

# Ibsen in China

*His reception and influence analyzed in time order*

**By Jing Xu**



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Center for Ibsen Studies

UNIVERSITETET I OSLO

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## Chapter One Introduction

During the last 100 years, and particularly when he was first introduced in China, Ibsen has been regarded as a revolutionary fighter or as a thinker by Chinese people. Western critics, however, have treated him as an outstanding dramatist. Why and what caused the difference? It is very important for present scholars, especially the Chinese to look back and find what really happened when Ibsen was in China and analyze his reception and influence in China.

In general, Ibsen's influence in China can mainly be summarized in two aspects, namely social political and artistic<sup>1</sup>. The fact that Chinese critics and intellectuals have defined Ibsen differently in China causes an extended national-scope debate. Wang Songlin<sup>2</sup> propounds in his article "One—Hundred—Year's Reception of Ibsen in China" that there are three climaxes of Ibsen study in China during the last 100 years: The first climax was around 1920s when Ibsen and his plays were initially accepted in China. The sharp criticism of social reality presenting in his "problem plays" attracted many Chinese intellectuals' attention. The second climax was around 1950s when Ibsen's plays were frequently performed on the stage in China. The last climax was about 1980s when Ibsen revived in China. In Wang's article, he regards this period as the revival of staging and multi-perspective criticism of Ibsen.<sup>3</sup> Since the last climax when Ibsen "returns to China", there has been more and more Chinese institutes initiated research on Ibsen and his dramas. An increasing number of Chinese intellectuals show their interests on this study, for example, Tan Kwok Kan, He Chengzhou, Wang Zhongxiang and Wangning have published several articles related to "Ibsen in China", and most of these articles have received favorable comments from the international Ibsen institutes. At the same time they expect to learn further from the first-rate Ibsen scholars abroad. Moreover in recent years several international Ibsen conferences and research seminars have been held in China and

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<sup>1</sup> Tan, 1984,P11

<sup>2</sup> Wang Songlin: a PhD candidate at the college of Chinese Language and Literature, Central China Normal University

<sup>3</sup> Wang, *One—Hundred—Year's Reception of Ibsen in China*, I cited his article from the website: <http://zwwxjt.blog.163.com/blog/static/18947982200782810419701>, which was published on Sept. 28, 2007

other countries in the world, which makes the topic of “the influence of Ibsen in China” progressively popular.

Over the years many valuable publications regarding “Ibsen in China” have been presented on different literary areas, such as, translation works, journals, periodicals, critiques and articles. Besides there are a lot of performances of Ibsen’s dramas performing in China. Scholars have extended the study to a wider field when discussing Ibsen’s effect on China, not only from the society aspect, but also his influence on Chinese modern drama. According to the sources I collect, I will try to focus my thesis on Ibsen’s reception and influence in China, besides analyze his different status in China respectively following the time order one after another. I will subdivide the first climax of Ibsen’s influence in China into two parts: from 1907 to 1917 and from 1918 to 1928. I choose 1918 as the dividing line, because it was the year before the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement broke out.

In general, before the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, Ibsen and other outstanding western writers attracted the attention from several contemporary Chinese intellectuals. Chinese people found that Ibsen’s plays hide spirits of rebellion, pursuing for freedom, expecting for liberation, which were lost in most of those people’s minds. Moreover many Chinese intellectuals considered that Ibsen’s plays unmasked the truth of the real society which was completely incurable. Lu Xun first found Ibsen’s value and his spirits, therefore in 1907 Lu Xun published *Wenhua Pianzhi Lun*, in which he announced a voice from Dr. Stockman in Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People*: “—the most powerful man is the one who stands most alone...”<sup>4</sup> And then in 1918 along with the publication of “*Yibusheng Zhuanhao*” (*Ibsen Issue*) coming out in *Xin Qingnian (New Youth)*, a door was opened and it welcomed Ibsen and his works to come in. Hu Shi has mentioned in his thesis *Ibsenism* that Ibsen’s works show essences of the family, society and individuality, in addition his plays expose that the society is controlled by three forces, namely law, religion and morality, at the same time people show off their hypocrisy.

The May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement exploded in 1919 at that moment Ibsen and his plays had

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<sup>4</sup> Ibsen: *An Enemy of the People*, 1902

already played significant roles inside Chinese intellectuals' minds. It has been known that *Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts* and *An Enemy of the People* are regarded as Ibsen's social problem dramas<sup>5</sup>, in the 1920s all of them were translated into China and the Chinese intellectuals knew these four realistic problem plays very well. Nora's voice: "I am first and foremost a human being"<sup>6</sup> and Dr. Stockmann's slogan: "the most powerful man is the one who stands most alone..."<sup>7</sup> encourage many Chinese innovators.

At that time Western drama was brought into China and grabbed by the Chinese intellectuals for our own use. Ibsen's social problem dramas influenced many of the Chinese activists in the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, Nora was treated as their admirable idol. Under the inspiration of Ibsen's problem dramas, Chinese intellectuals emulated Ibsen's plays and produced several Chinese problem plays, which reflect social contradictions and discuss social problems, for instance, morality, liberty, marriage and poverty, such as, *Zhongshen Dashi*, (*The Greatest Event in Life* written by Hushi in 1919), *Pofu* (*A Shrew*, 1922, by Ouyang Yuqian); *Bingbian* (*Mutiny*, 1925 by Yu Shangyuan); *Xinren de Shenghuo* (*New Personality's Life* by Xiong Foxi), a historical play *Zhuo Wenjun* (by Guo Moruo), *Dachu Youling Ta* (by Bai Wei), and others. Hu Shi's first drama —*Zhongshen Dashi* (*The Greatest Event in Life*,) is regarded as the first Chinese problem drama. It is also criticized as the first imitation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*<sup>8</sup>. In consequence social problem drama became a fashion in the May 4<sup>th</sup> period and it also brought a mainstream in Chinese literary creation. Since many of those Chinese problem plays ended with the heroine departure plot, critics commented them as departure plays or Nora plays. Those plays manifested the initial Chinese spoken drama feature of realism during May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement period.

Chinese spoken drama which is also called Chinese new drama emerged along with the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement. At first I have to introduce a pivotal term—Chunliu She (Spring Willow Society) which was founded in 1906 by Chinese student Li Shutong

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<sup>5</sup> He, 2003, P54

<sup>6</sup> Ibsen: *Ghosts*, 1924.

<sup>7</sup> Ibsen: *An Enemy of the People*, 1904

<sup>8</sup> Zhao, 2004, P189

in Tokyo, Japan. The leading members of Spring Willow Society were Li Shutong, Ouyang Yuqian and Lu Jingruo (All of them were students studying in Japan). Facing to the contemporary Chinese gloomy social reality, they advocated developing civilian's intelligence and embracing their spirits.

As a result of the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, Chinese revolutionary people treated Ibsen's social problem dramas as avant-garde samples and in consequence Ibsen was accepted as a social revolutionary thinker more than a playwright in China. In a way, Chinese intellectuals use Ibsen as the revolutionary thinker in order to awake people to get rid of the muddle situation.

On the other side, in the 1930s some scholars began to realize in particular that Ibsen was misinterpreted as a thinker by those Chinese reformers when he was first appeared in China. For example, Liang Shiqiu, one of the famous Chinese modern writers, said 'during the new literary movement, Ibsen's thinking attracted more attention than his art. So far as the campaign for modern drama is concerned, there has been a big mistake, because Ibsen's thinking is captured, but not Ibsen's dramatic art'<sup>9</sup>... Up till now it is still a popular subject discussing among Chinese Ibsen scholars, for instance in Wang Ning's article *Reconstructing Ibsen as An Artist: A Theoretical Reflection on the Reception of Ibsen in China*, he referred:

Ibsen is largely received not as a dramatic artist but rather, as a revolutionary thinker of strong avant-garde consciousness and ideological tendency in the Chinese context, especially for the characterization of some of his rebellious women, such as Nora and Hedda Gabler who have left so profound impressions to the Chinese audience, as well as drama scholars, that they have even forgot that Ibsen is first of all an artist, or in its narrow sense, a dramatic artist...<sup>10</sup>

As time goes by, an increasing number of intellectuals got references from the western countries and also re-evaluated Ibsen in China, as a result the attention shifted from considering Ibsen as a thinker to his dramatic art. There are two famous scholars I have to mention in this essay: one is Xiong Foxi and the other is Yu Shangyuan. Both

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<sup>9</sup> Sun, 1994, P221

<sup>10</sup> Wang 2003, P71

of them got first-hand literary knowledge and thinking from abroad during the time when they were studying in the United States. In Xiong Foxi's essay—*Ibsen the Social Reformer and Ibsen the Dramatist* (published in 1929), he pointed out very early about Ibsen's dramatic achievement. A new viewpoint was given for re-evaluating Ibsen so that more and more Chinese people shifted their focus on Ibsen's typical writing skills, such as, the depiction of characters, plot and structural technique.

There are two dramatists who can not be ignored when referring Chinese spoken drama: Tian Han and Caoyu, both of whom played very important role in the Chinese spoken drama history because they contributed Chinese spoken drama to mature and brilliant. In He Chengzhou's doctoral dissertation, he mentioned their significant effect:

[...] if the Chinese 'Problem Play' marked the seeding of Ibsen in China and Tian Han 'the budding Ibsen', the full blossoming of Ibsen in China as well as modern Chinese drama occurred when Cao Yu mad his way onto the Chinese stage with his *Thunderstorm*, *Sunrise* and *Peking Man*. Ibsen was essential to the realistic tradition of modern Chinese drama, known as the 'Ibsenian realism' ...<sup>11</sup>

He Chengzhou's thesis and other Ibsen research sources such as, Chen Lihua's *Yibusheng yu Caoyu de Xiju Guan (Compare dramatic view between Ibsen and Caoyu)*<sup>12</sup>, Zhang, Hao's *Cao Yu Juzuo dui Yibusheng Xiangzheng Zhuyi Shoufa de Jiejian* and others, convinced me that Cao Yu was influenced by Ibsen when he created his own dramas. However, in my thesis I will ask and discuss another question: when Cao Yu read Ibsen's plays how did he regard Ibsen, as thinker or as a dramatic artist?

Different historical periods form different understandings especially for literature

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<sup>11</sup> He, 2004, P 20

<sup>12</sup> Chen Lihua 2004: "Yibusheng yu Caoyu de Xiju Guan", in Sunjian and Wangning (eds.): *Yibusheng yu Zhongguo: Zouxiang Yizhong Meixue Jiangou*, Tianjin Folk Press

research, in 1950s new China was established and Chinese people were released from the extremely evil old feudal society. When the new country and new society formed, people required new entertainment to enrich their new lives. In that period of time there're so many chances for performing Ibsen's plays on the stage in China. Besides many recomposed plays imitating Ibsen's plays as well were performing on the stage. In consequence Ibsen aroused the second climax in China. Unfortunately when the Chinese Cultural Revolution began, Ibsen lost his position in China. Then around 1980s felicity and peace came to China again, Ibsen came back to China and aroused another upsurge of Ibsen studies. In this case, my thesis will analyze the reception and influence of Ibsen in China regarding to Chinese society and Chinese literary creation. In order to get more convincing answers, I will discuss according to those different specific moments.

## Chapter Two 1907-1917: Debut of Ibsen in China

Ibsen was introduced in China at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In order to find the clue for his influence and contribution on the Chinese modern drama, let us first look at the background of the social circumstance in China, based on both political and cultural aspects.

The old China faced a very hard period around 1900s, which can be described as political disorder and social unrest. During that period of time many activist intellectuals including the Chinese students worried about the situation of China. Some of the patriotic Chinese students who studied abroad began to warn Chinese ordinary people to recognize the truth of the society and advocated the Chinese people to reform the gloomy situation of the society. Doubting Chinese conventional stubborn thinking and questionable Confucianism tradition, in 1915 Chen Duxiu started *Qingnian Zazhi (Youth Magazine)* in Shanghai. From the second volume it was adapted into *Xin Qingnian (La Jeunesse/ New Youth)*. In this periodical Chen Duxiu referred Mr. De and Mr. Sai (namely, Democracy and Science) were very important for the Chinese society. Furthermore, he published several articles attacking the intention of Confucianism. At that moment there were a few Chinese notable ideologists and intellectuals who published many inspiring articles. Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao, Lu Xun, Hu Shi, Yi Baisha, WuYu, Qian Xuantong were representatives of this group of writers. Some of them accepted western democracy and science thought when they were studying abroad, such as, Lu Xun, Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu. Those avant-garde ideas became the leading thought for guiding the New Culture Movement. The essential matter of this movement can be generally summarized as: advocating democracy and fighting against feudal autarchy; pursuing for freedom, equality and personal emancipation; advocating science against blindly respecting Confucianism or idolatry thought; opposing to superstition; appealing for judging everything by science; advocating new literature against old literature and classical Chinese texts; appealing for literary reformation and vernacular revolution. The leading content for

New Culture Movement is literary reformation. In the article Chen Duxiu called for introducing western types of society and recognizing the truth of Confucian society:

If...we expect to establish a Western type of modern nation...then the most basic step is to import the foundation of modern Western society—the faith in the equality of men. In regard to Confucianism, which is incompatible with a new society, a new nation, a new faith, we must have a complete awakening and determination. Unless the/old/one is demolished, the /new/one will not arise...<sup>13</sup>

In 1917 Hu Shi published an article named *Wenxue Gailiang Chuyi (Literature Improvement Opinion)*, in which he brought forward a claim of literature improvement for the first time in China. Hu advocates using vernacular instead of the Chinese classical texts: 1) Speak on good grounds; 2) Do not imitate the ancients; 3) Pay attention to grammar; 4) Do not adopt a sentimental pose; 5) Must avoid shopworn tunes and conventional verbal exchange; 6) Do not quote the classics; 7) Do not use antithesis<sup>14</sup>; 8) Do not use characters in popular form, nor folk adage<sup>15</sup>

In February of the same year, Chen Duxiu published his *Wenxue Geming Lun(On Literature Revolution)*, in which he explicitly proposed to oppose feudalistic literature and unify content with formality for literary reform. Along with so many progressive articles were published, *New Youth* undoubtedly occupied the vital position in the New Cultural Movement. In my opinion it set a good foundation for accepting and spreading western authors with their works. New Cultural Movement fluctuated thousand of years feudalistic thought from the root to branches and emancipated Chinese ordinary people's thought in particular; moreover it mobilized those intellectuals to escape the ancient stubborn thoughts. Another contribution brought by this movement is: under its influence there were more and more periodicals originated after the *New Youth*, such as, *Xingqi Pinglun(Weekly Review)*, *Jianshe(Construction)*, *Xiaoshuo Yuebao (The Short Story Magazine)*, *Chenbao Fukan (Morning Post Supplement)*, *Xinchao (The Renaissance)*, and others. In this case an inspiring change

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<sup>13</sup> Chen, *New Youth*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1916

<sup>14</sup> Antithesis means a figure of speech in which sharply contrasting ideas are juxtaposed in a balanced or parallel phrase or grammatical structure

<sup>15</sup> Hu, *Wenhua Gailiang Chuyi*, 1917, I translate the Chinese version in English

in the intellectual atmosphere took place in the whole nation. Tan Kwan Kan referred the effect of this movement on Chinese literary field: “from 1917 to 1927 in China represented in miniature what had happened in the Western hemisphere in the previous two centuries. All the Western schools of thought, no matter how different they were, fluxed into China...”<sup>16</sup>

If the Chinese modern literature improvement indeed needs a revolution movement to accelerate, then similarly, any change for Chinese modern drama would cause a series of responses. Actually not only the conception of new literature, but Chinese traditional drama had also been questioned before the cultural movement. In the old China, Chinese traditional theatre was “little more than a combination of opera and ballet”.<sup>17</sup> Although at the beginning of 1900’s Gailiang Qingxi (Improved Peking opera) contributed a little to the Chinese modern drama, for “singing was reduced as dialogue increased”<sup>18</sup>, the effect for this primary change was very limited because it did not depart from the Chinese traditional drama. A significant turning point appeared in 1907 when *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was successfully performed on stage in Chun Liu She (Spring Willow Society). This performance causes an irrefragable development for Chinese modern drama because it is “the first time in the Chinese theatre that a complete text was used in a performance”.<sup>19</sup> Although this performance was not shown in China but in Japan, this group aroused noteworthy development for Chinese modern drama. In Hong Shen’s article<sup>20</sup> he states that the pioneers for reforming Chinese traditional drama were coming from some Chinese students in Japan but not from China directly. This successful performance brought several progressive elements to the Chinese theatre, such as, a complete dramatic script, realistic scenery, stage setting and dialogue.

