for national freedom and liberation.

Due to the complex and difficult social situation during the second Sino-Japan war, more and more real subject matters could be applied in spoken drama. Once spoken drama was successful in arousing the common people's involvement in the anti-Japan war, the availability of more realistic subjects in the spoken drama, gradually squeezed Nora's performance out of the audience's view.

Summary

Nora's performances were unpredictable active in the political arena in this period. First, progressive students performed *Nora* everywhere, which in turn formed progressive student communities. Encouraged by the *New Youth* and Hushi's *The Greatest Event in the Life*, they started to find new ways to express their own ideas and unite comrades to plan the coming revolution. It seemed as if Nora's departure in the play, started to awaken in society. But their rousing were premature, they could not find the way to solve it. Therefore, their passion just depended on the amateur drama societies which were limited to the campus. In the 1920s, the student

community pursued liberalism as it seemed Ibsen advocated in his play.

Afterwards, due to depute on the national drama movement, more and more realized that both the society revolution and drama reform could not just stay on the shouting slogan on the stage. Gradually, more and more amateur drama societies appeared with the new appearance and new directions. They carried out more professional performances and developed stage experiences by using new techniques and stage settings, director systems. Chinese spoken drama attained higher levels than ever and gained successes, both from the artistic aspect and the idea aspect. From Hushi's Nora Theme Play to Ouyang yuqing's *Kulei zhi Jiating*, Chinese spoken dramas just followed the normal development route.

Nora Year and Nanjing Nala Event verified this maturation process. In 1935, Nora's performance attained its historic peak. It was reported that more than 6000 performances had happened in Shanghai only in one month. Also the main big progressive cities staged Nora in the same year. Nora's influence spread to the whole country with the unexpected speed. The discussion about Nora's departure and women emancipation could be easily found in the newspapers at that time. The main leading roles in Nora's performance were communist members active in the revolution. They were artists who started to get involved in revolution through staging real spoken drama. This way was more effective and secret.

But, in 1930s and 1940s, the political situation got worse and worse. When anti-Japan war was totally broken, the more professional drama troupes could not only keep up with their pursuit of art, which held them back in revolutionary times. Therefore, they jumped into the revolutionary stream, which brought out the new adaptations of Nora's performance.

In 1939, Yi Qiao made Nora turned to a Chinese anti-Japan soldier and left home for the army. Not only did she leave home, but she encouraged her husband to fight for the country in the war. After 1948, Nora's performance faded into history.

Chapter III

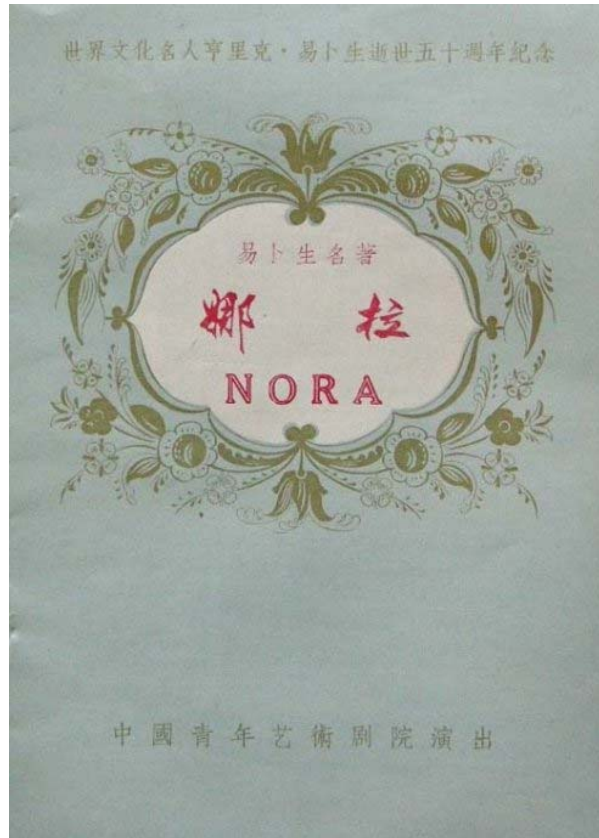
Nora = Ibsen = Ibsenism?! (1949-1979)

After 1949, China built a new country. Accordingly, the political, economic and cultural situations were greatly changed. Nora's position was also changed. From 1949 to 1979, Nora's fate was not so lucky as before. For these 30 years, almost no Nora's performances affected China as they had before. Accompanied with Ibsen's name, Nora and *A Doll's House* kept silent. Not so many Chinese audiences knew that Nora was so popular in China before China revolution.

This does not mean that China did not develop drama cultural during this period. On the contrary, China new government encouraged artists to write, introduce, perform and develop Chinese spoken drama. Spoken drama became more important than before. From the foundation of the People's Republic of China, spoken drama was seen as a drama genre rooted in the Chinese culture. Because of its extreme dedication to the revolution, like a double-edged sword, that brought her fame while prevented its development afterwards.

During this period, which spanned 30 years, there was only one performance worth noting in Nora's performance history and that would be remembered by Chinese performers.

On July 28 of 1956, Zhongguo Qingnian Yishu Xueyuan (China Youth Arts Academy) staged Nora in Beijing for the first time after China was established in 1949. Before he started to direct Nora, the director Wu Xun, who was president of the Academy, visited Norway to learn Norwegian society and culture in order to make the performance more close to Ibsen original Norwegian society. During his stay in Oslo, Wu watched several Ibsen performances, where he visited Gerda Ring, who was the director of the Norwegian National Theatre and directed *A Doll's House* in Copenhagen the year before. Later Wu invited Gerda Ring as a stage consultant and participated in the rehearsals. Ji Shuping took Nora's role, who recalled later that they acted so successfully that the Norwegian expert appreciated that they did not need her help.



The poster for Nora's 1956 performance



Ji Shuping's stage photo, played as Nora, 1956.



The actors of Nora's performance of 1956

The uniqueness of this Nora's performance lies in the special social situation. Before this performance, China was in the continually war times, while after this performance, China was in the chaos and political waves.

Encouraged by the agitation of spoken drama during the war times, China's high officers promoted spoken drama from the beginning to establish the new government. Although they advocated that spoken drama should serve the socialist society and liberate people, more and more spoken dramas were published with fresh ideas and new art techniques, rooted in social reality. In the government, Chairman Mao gave the famous speech which focused on advocating the slogan "A Hundred Flowers Blossoming, A Hundred Viewpoints Contending". Encouraged by this cultural principle, all kinds of cultural activities were carried out following this great guide. In the drama field, the officers launched a campaign to discuss about the nature of socialist drama.

Therefore, Ibsen's Nora was turned to serve the purpose of appreciate socialist drama and satire bourgeois social system rather than appeal for rebelling. Mao Dun said: "We commemorate him because his works encourage mankind to strive for freedom and liberation, because they criticize the petty and the vulgar, because they

reveal the misery that the patriarchal system brings.”⁸⁵ Ibsen’s drama is the story of Norway’s old society; Nora should not be necessary in a socialist country. No wonder after watching the performance a couple from the audience could discuss the performance in the following manner:

Wife: You have to reconsider yourself!

Husband: What do I have to reconsider?

Wife: What to reconsider? Nothing is clearer than this. I feel that you are like Helmer!

Husband: Nonsense. In our society, there is no Helmer.