In September 1907, the Chinese first new drama society was founded in Shanghai by Wang Zhongsheng<sup>21</sup>, Ma Xiangbo and Shen Zhongli. It is called Chun Yang She

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<sup>16</sup> Tan, 1984, P23

<sup>17</sup> Tan, 1984, P2

<sup>18</sup> Tan, 1984, P2

<sup>19</sup> Tan, 1984, P6

<sup>20</sup> An article written by Hong Shen, published in *Zhongguo Xin Wenxue Daxi*, P13

Hong Shen (1894-1955) a famous Chinese director, dramatist, dramatic critic, educationalist, social activist.

<sup>21</sup> Wang Zhongsheng, (1847-1911), went to Germany for studying physic and law, and returned to China in 1906

(Spring Sun Society) which was followed the sample of the Tokyo Spring Willow Society. Despite it appeared just like a night-blooming cereus, the performing style they presented was refreshing for the Chinese audience.

Wang Zhongsheng was a person with progressive and revolutionary thought, once he mentioned: “China needs to be prosperous and strong, which depends on revolution; while revolution needs propaganda which requires two methods, namely originating newspaper and improving drama”<sup>22</sup>. The Spring Sun Society also published a *Yijian Shu* (Position Paper) in order to advocate performers to utilize drama performance to “arouse the sleeping deeply lion—China”.<sup>23</sup> In March 1908 a performance called *Jiayin Xiaozhuan* was shown by Spring Sun Society in Shanghai. The production was very successful and attracted attention from all circles. Xu Banmei mentioned:

This time with the staging of *Jiayin Xiaozhuan*, an outline of what spoken drama should be like was finally established. If someone asks: which play can be considered as the first performance of spoken drama in China? The answer should be *Jiayin Xiaozhuan*. Although it was not perfect, it was epoch-making. None of the previous performances could be counted as spoken drama.<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, due to Wang Zhongsheng was murdered by Qing Government in 1911, and then Spring Sun Society became disorganization. One year later another progressional party was set up in Shanghai. It was originated by Lu Jingruo and together with Ouyang Yuqian, Ma Jiangshi and Wu wozun. They called it as Xinju Tongzhi Hui (New Drama Comrade Community) and Spring Willow Theatre was another name for this community. However, at that time the Chinese audience did not interested in western plays, Ouyang Yuqian remarks:

When we returned to China, the “civilized new drama” was apparently resisting the “Spring Willow” school...The drama of Shakespeare, Tolstoy and Ibsen brought back by Lu Jingruo from the Literary Society could hardly be presented...<sup>25</sup>

At that time, Jingruo strongly wished to perform *A Doll's House* and *Wild*

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted from Mei Lanfang: *Xiju Jie Canjia Xinhai Geming de Jijian Shi*, *Xiju Bao*, 1961, no. 17, no.18  
Mei Lanfang: (1894-1961) modern Chinese outstanding artist of Peking Opera, Chinese drama art master.

<sup>23</sup> *Tianjin Dagong Bao*, Oct. 15, 1907

<sup>24</sup> Xu, 1957, P18-19

<sup>25</sup> Ouyang Yuqian: *Huiyi Chunliu (Memoirs of Spring Willow)*, included in *The Collected Works of Ouyang Yuqian*, 1990,P33

*Duck...*<sup>26</sup>

It is true that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century western plays were facing a lot of difficulties on the Chinese stage. Take one simple example that the behavior and the name of the western people were unfamiliar with the Chinese audience, at that time few Chinese people had experience of living abroad or staying with the western people in their lives. As a result, Chinese people could not imagine what the western people behaved in the daily life. Actually Ibsen's play was performed on Chinese stage earlier than his Chinese translation work was published. In 1914 Spring Willow Theatre performed *A Doll's House* in Shanghai (It was the first time Ibsen's play was played on the Chinese stage). However, it stopped soon because very few audience shown to watch the performance. The reason was given by Tan Kwok Kan in order to explain why western plays at first were not welcomed by the Chinese audience:

In presenting foreign drama, such as Ibsen's, the Chinese actors will have to overcome even more difficulties than in producing a Chinese one. The difference in social customs between Norway and China renders an Ibsen play difficult to be realized on the Chinese stage.<sup>27</sup>...Prior to the Literary Revolution in 1917, there was no hope of producing a significant influence in China by staging a Western play.<sup>28</sup>

In the autumn of 1915, Lu Jingruo was broken down from constant overwork and as a consequence Spring Willow Theatre also faded away. Spring Willow school contributes some indelible effects for it initially introduced western plays to the Chinese audience so that it was regarded as the leading corps for fashioning Chinese modern drama and moreover it laid a foundation for Chinese Spoken Drama. In 2007 China celebrated the 100-year anniversary of Chinese Spoken Drama and commemorated the establishment of Spring Willow Society throughout the whole nation, which demonstrates Spring Willow Society indeed representing the milestone for the Chinese modern drama.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., P105

<sup>27</sup> Tan, 1984, P162

<sup>28</sup> Tan, 1984, P164

### Chapter Three 1918-1928 Ibsen: a great thinker or an outstanding dramatist?

The New Cultural Movement opened a door for the Chinese people to see what was going on outside China and helped them to expand their eyes to accept the western arts. Tan Kwok Kan underlines the effect of this literary revolution that it attracted the notice of Ibsen in China. From 1917 the literature articles were written in vernacular and it stimulated a great change in China. A growing number of Chinese ordinary people can understand the literary productions written in vernacular. After the literary revolution there were lots of essays and novels written in the new literary style, even the translation versions of western works appeared one after another owing to the revolution.

Not only the literary writing style needed to be reformed, but also the literary content should not be ignored. Both of Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu woke up to this point so that they published articles and essays in the *Xin Qingnian (New Youth)* in order to advocate: “a good literary method” should “have the technique of plot, description of people, or construction. The writers should enlarge their sphere of experience, observe better the surroundings, stress actual observation, use their own imagination etc.”<sup>29</sup> Owing to the translation works appeared in China, the western literary theories and solid samples of writing style were introduced in China. Eide’s essay also mentioned Chou Zuoren<sup>30</sup>’s view about the important relation between literature works and society: “one may notice that his (Chou Zuoren) concern is that literature and society should be interrelated and should influence one another. He believes that literature can change man’s nature and reform society...”<sup>31</sup> Another essential in the contemporary China as Xiao Qian mentioned in his article that:

In those days, China was so hopelessly ill that she needed a daring doctor

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<sup>29</sup> Hu, 1918

<sup>30</sup> Chou Zuoren: (1885-1966), like his brother Chou Shuren (Lu Xun), has made positive contributions toward the literary and intellectual progress of modern China. He first became known for his 1918 essay on “Humane Literature,” a crucial document in the new literary movement, which defined the new literature in psychological and moral terms. (Cited from Winston L. Y. Yang’s book review, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1. pp. 149-150. in Nov., 1972)

<sup>31</sup> Eide, 1973, P23

capable of prescribing the most desperate remedies... In the midst of the revolt, young Chinese, especially those who had studied abroad, found sympathizers in Europe. Foremost of these was the Norwegian dramatist Ibsen. His works seemed to express their own resentment against existing society and their passion for revolt... He was hailed by young China as a comrade rebel, a champion of individual rights...<sup>32</sup>

Under this kind of Chinese specific historical condition, Ibsen with some other valuable European writers was introduced into China. His social problem dramas became popular in China since 1918 and his individuality idea shown in his plays was utilized by the Chinese intellectuals in order to advocate the young generation to cure the sick China.

The term *Grabbism* came in to use by the Chinese intellectuals, grabbism was first mentioned by Lu Xun. Lu advocated grabbing or taking anything beneficial to the Chinese people. He said: "Human being shares everything together especially the good stuff. China is now under the vital moment for her development so that China has to grab or absorb every valuable thing which is benefit for China from abroad"<sup>33</sup>. It is not complicated to understand this term, Chinese people prefer to add "-ism" behind the word in order to present a phenomenon or a fashion existed currently. Referred to the "grabbism", Wang Ning explained this term in his article as: "In order to fight against the feudal society and traditional cultural conventions, they would rather 'grab' or 'appropriate' foreign or more exactly, Western cultural and academic trends to attack the stubborn established Chinese cultural conventions"<sup>34</sup>

First of all, it should be traced back to the moment when Ibsen was first and foremost introduced into China. Lu Xun was the earliest Chinese intellectual who originally found Ibsen's value and his spirits. In 1907 Lu Xun published *Wenhua Pianzhi Lun*, in which he announced a voice from Dr. Stockman in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*

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<sup>32</sup> Xiao Qian, 1944, P16

Xiao Qian: (1910-1999), Chinese author, journalist, literature translator. He received the National Honor by the Norwegian Government in 1986, due to his translation work of *Peer Gynt*.

<sup>33</sup> Originally published in *Zhonghua Ribao Dongxiang*(*China Daily, Pulse*) on 7<sup>th</sup> of June, 1934, name signed as Huo Chong

<sup>34</sup> Wang, 2003, P78

Wang Ning: Professor of English and Comparative Literature and Director of the Centre for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies at Tsinghua University, Beijing. He is the author of ten books on comparative literature and western literature as well as critical theory, and numerous articles in prestigious literary journals in China and in Western countries.

that “—the most powerful man is the one who stands most alone...”<sup>35</sup>. Lu Xun considers what Chinese people need is presented in Ibsen’s play and his iconoclasm is the prescription for curing the sick China. *Yibusheng Zhiju (Ibsen’s Drama)*, wrote by Lu Jingruo was published in the first volume of *Feiyou zazhi(Feiyou Magazine)* in 1914, which formally represented the very beginning when Ibsen’s drama was introduced into China.

From 1918 onwards, following the advocacy of introducing western literature into China, the number of translation works and critic essays increased fast.

### **Chinese Translations of Ibsen**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, China received a lot of western literary works due to the political reasons I mentioned before. In Guo Yangsheng’s article, he presents the significance of translation in China especially during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century:

As postcolonial, gender, social and globalization studies show, translation has many faces and dimensions. As a double-edged sword, it can serve as a tool for rebellion, resistance, subversion, revolution as well as empire, slavery, cultural hegemony, and gender and ethnic oppression and suppression[...]

The political nature of this period of translation may be discerned in:

- 1) The political background against which certain translations emerged;
- 2) Particular texts that were selected, translated, accepted, and re-interpreted;
- 2) The intentions of the translators who were involved in debated over translation...<sup>36</sup>

The Chinese students who studied in Japan brought the first translations to China. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Qing government sent a lot of Chinese students to Japan in order to learn their advanced techniques. This group of Chinese students brought back to China the Japanese translations of the western literary works, including Ibsen’s

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<sup>35</sup> Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People*, 1904

<sup>36</sup> Yangsheng Guo: *Modern Chinese Translation as a Political Act*, P 1, this article was published on the website: [www.nucba.ac.jp/cic/pdf/njlcc081/02GUO.pdf](http://www.nucba.ac.jp/cic/pdf/njlcc081/02GUO.pdf)

plays<sup>37</sup>

In Yangsheng Guo's opinion, the development of Chinese modern literature has a close relation with the translations:

The May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement facilitated the growth of Modern Chinese Literature, which was born with translation. In fact, one could hardly talk about modern Chinese literature without going to its source in translations...translation and creations were inseparable from each other. Similarly, nearly all the forms of modern Chinese literature (drama, fiction, poetry, prose, and literary criticism), along with their core vocabulary and grammar, came into being through translation.<sup>38</sup>

Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren and Mao Dun initiated a new trend of Chinese translation. They published the Chinese translation version of western works such as the works from Britain, America, Russia, France, Denmark, Japan, etc in the *New Youth*. Before 1917 they focused their translation sources on selecting the western realism and aestheticism, and from 1918 they had started to choose the literary works which shared more things in common with the contemporary China. In 1918 Ibsen was elaborated by Hu Shi in his *Ibsenism* and Yuan Zhenying's *Biography of Ibsen*. Under the influence caused by these articles, Ibsen became a popular star in China. Consequently many Ibsen's Chinese translation versions appeared in China year by year. "Yibusheng Zhuanhao" (*Ibsen Issue*) came out in *Xin Qingnian (New Youth)* Volume 4, No. 6 (June, 1918), and it was the first time that Chinese versions of Ibsen's plays were formally published in China<sup>39</sup>, including: *A Doll's House* (in China it was called *Nala*<sup>40</sup> at that moment); *Little Eyolf* (in Chinese was *Xiao Aiyoufu*<sup>41</sup>) and *An Enemy of the People* (in Chinese was *Guomin zhi Di*<sup>42</sup>). Later another Chinese translation version of *A Doll's House* (in Chinese was called *Kuilei Jiating*<sup>43</sup>) was published in Shangwu Yinshu Guan (Commercial Press) in Shanghai. It has to be mentioned that in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century none of Chinese people

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<sup>37</sup> He Chengzhou's reference shows that these Japanese translation versions of Ibsen were probably based on English versions.

<sup>38</sup> Yangsheng Guo, P4

<sup>39</sup> Here I mentioned the first formally published Chinese translation version of Ibsen's play, because the earliest Chinese translation of Ibsen play was a stage text of *A Doll's House* performed on the Chinese stage in 1914 by Spring Willow Society.

<sup>40</sup> *Nala* was translated by Luo Jialun and Hu Shi

<sup>41</sup> *Xiao Aiyoufu* was translated by Wu Ruonan

<sup>42</sup> *Guomin zhi Di* was translated by Tao Lugong.

<sup>43</sup> *Kuilei Jiating* was translated by Chen Jia

understood Norwegian language, the source texts for the Chinese translators were based on the English versions. It happened the same as in Japan when translated Ibsen's plays into Japanese. William Archer's 1906 English version of Ibsen's works was regarded as the best Ibsen source<sup>44</sup> for Japanese people. In my opinion, Japan and China share the similar culture and concept about the western literary works during that period of time. Later Chinese translators chose William Archer's version as the first-rate English translation source would be share the same original intention as the Japanese counterparts. Besides Chinese sources of Ibsen's plays were originally coming from Japan and the medium was a group of the Chinese students studied in Japan, such as Lu Xun.

Song Chunfang wrote an article to introduce a hundred famous western modern plays. It was published in *New Youth* in 1918. In this article, Song referred several outstanding playwrights, such as, Shakespeare, Chekhov, G. Bernard Shaw, Ibsen, etc with their excellent works. Song regarded Ibsen as the most important playwright in his article and also mentioned eight plays of Ibsen's. After this article was published several plays written by Ibsen were translated into Chinese and published in public one by one in the next few years. In 1919 *Xinchao* volume 1 No. 5 published the Chinese translation version of *Qungui*<sup>45</sup> (*Ghosts*). In 1920 *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* (*Short Story Monthly*) volume 11 translated *Shehui Zhushi*<sup>46</sup> (*Pillars of Society*) (This translation was later published in book form by Commercial Press, Shanghai, 1921). *Haishang Furen*<sup>47</sup> (*The Lady from the Sea*) was published by Commercial Press in Shanghai in 1920; One year later Pan Jiayun published a book called *Yibusheng Ji* (*Selected Plays of Ibsen*), which centralized to translate six Ibsen's plays together: *Nala* (*A Doll's House*); *Qungui* (*Ghosts*); *Guomin Gongdi* (*An Enemy of the People*); *Shaonian Dang* (*The League of Youth*) and *Da Jiang* (*The Master Builder*).etc.

In general, Ibsen's social problem plays were the most popular in China and this situation lasted till 1984 that only 16 Ibsen's plays were translated into Chinese in

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<sup>44</sup> Mentioned by Tan when he analyzed the Japanese translation version of Ibsen's plays in Japan (Tan, 1984, P57)

<sup>45</sup> Qun Gui was translated by Pan Jiayun

<sup>46</sup> Shehui Zhushi was translated by Zhou Shoujuan.

<sup>47</sup> Haishang Furen was translated by Yang Xichu

China, in which 12 Ibsen's realistic and symbolist plays were included. The other four plays were chosen from his romantic period creations. Not only the translations activated Chinese literature, but also some critical articles about Ibsen were published synchronously.

### **Lu Xun and the earliest Ibsen essay in China**

Lu Xun noticed Ibsen and his plays early in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when he studied in Japan. Ibsen had attracted Japanese scholars' eyes since the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century when the whole country began to animadvert on *Japanism*. During that period of time, the Japanese critics advocated rebellious spirit which they found in Ibsen's plays. As time goes by, more and more ordinary Japanese people began to concern about their own social problems and Ibsen's social problem plays successfully won Japanese people's heart. *A Doll's House* was the first Ibsen's plays introduced into Japan, and then it was translated and published together with *An Enemy of the People* in Japan. In the year of 1906 when Ibsen died, Japan raised an upsurge for discussing Ibsen. By 1907 Ibsen has already been a well-known playwright in Japan. For this reason Ibsen's popularity gave a good chance for the Chinese students who were studying in Japan to know this great dramatist. One of these Chinese students—Lu Xun collected sources of Ibsen from the Japanese translation and critic works. According to Zhou Zuoren's recollection, Lu Xun began to accept Ibsen and his plays from 1906, at that time Lu Xun was studying in a German school which was set up by a German Committee in Tokyo. Besides learning German and producing literary works, Lu Xun spent most of his time on reading and collecting eastern and western European literature sources. During this time Lu can read almost 20 translations and critic works in Japan, among which the most impressive plays for Lu Xun were *Brand*, *An Enemy of the People* and *A Doll's House*. In Lu Xun's opinion China needed rebellious spirits like Ibsen awoke his people from the lethargy and like Ibsen stimulated Japanese people escaping from their indolence. For Lu Xun Ibsen is a revolutionary fighter and a social critic rather than a dramatist. In 1908 Lu Xun wrote

an essay titled as *Moluo Shili Shuo* (*A Discourse on the Power of Mara Poetry*), which was regarded as the earliest reference to Ibsen in Chinese writing<sup>48</sup>. It was published in a journal named *He Nan*, which was run by a group of Chinese students in Japan. In Lu Xun's essay he introduced Byron and Ibsen besides he also advocated Chinese people to pay more attention on the rebellious spirits. He praised the uncompromising protagonist—Dr. Stockmann: “The most powerful man is the one who stands most alone” in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* and he adored Ibsen's rebellious spirit:

In *An Enemy of the People*, Ibsen expresses his ideas through the protagonist Dr. Stockmann, who in upholding truth against the prejudices of society is attacked by the people. Although Dr. Stockmann is expelled from his house even his son is rejected by his school, he is not frightened and continues fight. He says in the end that: the strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone. This is Ibsen's own opinion of the world.<sup>49</sup>

Almost at the same time Lu Xun wrote another essay *Wenhua Pianzhi Lun* (*On Cultural Extremes*), in this essay he quoted several progressional pioneers appeared since the France Revolution broke out and he mentioned Ibsen for three times in the different paragraphs of his essay: Lu Xun praised Ibsen's works which contained full of rebellious ideas opposing against the society. Ibsen noticed that mediocrity and superficiality growing everyday, besides follies and hypocrisy also existing in people's daily life and that's why Ibsen realized it's time for revolution no matter how hard it would be.

Why Lu Xun chose Ibsen and why he was so interested in Ibsen's plays?

Lu Xun answered this question by himself: “That is because that Ibsen dares to attack the society and does not fear to attack the majority. At that moment most of the introducers feel like isolated force that stands in the middle of the society full of the fusty and gloomy opinions.”<sup>50</sup>

As far as I am concerned, the main reason why Lu Xun chose Ibsen at that time is because the spirits and themes expressed in Ibsen's plays were very close to Lu Xun's

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<sup>48</sup> Tan, 1984, P35

<sup>49</sup> Lu, 1908, P79

<sup>50</sup> Lu Xun: edition of the *Ben Liu* vol. 2, no. 3: *Commemoration of Henrik Ibsen's 100 Birthday*, 1928

temporal thought and consciousness. Moreover during his student time, Lu Xun held an ambition of “catch up with the trend of thought in the world from the external side; remain steadily our own flesh and blood from the internal side; utilized present advantage to revive the ancient and open one’s eyes to explore new land; build up meaningful personality in order to awake ordinary people; emphasize one’s individuality.”<sup>51</sup>. In order to achieve his ambition Lu called the other Chinese people following his manifesto and holding the rebellious spirits like Ibsen so that they could use Ibsen’s social ideas as the prescription for curing the spiritual illness of China, no matter how lonely and isolated from the majority.

As a matter of fact Ibsen and his social problem plays did not attract much attention of the Chinese people until 1918 when Hu Shi published his *Yibusheng Zhuyi (Ibsenism)* in *Yibusheng Zhuanhao (Ibsen Issue)* of *New Youth*, which activated for Ibsen and his dramas becoming popular in China.

### **Hu Shi and his Ibsenism:**

After the announcement of using vernacular instead of the Chinese classic style of writing, Hu Shi proposed another important conception—Ibsenism. Elisabeth Eide regarded this Ibsen essay as: “the main source to Hu’s interpretation of Ibsen, and it is also the article that really introduced Ibsen to Chinese readers.”<sup>52</sup> Similar as Lu Xun, for Hu Shi Ibsen is a social critic and a social revolutionist rather than a dramatist. Hu praised Ibsen because ‘he tells us the truth, describing the various evil situations of society so that we can have a close look at them’<sup>53</sup>. Hu Shi introduced Ibsen to the Chinese people and encouraged them using Ibsen to reveal the problems in Chinese society. Hu adored Ibsen because he thought that Ibsen told how to be an individual and how to behave as independent status. Hu Shi remembered Ibsen’s “To save one’s self”<sup>54</sup> by heart during the time he produced *Ibsenism* and the time after this essay

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<sup>51</sup> Cited from *Moluo Shili Shuo (A Discourse on the Power of Mara Poetry)*

<sup>52</sup> Eide, 1973, P68

<sup>53</sup> *Xin Qingnian*, 1918

<sup>54</sup> Morison 1970, P. 218

was published. In my opinion this idea echoes Hu Shi's another essay in which he mentioned that: "If you fight for your individual liberty, then you are fighting for the freedom for your country. An independent and equal country can not be founded by a group of slaves"<sup>55</sup>. In these two essays Hu Shi discussed the relation between individual and the society besides he also showed how to deal with this relationship. Hu Shi was also impressed by Ibsen's voice: "The most powerful man is the one who stands most alone" presented in *An Enemy of the People*. Hu regarded the thinking that the minority are always correct as the fundamental principle of Ibsenism.

Why Hu Shi was so interested in Ibsen and what made him produce this Ibsen essay?

Let us look at some influences he got: I will begin with the time he was studying in America. It is similar as Lu Xun, Hu Shi accepted Ibsen and his plays from abroad. In 1910 in order to study a subject which he could use in the new China, Hu Shi went to Cornell University of America for agriculture study. However, he changed his mind to study philosophy one year after he came there. He said that he realized study should match the needs of his country. He left Cornell for Columbia University and continued his Philosophical studies in 1915. I suppose he changed major more or less having some connection with the influence brought by the western literature, even directly from Ibsen's plays. During the time in Cornell Hu Shi spent a lot of time on reading Ibsen's plays and watching performances. Moreover his diary is full of admiring comments on Ibsen.<sup>56</sup> As a matter of fact the original essay of Ibsenism was written in English in 1914 when he was studying philosophy at Cornell University. Both Tan Kwok Kan<sup>57</sup> and Elisabeth Eide have noticed that although no evidence show the relation between Hu Shi and G. Bernard Shaw's *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, Hu Shi apparently was inspired by Bernard Shaw's Ibsenism. For both Bernard Shaw and Hu Shi used Ibsenism as the name of the book/essay, in addition, Hu Shi shared several similar opinions with Shaw on Ibsen:

- 1) When analyzing *A Doll's House*, Bernard Shaw mentioned the truth Ibsen revealed in marriage, while Hu Shi attacked four evils existed in the family:

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<sup>55</sup> Hu Shi: *Luetan Wode Rensheng Guan*, 2001, cited from <http://www.guoxue.com/master/hushi/w-ltrsg.htm>

<sup>56</sup> Tan, 1984, P43.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, P45

selfishness, slave nature, a hypocritical attitude and cowardice.

2) When discussing *An Enemy of the People*, Bernard Shaw insisted that “It is a scientific fact that the majority...is always wrong in its opinion of new developments, or rather is always unfit for them...The pioneer is a tiny minority of the force he heads”<sup>58</sup>, while Hu Shi said: “Most of people think the majority is always right, but Ibsen did not agree. He thought the minority is right. Those who want to reform are always considered as the minority and always be opposed by the majority.”<sup>59</sup>

In the whole essay, Hu Shi expressed his understanding about the themes he gained from Henrik Ibsen. Owing to both of Elisabeth Eide and Tan Kwok Kan have already analyzed Hu Shi’s Ibsenism very clearly and in detail, I will not do that again in my thesis.

Tan Kwok Kan confirms the significance of Hu Shi’s *Ibsenism*: “The discovery of individualism in modern China was largely due to Hu Shih’s essay ‘*Ibsenism*,’ which was a powerful weapon in undermining the traditional value system.”<sup>60</sup> Besides Tan mentioned that Hu Shi’s *Ibsenism* shocked the contemporary society during that special time in China, his article seems like a bomb exploded in the whole nation. The influence of this essay extended to the Chinese youth even the Chinese women. However, Tan also pointed out that Ibsen is misrepresented by Hu Shi’s essay which advocated Chinese people following Ibsen’s thought to cure Chinese illness rather than analyzing Ibsen’s plays, which announced Ibsen as a rebellious revolutionary thinker rather than a dramatist. To him: “the basic premise of *Ibsenism* is a realistic attitude towards life. In this way, the plays are seen as an expression of Ibsen’s indictment of social conventions and traditional morals. Neglecting Ibsen’s artistic achievements as a dramatist, Hu successfully explores his social philosophy”.<sup>61</sup> Ibsen, as well, became the mouthpiece of “Hu-Shih-ism.” “For a long period of time after the publication of this essay, Hu Shih’s interpretation not only went unquestioned, it actually became the orthodox statement on Ibsen.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Shaw, 1917, P 105

<sup>59</sup> Hu Shi: *Ibsenism*, *New Youth*, vol. 4, no. 6, 1918

<sup>60</sup> Tan, 1984, P193

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, P 44

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, P. 49

After Hu Shi's Ibsen-essay, many articles appeared in China. In these articles Ibsen and Ibsen's plays were more or less attributed to the influence of Hu Shi's *Ibsenism*.

In 1919 the worldwide known event, the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement broke out. Tan Kwok Kan referred that this movement "aimed at completely undermining any authoritative social institution, particularly the Confucian socio-moral discourse of human relationships, and liberating the individual self from repression."<sup>63</sup> At that moment Ibsen and his plays had already played a significant role in China. Owing to the advocacy announced by some Chinese progressive intellectuals (such as, Lu Xun, Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi) Ibsen's uncompromising thought and rebellious spirit were perfectly used for the Chinese people to attack the conventional society besides for them to find an appropriate way for new China. Suffering the political turmoil and ethical chaos, Chinese people need Ibsen's thought which reflects in his plays more than his art techniques. In Hu Shi and Lu Xun's articles the Chinese people find hope for curing China illness. According to Pan Jiaxun, Ibsen's social problem dramas (some people defined as contemporary realistic dramas) present four traits as follows:

1. Use the social issues as the discussion themes;
2. Hold the viewpoint of criticizing the society;
3. Plots happen under the contemporary circumstance;
4. Depict the ordinary people and common stories.

It is known that *Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts* and *An Enemy of the People* are regarded as Ibsen's social problem dramas<sup>64</sup>, in the 1920s all of these four plays were translated into Chinese and the Chinese intellectuals knew these four realist problem plays very well. Nora's "I am first and foremost a human being", and Dr. Stockmann's "the minority is always right." inspired most of the Chinese revolutionary people. It seems like a chain reaction that many of the modern plays have been written by the Chinese intellectuals following Ibsen's effect since 1920. Those plays raised problems in front of the people for discussing, such as, family

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<sup>63</sup> Tan Kwok Kan's article: Self-identity and the Problematic of Chinese Modernity, P4

<sup>64</sup> He, 2003, P54

issues, moral issues and women issues, etc. Those social problem plays written in the 1920s were referred as Chinese ‘Problem Play’<sup>65</sup>. Those social problem dramas represent such popular issues happened in the contemporary society as the living issue, family issue, love issue, female issue, and other social issue. The playwrights always draw materials from the contemporary society and praise a group of people who are brave to betray the old feudal society and fighting for individual liberty. Most of the social dramas represent ethical morality and education issues, and also disclose the gloomy, hypocritical and corrupt truth in the half-colonial and half-feudal society. The most renowned Chinese ‘Problem Play’ is Hu Shi’s virgin drama—*Zhongshen Dashi* (*The Greatest Event in Life*)<sup>66</sup>, published in *Xin Qingnian* (*New Youth*) in 1919. It was regarded as the first Chinese problem drama, and was also criticized as an imitation of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*. *Zhongshen Dashi* was a one-act play which was written in vernacular.