Wife: It’s not nonsense. I have the reason to say that. What I mean is that your mind is full of the ideas and attitudes same as Helmer towards women.⁸⁶

Although the wife was aroused a little rebellion from the play, the current society could not allow her to think more about it. In other words, the China new society endowed women more rights than bourgeois society. It was confirmed that China women’s status has substantially been improved in the new society, whatever they still felt it was not the same situation as before. They could not criticize society but request their husband to change. In the audiences’ eyes, the story happened in the bourgeois society, which was far away from the new realities in China. The performance represented to the Chinese audiences a totally new experience about foreign plays, which told a story about a country far away and happened long time ago. Since people were satisfied with the new status, it seemed that nothing to do with the socialist China’s reality. Actually, just as Tam commented: Wu Xue makes it clear that “the play had a different but higher mission in socialist society.” It was treated “as medicine eliminating corrupt bourgeois morals” and “as a song praising new life.”⁸⁷

Based on commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Ibsen’s death, and to show the gratitude for the recognition of China by Norway, Ibsen and his well-known Nora were remembered again. In 1956, the Chinese authorities decided to ask Zhongguo Qingnian Yishu Xueyuan (China Youth Art Academy), which was famous for making the official professional performance, to stage *A Doll’s House*. Tam told the truth,

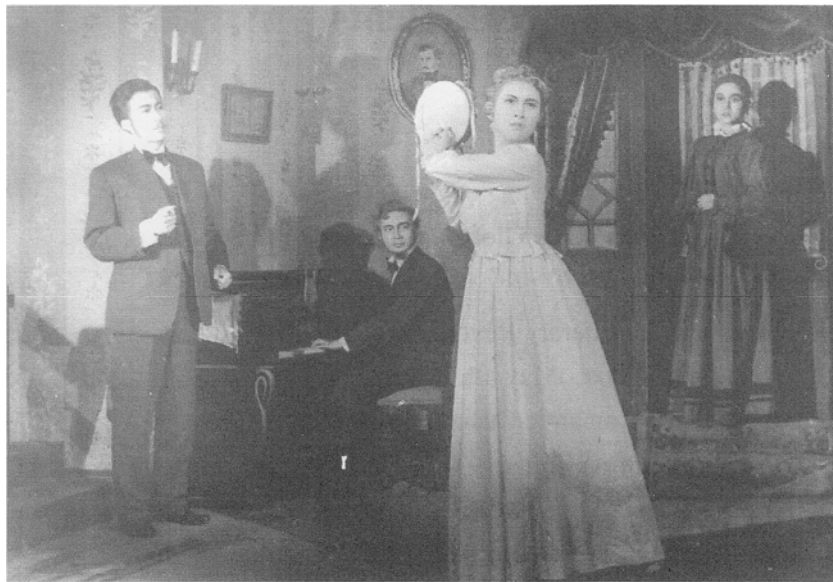
⁸⁵ He Chengzhou, 2004, p106.

⁸⁶ Tam, 1984, p25.

⁸⁷ Tam, 1984, p23.

“The performance of *A Doll's House* was treated as a gesture of China's friendly attitude towards Norway.”⁸⁸

It was later revived in Beijing 1957 and perhaps in 1959 as well. It was also sent on a tour around China, and everywhere the company had a full house. In addition, selected parts of the play were made into a film and distributed around the country.⁸⁹



Both photos from the stage of *A Doll's House* in Shanghai, 1962

However, even this friendly gesture did not last very long. After this highlight show, Nora was disappeared from the China's vision for a long time. In an article

⁸⁸ Tam, 1985,p183.

⁸⁹ Eide,1987, p313.

Zhang Yaoqing referred to that Wan Laitian directed Nora again in this period, but the exact year was not depicted in the content.⁹⁰ Even in 1962 Nora's performance appeared in Shanghai Xiju Xueyuan (Shanghai Theatre Academy), it was just limited in the campus for the academic experiment. Nora's performer Cao Lei wrote some details about rehearsal. She remembered that Nora's performance was just their graduation experiment performance. But this production was an attempt to reproduce the play in a style as close and faithful to the original as possible. It was from this Nora's performance Cao learned more about performance. She said:

Before graduated, our class prepared A Doll's House as graduation experiment performance. When we heard that president Xiong (who was in charge of Shanghai Theatre Academy) would direct it in person, we felt very worried and nervous. I was chosen to take Nora's role, therefore, I was even more nervous, and I had read lots of resources in order to prepare the rehearsal. Even so, due to my loose daily habit, when I wore a skirt trousers when I came to the first class, I was caught coming short and criticized: "How could you wear short pant and enter the classroom?" It was impolite to wear skirt-pant to class; especially it was far away from the figure in the script, because what we were going to perform was the last century drama.

The day before staging to the public, we were carrying out rehearsal, i.e. it was an informal performance, where sat lots of directors, actors from different drama academies and film companies, and president Xiong sat in the middle of them. When appeared on the stage as Nora, who came back to home happily with lots of children's Christmas gifts, Xiong suddenly stood up from the audiences' seat and shouted at me after I had performed about two minutes: "Wrong! What are you playing! Wrong feeling! Shut up the curtain! Try it again!" Stood in the middle of the stage and faced the whole audiences, I was totally shocked. This became gossip topic afterwards, and I could not forget in my whole life.⁹¹

Cao Lei was Xiong's student, who became a very famous actress, director and voice actress. Xiong had studied in American Columbia University and got a master degree of drama studies. He was very strict with the students on the stage. Cao Lei was also Cao Juren's daughter, and benefited from her father's earlier education.

⁹⁰ Zhang Yaoqing 张耀卿, *An Antecessor Who was Struggling in the Film and Stage: Wan Laiting's Brief Art Life*, Liaoning People's Art 《辽宁人艺》院刊 2007, Vol,3.

⁹¹ Cao Lei, *Some Storiness about Xiong Fuoxi 熊佛西院长二三事*, *Jiefang Daily 解放日报*, Nov29,2000.

Cao's father was a famous drama critic and liked to watch spoken drama, and had written some articles about Nora's performance both during the revolution and after the People's Republic of China was founded.

After the 1960s, because of the political chaos, Nora's performance disappeared just as other sensitive topics. Even though the first famous Chinese Nora was powerful, who later became Chairman Mao's wife; this did not encourage Nora's performance. She just used the history boosted her performance talent, since she were trying to pursue her political life. Sometimes she tried to avoid touching on her earlier life in Shanghai when she acted as Nora, because she was ashamed of her romantic life at that time. In my opinion, maybe this is also the reason Nora and Ibsen were neglected by people at that time. Since only eight model plays could be staged to the public, who dared to challenge this great powerful leader? If any person staged Nora, it would be impossible to avoid connecting with her fame, since she was famous as 1935's Nora.

Although there are no sources to verify it, I would like to mention another possible reason of Nora's cold reception in China. In the mid-1950s, in response to Mao Zedong's call for a critique of Hu Shi, Dai Liuling wrote an essay to criticized Ibsenism. By stressing on literary conflicts as a method of drama, Dai pointed out that the fallacy in Hu Shi's interpretation of Ibsenism lies in the point that Ibsen is taken merely as a preacher rather than as a playwright. Meanwhile, according to Friedrich Engel's comments on Ibsen, Dai advocated that Ibsen's drama aims to pointing out the corruption of Norwegian society. Dai also deputed that Hu Shi's definition about Ibsen's realism. Hu Shi considered that realism in Ibsen's plays was as a reflection of the playwright's realistic attitude towards the world. On the contrary, Dai thought that realism was only a method in Ibsen's plays, and based on this, he draw a conclusion that Hu Shi's essay was an attack of Russian Revolution. Dai's behavior is an excellent example of far-fetched interpretation and the political situation in China in the 1950s.