In the preface Hu Shi said this play was initially written in English and then was translated into Chinese. The heroine is called Tian Yamei who was regarded by Hongshen as the first Chinese ‘Nora’<sup>67</sup>. Yamei was born in a middle class family and falls in love with Mr. Chen. After they return back to China they decide to get married. Yamei’s mother was a traditional Chinese woman who asked fortuneteller about the fate of her daughter’s marriage. She opposes strongly against her daughter’s marriage after she knows that their birth-dates are not match. Yamei’s father supports his wife’s decision because he finds that the people whose surnames are Chen and Tian belong to the same family some 2000 years ago. Facing the bondage of feudal superstition and traditional customs, Yamei decides to make her own decision. In the end of this play, she leaves a note to her parents, which represents the greatest event in her life is marriage and she had to make her own decisions.

This play is created under the circumstance of May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement. Yamei is regarded as the Chinese Nora because she has the similar individuality as Ibsen’s Nora. Both of

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, P144

<sup>66</sup> *Zhongshen Dashi* (*The Greatest Event in Life*): published in March, 1919 in *New Youth* vol. 6, no. 3

<sup>67</sup> Hong Shen: *Zhongguo Xinwenxue Daxi Xiju Pian Daoyan* (*Collected Works of Chinese New Literature, Drama Volume, Introduction*) 1935, Shanghai

them depart their home for the marriage freedom. But Nora leaves her husband's home for her hometown, while Yamei departs her parents' home for Mr. Chen's. Although the plot of this one-act play is a little bit simple, it has a sharp-cut theme because it advocates anti-feudalism and encourages individualism. Hu Shi's ideas about family issues presenting in his *Ibsenism* are also expressed in this play. This play received immense reverberation from the public and Tian Yamei becomes a rebellious model welcomed by many Chinese women. Hu Shi depicts a basic characteristic for Chinese Noras who fight for their freedom and oppose against the traditional Chinese society which was built up under the authority of father or husband. Later several social problem plays appear following the model of *Zhongshen Da Shi* and *Nora*. He Chengzhou praised the significance of Hu Shi's *Zhongshen Dashi* which set a good foundation for the later Chinese intellectuals to create Chinese modern drama, He mentioned:

...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 era.<sup>68</sup>

Yuan Zhenying published a biographical article of Ibsen on *New Youth* in 1918, which was the first Chinese biography of Ibsen. And later in the year of 1927 he wrote a book called *Yibusheng Shehui Zhexue (The Social Philosophy of Ibsen)*. Yuan Zhenying agreed with Hu Shi's opinion related to Ibsen and his plays. Yuan also praised individualism and "the minority is always right" which seems like a supply or adherent to Hu Shi's *Ibsenism*. In Yuan's opinion, Ibsen is a revolutionist and a philosopher.

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<sup>68</sup> He, 2004, P148

## The “Nora theme plays”

In the following years, numerous Ibsen-type social problem dramas emerge one after another in the Chinese literary field. Most of them reflect social contradictions and discuss social problems, such as, morality, education, marriage and poverty. The most famous plays are *Pofu (A Shrew)*; *Zhuo Wenjun*; *Bingbian (Mutiny)*; *Xinren de Shenghuo (Life of New People)*; *Qingchun de Meng (the Dream of Youth)*; and *Dachu Youling Ta (Break out of the Ghost Tower)*. Those plays are also regarded as “departure plays” or “Nora plays” and in consequence social problem drama becomes a fashion for the May 4<sup>th</sup> period and it also bring a mainstream in Chinese literary creation. He Chengzhou explains in his book why those plays are called ‘Nora Play’ and why Nora-theme plays were so popular in May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement 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<sup>69</sup>

Besides I would like to say that Hu Shi’s *Zhongshen Dashi (The Greatest Event in Life)* is created by imitating Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, while the Chinese Problem Plays are modeled after *Zhongshen Dashi*. In consequence, after two-emulation a group of Nora-type heroines come forward and the term of ‘Chinese Nora-Plays’ appear.

In spite of almost everyone is eager to follow Nora and desires to depart like Nora, Lu Xun stands out in 1923 and pours cold water on Chinese Nora fever. He makes a speech called “*Nala Zouhou Zenyang? (What Happens after Nora Leaves Home?)*” in the Beijing Normal College for Women. He stands on the base of Chinese realistic problems and points out this question left by Ibsen, and then he hit the mark with the Chinese cruel reality: owing to lack of independent economic position, after departure from home Nora has no more than two ways—either degenerate into whore, or go back home:

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<sup>69</sup> He, 2004, P29

Based on common sense, Nora perhaps has only two alternatives: either she will become bad or she will return to her husband. It is like the case of a caged bird. Of course there is no freedom in the cage...while if imprisonment has atrophied its wings, or if it has forgotten how to fly, there certainly is nowhere it can go. Another alternative is to starve to death, but since that means departing this life it presents no problem and no solution either. The most painful thing in life is to wake up from a dream but find nowhere to go. If no way out can be seen, the most important thing is not to awaken them<sup>70</sup>

However, since Nora has awakened it is hard for her to return to her dream world in consequence all she can do is to leave. After departure though, she can not avoid becoming bad or returning. Other wise the question becomes: “What has she taken with her apart from her awakened heart?” If she has nothing but crimson woolen scarf, no matter its width reaches to two or three Chi<sup>71</sup>, it will prove completely useless. She needs more than that and she needs something in her purse. To put it bluntly, what she needs is money.

Dreams are fine, but money is essential.<sup>72</sup>

Lu Xun also warns people that freedom could not be bought by money; however, it could be sold for money. He insists that female would gain true freedom only when they can equally have economic and social position as the male: “Firstly, there must be a fair sharing between men and women in the family; secondly, men and women must have equal rights in society.”<sup>73</sup> Although Lu Xun admits that he does not know how to find a solution for dealing with this problem, he shows a path to awake people that they have to “fight for them. We even have to fight harder for these than for political rights.”<sup>74</sup> Besides considering the old Chinese traditional history, Lu Xun indicates that it is more difficult for the Chinese women to depart their home than Nora. In 1925, a short story is created by Lu Xun and he names this story as *Shang Shi (Regret for the Past)*. It is worth analyzing because this novel presents what will happen after Nora’s departure and it can express Lu Xun’s viewpoint on this problem.

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<sup>70</sup> Lu, 1923, Beijing, the original text I cited from the website: <http://mgnky.blogdriver.com/mgnky/967550.html>

<sup>71</sup> Chi : a Chinese unit of length, three Chi equals to one meter

<sup>72</sup> Lu, 1923, Beijing, the original text I cited from the website: <http://mgnky.blogdriver.com/mgnky/967550.html>

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, P 161

The story starts with the plot after departure from home. Imitating Nora's voice: "I am first and foremost a human being", the heroine of *Shang Shi*—Zi Jun announces that: "I am my own mistress. None of them has the right to interfere with my life"<sup>75</sup> After departure from home, Zi Jun spends a happy life with her lover—Juan Sheng in the first few days, however, unfortunately Juan Sheng is discharged and they have to face the actual problems. Zi Jun's voice of "I am my own mistress" wears down along with the plot going. After a long period of time their living situation does not get better, and then they get depression and realize that the current society is not that easy. Later even the so-called happiness family possession—Zi Jun's chick and doggy become the excuse for Juan Sheng to detest his lover. The flowers which represent love wither away in the corner of their home. Their dreams evaporate and then Zijun goes back home in terms of the fatal arrangement and dies afterwards. Zijun is a victim of the Literary Revolutionary Movement. In the story Lu Xun elaborates that economic base decides whether the women can gain independent individuality and whether they can obtain a freedom marriage, so that it gives a head-on blow to the Chinese women those who eager to leave their home. Tan Kwok Kan thinks that for Lu Xun return after realizing no other ways to go is crueler than poverty even death: "As a matter of fact, to return home is even more terrible for Tzu-chun<sup>76</sup> than to starve to death. Tzu-chun's returning home is a kind of self sacrifice and is a testimony of Lu Hsun<sup>77</sup>'s prophecy that there is no place for Nora in society"<sup>78</sup> Some of the Chinese scholars, like Tan Kwok Kan, regard *Shang Shi* as an answer to the question: "What Happens After Nora Leaves Home?" posed by Lu Xun in 1923. Lu uses this story to warn that Ibsen's Nora can not help the Chinese women to solve the problems in the Chinese special social situation.

On the March 20<sup>th</sup> of 1928, in order to commemorate the anniversary of Ibsen's centenary, *Dagong Bao Wenxue* published a long article called "*Yibusheng Dansheng Baizhounian Jinian*" (*Commemoration of Ibsen's Centenary*). The social significance

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<sup>75</sup> Lu, *Shang Shi*, Oct., 1925, I cited the original text from the website: <http://read.anhuinews.com/system/2004/10/19/001020223.shtml>

<sup>76</sup> Tzu-chun in present Chinese Pinyin style should be Zi Jun

<sup>77</sup> Lu Hsun in present Chinese Pinyin style should be Lu Xun

<sup>78</sup> Tan Kwok Kan, 1984, P227

of Ibsen's plays as well as the artistic value were discussed and evaluated in the article. This time the effect of Ibsen's plays reached to an unprecedented peak in China. As a result in the period of May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, Chinese revolutionary people treated Ibsen's social problem dramas as revolutionary samples and in consequence Ibsen was accepted in China more as a thinker than a playwright.

### **Ibsen's plays were performed on Chinese stages**

If it can be said that *New Youth* supported Nora and Ibsen's other plays, which evoked a huge response in Chinese society, then the performances of Ibsen staged in China helped to bring about an idol—Nora for the Chinese people.

Actually there is an interesting fact that Ibsen's plays are performed on the Chinese stage a little bit earlier than its Chinese translation published in China. As mentioned in the Chapter two: *A Doll's House* was the first Ibsen's play performed on Chinese stage in 1914 by Chun Liu She. In the beginning the performances of western plays got into a miserable condition for Chinese audience did not accept the way presenting western plays on Chinese stage. At that time Chinese did not familiar with the western plot, the western way of speaking, the western way of behavior, and others. In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Chinese audience could not find any interests in the western performances. Later along with the New Cultural Movement broke out, the Chinese directors and actors realized that they should reverse this bleak situation and they tried to edit the western plays for the Chinese's taste. For example, they added some Chinese features and culture in the performance. Later in 1923 Ibsen's play—*A Doll's House*<sup>79</sup> was performed again in China. The performance received a favorable response and some critics praised its success. On 18<sup>th</sup> of May, an article was published in *Chenbao Fukan (Morning Post Supplement)* by He Yigong<sup>80</sup>, who paid attention to its theatrical elements such as, the setting, the stage equipment and he praised the actress's adept performing skill. However, Fangxin noticed some audiences were not satisfied with the performance and left very early after the end of

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<sup>79</sup> On May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1923, *A Doll's House* was staged in Beiping Nuzi Gaodeng Shifan Xuexiao (Peking Normal College for Women) in order to commemorate the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement.

<sup>80</sup> He Yigong is also known as He Honglie an editor of *Qinghua Zhoukan*, died in 1926

Act one. The performances of western modern dramas had a long way to go before the real theatrical success of modern drama came to China.

Several performances of Ibsen's plays appeared on the Chinese stage in the following years. In 1924, another *A Doll's House* performance was staged in Beijing by Er Shi Liu Jushe (Twenty Six Drama Society). Although during its rehearsal it was interrupted by the police (at the moment, the actresses were not allowed to act together with the actors in the same performance), the performance was still staged on December 19<sup>th</sup> 1924 as it was expected.

In 1925 *A Doll's House* was performed in China for the fourth time. It was staged in Shanghai by Shanghai Xiju Xiehui (Shanghai Drama Society) and Hong Shen was the director. It was also a successful performance of Ibsen's plays in China. Tan Kwok Kan praised its significance of Chinese drama: "This theatre company was created with the purpose of introducing Western drama to China".<sup>81</sup> Before *An Enemy of the People*<sup>82</sup> was first performed in China (in 1927), *A Doll's House*<sup>83</sup> had been performed for five times in China. Nora's image appeared more and more frequently in China and as a result Nora received more and more attention from the Chinese people furthermore, Ibsen's plays had become popular from then on.

*An Enemy of the People* was first performed in Tianjin Nankai Middle School in 1927. Anytime when speaking of Tianjin Nankai Middle School, people could not ignore to mention Zhang Pengchun<sup>84</sup> who was also the director for the first performance of *An Enemy of the People* in China.

Zhang Pengchun studied Education and Philosophy in Clark University of America, where Zhang spent a lot of time on learning knowledge about drama. He avowed that drama was his favorite even more than his major. His adoring playwright was Henrik

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<sup>81</sup> Tan, 1984, P 170

<sup>82</sup> The first performance of *An Enemy of the People* in China was shown in Tianjin by Tianjin Nankai Middle School in 1927

<sup>83</sup> In Elisabeth Eide's article—*Huaju Performances of Ibsen in China*, written in 1983, she mentioned the most performances in China is *A Doll's House*.

<sup>84</sup> Zhang Pengchun (1892-1957): Chinese famous educationist, director of the Chinese spoken drama.

Ibsen, when Zhang was still a young man. Under Ibsen and his plays influences, Zhang began to study drama theories and also tried to create his own play scripts. Zhang continued his study in Colombia University. He went back to China in 1916 after his graduation and became the second chief of NanKai New Drama Troupe. From then on his talent and his fame grew higher and higher. He not only brought new drama scripts from abroad, but also transplanted the advanced western manners in China. Zhang Pengchun started his director career very early in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century( 6 years earlier than Hong Shen<sup>85</sup>) Zhang is respected as the core in Nankai drama troupe and he trained several excellent dramatists from this troupe. One of them is the famous dramatist—Caoyu who said Zhang Pengchun showed him the way for creating drama.

After *An Enemy of the People*<sup>86</sup> was staged in China in 1927, one year later Zhang also directed *A Doll's House*<sup>87</sup> in Tianjin Nankai New Drama Troupe in order to celebrate the school's anniversary.

Although more or less Ibsen's plays were performed by amateur troupes in the earliest period of time, and even some of the performances were regarded as immature productions, these performances unconsciously accomplished the enlightenment part in Chinese modern drama. Furthermore, they built a good foundation for the development of Chinese modern drama.

### **Ibsen plays' aesthetic and dramatic value were found by Chinese intellectuals and then be used in China**

Although at the beginning Ibsen and his dramas were utilized for encouraging and awaking Chinese people escaping from the gloomy society. It was ill-considered to define Ibsen and his plays totally for the political purpose, when they were accepted in China. Actually the dramatic achievement presenting by Ibsen was discovered by Chinese people as early as he was introduced in China. Moreover, some Chinese

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<sup>85</sup> Hong Shen is regarded as the earliest director in China by drama historian.

<sup>86</sup> In this performance, Caoyu played the part of Dr. Stockmann's daughter.

<sup>87</sup> In this performance, Caoyu played the part of Nora.

dramatists tried to utilize Ibsen's dramatic techniques in their own plays. Many Chinese scholars and dramatists, such as Xiong Foxi, Yu Shangyuan, Hong Shen, Ouyang Yuqian, etc. studied on how China was influenced by Ibsen, from the dramatist aspect.

In fact as early as 1914, Lu Jingruo already published an article called *Yibusheng Zhi Ju (Ibsen's Drama)*<sup>88</sup> in *Paiyou Zazhi (The Actor's Magazine)*. In his article, Lu Jingruo praised Ibsen as a strong opponent of Shakespeare by analyzing the characters of Ibsen's plays and Lu also considered Ibsen as a significant fighter in drama revolution. Lu Jing ruo's comment was regarded as the first Chinese evaluation of Ibsen as a dramatist. Furthermore Lu introduced eleven plays written by Ibsen, including *A Doll's House*, *An Enemy of the People*, etc. Lu recommended Ibsen's later plays and said that Ibsen had already touched the deep spirit, besides Ibsen exerted himself to discover the foundation of human's torture and tried to find its origin. In his article, Lu mentioned Ibsen's artistic achievement had already reached the professional level. Lu Jingruo's introduction about Ibsen differed from others such as, Lu Xun and Hu Shi who regarded Ibsen as rebellious reformer.

Yu Shangyuan<sup>89</sup> was another Chinese scholar who encouraged reading Ibsen from the aesthetic perspective. Yu wrote an article and then published in *Chenbao Fukan (the Morning Post Supplement)* in 1922. In the content Yu mentioned the discussion scene in *A Doll's House* and viewed this was an outstanding contribution to modern drama.

In addition to these unique evaluations about Ibsen's artistic achievement, there were also some Chinese intellectuals standing out to argue against the opinion which advocated Ibsen as the social rebellious fighter. Wen Yiduo<sup>90</sup> did not satisfied with most of the ordinary Chinese people who regarded Ibsen as a weapon of political propaganda. In 1926, Wen published his *Xiju de Qitu (Drama Goes Astray)* in *Chenbao Fukan (the Morning Post Supplement)*, in which Wen Yiduo mentioned:

It was by accident that modern drama came to China with Ibsen introduced as a social reformer. It was also by accident that Ibsen used drama as a

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<sup>88</sup> Lu Jingruo wrote this article in order to celebrate the performance of *A Doll's House* staged by Shanghai Spring Willow Theatre in 1914.

<sup>89</sup> Yu Shangyuan (1897-1970): a well-known Chinese dramatic educationist, theorist.

<sup>90</sup> Wen Yiduo: (1899-1946) Chinese famous poet, scholar, painter and patriotism democracy fighter.

medium for preaching his ideas. Since we had to introduce Ibsen, we could not avoid his “problem plays”...Our first knowledge of drama started with the treatment of problems, and since the first impression is the most authoritative, it stays deep in our mind that the problem presented in a play is its soul. From then on we seem to consider the problem as the foremost element in drama...Every time they were introduced their thoughts came before their art...<sup>91</sup>

Later in the year of 1927, Zheng Zhenduo<sup>92</sup>, published a book entitled “*Wenhua Dagang*” (*An Outline of Literature*), in which Zheng eulogized Ibsen was the greatest European dramatist in the past 150 years. And Zheng also ranked Ibsen’s status in literary aspect “was the same as Aeschylus, Shakespeare and Corneille”<sup>93</sup>

It was followed by an article published in *Chenbao Fukan (the Morning Post Supplement)*. It was translated into Chinese from Janko Lavrin’s article “*Ibsen as Artist*”. In the context Lavrin placed Ibsen as artist rather than philosopher.

In 1928 Yu Shangyuan also pointed out that Ibsen was misinterpreted in China which can be seen in his essay titled “*Yibusheng de Yishu*” (*Ibsen’s Art*): “Drama which aims at portraying and criticizing life has led many into applying it socially. In modern China, Ibsen is among those who have had the bad luck of being misinterpreted”<sup>94</sup>. Furthermore, in the end of this essay, Yu concluded that Ibsen used ordinary life as the subject matter, and also professionally utilized dramatic techniques as a medium to balance thinking and art, content and structure.

## Summary

In 1928, Ibsen accomplished his introduction in China and was primarily accepted by the Chinese society, as well as the Chinese intellectuals and the ordinary people. Several different voices existed when evaluating Ibsen during that period of time: some regarded Ibsen as a revolutionary full of rebellious spirits; some considered him as a talented artist, and some treated him as a social theorist. In the May 4<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Wen, 1926

<sup>92</sup> Zheng Zhenduo: (1898-1958) Chinese famous literary historian, cultural relic archeologist, writer, editor in chief of *Xiaoshuo Yuebao (Novel Journal)*, *Shijie Wenku (Worldwide Library)*, etc.

<sup>93</sup> Zheng, 1927

<sup>94</sup> Yu, 1928

Movement people focused on the social reality of the contemporary China so that most of them paid more attention to Ibsen's thinking aspect and grabbed Ibsen's plays for Chinese use. The advocates of the movements utilized Ibsen as a social reformer. As a matter of fact it led to a certain extent of misunderstanding and misrepresentation, for instance, some ignored the dramatic structure or poetry in Ibsen's plays; some ignored the character's innermost feelings as well as the image-building skills. Only the social problems and the individualism were emphasized to present. Tan Kwok Kan referred that Hu Shi's *Ibsenism* set a bad example for the Chinese people when introduced Ibsen in China: "he (Hu Shi) mixed up art with thought and considered realism in drama as the author's basic attitude towards life and society."<sup>95</sup> As a result the dramatic productions were getting weaker and weaker, straightforward, empty and less of esthetics charm. In May 4<sup>th</sup> period of time, quite a lot of scripts appeared with a flaw only presenting the questions. Along with more and more articles and translation versions been published, more and more Chinese people noticed the artistic and technical aspects in Ibsen's plays. Not only Ibsen's name but also his literary contribution and dramatic techniques became familiar to the Chinese people. From 1907 to 1928 was a long period, which based a foundation for building up Chinese modern drama. Some of the scholars, such as, Yu Shangyuan noticed that many dramatic techniques used in Ibsen's plays were good examples for reforming and developing Chinese own drama.

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<sup>95</sup> Tan, 1984, P 216

## Chapter Four 1929—1948 Ibsen-style dramas blossom all over China

### Introduction:

During the twenty years from Ibsen was firstly introduced in China until 1929 Ibsen and his plays were no strangers to the Chinese people, especially to the Chinese active intellectuals. Eleven of Ibsen's twenty-six plays had been translated and published in Chinese, including all of his social problem dramas. In addition many Chinese scholars, such as, Lu Xun and Hu Shi had already written and published their critiques and articles about Ibsen and his plays which aroused eager discussions. Numerous people considered Ibsen as a rebellious reformer rather than an excellent dramatist. At this moment, Hong Shen and Xiong Foxi stood out and advocated people to focus on Ibsen's aesthetic contribution and avoid the political explanation, which drew back some attention on Ibsen plays' dramatic value. Starting from 1929, an increasing number of Chinese scholars began to re-evaluate Ibsen and his plays. However, there was always a disputation between whether Ibsen was more a rebellious reformer or more an experienced dramatist in the following years after the year of Ibsen centenary. It can be seen as a delightful progress to estimate Ibsen in China, just like what Tan Kwok Kan said: "compared with the initial reception of Ibsen in the 1910" in the period after 1929 "Ibsen was no longer regarded solely as a social revolutionist or an ideologue. The shift in emphasis from theme to technique in the later studies of Ibsen reflected a maturity in the Chinese drama critics and an attitude capable of grasping the essence of Western drama."<sup>96</sup> Under Ibsen's influences which lasted about 20 years, in the 1930s Chinese people witnessed a tremendous change in Chinese modern drama. It is no doubt that Ibsen plays a significant role in China and his plays have set a good example for developing Chinese modern drama. Many notable playwrights came forward during that period of time like bamboo shoot after a spring rain. The most famous dramatists were Ouyang Yuqian, Hong Shen, Xiong Foxi, Tian Han, Cao

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<sup>96</sup> Tan Kwok Kan, 1984, P 95

Yu, etc., who also impelled Chinese modern drama. They “contributed to the development of spoken drama<sup>97</sup> in China” as Tan referred in his book.

From 1937 to 1945, the influence of Ibsen and his plays in China had experienced a big change. With the outbreak of Sino-Japan War in 1937, the Chinese people shifted their attention from Ibsen and Nora to saving nation defense. In this critical period Ibsen and his plays no longer satisfied the Chinese intellectuals, and the war became a turning point for Ibsen effect in China. Not only in these eight years but also the following several years after the war, there were very few Ibsen’s plays staged in China. Even the literary productions about Ibsen almost faded out. Ibsen fever and Nora fever had already been a significant part in Chinese revolutions, in terms of politics, literature and drama creations for almost 20 years. Nevertheless, Ibsen and his plays ceased all activities practically in an instant.

### **Literary critiques aspect**

The passion of researching and studying Ibsen and his plays grew bit by bit after Ibsen’s centenary in 1928. A lot of literary critiques related to Ibsen were published in China. The voice of re-evaluating Ibsen has been reached to the upsurge. From 1920s to 1930s, discussions regarding to Ibsen had brought a new critical field about the dramatic techniques in Ibsen’s plays.

#### *Yu Shangyuan’s critique*

In 1928 Yu Shangyuan, who published his essay *Yibusheng de Yishu (Ibsen’s Art)* in *Chenbao Fukan (The Morning Post Supplement)*, expressed that Ibsen was misinterpreted in modern China. In consequence a growing number of literary essays discussing Ibsen appeared in the following years. In 1929 Chinese intellectuals shifted

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<sup>97</sup> Chinese Spoken Drama has several different names in its development history, in order to distinguish from the Chinese traditional drama, Chinese people had called it as “Chinese New Drama”; “Wenming Xi”(Intellectual Drama); “Chinese Play” and others. It was not until 1928 when the Chinese modern drama was formally nominated as “Chinese Spoken Drama” by a famous Chinese drama director Hong Shen. The Chinese Spoken Drama was a stage artistic style imitating western modern drama, and it expanded plots by using dramatic conversations and stage narration.

from the previous opinion of considering Ibsen as a thinker to an objective view of estimating him as not only a rebellious thinker but also a dramatist.

### *Xiong Foxi's critique*

Xiong Foxi<sup>98</sup> published his essay *Shehui Gaizao Jia de Yibusheng Yu Xiju Jia de Yibusheng (Ibsen the Social Reformer and Ibsen the Dramatist)* in 1929. In his essay, Xiong Foxi summarized the temporal opinion about Ibsen, who was regarded as an absolute social reformer holding progressive thinking. However, Xiong was dissatisfied with the general interpretation of Ibsen in China so that he advocated: "Now we have to consider him as a dramatist"<sup>99</sup> Furthermore Xiong discussed three aspects he found in Ibsen's dramatic contribution, namely:

- 1) Ibsen selects his protagonists from the ordinary people and creates no strange plots which can be found in real life;
- 2) Ibsen admirably masters the well-made plays and manages retrospective method in his plays;
- 3) Ibsen utilizes prose language instead of verse language which is close with the plots.

Furthermore Xiong Foxi disagreed with the majority people who tended to define Ibsen's contribution only related to his social thinking. At last Xiong Foxi pointed out the weakness about Ibsen's plays for the Chinese audience. And he said it would be the reason why Ibsen's dramatic techniques did not attract those people's attention. Xiong said: "Ibsen prefers debate and he always gives long and boring lectures. In this case, audiences often get sleepy and keep talking on stage, which is especially true when his plays are staged in China. Having been familiar with the exciting scenes, Chinese audiences are not fond of discussion on the stage."<sup>100</sup>

There is a detail I would like to discuss why Xiong Foxi and Yu Shangyuan based their interpretation on Ibsen's dramatic aspects.

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<sup>98</sup> Xiong Foxi (1900-1965), Chinese well-known dramatic educationist, playwright.

<sup>99</sup> Xiong Foxi: *Shehui Gaizao Jia de Yibusheng Yu Xiju Jia de Yibusheng (Ibsen the Social Reformer and Ibsen the Dramatist)*, 1929

<sup>100</sup> Ibid

Yu Shangyuan, who added dramatic techniques that Ibsen utilized, appraised Ibsen's achievements for the modern drama. Yu indicated Ibsen's greatness shown in his plays can be concluded in three aspects: language, characters and environment. He even ranked Ibsen above Shakespeare because: "Ibsen's greatness lies in his use of life as subject-matter and realism as a means for artistic achievement."<sup>101</sup> To Yu Shangyuan's understanding Shakespeare created his protagonists from special or fictive places, in a certain extent the plots in Shakespeare's plays could seldom happen in the ordinary life. While Ibsen's heroes and heroines are from the ordinary society and they are those people who meet every day. Another advantage Ibsen compared with Shakespeare, in Tan Kwok Kan's words, is Ibsen's "original in his works"<sup>102</sup> which means that Shakespeare's stories mostly draw materials from history records, historical novels, folk legends and ancient plays. For example, the source for *Hamlet* comes from a tragedy of a Danish Prince in the 12<sup>th</sup> century; *The Merchant of Venice* draws material from an ancient legend; *Romeo and Juliet* is from a fiction story, which was first read in an Italian story of Bandell's; *King Lear* draw material from an old British historical legend. However, Ibsen creates his own stories and he also extends to use prose language in his plays, which play a significant role in reforming the modern drama. His contributions can be seen in the letter Ibsen wrote to Edmund Gosse in 1874:

...it was the illusion of reality I wanted to produce. I wanted to evoke in the reader the impression that what he was reading really happened. If I had used verse, I would have run counter to my own intention and to the task I had set myself. All the many ordinary and insignificant characters that I deliberately introduced into the play would have been blurred and mixed up with each other if I had let them all talk together in measured rhythms. We no longer live in Shakespeare's time...My new play is no tragedy in the old style; what I wanted to portray was people, and it was precisely for that reason that I did not allow them to speak with the tongues of angels<sup>103</sup>

Yu Shangyuan went to Colombia University to study, where Yu chose Western opera

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<sup>101</sup> Yu Shangyuan, 1928, P 16

<sup>102</sup> Tan, 1984, P 71

<sup>103</sup> Henrik Ibsen: from a letter to Edmund Gosse 15 January, 1874. included in *a critical anthology* / edited by James McFarlane, 1970, P 83

literature and Theater Art as his major. At that time very few students chose theater art as their major. He met with Xiong Foxi, Wen Yiduo and Liang Shiqiu<sup>104</sup> very often in their spare time in the United States. After he came back to China, Yu Shangyuan originated Drama Department in Beijing Yishu Zhuanmen Xuexiao (Beijing Art Special School) together with Zhao Taimou<sup>105</sup> and Wen Yiduo. This was the first drama department in the formal school in China and was also the beginning for Yu Shangyuan devoting himself to Chinese drama education. Wu Zuguang<sup>106</sup> recollected Yu Shangyuan's greatness for Chinese dramatic education. Wu praises Yu Shangyuan who did not select the way to become a dramatic artist but chose to be a dramatic educationist. Although he had no ability to be an artist, he paid much more attention on the dramatic career from a wider perspective.