Hu Shi was the first man who introduced Nora in China with great effort, since Hu Shi represented bourgeois' ideas and became a target of criticism, even the great

leader Mao Zedong focused on disclosing his unhealthy ideas, it was reasonable that Nora and Ibsen together with him were abandoned like a pair of worn-out shoes. Not only they used this to find fault, but also they used this point to attack Ibsen's realism in his plays, and finally they built a new rule called social realism to against their misinterpretation of Ibsen. In such situation, Nora was reduced to a bomb which was too dangerous to perform. It could only be staged while serving as the country's friendly gesture or as an academic experiment.

Summary

Nora's performance gave the audiences a historic experience, although it was only one time that it gained more attention. How Chinese government dealt with it reflected how the political chaos interfered in the performing arts.

On the one hand, taking the opportunity of commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Ibsen's death, China government commanded the national theatre academy to perform *A Doll's House*.

Because Norway was one of the earliest western counties who accepted the Republic of China's political position in the world and built diplomatic relations with China, the Chinese government chose Nora to please Norway and show gratitude.

Actually the government did not really want to give Nora's performance a new opportunity to show off its ideas and the spirit of the original script. They used Nora again, and this time was tragic. Nora's performance had short life, just similar to Morning glory.

On the other hand, they carried out the movement to attack Hu Shi, thus attacking Ibsen's realism and his plays; therefore, Nora could not escape her tragic fate.

Even Gerda Ring tried her best to help Chinese actors and director to understand better the characters in *A Doll's House*, and brought out the western interpretation of Ibsen, it did not help Nora's tragic fate in China during the new period.

In her speech at the commemorative conference, Gerda Ring (1956) said:

Ibsen's dramatic works are not just one form, they contain an endless

number of forms of which 'bourgeois realism' is only one, and perhaps the least important one... The essential point is to give him the right he has won of being classed among the greatest authors in world literature, the right to be considered a poet, and not merely a polemical mouthpiece of certain trend of ideas.⁹²

Once the great leader Mao Zedong put the "bourgeois" label to Nora, no one could tear it off. Out of concern for political ideology, the Chinese speakers focused on the ideas in Ibsen's plays.

During this tumultuous period of history, Nora had an adventure, and continually exemplified Chinese dramatists' struggle with far-fetched interpretations and complex political situations.

⁹² Both the citations here and the follow of Mao Dun are taken from *Programme on the commemorative conference of George Berard Shaw and Henrik Ibsen* , Peking, 1956. p105.

Chapter V

Where is Nora? (1980-2010)

Compared to the attention and influence of Nora's performance appeared before 1948, Nora faded from the Chinese stage and became unfamiliar to Chinese audiences after 1962. After the decade of Cultural Revolution, Chinese theatre was dominated by the "Eight Model Style Traditional Drama". During the China Cultural Revolution period or during the recent opening-policy times, Nora was not so useful for the country's reconstruction after revolution. When the revolution was over, Nora was not as important as before, and performance of Nora was almost abandoned because of its decreased relevance for the new country.

In the 21 century, People have almost forgotten Nora and its unbelievable influence on the history of Chinese spoken drama. Even now if you ask the students at the university who is Ibsen and what is Noraism, Ibsenism, I am sure it would be only a few who can give the right answers. Although Chinese dramatists were trying to keep up with Ibsen's performances, and Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* was staged in the early 1980s, Nora was still kept on ice.

Then, where is Nora? It is no doubt Nora is still in China. But it is more welcome in Hong Kong and Taiwan areas than in mainland. On the mainland, except a few times' directed by Wu Xiaojiang, there have been no more performances to the public before 2006.

1 Historical Special Administrative Region of China

Hong Kong was part of China, but due to the special treaty status, it was occupied by the British until 1997. Therefore, it had special rule for the culture and performance, even after it was returned to China.

When mainland was starting to carry out Deng's "Reform and Open Policy", Hong Kong had already found Nora and performed three times before 1997.



1985 *A Doll's House* stage photos, Hong Kong.

Hong Kong Youth Theatre Company (Xianggang Qingnian Jutuan) staged *A Doll's House* in 1985. This is an adaptation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, and the story was supposed to happen in 1920s. But it was changed to Cantonese performance and all the characters were given Chinese names with Chinese costumes. It was said that

audience almost could not recognize that adapted from Ibsen's *Nora*.⁹³

This performance was not as popular as Huang HoYi's other works, even in his official website did not appear more comments on it. However, Huang HoYi is a legendary figure in the history of Chinese spoken drama. In this play, he was not only a director, but also an actor and stage producer. He founded Hong Kong Youth Theatre Company and Hong Kong's Spotlight Productions and became the first actor-manager in the history of Chinese "stage play". In establishing his independent theatre companies, he re-named "stage play" as "Wu Tai Ju" in Chinese, an accurate translation and suitable deviation to the political sensitive term of "Hua Ju". In the following two decades, this was adopted by official and unofficial bodies on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, he unified Greater China in dramatic terminology with one single stroke.

Hong Kong Augustine Drama Group (Siding Jushe) also staged *Nora* in Hong Kong 360 Degrees Theatre in 1996. According to the given statistics; there were four performances with a total audience of 450⁹⁴. Augustine Drama Group connected to Hong Kong Catholic; therefore, most audiences were probably connected with the church. It was unbelievable that such a drama group (part of the missionary work) staged *A Doll's House*. I am very curious about *Nora*'s characteristics in their performance. From the official website⁹⁵, I found they staged no more plays like *Nora*.

In 1997, Hong Kong Movie and TV Theatrical Company (Xianggang Yingshi Jutuan) staged *Nora*. According to Tam's reference,

This is a highly faithful production of *A Doll's House*. It is faithful in the sense that the production captures the original spirit of the play. In the terms of adaptation, the ending is moved to the beginning to so that the audience is given a shock about the confrontation between *Nora* and *Helmer* before they see what leads to the confrontation. Such a beginning produces a strong effect of suspense. Though the dialogue is in Cantonese, the furniture and the costumes

⁹³Tam, *Ibsen in China(1908-1997)*,p206, Hongkong, The Chinese University Press,2001. and Huang HoYi official website: <http://www.ho-yi.com/index2.htm>

⁹⁴ Tam, *Ibsen in China1908-1997*,2001, p206.

⁹⁵ <http://augustinedrama.catholic.org.hk/shows.html>

are in Norwegian style and the audience knows that it is Ibsen's play.⁹⁶

Nora appeared in Hong Kong due to Hong Kong's colony status, which limited the development of Chinese culture. In 1997 Hong Kong was returned to China, which was a world famous event. But, Hong Kong people worried during the negotiations between the British and Chinese governments. Some of them worried about China government's policy, some of them scared by the 1989 Tiananmen Square Event, and they were busy in moving their homes to other countries.



A Doll's House stage photo, performed by Hong Kong Movie and TV Theatrical Company, 1997

Under that situation, there were few dramatists in Hong Kong. Some Chinese famous dramatists staged in Hong Kong just to escape the chaos in mainland and afterwards they immigrated to western countries; other elder local dramatists faded from the theatre groups. Therefore, even as the Hong Kong government tried to revive Hong Kong theatres; it was difficult to encourage artists to write local scripts. So, they found a way to solve the problem-----translated foreign plays. Ibsen and other classical dramatists were their favorite authors.

Without stricter culture censorship system in the stage field, Hong Kong theatre has more freedom. However, Nora's performance was also appreciated by a small group, for example, Huang Ho Yi liked to stage world classic masterpieces, Augustine

⁹⁶ Ibid, p206,207.

Drama Group connected to Catholic Church. Another was a students' experimental performance, which appeared on campus of Hong Kong Academy for Performance Arts in 2001.⁹⁷

Just as Jon Nyggard said, after the revolution, theatres lose its ability to involve in the coming revolution. Nowadays it has become a show or experiential performance. Besides, Hong Kong is a very special region, where all kinds of cultures converged from all over the world. Therefore, Nora's performance could not take the leading role nowadays any more as its most splendid periods: for example, in the New Culture Movement period, May Fourth period and the Anti-Japan War period.