The similar experience happened to Xiong Foxi who went to the United States for drama and literature studies. Probably it is easy for people to relate his study background when interpreting Ibsen in China, namely, dramatist would make his research point starting from the dramatic aspect when criticized an author.

With the background of studying dramatic literature and theater art as well as the knowledge of western drama, both of Yu Shangyuan and Xiong Foxi focused their attention on the dramatic aspect when they evaluated Ibsen and his plays.

In the same year when Xiong Foxi published his Ibsen essay, another two scholars expressed their dissatisfactions about the misinterpretation of Ibsen as a thinker in China.

*Other literary critiques:*

One is Chen Chih-tse, who wrote *Yibusheng de Qungui (Ibsen's Ghosts)*. In this essay, besides analyzing his *Ghosts* Chen praised Ibsen's achievements of dramatic techniques which were useful for developing modern drama, for instance Ibsen used

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<sup>104</sup> Liang Shiqiu (1903-1987) Chinese educationist, playwright, litterateur.

<sup>105</sup> Zhao Taimou (1889-1968), Chinese dramatist, modern educationist.

<sup>106</sup> Wu Zuguang (1917-2003), Chinese famous modern playwright, director, author.

the retrospective exposition skill in his plays which was quite different from the other playwrights.

The other is Chen Xiyong<sup>107</sup> who wrote an essay named *Yibusheng de Xiju Yishu (The Dramatic Art of Ibsen)* in 1929. Chen also interpreted Ibsen from the dramatic aspects and praised his artistic achievements contributed to modern drama. It seems that Ibsen is not only first and foremost a dramatist but also the greatest dramatist in the world to Chen Xiyong's comprehension. None of the protagonists from Ibsen's plays are romantic heroes, instead they are miscellaneous common people living in our neighborhood and the stories happened to them are not unacquainted for the audience, besides the settings are very familiar to the readers/audiences. Those ordinary people behave in the common environment and speak their daily language. However, behind those common plots Ibsen showed many uncommon artistic conceptions. It is what the brilliant talent artist contributes to the modern drama. In the essay Chen belauds that Ibsen masters and promotes the dramatic technique of well-made play by analyzing some of Ibsen's plays, such as, *The Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *The Wild Duck*, *Rosmersholm* and others. Although Chen eulogized that *Ghosts* exerts an epochmaking influence on Ibsen's realism plays, for he uses 'well-made play' technique freely and masterly, Chen ranks the *Wild Duck* and *Rosmersholm* above the prestigious play—*Ghosts* in regard from the perspective of dramatic technique. Chen Xiyong believes *Rosmersholm* is better than *Ghosts* from the psychological aspect. Chen discussed the dialogues and behaviors between Rosmer and Rebecca in order to find the psychological clues changed gradually from the time they faced to the crisis and fell into the difficult situation, then they lost their confidence and their will power became weaker, finally they fell into a distracted realm and decided to jump into the mill together. Concerning the achievement of Ibsen's art, Chen also thinks *The Wild Duck* is more successful than *Rosmersholm* for its perfect psychological description. Besides Ibsen uses many cause-effect relations in the plots and then naturally and smoothly lead the audience to the climax came out

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<sup>107</sup> Chen Xiyong (1896-1970), Chinese well-known litterateur, author, who published *Xiyong Xianhua (Xiyong's Scribble)* in 1928

at the end of this play. Chen Xiying's essay was taken as the most profound and provocative Chinese analysis of Ibsen's dramas<sup>108</sup> at that time.

In 1931 Janko Lavrin's essay "Ibsen and Shaw" was translated by Zhang Menglin and published in *Xiandai Xuesheng (Modern Student)*. Lavrin analyzed and compared Ibsen with Shaw in many different aspects, such as, temperament, outlook, language, technique and also effect. For Lavrin, Ibsen by his temperament is the last great figures of romanticism and his romantic is permeated with a violent puritanic strain: "Puritanism which always demands a rigid self-mastery and self-restraint, gives the key to the character of Ibsen and Ibsen's works."<sup>109</sup> Lavrin also mentioned that Ibsen presented the divergence and contradiction between his ideals and the real world:

His *Lady from the Sea* strikes a note of reconciliation with reality, but his note is as artificial as the whole play...<sup>110</sup>

The *Master builder* marks Ibsen's final effort towards a reconciliation of his romantic hopes with reality, and at the same time his final heroic defeat.<sup>111</sup>

There is no doubt that whatever Ibsen wrote, he wrote out of an inner inevitability. The chief stimulus of his (Ibsen's) works was his own spiritual fight and experience, which he tried to embody in his plays<sup>112</sup>

Lavrin compared the characters between Ibsen and Shaw and found that Ibsen contrasted to Shaw was more introvert and he believed things were not as simple as Shaw felt. Consequently at the end of the play Ibsen always left a question to the readers while in Shaw's play he "only answers—and this with perfect self-assurance, because he knows beforehand all answers and solutions."<sup>113</sup> Lavrin's essay exploited a wide sight view of analyzing Ibsen from the psychological perspective to the Chinese readers:

Ibsen concentrates first of all upon that eternal Problem of Life which can perhaps be solved only upon a supra-logical or religious plane. The whole inner tragedy of Ibsen was due to the fact that, endowed with a profound moral instinct he had no religious instinct. Devoid of religious

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<sup>108</sup> Tan, 1984, P 88

<sup>109</sup> Lavrin, 1929, P81

<sup>110</sup> Lavrin, 1929, P 82

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, P82

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, P 83

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, P 84

consciousness, he was bound to have recourse to purely intellectual solutions, to various philosophic and sociological creeds, which led him to skepticism and proved eventually mere illusions, mere “ghosts”...

Ibsen needed religion as the ultimate justification of his own moral sense, which was strong enough to keep him spell-bound to the end by the uncompromising “all-or-nothing,” and to weigh him down by his continuous feeling of guilt—the feeling of individual responsibility for the evils of all life...<sup>114</sup>

It is only at his best that Ibsen managed to embody his problems and ideas in such a way as to make them an inevitable outcome of the inner lives of his characters.<sup>115</sup>

It can be seen from Lavrin’s discussion that Ibsen’s psychological activity more or less reflected in his plays. Furthermore, Lavrin also mentioned Ibsen’s dramatic technique employed in his plays:

The new technical devices of the so-called “Ibsenian drama”...have but one aim: to find the most economic way of embodying various social or ethical problems in living characters. Ibsen struggles with his “thesis” until he transmutes it into flesh. How stubborn and difficult this fight must have been is proved by all his plays after *Brand*. In order to overcome this difficulty, he altered the technique of modern drama first of all by introducing into it the retrospective exposition instead of the accepted development of the entire plot on the stage. Each of his plays is only a psychological “epilogue,” an inner reaction to a tragic guilt contracted by the hero in the past, before the play began.<sup>116</sup>

### **The performance aspect**

Dating back to the first performance of Ibsen play staged in China in 1914, it had been approximately 20 years by 1934. Among these years most of Ibsen’s major plays were staged in China and as one of the most influential Ibsen’s plays in China, *A Doll’s House* had been performed in China for more than seven times before 1934. And then in 1935 Nora was frequently presented on Chinese stage and the seething extent of performing Nora reached to an incomparable height. In January of the same

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, P86

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, P93

<sup>116</sup> Lavrin, 1929, P 92

year, a teacher of Nanjing Mofeng Jushe (Nanjing Mofeng Drama Society) was dismissed for the crime of “prejudice of ethical morals” because she continually played the part of Nora for three days. In June two performers—Zhao Dan and Lan Ping from Shanghai Left Wing Drama Society amazed the whole nation for playing the part of Helmer and Nora. From then on Nora Plays spread to every corner in China and 1935 was called as “the Year of Nora” by Chinese dramatists. Why were Nora Plays able to arouse an earthshaking response in China? One of the main reasons is: it coincided with the fact in feudal society which was revealed by the new literary pioneers; in addition it accorded with the time spirit of emancipating individuality and liberating female. Nora’s announcement seems like a lightning which lacerates the darkness bondage-cage. In Nora Plays Chinese pioneers found a model image that daringly pursued humanity equality and independent individuality.

Along with *A Doll’s House*’s frequently performed in China, a Nora-fever was raised again in China and between 1934 and 1935. The question posed by Lu Xun in 1923 as “*What Happens After Nora Leaves Home?*” was asked again in China. It caused an extraordinary discussion among Chinese big cities, such as, Shanghai, Nanjing, and others. Many events took place in 1934 in relation to female problem and marriage problem. Jiang Zhiping expressed his opinion on Nora’s ending after departure in his essay “Nala Zouhou Jiujiing Zenyang Duhou” (*After Reading ‘What Really Happens to Nora after She Leaves Home’*): they have to return home which is wiser than to resist in the society. Because he knew that so many women left their home in 1934 but unfortunately they had to return without other choices. In the same year, Cao Juren published his essay “The Problem of Nora’s Departure” in Shenbao and indicated what he saw during these years and what happened to the Chinese women after they left their homes. He pointed out that most of the Chinese Noras fulfilled Lu Xun’s prediction: either becomes a prostitute, or returns home. Cao added that: “No matter which way they finally walked on after departure, they changed nothing but return back to dolls as they were before”<sup>117</sup> To the opposite opinion of the pessimistic results given by the former intellectuals, Guo Moruo pointed out the third way

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<sup>117</sup> Cao Juren: The Problem of Nora’s Departure, Shenbao, July, 10<sup>th</sup>, 1934

departure women could follow, in a series of articles for commemorating Qiu Jin<sup>118</sup> Guo Moruo praised that Qiu Jin chose a different way from the other women, namely devoting herself to revolution movement and Guo believed Qiu Jin's choice should be regarded as the answer to Nora plays<sup>119</sup>. At the beginning of his *The Answer to Nora*, Guo said *A Doll's House* presented a consciousness process of a woman called Nora who left her false-hearted husband and parted from her lovely children. She gained her freedom and individuality after escaping from her doll house. Guo asked a question by himself: "Where will Nora go after her departure?" In regard to this question Ibsen did not give any answers in his play, but "our great martyr Qiu Jin devoted her whole life to answering the question." For Guo Moruo, Ibsen presents Nora getting her individuality freedom from the spirit position, while the way pursuing freedom presented by Qiu Jin is actually not only from spiritual level but also from the activity level. Finally Guo Moruo admired Qiu Jin as "a one hundred percent Chinese Nora forty-three years ago."<sup>120</sup> Nevertheless Guo did not intend to deny the other answers to Nora in the contemporary China. Because at that period of China there were very few women like Qiu Jin who joined into emancipation of female revolution for pursuing their true freedom but most of the departure women degraded to prostitution or returned home. Guo Moruo wrote this essay in order to emphasize that the future for the Chinese departure women was not gloomy and their efforts could not be worthless. They should keep learning living skill, and be responsible for their social position. Like Guo most of the Chinese intellectuals paid so much attention to the "problem" shown in the play. As a result they often evaluated Ibsen in accordance with Chinese current political situation and made unilateral explanation of Ibsen's social problem plays. Because of the difference in social circumstance and culture background, it is easy for those temporal Chinese

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<sup>118</sup> Qiu Jin (1875-1907) a female, Chinese revolutionary pioneer, who suffering her life with her disobliging and disingenuous husband in her first twenty-five years. She left her doll's house and went to Japan for study. She learned that women should not rely on men and with her rebellious spirits Qiu decided to fight against the gloomy old Chinese society and advocated revolutionary idea. She was arrested by Qing Government in 1907 and killed in July the same year.

<sup>119</sup> Nora Plays, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, means after the influence by *A Doll's House* in China, in 1920s so many Chinese writers created a lot of plays with the ending of female protagonists left their home. Those plays were called Departure Plays or Nora Plays.

<sup>120</sup> Guo Moruo: *The Answer to Nora*.

intellectuals to deviate from Ibsen's original intention from the very beginning.

### **Other types of literary creation in China**

In this period of time many of the critics put their eyes on the technique perspective of Ibsen's plays, for example, one of the chief editors of the *New Youth*, Yuan Zhenying also noticed Ibsen's techniques utilized in the play. In 1936 he wrote an article analyzing Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*. In his essay Yuan found that Ibsen's plays are full of psychological elements which grasp readers' attention firmly. Furthermore, in 1940 Pan Jiaxun analyzed Ibsen based on the theme shown in his plays. In his book, Pan discusses that Ibsen's plays affect literature creation. Pan takes Ibsen's plays as examples to express his understanding about social problems in Ibsen's plays. Furthermore Pan makes it clear that individualism is definitely different from selfishness. Like Hu Shi, Pan also noticed the relationship between individual person and society, besides Pan emphasized the importance of free will and "I am first and foremost a human being" for an individual person.

The voice of "I believe that I am first and foremost a human being, just as much as you, -or, at least, that I'll try to become one" that Nora spelt out has already inspired many ordinary women leaving their doll house like her. This influence continued in the 1930s. In addition the booming tendency of Chinese social problem plays directly impelled Chinese early problem novels to come forth and to develop. Many good problem novels were published during the 1920s and 1930s, for example, Mao Dun wrote a novel *Hong (Rainbow)* in 1929 and the protagonist—Mei Xingsu presents more or less the image of Nora in the whole story. Mei is a progressive Chinese new woman who holds the liberal idea in her mind and she always makes discussion with her friend about Ibsen and Tolstoy because: "Both Tolstoy and Ibsen represent new ideas and therefore must be good."<sup>121</sup> Following her idol—Nora's road, Mei fights against the fallacious marriage and her stubborn family and leaves her home in order

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<sup>121</sup> Mao Dun, *Hong*, 1929, P 28

to pursue the real freedom. Many Chinese scholars such as, He Chengzhou and Tan Kwok Kan, consider that Mao Dun's *Hong* states an answer to "What Will Happen after Nora's Departure?"

And then in 1931 Ba Jin<sup>122</sup>'s novel *Jia*<sup>123</sup> (*Family*) came out to the public. The male protagonist Jue Hui was portrayed as Chinese first "Male Nora" who can not bear traditional corrupt customs any more and finally departs his home. At the same time, Bing Xin<sup>124</sup>, Ding Ling, Xiao Hong<sup>125</sup>, Zhang Ailing<sup>126</sup> and other female writers reflected May 4<sup>th</sup> Chinese New Women from a new perspective. Those new female gave a convincing respond to the individualism upsurge that Ibsenism advocated. Among them, there is a representative female—Ding Ling who wrote her medium-length novel—*Shafei Nushi de Riji* (*Madam Shafei's Diary*) in 1927 and published in *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* (*Short Story Monthly*) in 1928. This is a diary style novel which presents the living situation of a few young people in following few years after May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, and Ding Ling<sup>127</sup> successfully uses audacious and straight-out style of writing to depict exquisitely a heroine with intractable individuality and rebellious spirit. The heroine Shafei is a mirror of the new women who pursuing their true love, real individuality and in the mean time they can not wait to break from the old tradition influence. Shafei represents the woman who is dissatisfied with the contemporary society. In this novel, Ding Ling wants to express that women are not the slaves of love life any more, and they can make decisions with no obstruction. Furthermore, Ding also presents female should have their own recognizant consciousness when facing male dominant.