2 Mainland: Artists' International Cooperation

On the mainland, Nora's fate was no luckier than in Hong Kong. After the long silence of the Culture Revolution period, Nora appeared in mainland officially only in 1998. It was almost half a century from the last official appearance of Nora's performance in 1956.

After long preparation, Nora's performance glittered on Central Little Theatre stage in Beijing in 1998. This adaption was dominated by China National Experimental Theatre (CNET). It reported that was a big success, which not only surprised the Chinese audiences, but also gave foreign audiences a fresh interpretation. Later, they staged again at Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre from 17 to 21 January in 2001. During the season of 2006 Eternal Ibsen International Drama Festival, it had been put on The National Theatre of China from 17 - 22 September. Here, I will discuss the first two performances; for the one produced in 2006, later I will depict it more in the next topic.

In 1998, a unique adaption of A Doll's House appeared in Beijing by Central Experimental Theatre. Director Wu Xiaojiang Sinicized the performance by combining West and East culture elements, and he changed the original theme of the script to cross-cultural marriage conflict. This was called experimental theatre by the director and critics at that time and gained lots of applause.

⁹⁷ <http://www.mydramaactor.com/mercy/main.htm>

However, except the compliment, the mass media did not discover more details of this production and seldom mentioned the background of the adaption. In May 1997, Wu Xiaojiang directed *An Enemy of the People* in Beijing and staged on Central Experimental Theatre, and this performance was well received by the audience and critics both in Norway and in China. In the next year, even Wu got the chance to bring this production to Oslo to attend “The Ibsen Festival”, through which Wu broaden one’s vision to cooperate with Norwegian actors and critics. And Agnete G.Haaland’s husband was working in Beijing at that time and she would stay in China two years. Then, naturally Wu and Agnete G.Haaland could cooperate later in the adaption of *A Doll’s House* in Beijing. Therefore, their cooperation got support from Norwegian Embassy in China. As Bettina S. Entell depicted in her dissertation:

A Doll’s House was a co-operation with Norwegian National Culture Development Bureau of Norwegian Foreign Ministry investing 170,000 RMB. It is noteworthy that when CNET production manager Liu Tiegang (as *A Doll’s House*’s producer) and director Wu first procured sponsorship from Norway , they hoped to produce the play independently. But for the stable investment, The Norwegian Embassy would only approve this financial support to a Government-sponsored theatre as a more stable investment.⁹⁸

Actually, Chinese director Wu and manager Liu tried to struggle for perform Nora independently, this just showed their production was a result of concession between the art and the support. Therefore, this production was Chinese and Norwegian artists’ friendly international cooperation.

Due to this complex background, the experimental performance combined unexpected elements together, which resulted in the very special adaption of *A Doll’s House*. Nora became the reconciliation between co-partners, which could attract both Chinese and foreign audiences. Because this was a totally new and alien Nora for Chinese audiences, while a totally unbelievable Nora for foreign spectators.

According to director Wu’s explanation, the adaption was a challenge. It is important to make the performance more entertaining and more exciting⁹⁹. He

⁹⁸ Bettina S. Entell , *Post- Tinamen: A New Era in Chinese Theatre*, Hawai University, 2002,p111.

⁹⁹ *The Conflict Between West and East: The Introduction before Staging of” A Doll’s House”*, *Best Shopping Guide 精品购物指南* March 27, 1998.

changed the drama plot boldly. The story was set in 1930s China. Nora, who was a Norwegian woman, and married a Chinese oversea studied man Han Ermao (Helmer). After married, they moved back to China. As her Chinese husband's wish, Nora tried her best to become a perfect traditional Chinese housewife. She learned Chinese, Chinese cooking, Peking opera, and Chinese traditional customs. She even used to prepare Chinese Spring Festival. The story began with Nora came home after shopping for the Chinese New Year. Although she managed to keep the family happily survived four years, the happy family confronted with latent crisis because of the appearance of Ke Luotai (Krogstad in Ibsen's script). Finally, when Nora found Han Ermao was selfish and she could not bear Chinese traditional social stereotype, she left the home.



A poster of performance of *A Doll's House*, Shanghai. 2006



A Doll's House stage photos, Beijing, 2006



A Doll's House stage photos, Beijing, 2006



A Doll's House stage photos, Beijing, 2006.

Since the target audiences were both Chinese and foreign, therefore, director Wu not only changed the story, but also based on the new theatre conflict, and added more Chinese traditional culture elements, for example, Peking Opera, traditional costumes, Mandarin Chinese, traditional music instruments, etc. Combined both Chinese traditional culture and Norwegian culture elements, this production was more localization and inter-culturalization. Conflicts in the play was not only focused on the relationship between men and women, but also shed light on the culture difference between the West and the East. This adaption was very subtle and shrewd. On the one hand, the director could use both Norwegian and Chinese actors perform on the same stage without language barrier, for meeting the request of co-operation; on the other hand, the director applied more Chinese traditional element to foreign audiences, fulfilling the duty to broadcast Chinese traditional culture. This production avoided the censorship successfully, even though it reflected current situation in China through the Nora's last conversation with Han Ermao, most of which were rewritten by director Wu, as the following:

Helmer: Foreign women are like monsters...you have lots of shortcomings that foreigners have; you want to control what's happening in China.... You are a foreigner, your task is to perform as a lovely foreigner.

Nora: I am not your ugly uneducated Chinese wife,... Does the philosophy of Confucius teach you Chinese to be such mediocre human being? If that is true, I curse such a morality and such a culture!¹⁰⁰

This conversation could have different explanations, therefore, even the censorship could not find fault with such a production, set in the 1930s and cooperated with Norwegian National Culture Development Bureau of Norwegian Foreign Ministry.

It showed that the production was very successful. Even the performance performed on the CNET's Little Theatre, which could only supply 160 seats, it attracted lots of foreigners to watch, especially some people from Norway Embassy and some business men:

With free tickets distributed, *A Doll's House* was also popular, and during the limited run (twelve performances, April 1-12, 1998). CNET's Little Theatre was often packed. Overall, the spirit of the play was fun and entertaining, especially with a foreign actress shared the stage with Chinese, intriguing both Beijing's Chinese and foreign communities.¹⁰¹

This is a first bilingual performance with Chinese traditional culture elements. Agnete G. Haaland, who was leading the role of Nora, instead of speaking her native Norwegian, spoke English with some Chinese words on the stage. Meanwhile, other actors talked in Chinese with "Chinglish". The languages in the cross-cultural background with local accents, both Chinese spoken by Nora and English spoken by Chinese actors, caused comic effect, which made the atmosphere of the stage very realistic, even though the adaption transformed the story from Ibsen's time in Norway to 1930's China.

However, some avant-garde Chinese directors doubted if it should be called experimental performance. Lin Zhaohua pointed out that *A Doll's House* was nothing

¹⁰⁰ Ibid 87, p110.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p111.

new if judged by the theatre techniques and artistic method. Meng Jinghui, who is the well-known avant-garde director, also confirmed that combining Western and Chinese elements did not define experimental theatre. If these points were true, this Nora's performance could not be called experimental theatre. Maybe it was just for the entertainment of Norwegian artists and CNET¹⁰².

It would be difficult to measure how successful the show was, since most tickets were given out for free. Of course, the audiences' number could also show the level of the performance. After all, this was the first cooperation between Chinese artists and Norwegian artists, which led the base for the further cooperation during the "2006 Eternal Ibsen International Festival".



A Doll's House stage photo, Shanghai, 2005.

¹⁰² Ibid, p117.

In 2005, during the period he was Dean of the Academy of Performing Arts of the newly founded Shanghai Institute of Film Arts, he directed Nora again. June 10, Nora appeared in Shanghai Han Xin theatre. From the bulletin announced to enroll actors, we could see that was a brave attempt at combining commercial performance and performance education. All the actors were non-professional students without any performance experience, and Huang worked both as a teacher and a director. Those student who were chosen to study and act in the performance, could learn performance techniques and accumulate the stage experience, but would not get paid.¹⁰³

Even though it was in the same city and staged in the famous theatre, Shang Hai was more modern than before, Nora could not gain more attention in 2005 than in 1935. I tried to find some reports about it, but it turned out very few.

3 2006' Eternal Ibsen International Drama Festival: Political Show

Nora's performance returned to China's attention after almost one century in 2006. 2006 Eternal Ibsen International Drama Festival is one part of the programme of Ibsen Year, to commemorate the great Norwegian dramatist. It is well-know that Norwegian government decided that 2006 would be Ibsen Year. During the whole year, everyday at least one production of Ibsen's plays would be staged somewhere of the world

Ibsen was introduced in China in 1906, where Nora and Ibsen had been very popular for a long time and was regarded as one the first Asian countries on which Ibsen had influence. There was consensus in China drama field about Ibsen's contribution to China spoken drama. Although his plays were not so often performed on the public stage, Ibsen and Nora was always a land mark standing in the drama history. No one could escape them.

Nowadays Ibsen became a Norwegian culture's calling card in the foreign affairs. In 2006, Norwegian Embassy encouraged Chinese drama troupe to stage

¹⁰³http://bbs.sjtu.edu.cn/bbsanc.path,%2Fgroups%2FGROUP_9%2FPartTime%2FD656FD8A3%2FD6D481394%2FDA5228852%2FD4B0D472C%2FM.1123134905.A.html)and <http://www.chinamusical.net/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=9642&page=1>

Ibsen's plays by supplying financial support. Therefore, 2006 Eternal Ibsen International Festival (EIIIF) launched in China National theatre and brought out a series of performance tour to other big cities. From 25 August to 25 September, the festival lasted whole month, and applied 5 Government-control theatres (Capital Theatre, Haidian Teatre, Dongfang Avant-garde Little Theatre, Eight One Theatre, Tianqiao Theatre), which distributed the most crowded districts of city centre. The repertoires included five Ibsen's scripts and one developed by Elfriede Jelinek. Norwegian actress Agnete G. Haaland performed both in *Peer Gynt* and *A Doll's House*.

Nora had a long tradition in China. In China, people knew more about Nora than about Ibsen. Of course Nora was invited to the festival. There were at least five different versions of Nora's performances staged in China. In Beijing, there were four different ones, another appeared in Hong Kong. Apart from the main arenas, Ibsen Year also triggered another Nora's performance to Beijing.

1998 version of *A Doll's House* was one of the main courses for this big theatre festival dinner. American theatre performed adaptation of Elfriede Jelinek's *After Nora Left Her Husband*, which was regarded as a successfully developed ending after Nora left home in *A Doll's House*.

Actually, earlier in April, a production *Nora's Children* was staged in Beijing, which opened the curtain of Ibsen Year's performance. The artists both from Norway and China performed together.

A Doll's House followed the 1998 version, and still applied bilingual dialogues on the stage. From 17 to 22 September, it staged 6 times in Dongfang Avant-garde Little Theatre. It was reported in Chinese newspaper that Agnete G. Haaland's fans even followed her to Beijing in order to experience the special "Chinese Nora". Later, 8 and 9 of December in the same year, *A Doll's House* staged in ShangHai Spoken Drama Centre two times, with seating for 530 audience members.

From 3 to 5 of November, Dong Fang Chinese Performing Arts Association (Zhijiage Dongfang Yishutuan) was invited to perform *A Doll's House* in Dongfang Avant-garde Little Theatre. This group was formed by non-professional

Chinese-American artists.



A Doll's House stage photos, the different feelings about the receipt, Beijing, 2006



A Doll's House stage photo, Beijing, 2006

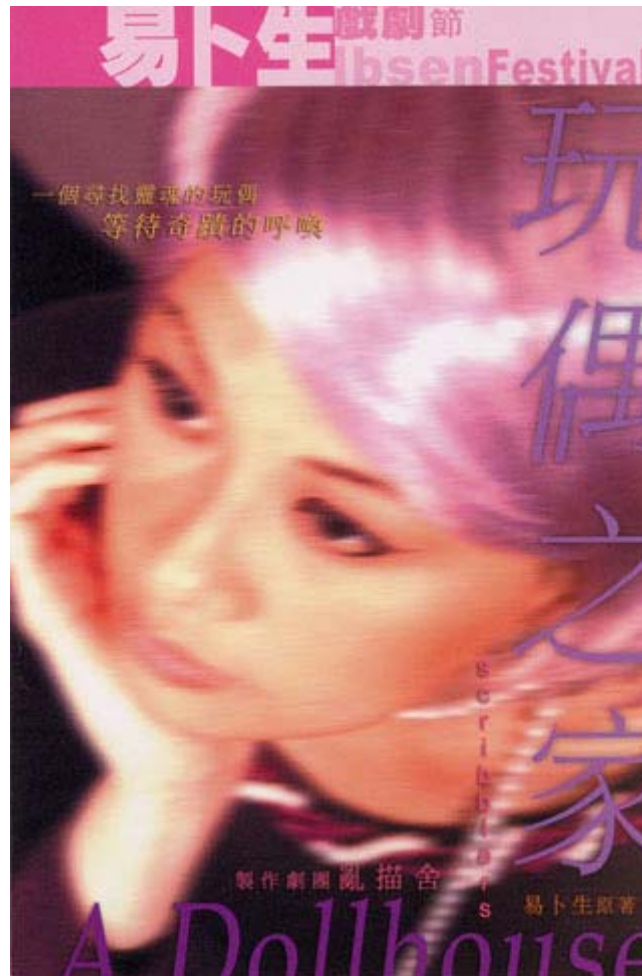
It was organized in 2006, and *A Doll's House* was the first play they put on the theatre. From that on, they performed a few plays every year and were often invited to perform in other cities. Gradually, it became a famous Chinese Drama Society in the United States.¹⁰⁴

Ibsen festival was also organized in Hong Kong in 2006. Nora's performance definitely should not be excluded.¹⁰⁵

Ibsen Year gave the China more opportunity to perform Ibsen's play, whether through financial support or international culture exchange. During this period, Ibsen seemed come back to 1930s popularity in China. Both Nora and Ibsen gained lots of applause. Even it prompted the Ibsen's Master Builder could perform in China for the first time. Media gave lots of support, almost all the well-know newspapers reported this event. Sina.com even designed special report on their website.

¹⁰⁴ <http://yule.sohu.com/s2006/wanouzhijia/index.shtml> special report in the entrainments channel.

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.theatrespace.org/event/et06-Ibsen.html#1>



Poster of *A Doll's House* in Hong Kong, 2006 Ibsen Festival

In 2007, a production of *Nora* staged by Tellus Theatre and appeared in Taipei. In my opinion, this production is also connecting with Ibsen Year.

In 2010, a *Nora's* performance was planned to appear in Shanghai by a new adaption. A Chinese ballet dancer Jin Xing, who was a man and later changed his gender, will interpret *Nora* from her own experience. It is also because Inger Buresund, who is the leader of Norwegian art and Culture Program for 2010 Shanghai World Exhibition, invited Jin Xing to perform *Nora*.