### Chinese Translation of Ibsen's plays in this period

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<sup>122</sup> Ba Jin (1904-2005): Chinese well-known modern litterateur, translator

<sup>123</sup> Ba Jin wrote three saga novels and collected them together as *Jiliu Sanbu Qu* (*Riptide Trilogy*), *Jia* is one of this famous trilogy.

<sup>124</sup> Bing Xin (1900-1999): Chinese modern female writer, children's litterateur, poet.

<sup>125</sup> Xiao Hong (1911-1942): Chinese well-known modern female writer.

<sup>126</sup> Zhang Ailing (1920-1995): Chinese famous female writer, litterateur.

<sup>127</sup> Ding Ling: (1904-1986), Chinese modern female writer, she joined in Chinese Zuo Yi (Left Wing) Author League in 1930. She wrote many excellent novels in her whole life, such as, *Madam Shafei's Diary*, *Water*, *Mother*, *Mengke*, and others.

Due to few people in China knew Norwegian language at that time, the Chinese translation version of Ibsen's plays was mostly based on the English translation. It can not be neglected that: several important details, such as, the manners of speaking, the language context, the expression manners, and connotative culture in the original scripts would be lost or missing during the translation process. As a result, much of the original meaning of Ibsen's plays has been lost through the translation: from Norwegian to English and English to Chinese. However, no matter how many questions Chinese people faced when introducing Ibsen in China, an increasing number of Ibsen works came forth in China and the translation versions as well. In 1920s and 1930s the translation work of Ibsen's plays reached its peak in China. As mentioned in previous chapter that by the year 1928, the centenary of Ibsen's, Pan Jiaxun's contribution to translating Ibsen's works into China is admirable among those excellent Chinese translators. By 1928, Pan Jiaxun<sup>128</sup> had finished translating most of Ibsen's plays, including *Ghosts*, *A Doll's House*, *An Enemy of the People*, *The Master Builder*, *The League of Youth*, *Hedda Gabler*. Starting from 1929, Pan Jiaxun continued his Ibsen's translation and published the Chinese version of *When We Dead Awaken*<sup>129</sup> in *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* (*Short Story Monthly*) in 1929. His translation of John Gabriel Borkman<sup>130</sup> came out to the public in 1931 which was also serialized in *Xiaoshuo Yuebao*. Later in the year 1959, Pan Jiaxun published a collection of Ibsen's plays and titled as *Yibusheng Xiju Ji* (*Selected Plays of Ibsen*), in this book Pan compiled thirteen plays<sup>131</sup> of Ibsen's. In Pan's whole life he translated fifteen Ibsen's plays. Though based on English version not Norwegian, Pan's Chinese versions are quite faithful to the English versions besides his language is fluent and vivid. Pan used a lot of modern drama language in his translation versions, which received an extensive welcome from the Chinese readers. Pan Jiaxun's contribution to making Ibsen's plays popular among the ordinary Chinese is imponderable. Tan Kwok Kan

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<sup>128</sup> Pan Jiaxun (1896-1989), Chinese well-known translator, he translated a lot of books written by Ibsen and other European modern playwrights.

<sup>129</sup> *When We Dead Awaken* translated into Chinese was called *Women Siren Zai Xing Shi*

<sup>130</sup> *John Gabriel Borkman* translated into Chinese was called *Bokemen*

<sup>131</sup> Pan Jiaxun collected 13 major plays of Ibsen's besides the eight plays I mentioned before, it also included *The Wild Duck*, *Rosmersholm*, *The Lady from the Sea*, *Little Eyolf*, *Pillars of Society*.

praised that Pan Jiaxun's contribution to the Chinese translation version of Ibsen can be compared to William Archer in England.

### **Drama and performance aspects**

A large number of Chinese dramatists appeared around the 1920s and 1930s, which caused a blossoming development of Chinese modern drama. Among those famous dramatists, Hong Shen, Ouyang Yuqian, Tian Han, Cao Yu are the most representative dramatists for founding and promoting Chinese modern drama.

Tian Han was a significant person who devoted his whole life to his favourite career—Chinese modern drama. Tian Han was regarded as one of the masters in Chinese modern drama history and he was a world-wide known playwright, poet, dramatic organizer. Besides, he could not be ignored when talking about the whole maturity process of Chinese modern drama for his contribution to Chinese spoken drama is shown in the following two aspects: 1) Tian Han is a predominant organizer and leader in the revolutionary movements of modern drama; 2) in the history of Chinese spoken drama development, Tian Han is a pioneer playwright and a founder of transferring Chinese modern drama from realistic artistic writing style to poetical style. The famous Chinese dramatist—Cao Yu also praised Tian Han as a significant playwright: “His whole life can be seen as the development history of Chinese spoken drama.”<sup>132</sup> Like many Chinese dramatists, who were influenced by Ibsen from his dramatic techniques perspective, Tian Han also stated that when he was young, reading Ibsen's plays had already been a part of his daily life and Ibsen became a model for him to study. Tian Han expressed his aspiration in the letter written to his intimate friend Guo Moruo that he wanted to be a talented playwright and even signed his name as “a budding Ibsen in China.” Tian Han went to Japan in 1916 for study and came back to China in 1922. He had never known anything about modern drama until he went to Japan. It can be said that the enlightenment phase for him to know modern

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<sup>132</sup> Song Baozhen, 2007, P101

drama is attributed to Japanese modern drama. During these six years Tian Han was intently enamored of reading Shakespeare, Tolstoy, A. Herzen, Ibsen and watched so many dramatic works performed in Japan. Those outstanding western masters' works and high standard performances had an incontestable effect on Tian Han for his creation of plays thereafter. In another letter he wrote to Guo Moruo, Tian expressed that he was willing to reveal the gloomy social reality by creating dramatic plays, he said: "there is a magic energy inside my body, as an artist we should on the one hand uncover the darkness side of the real life and throw all the hypocritical things away, and on the other hand, we should lead people into an artistic realm in which life is art, suffering no more exists."<sup>133</sup> At the beginning of his career, Tian Han set romantic, schmaltz and aesthetic elements into his drama creation which in a certain extent enhanced the artistic taste. Consequently with these elements his early works such as *One Night in the Coffee Shop*; *The Night When the Tiger Was Caught*; *The Death of a Famous Actor* and *Return to the South* gained plentiful achievements from the aesthetic point of view. Actually his success based on not only his presentation of the inhumanity social reality vividly but also his patriotic emotion to an aesthetic conception. In this period Tian Han's plays contained intense individual consciousness and rebellious spirit against unenlightened tradition. Tian's well-known play—*The Night When the Tiger Was Caught* has been seen as the imitation work of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Because the heroines in two plays have the same rebellious spirit: fighting for individual freedom and against traditional corrupt customs. Besides the realistic aspects Tian Han found in Ibsen's plays, he also praised Ibsen's adept dramatic techniques employed in the dramatic creation. Like many other dramatists, Tian Han regarded Ibsen as a poet and a dramatist. He Chengzhou mentioned in his book that for Tian Han, "the primary concern of a writer should not be the social message, but rather the poetic perception of reality," and "He supports his idea by referring to Ibsen, pointing out that Ibsen's writings had enormous social significance, but were in fact written as poems."<sup>134</sup> In addition, those social plays Tian Han created

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<sup>133</sup> A letter to Guo Moruo from Tian Han in February 1921, collected in *San Ye Ji*

<sup>134</sup> He, 2004, P 165

can be found a crytic connection with Ibsen's influence in terms of "thematic content, the characterization and the dramatic structure."<sup>135</sup>

Tian Han's great achievement for developing the Chinese modern drama also reflects in another aspect: he is a pioneer of promoting Chinese modern drama activities. After his return to China from Japan, in 1924 Tian Han originated *Nanguo Ban Yuekan* (*South Land Bi-weekly*) with his wife Yi Shuyu; In 1926 Tian Han founded the well-known Nanguo Dianying Jushe (South Land Drama Society) which was renamed as Nanguo She (South Land Society). There were many performances staged in this society after its foundation. Later Tian Han originated Nanguo Yishu Xueyuan (the South Land Fine Arts College) in which he cultivated a few talented dramatists for Chinese modern drama. By grace of Nanguo Society, many plays can be performed in China and it is not exaggerate to say that Nanguo Society brought a progressive social effects and it also infused vital energy for Chinese modern drama. It can be said that Tian Han perfectly fulfilled his responsibility to promote Chinese modern drama so that he achieved his ambition of becoming 'a budding Ibsen in China'. In 1930s, the appearance of Cao Yu and his realistic plays indicates Chinese modern drama formally reached its maturity phase and "the full blossom of Ibsen in China"<sup>136</sup> arrived.

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, P 177

## Chapter Five Cao Yu

### Introduction

Like the other Chinese intellectuals, who were influenced by Ibsen no matter from the dramatic aspect or rebellious spirit aspect, Cao Yu represents a group of Chinese scholars whose writing career blossomed around 1930s and 1940s. Since 1933 when Cao published his first play—*Thunderstorm*, he created more than 20 plays in his whole life which has won him comprehensive praise from the public. His most famous four dramas are still time-tested in China. Cao Yu said several times to the public that his literary creation was influenced by both western literal cultural thoughts and western literature. However, the influence from Ibsen was undeniable. By analyzing Cao Yu's early plays created in the 1930s and 1940s, it can be seen clearly that he was influenced by Ibsen and his plays. Cao Yu also stated about his indebtedness to Ibsen for several times. In 1978, Cao Yu again appraised Ibsen's influence on his drama creation: "I have worked at drama for decades. When I first began to be interested in drama and playwriting, I was strongly influenced by Ibsen." In the following paragraphs I would like to discuss specifically in which aspects Ibsen and his plays affected Cao Yu. In addition, I will take one of Cao Yu's drama—*Thunderstorm* as an example and compare it with *Ghosts* and Ibsen's other famous plays to make this question clearly. After that I want to explore another question: as to Cao Yu, is Ibsen a playwright or a rebellious thinker?

He Chengzhou considers that Cao Yu brought the blossom period to the Chinese modern drama and Cao Yu was "the greatest Chinese playwright of modern drama in the 20<sup>th</sup> century"<sup>137</sup> In 1930s and 1940s Cao Yu created the most famous four full-length drama—*Leiyu* (*Thunderstorm*, published in 1934), *Richu* (*Sunrise*, published in 1936), *Yuanye* (*The Wilderness*, published in 1937) and *Beijing Ren* (*Peking Man*, published in 1940). These four plays established an important historical position for the Chinese modern drama, especially Cao Yu's maiden

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<sup>137</sup> He, 2004, P 179

work—*Thunderstorm*, which as He Chengzhou comments was the first modern Chinese play to achieve critical and commercial success and it also announced the establishment of theatrical company for modern Chinese drama. The glorious drama achievement Cao Yu gained should be attributed to not only his outstanding drama talent, but also the fact that he got inspirations widely from the excellent foreign playwrights and plays, among which Ibsen played the greatest role in his drama career.

### **Ibsen's influence on Cao Yu**

Cao Yu's first contact with Ibsen's plays was right after his participation in drama performance. Cao Yu said that his drama career began since the year he was 15. In 1925 when studying in NanKai Middle School, Cao took part in a performance group in his school called Nankai Xinju Tuan (Nankai New Drama Troupe) initiated by Zhang Pengchun. Under the direction of Mr. Zhang, Nankai New Drama Troupe started to stage Ibsen's famous plays in the school. In July of 1927, Mr. Zhang directed the members in the troupe to perform Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* and Cao Yu played the role of Dr. Stockmann's daughter in the performance. This is the first time for Cao Yu to know Ibsen and his plays. A few years later in 1978, when he was asked: "Which was the first drama script you read before?" he answered without hesitation: "The first one was written by Henrik Ibsen and I read an English version."<sup>138</sup> In 1929, Cao's teacher Zhang Pengchun gave an English translation version<sup>139</sup> of *Yibusheng QuANJI* (*The Complete Works of Ibsen*) as a gift to him. It offered Cao a very good opportunity to know and understand the master's plays and explored a wide view for him to get to know about dramatic art. Cao Yu recalled: "During the time I was in Nankai, I read all of Ibsen's plays in English which built an important connection when creating my own dramas."<sup>140</sup> By reading Ibsen's plays and performing Ibsen plays personally, Cao Yu's interest in drama grew little by little.

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<sup>138</sup> An interview by Zhao Haosheng in Beijing in May, 1978 and it was included in *the Collection of Caoyu Studies*, P 163

<sup>139</sup> It is translated by William Archer.

<sup>140</sup> An interview by Lu Wenbi, included in the *Collection of Caoyu Studies*, P 212

Once he said “In Ibsen’s plays I found that dramatic art can have various ways of manifestations. Characters can be so real and so complicated as well.”<sup>141</sup> During the years in Qinghua University, Cao Yu chose Western Literature as his major and his concern about Ibsen plays never faded away. He decided to write his Bachelor Thesis about Ibsen, he also prepared for his own drama creation in his spare time after class. In 1933, Cao Yu finished his thesis *Lun Yibusheng (On Ibsen)* and in the same year accomplished his maiden work—*Thunderstorm*<sup>142</sup> when he was 23-year old. This play received unpredicted recognition and made this young man well-known. It could be said that *Thunderstorm* is a classical play which stands time-tested. Since *Thunderstorm* was published, many critical articles and analyses appeared. Especially they concerned more about the source of the inspiration. Mao Dun mentioned that an intellectual engaged in literature creation, all literary works he read before he started to write, especially those he liked the best, could be traced in his first production. For Cao Yu, Ibsen and his plays are so familiar to him, not only he read through all his plays but he also performed Ibsen’s plays for several times before *Thunderstorm* was published. As a result, it is not difficult to say that Cao Yu had already learned Ibsen’s plays by heart and known Ibsen’s dramatic presentation art very well. At the celebration of Ibsen’s 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary in Beijing, Cao Yu expressed: “I have been engaged in drama for decades, My interest in drama and dramatic creation should be attributed to the significant influence by Ibsen...I was attracted by the precise structure Ibsen presented in his plays, inornate and refined language, along with his keen questions on capitalistic social reality.”<sup>143</sup>

When many people focus on studying Cao Yu plays’ connection with Ibsen and some point out that in *Thunderstorm* there are several aspects similar to Ibsen’s *Ghosts*, Cao Yu shows discontent about those critiques. Cao Yu did not deny his drama creations were influenced by Ibsen, however, he disavowed his plays were just Ibsen’s imitation, in the preface of *Thunderstorm* Cao Yu wrote:

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<sup>141</sup> Tian Benxiang, 1991, P17

<sup>142</sup> *Thunderstorm* was published in July of 1934.