Summary

After reform-opening policy was carried out, China experienced tremendous change from every facet. But in the culture fields, artists were still wondering how to develop it, especially after 10 years of Culture Revolution trauma. Under the censorship

system, they still could not freely to express, even through experimental art.

Therefore, only the government-controlled theatre could perform Ibsen and Nora. Since they were labeled special mark which was connected with progressive idea and now China government takes effort to develop the economic and culture, no one wanted to touch this wasp. 1998 version of Nora's performance was based on the Norwegian and Chinese artists' enthusiasm to cooperate on the same drama. Because both artists belonged to the National Theatre, and the most important thing was that Norwegian Government gave the financial support so that Agnete G. Haaland could stay in China for two years. If this performance showed both countries artists' desire to have international cooperation and try the cross-cultural performance, 2006 Eternal Ibsen International Drama Festival was mostly politics and culture show.

Since the Norwegian Embassy extended the olive branch to China National Theatre, China government would cooperate and took it seriously. Not only had the artists endeavored to rehearsals of new performances, but also collected mass media to propaganda this. Scholars organized the conferences, artists precipitated in the discussion with the audiences after performances, and invited Chinese-American drama group to the festival, was very active for the promoting the performances. Under such situation, silence was impossible, even if Ibsen and Nora would like to keep silent. But pulling aside the veil, Chinese directors' embarrassment appeared on the face. They were still in the dilemma between accepting support from the Norwegian government and avoiding censorship. Norwegian Embassy's financial support would give on the condition they represented China National Theatre. It is very difficult for Chinese artists to keep balance between politics and art.

Erika Fischer-Lichte had said:

In this sense, the global and the local do not constitute binary opposites. Instead, the global functions within and as part of the local. Today, the local and the global go hand in hand. Therefore, the performances that emerge as a result of such processes of interweaving are local and global at the same time.¹⁰⁶

It is thus important to bear in mind that when Chinese intellectuals were promoting the West in their theatrical productions, their seeming celebrations of

¹⁰⁶ Fischer-Lichte, *Ibsen Studies*, no 2/2008, p152.

the current political regime were on many occasions used to conceal criticisms of the communist system in general, which produced a Maoist regime as well as a Dengist one.¹⁰⁷

After 20 years reform and opening-up policy, China's social situation went through earthshaking changes. All kinds of pioneer dramas were swarming on China's stages. But why could Nora's performance still catch audiences' and media's eyes?

¹⁰⁷ Chen Xiaomei, 2002, p45.

Conclusion

In the above chapters, through the periods in chronological order, I described an overview of *Nora's* performance in China. Now it is the time to answer the questions I mention in the introduction.

Firstly, there is no doubt that *Nora's* performances were popular in China before the liberation. From 1914 to 1948, it was a time of chaos in China. In this period, China experienced uncountable wars, and people were fighting with all kinds of enemies, in order to gain the independence for the country, to break away from the feudal system, and build a democratic country. Chinese intellectuals and elites were trying to find the methods to bring old country a new appearance. More and more people who had studied abroad tried to implant the drama into Chinese culture and use it as a weapon to arouse the public. Meeting the needs of the social situation, *A Doll's House (Nora)* was introduced to China.

It was not just coincidence that *Nora's* performance and Ibsen's script had the same influence when they were first introduced. It is worthy of emphasis that the time Hu Shi introduced the *A Doll's House*(1918) and Lu Jingruo staged *A Doll's House*(1914) are almost at the same period. Hu Shi later confessed that he introduced *A Doll's House* by emphasizing Ibsenism in order to inject the fresh blood to the sick China.

It played most exciting and liberated function roles in the seventh or eighth year of Republic of China, just because it advocated individualism, which was really the most fresh and most demanding needle injection.

Nora abandoned the family, husband and children, and left easily, which just because she aroused that herself was also a human being, and realized that "whatever, should try to be a human being". This was Ibsenism.¹⁰⁸

Meanwhile, Lu Jingruo tended to recommend Ibsen drama styles' vigor deserved people to hand down. Hu Shi focused on the Ibsenism expressed through *Nora* while Lu Jinruo was more interested in the performance's techniques. Although

¹⁰⁸ Hu Shi, *Introduce My Own Thoughts: Self-Prologue of Hu Shi Selections, Hu Shi Complete Collections*, vol.4, Hefei: Anhui Education Publishing House, 2003, p662.

they influenced reader and audiences in the different areas (one used the magazine to call for the youth while another used the stage to collect the progressive audience), they had the same contribution to China. Although in the first period (1914-1922), Nora's performance was not so much influence on the stage due to the difficulty of developing spoken drama, Nora became the special stressor of Chinese spoken drama. When people discussed the history of Chinese spoken drama, Nora and Spring Willow Society was the milestone which could not be ignored. Choosing *A Doll's House* at the same time reflected that both Hu and Lu's choice could meet the requirement of the society situation at that time. When Hu wrote the first Nora Theme Drama, and brought the appearance of a series of Nora Theme's Dramas and even Nora theme's novels, Hu and Lu's ambition met together without appointments. This also reflected how intellectuals were indulging in finding the way to change the society. Through the performances, public media, they tried to form a new imagined community.

Secondly, in the period with more conflicts and before the real revolution came, the intellectuals used Noraism to form different imagined communities. Encouraged by the *New Youth's* propaganda, Hu Shi's Ibsenism and *A Doll's House* was deeply embedded in progressive students' hearts. In the May Fourth period, Nora's performances were everywhere and most young people also departed from their feudal system families and involved in the coming revolution. They performed Nora, learned from Nora and became Nora. More and more amateur theatre societies mushroomed in 1920s, and spoken drama developed very quickly. Among these amateur theatre societies, *Nora's* performance was often on their repertoires. In this period, *Nora's* performance mostly was limited in amateur theatre societies at the universities, in the high schools or some theatre colleges. The audiences mainly were progressive students. In 1925, *Nora's* adaption staged by Hong Sheng and Ouyang Yuqian, paved the way to open to the public. They organized Shanghai Drama Association Society, which combined both drama essences from Japan and America, and began to perform spoken drama more professionally. They changed the old stage experience of shouting some progressive slogan on the stage, and started to pursue theatre effects by applying different theatre systems to direct the performance. They

also began to cooperate with media, in order to get feedback on the audience's reactions. They used media advertisement to introduce the performance, published the adaptation script on the media before the premiere and afterwards launched the debate on the newspaper. In 1930s, most drama societies and drama groups not only became professional performers, but also became secret progressive groups, which either connected with the Communist party or directed by the Communist leaders. Therefore, Nora became a household name, especially in Shanghai, Beijing, Nanjing, Jinan, and Chongqing. Ascribed to the blooming of *Nora's* performance in the same year and its unexpected influence, the year of 1935 was called Nora Year in China theatre history. After the Nanjing Nala event, Nora was suddenly as popular as one of today's pop stars. Audiences went to the theatre watching the performance, readers were discussing Nora's fate and launched the debate on Chinese women's emancipation, media were following the debate, and even politicians were involving in controlling *Nora's* performances. Two successful *Nora's* performers, Lan Ping (later known as Jiang Qing) and Wang Ping later became famous figures in Chinese history. They both joined the communist party and were active in the following revolutions. Jiang Qing became Chairman Mao Zedong's wife while Wang Ping became the first female film director in Chinese history after the revolution. Now no one can say for certain how many people were affected by *Nora's* performance and influenced by Nora. But it is a truth that lots of people devoted to the revolution and benefited from Nora and Ibsen. At that time, Ibsen's power was not less than Marx and Lenin. In 1925, Mao Dun reviewed like this:

Ibsen had an extraordinary relationship with our famous across-country New Culture Movement in recent years. About six or seven years ago, *New Youth* published Ibsen Special Issue, and regarded this Nordic great writer as a symbol of literature revolution, women emancipation, against traditional ideas and other new movements. At that time, Ibsen was the name reverberated in the hearts of the Youth, and oral communicated among the Youth, which was no less important than nowadays' Marx and Lenin.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹Mao Dun, *Discussing about "Puppet Family"*, *Mao Dun Complete Collection*, vol.33, 1981, p149.

When the Sino-Japanese war broke out, *Nora* was adapted to an anti-Japan national hero; she not only left her family, but also encouraged her husband to dedicate himself to the anti-Japan war. Obviously, the performers aimed to call on more and more people devoting in anti-Japan war. This performance was a complete adaptation, Chinese names, Chinese background, and Chinese story plot.

However, audiences began to lose the interest in *Nora's* performance in the 1940s, partly because more and more other anti-Japan theme dramas appeared on the stage and those performance attracted more audiences due to the maturity of spoken drama. Other anti-Japan theme dramas were closer to the realities and moved the audiences more easily. Therefore, near the end of the revolution, *Nora's* performance almost faded into history. When the Anti-Japanese war and the civil war between Nationalists and Communists were over, *A Doll's House* began to serve another purpose in contemporary China.

Thirdly, after revolution, *Nora* was up in the air and no-one had the same passion as before to perform it. On the one hand, the new country started to encourage the local national drama to be created, therefore, *Nora* and other foreign dramas, which were important in developing Chinese spoken drama, faded into history after they finished their historical mission. On the other hand, *Nora* was still mentioned a couple of times, either for representing the friendship to the Norwegian government or remembering the great dramatist by theatre college's experimental performance. In the period from 1949 to 1979, *Nora* was almost out of the intellectuals' discourse in China except the very few times I just mentioned above. In the chaos times, *Nora* was labeled with Ibsen, Ibsenism, Hu Shi and called a representative of bourgeois, and put in a mental prison. For a long time no one dare to mention Ibsen, let alone *Nora* and its performance.

In the 1980s, *Nora's* performance first appeared a couple of times in Hong Kong, probably due to its loose political environment. After China and British signed the treaty to return Hong Kong back to China, Hong Kong became the Special Administrative Region of China and it had a special political system. Meanwhile, *Nora's* performance did not appear in the mainland until 1998. Although after

reform-open policy, China society changed quickly both in political areas and in cultural areas, and Ibsen was welcomed back to China with his *Peer Gynt* early in 1983, *Nora* did not come back yet. Even though *Nora* reappeared in 1998 after many years' silence, *Nora* was not so popular as before. It seemed that it was just an international performance experiment, in order to promote the cooperation between Norwegian artists and Chinese artists. In 2006, with the aura of Ibsen, *Nora* shed more light on the stage again. In the same year and the next, *Nora*'s was performed more than three times, each time with large audiences. Some big cities, like Beijing and Shanghai, became the most important theatre tour targets. *Nora*'s glory in 2006 could compare even to that of 1935. With the financial support from the Norwegian embassy, *Nora*'s performance suddenly burst out in different editions. From *Nora*'s Children, Chicago Dong Fang Chinese Performing Arts Association American Chinese's adaption, 1998 Central Experimental Theatre's adaption to Hong Kong's performance, *Nora*'s performances competed on the stage in the same year, which formed a beautiful and splendid 2006 Ibsen Year. But, it was still mainly a political show. For example, the Norwegian embassy not only supplied financial support to the performance, but also encouraged more and more audiences come to the theatre by distributing free tickets. Concerning the 1998's adaption, when the performance appeared in the Little Theatre again in 2006, instead of focusing on the social problems which Ibsen questioned in the play a hundred years ago, most spectators were more interested in the multicultural elements added in the new adaptation. In this sense, such *Nora*'s performance was either political show or experimental theatre or a combination of both. This can explain why *Nora* could be just instant glory in 2006.

All in all, *Nora*'s performance experienced both glory and gloom on the Chinese stage. In the revolution times, as a signal of coming revolution, *Nora*'s performances mushroomed in China main cities and were applauded by the progressive students and elites, who were in favor of China's new revolution. Although in different times *Nora*'s performance was adapted for different purposes and attracted different communities, those adaptations were still products of the situation at the time, and predicted the coming revolution. Therefore, *Nora*'s

performance was very popular during the May Fourth Movement and in 1930s. Whether they focused on women's emancipation or individual liberty by breaking away from the old traditional feudal family system and semi colony position, Nora's performance could always supply the spiritual support for different interpretations of Nora's figure, who bravely dared to break away from her family and doubted the traditional society system deeply. Just as the following:

The poetics of the oppressed is essentially the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theatre is action... perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal for revolution! ¹¹⁰

It is worth emphasizing that Nora's performance was connected with the revolution. The first Nora's performance happened in 1914, which was 5 years before the May Fourth Movement. The May Fourth Movement was the event which marks the start of China's modern history. The first important Nora's performance appeared in 1923 and in Beijing Female High School, which was 3 years earlier than The Northern Expedition¹¹¹. The Nora Year in 1935 was 2 years before the second Sino-Japanese war. The 1948 adaption was 1 year before the foundation of the People's Republic of China. After the revolution, Nora was not in as much demand as in the revolution times. Nora's performance raised attention a couple of times when China's government wanted to show friendship to Norway or the support for artists' cooperation. Sometimes Nora's performance attracted art colleges to apply experimental theatre techniques. Nora's rise and fall on the Chinese stage mirrored the theatre's function in society and could explain why Nora had so many political meanings.

What Jon Nygaard had explained about changing of theatre's function in European countries also supports my interpretation. He said:

¹¹⁰ Boal, Augusto, *Theater of the Oppressed*, London: Pluto Press, 1979, p243.

¹¹¹ The Northern Expedition 北伐 was a military campaign led by the Kuomintang (KMT) from 1926 to 1928. Its main objective was to unify China under the Kuomintang banner by ending the rule of local warlords. It led to the demise of the Beiyang government and the Chinese reunification of 1928.

The theatre's unique characteristic is to be a relationship between people, and communicate the energy that exists between people and in the society. Therefore, the theatre functions only in a context. When the context disappears, is changed or dissolves, the theatre's function also disappears – and thus eventually also the theatre itself.

[...]

But after the function is gone, the theatre is no longer an interface or magnetic field. It stands outside and isolated from society, robbed of its creative functions and persons. The theatre no longer captures the energy in society. Without energy, it stops. It no longer produces, but reproduces and recycles that which is already created or established. It simulates culture using earlier period's culture. The classics dominate the repertory, no longer in work which challenge society, but confirm and fortify it.¹¹²

In China, it is a common consensus that Chinese spoken drama was introduced, developed and grew up accompanied by the revolution. Tian Han pointed in 1956:

Our spoken drama was closely connected with Chinese people's requirement on expressing their national democracy, which grew up in the cruel national democratic struggle in the past half century, and its general characteristic was the strong tendency of pursuing thought, which was normally healthy and progressive.¹¹³

Therefore, it also became the main target for many Chinese Ibsen scholars. They criticized that Ibsen's play was damaged by the earlier Ibsen's advocates. Tam was one of the representatives, he commented this as follows:

Ibsen has been presented to the Chinese mainly because of the social themes in his plays. For this reason he has too often been misrepresented and misunderstood as no more than a social revolutionist. In China, Nora has become the symbol for Ibsen. [...] *A Doll's House* enjoys the unsurpassed favor of the Chinese. Almost every time it was presented, it was related to some social or political events in China. Ibsen has been presented on the Chinese stage with too much freedom at the expense of the original. The adaptations have brought more harm than good to the drama of Ibsen, though they helped promote interest in his plays. The overemphasis on Ibsen's social plays was also a factor causing the misunderstanding of the dramatist.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Jon Nygaard, *Teatrets Historie i Europa*, vol.3, 1992, p222-223.

¹¹³ Tian Han 田汉, *The Perspect and Path of China Spoken Drama Development 中国话剧艺术发展的径路和展望*, *The Collection of Historical Drama Movement in Fifty Years of China 中国话剧运动五十年史料集*, 1958, p3.

¹¹⁴ Tam, 1984, p187.

Even though he had written was partly true, Ibsen was not misused or misinterpreted. Ibsenites just applied Ibsen's play in Chinese society and revived it in China by giving a new interpretation. This is coincided with the theory of theatre history which Jon Nygaard pointed out:

Therefore [the theatre] has been an expression for this change or a seismograph for society. Thus the theatre also has out of its peculiar characteristics as relationship or function has necessarily had a political meaning in the large or important epochs in theatre history. This has not been intentional. All attempts at intentional political theatre have been failures. The theatre can only capture a development. It cannot force or manipulate into being a development.¹¹⁵

Besides, Nora's introduction together with Ibsen was never just limited in the revolution field. The reception of Ibsen in China followed two lines. One was focus more on his idea and social problem plays; another was focus on more about Ibsen's art. Nora's introduction first aimed to build new drama genre in China. It is well-known that Chinese spoken drama is an imported genre. At the beginning, Lu Jingruo and his Spring Willow Society tried to use it to revive new spoken drama in China. Its original goal aimed to introduce Western drama art, which emphasized more on art aspect than political aspect.

Compared to the classical foreign drama, Nora's fame has faded after 1948, let alone Ibsen's other plays, which did not raise much more attention than Nora's performance. Therefore, I was wondering about this strange phenomenon for a long time: if Nora was not labeled lots of different meanings, for example, women emancipation, individualism, and bourgeoisie's representation, rebellion; if Lan Ping did not perform it; if Hu Shi did not introduce it and he did not leave for Taiwan, would Nora still be cherished as William Shakespeare's Hamlet? History can not be rewritten; therefore, no one could answer the question based on such supposition. But in my opinion, those total factors which affected Ibsen's reception in China, even if they were not the decisive factors, they were necessary factors. On the one hand,

¹¹⁵ Ibid 93, p223.

Ibsen gained misinterpretation in China for a long time, which affected Ibsen's reception in the future; on the other hand, the misusing of Ibsen's performance, especially Nora's performance, was very closely connected with the China's revolution, which changed China completely, both from the theatre aspect and from the ideology aspect.

Whatever, Nora's performance is very important in China's history: both theatre history and revolution history. Nora together with Ibsen helped China build a new drama genre, and broadcast new ideas.

From the first Chinese Nora Tian Yamei (Hu Shi's Nora theme play) departure to the new family in the May Fourth period, to the many women like Lan Ping who went to Yan An and got involved in the revolution, Nora's departure suggested a process of women's emancipation, awakening from the May Fourth to fulfillment in revolution in 1930s. At beginning, Nora represented awakening to individuality and freedom, which encouraged women to break away from the traditional families and pursue love and freedom. Finally, Nora became a symbol of calling for revolution by the Left-wing and gained the complete liberation through the national liberation. Therefore, Nora's history in China is a national allegory.

Finally, is Nora as well as Ibsen outdated in today's China? Why do the echoes of Nora slamming the door die away in China? How has censorship affect Ibsen's performance in China?

On the one hand, when the local situation meets the historical original drama text, it is possible to bring out a new form of performance. But the adaptation and the performance should be embedded in the local situation and combined with the spirit of the original drama text. When the historical text is injected with new lively elements drawn from the current everyday life, it will taste special. Especially when it was applied on the stage, added with the new stage elements both inherited from the original culture and local culture, it would easily attract the audiences who had experienced the same situation as Nora. Such performances can be performed from the limited campus to professional theatres and applauded unexpectedly. It should be recognized that both Chinese government and intellectuals controlled some power for

leading the progress both aesthetic and politics in theatre experiment. However, on the other hand, it suggests that the stubborn power, similar to the power depicted in the play, still exists in China and tries to hold back the progress in many aspects from time to time. It is still very difficult to perform a play which maybe be rejected by the strict censorship through labeling “aggressive” or “provocative”.

For a drama text for performance, it should be used both as entertainment with aesthetics and as enlightenment with political meanings. Meanwhile it also should not cause the officials to be nervous. For a Western performance which is going to be performed successfully in China, it is better to interweave the different culture elements in the performance, keep the audiences distant (to avoid the censorship), but also close to the local realities.

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Appendix

A Chronology of Chinese Stage Productions of *A Doll's House*

- 1914 Shanghai Chunliu She (Spring Willow Society), Shanghai.
- 1923 Beijing Nugaoshi (Peking Normal College for Women), Beijing.
- 1924 Ershiliu Jushe (26 drama society), Beijing.
- 1925 Xiju Xieshe (Drama Association Society), Shanghai.
Nankai New Drama Society (Nankai Middle School), Tianjin.
- 1926 Shanghai Wuben Nuxue (Shanghai Wuben School for Women), Shanghai.
Nankai New Drama Society (Nankai Middle School), Tianjin.
- 1928 Shanghai Laodong Daxue (Shanghai Labour University), Shanghai.
Nankai New Drama Society (Nankai Middle School), Tianjin
- 1931 Qinghua Daxue (Tsinghua University), Beijing.
- 1934 Mailun Zhongxue (Mailun Middle School), Shanghai.
- 1935 Mofeng She (Grinding Wind Society), Nanjing.
Shanghai Yeyu Juren Xiehui (Shanghai Amateur Actor Association, or Shanghai Amateur Experimental Drama Troup), Shanghai.
Guanghua Jushe (Bright China Drama Society), Shanghai.
Jinan Minjiaoguan (Jinan People's Education House), Jinan.
Shanghai Zhirenyong Jushe (Shanghai Wisdom-benevolence-bravery Drama Society), Shanghai.
- 1939 Qingnianhui (YMCA), Shanghai.
- 1941 Peidu Jushe (Chongqing Drama Society), Chengdu.
- 1945 Nankai New Drama Society (Nankai middle school), Chongqing.
- 1948 Peidu Jushe (Chongqing Drama Society), Chongqing.
- 1956 Zhongguo Qingnian Yishu Xueyuan (China Youth Arts Academy), Beijing.
- 1962 Shanghai Xiju Xueyuan (Shanghai Theatre Academy), Shanghai.
- 1985 Xianggang Qingnian Jutuan (Hong Kong Youth Theatre Company), Hong Kong.
- 1996 Siding Jushe (Augustin Drama Group), Hong Kong.
- 1997 Xianggang Yingshi Jutuan (Hong Kong Movie and TV Theatrical Company), Hong Kong.
- 1998 Zhongyang Shiyuan Huajuyuan (Central Experimental Theatre), Beijing.
- 2001 Zhongyang Shiyuan Huajuyuan (Central Experimental Theatre), Beijing.
Drama School of Hong Kong Academy for Performance Arts, Hong Kong
- 2005 Shanghai, Director: Huang Ho Yi.
- 2006 Zhongyang Shiyuan Huajuyuan (Central Experimental Theatre), Beijing.
Hongkong Nora and other play put together.
Zhijiage Dongfang Yishutuan (Dong Fang Chinese Performing Arts Association), Chicago, Beijing.
- 2007 Tellus Theatre, Taipei.