<sup>143</sup> Cao Yu: *The Celebration of Ibsen’s 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary*, published in *Renmin Ribao (People Daily)* in 1978, included in *The Collection of Cao Yu Studies*, 1984

Now that this play (*Thunderstorm*) has been publicly performed many times in this country, it is quite common for people to identify me as a follower of Ibsen...Seriously this to me, is more or less a surprise. I am myself, I am a trivial person. I could not pry into those masters' abstruse, just like a bug living in the dark night will never image how bright the daylight is. For while it is true that in the past ten years or so I have read quite a number of plays and have taken part in some performances myself, I cannot, however, recall exactly which part of my play was written in intentional imitation of which master. Possibly, in my subconscious, I have stolen the threads of golden yarn from the master's house, used them to mend my ugly coarse garments and then denied that these discolored threads (for they now become mine) originally belonged to the master. Actually it is not disgraceful to steal a story or some insert from them. The same story has been written by ancient and modern writers and been deducted into many literary styles, such as, poem, drama, novel and legend...if I have to keep a straight face and analyze my work stiff, I would say that I can not recall which plays I imitated when I created...<sup>144</sup>

Cao Yu emphasized many times that there is an obvious difference between imitation and using for reference. Like Lu Xun who suggested grabbing the foreign beneficial experience for Chinese own use, Cao Yu also proposed:

It is very important for drama writers to accept and absorb precursor experiences, besides we should "draw ancient benefits for today use; draw foreign advanced experience for Chinese use". As far as I know, reading foreign and Chinese play scripts benefits me a lot... in order to "use", you should "copy", but this "copy" does not represent you have to write following what they say word by word. "Copy" means you should "digest" and transform it into your stuff...

He Chengzhou had mentioned that actually Ibsen and his plays exert a subtle influence on Cao Yu when he created his own plays. His realistic drama conception is resembled to Ibsen's. Besides, the humanitarianism and individual liberal spirits represent in his plays indeed follow the Ibsensism which was discussed frequently in May 4<sup>th</sup> period. However, Cao Yu's achievement is that he adds strong tragic tone in his creation and permeates his concerns about the Chinese social reality. He Chengzhou analyzed this is the reason why *Thunderstorm* has played a noteworthy role for decades of years in Chinese modern drama history.

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<sup>144</sup> Cao Yu, *The Preface of Thunderstorm*, included in *the Collection of Caoyu Studies*, 1985, P 14-15

In his drama career, Cao Yu created his own plays according to what he advocated. On the other side, it should be noticed that sometimes “draw ancient benefits for today use; draw foreign advanced experience for Chinese use” will cause an ineluctable weakness: under the culture and time circumstance, it is hard to avoid in the process of introducing and transmitting Ibsen to China, the acceptor would filtrate, change and misread Ibsen and his plays. It really happened in the earliest time when Ibsen was introduced in China. For instance, only Ibsen’s middle time social problem plays were kept and other plays were filtrated; the rebellious spirits presented in Ibsen plays were expanded; Ibsen was misunderstood by those people as a pure thinker and his dramatic arts were neglected. Blindly in accordance with the concept of “transplant foreign experience for Chinese use” is definitely incongruous, because following this way the essential parts of Ibsen’s plays would be kept only for sociological value. In this way the Chinese modern drama would be left only social problem dramas. Unlike the other intellectuals who added political meaning in drama, Cao Yu realized observantly that Ibsen’s plays did not only express realistic meaning, nor only social problems. It can be seen as an echo to Ibsen’s speech at the Norwegian League for Women’s Rights (1898): “I have never been deliberately tendentious in anything I have written. I have been more of a poet and less of a social philosopher than people generally seem inclined to believe. ..”<sup>145</sup> Cao Yu demonstrably announces his *Thunderstorm* is “a poem, an epic” and it is absolutely “not a social problem play.”<sup>146</sup> In China, Cao Yu is regarded as a gifted playwright standing closer to Ibsen than the others. Many times he was asked about why and how he wrote *Thunderstorm*, and his answer was:

But strangely, now that I recall the state of my mind when I was writing the play three years ago, I did not think I should resort to deceit and make my ideas sound better than they really were. I didn’t then distinctly feel that I intended to correct, criticize, or satirize anything. Quite possibly, when I came close to finishing the play, it might be that I was seized by a sudden passion so overwhelming that I could not but seek to release it in vilifying the Chinese family system and society. Yet, at the very outset,

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<sup>145</sup> Henrik Ibsen, from a speech to the Norwegian Women’s Rights League, Christiania May 1898, included in James McFarlane’s *Henrik Ibsen : a critical anthology*, 1970

<sup>146</sup> Cao Yu, *the Creation about Thunderstorm*, included in *the Collection works of Cao Yu*, 1985

when I first conceived the idea of *Thunderstorm*, what fascinated me most was no more than one or two episodes, a few characters, and a complex and yet primitive sentiment.<sup>147</sup>

This means that for both Ibsen and Cao Yu the original intention for them to write their plays was not to meet the needs of some politics agitprop campaign, nor did they intend to express some specific opinion. They wrote drama for nothing more than describing the real feeling and experience. When they interpreted those profound emotions into words, the poetic modern drama came out. Consequently their productions possess abundant of profound ideological meaning and poetic aesthetic feeling, in addition in this way their plays can display endlessly strong artistic charm.

Now I would like to analyze in which aspects Cao Yu gained influence from Ibsen and how Ibsen influenced on Cao Yu's drama creations. In an interview Cao Yu said specifically:

When I was young, I noticed Chekhov, especially Ibsen. Specifically I regarded his structure, character, personality, and climax of his plays. There's a Chinese idiom: "If you want to know what will happen the next, you have to wait until the next scene shows up". His plays attract audience eagerly to watch the second act after the first, and the third after the second. In order to draw audience's attention, the structure frame is very important.

In the following paragraphs, the focus will be switched to two things by analyzing *Thunderstorm*: one is the structure designed in this play; the other is the discussion about what he found and learned from Ibsen.

### ***Thunderstorm***

*Thunderstorm* is a tragic play which is composed by complicated consanguinity relation, suspense plots and several coincidences. The master of Zhou Residence—Zhou Puyuan who had studied in Germany for years, is the board chairman for a coal mine. Zhou is a merciless, selfish and hypocritical devil even in his own family. 30 years ago his family forced him to marry a genteel lady and

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<sup>147</sup> Cao Yu, *the Preface of Thunderstorm (1936)*, included in *the Collection works of Cao Yu*, 1985

drummed out his mistress Shiping - who was his maid and gave birth to two sons for Zhous. After leaving Zhous, Shiping threw herself in the river and everybody believed Shiping was dead, but she was rescued by some people. The fate plays a game with them: after 30 years Shiping's only daughter, Si Feng, serves in Zhous again besides her current husband—Lu Gui. Si Feng falls in love with the young master Ping and has already been pregnant for three months though neither of them knows Ping is Si Feng's half-brother. There's an obstructor—Fanyi between the pathetic young couple, Fanyi is the second mistress<sup>148</sup> of the family who bore Master Chong who is 17 years old now. When Chong was young Zhou Ping seduced his stepmother and had an incestuous relation with her. When Zhou Ping fell in love with Si Feng, he loathed Fanyi so that she persuaded and begged Zhou Ping not leaving her behind. At the time when Shiping comes to Zhous for visiting her daughter, she sees the old furniture and the picture of “the first mistress” and then Shiping realizes she's back to Zhou Puyuan's family and meets Zhou again. Si Feng serves for the same family as her mother did 30 years ago and following her mother's mistake that she gets involved in a love relation with the young master. After 30 years the secret truth is exposed in front of everybody, which leads to a tragic ending: Si Feng is kill by a creepage wire; Zhou Chong is also electrocuted because he intends to save her; Zhou Ping shots himself in head; Shiping becomes oafish and Fanyi becomes insane and leaving Zhou Puyuan suffering his rest of life alone.

### **The opening scene**

In the beginning of the first Act of this play comes a conversation between two servants in the master's house. The playwright uses this way to help the audience to image the personality of each character and the cryptic relationship between different protagonists, further more it prepares for the development of the plot:

Lu (becoming agitated): Now, Si Feng. What's the matter? You're my own daughter, aren't you?

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<sup>148</sup> Although Zhou Puyuan told the others that Shiping was the first mistress in this family, actually Shiping was only his maid and was expelled, and Fanyi is one of the formal wedded mistresses.

Feng: Yes, but even your own daughter can't be expected to pay your gambling debts for ever!

Lu (solemnly): Now, my dear girl, be reasonable. Your mother only talks about loving you, whereas I take a real interest in everything that concerns you.

Feng (realizing that he is hinting at something): What else is worrying you?

Lu (after a swift glance all round he moves closer to her): Listen. Master Ping often talks to me about you. Well, he says—

Feng (unable to contain herself): Master Ping, Master Ping all the time! You're off your head!—Well, I'm going. The mistress will be asking for me in a minute.

Lu: No, don't go. Just let me ask you one thing. The other day I saw Master Ping buying material for a dress—

Feng (darkly): Well, what of it?

Lu (looking her up and down): Well—(his eyes now rest on her hand) this ring—(laughing) didn't he give you this, too?

Feng (with disgust): The nasty-minded way you talk about everything!

Lu: You don't have to put on an act with me. After all, you are my daughter. (With a sudden avaricious laugh) Don't worry, there's nothing wrong in a servant's daughter accepting gifts or money from people. Nothing wrong at all. I quite understand.

Feng: Don't beat about the bush. Exactly how much do you want?

Lu: Not much. Thirty dollars would do.

Feng: I see. Well, you'd better try and touch your Master Ping for it.

Lu (mortified and angered): Now look here, my girl, you don't really think I'm such a fool that I don't know what's going on between you and that young scoundrel?

Feng (suppressing her anger): Call yourself a father? That's a fine way to talk to your own daughter, I must say!<sup>149</sup>

It is obviously that this conversation is taken between a daughter and her father. The father in this relationship is trickish and flagitious because he accumulates money by indecent means, even wants to use his own daughter as a profitable tool. All he wants to do is getting money from the young master. On the other side, the daughter—Si Feng is a naïve and simple girl who acts very differently from her natural father. After realizing her father is blackmail her for money, she is unable to endure and asks with anger: “Call yourself a father? That's a fine way to talk to your own daughter, I must say!”

Actually the similar opening scene is also presented by Ibsen in *Ghosts*:

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<sup>149</sup> Cao Yu, *Thunderstorm*, translated by Wang Tso-Liang and A.C. Barnes, 1964, P 14-15

REGINA. [After a short silence.] What do you want with me in town?  
ENGSTRAND. Can you ask what a father wants with his only child?  
REGINA. Oh, don't try on any nonsense like that with me! Why do you want me?  
ENGSTRAND. Well, let me tell you, I've been thinking of setting up in a new line of business.  
REGINA. [Contemptuously.] You've tried that often enough, and much good you've done with it.  
ENGSTRAND. Yes, but this time you shall see, Regina! Devil take me--  
REGINA. [Stamps.] Stop your swearing!  
ENGSTRAND. Hush, hush; you're right enough there, my girl. What I wanted to say was just this--I've laid by a very tidy pile from this Orphanage job...  
REGINA. Well, what then?  
ENGSTRAND. Why, you see, I thought of putting the money into some paying speculation. I thought of a sort of a sailor's tavern--  
REGINA. Pah!  
ENGSTRAND. A regular high-class affair, of course; not any sort of pig-sty for common sailors. No! damn it! it would be for captains and mates, and--and--regular swells, you know.  
REGINA. And I was to--?  
ENGSTRAND. You were to help, to be sure. Only for the look of the thing, you understand. Devil a bit of hard work shall you have, my girl. You shall do exactly what you like.  
REGINA. Oh, indeed!  
ENGSTRAND. But there must be a petticoat in the house; that's as clear as daylight. For I want to have it a bit lively like in the evenings, with singing and dancing, and so on. You must remember they're weary wanderers on the ocean of life. [Nearer.] Now don't be a fool and stand in your own light, Regina. What's to become of you out here? Your mistress has given you a lot of learning; but what good is that to you? You're to look after the children at the new Orphanage, I hear. Is that the sort of thing for you, eh? Are you so dead set on wearing your life out for a pack of dirty brats?  
REGINA. No; if things go as I want them to--Well there's no saying--there's no saying...  
ENGSTRAND. Come to town with me, my lass, and you'll soon get dresses enough.  
REGINA. Pooh! I can do that on my own account, if I want to.  
ENGSTRAND. No, a father's guiding hand is what you want, Regina. Now, I've got my eye on a capital house in Little Harbour Street. They don't want much ready-money; and it could be a sort of a Sailors' Home, you know.  
REGINA. But I will not live with you! I have nothing whatever to do with you. Be off!  
ENGSTRAND. You wouldn't stop long with me, my girl. No such luck! If

you knew how to play your cards, such a fine figure of a girl as you've grown in the last year or two—

The conversation shows that the father Engstrand is an insatiable man who indulges in excessive drinking and gambling. Like Lu Gui, Engstrand also wants to impose his daughter in order to gain his attempt for gathering money. Different from Si Feng, Regina is a very smart girl who has ambition and can make decision on her own. In order to raise her position for matching the young master, Regina studies French and acts in elegant manner.

### **The retrospective exposition**

The retrospective exposition skill can be found in many Ibsen's famous plays, and Ibsen adeptly utilizes this technique to impel the development of the drama plot and impress the audience. The event happened in the past is the chief reason for the result of today's action. For example in *Ghosts*, Mr. Alving did evil things 20 years ago and now after 20 years his children have to pay for his debt. Along with the truth is exposed by Mrs. Alving, the play reaches to the tragic apex. Different from the traditional Chinese drama which progresses the plots in accordance with chronology, Cao Yu tries to use western drama techniques in order to give audience a new experience when reading his plays. Many Chinese scholars, such as, Xiong Foxi, Shen Weide and Chen Shouzhu, notice that Cao Yu uses Ibsen's "Retrospective Exposition" skill as reference in his own drama creation. Cao Yu focuses very carefully on opening scene writing and he studies dramatic skills from the precursor dramatists such as Ibsen by heart.

He Chengzhou says: "Cao Yu's use of retrospective exposition in *Thunderstorm* is probably part of his indebtedness to Ibsen", besides Chen Shouzhu also notices that Ibsen's dramatic technique of retrospective exposition influenced on Cao Yu, who manages to use the past event in order to put forward the current plots. Cao Yu starts his play with the process which is close to the climax and tells the past events by protagonists' narrations step by step. In *Thunderstorm*—a four acts play, Cao has to

describe a story which happened in the last 30 years and compresses the plots in less than one day. Besides in order to meet the aesthetic habit of Chinese audience who prefer “intense plots and unpredictable spectacles”, Cao Yu also uses the well-made play skill to permeate the past story bit by bit with the present plot and in the same time introduce the relationship among the protagonists, which prepares for exposing the final tragic effect. However, in *Thunderstorm* than one event happened in the past. How does Cao Yu insert the event happened in 30 years ago to current scene? Tan Kwok Kan gives his explanation: “*Thunderstorm* utilizes a time structure which goes back and forth in the play. The technique of releasing information carefully planned to surprise the audience...”<sup>150</sup> Cao Yu presents the past affair to the audience gradually: at first he reveals a story happened 3 years by using a gossip conversation between two servants, and waits until the second act to unveil the past affair appeared some 30 years ago length by length. After this elaborate arrangement, the conflicts present in this play can be accepted by the audience easily.

Lu (rather pleased with himself): oh yes, Si Feng, there’s something else I want to tell you.

Feng: Couldn’t you save it for later on?

Lu (mysteriously): Ah, but this is something that concerns you. (He smiles hypocritically.)

Feng (scowling): Me again? Now what? (putting down the bowl) All right. Let’s get everything cleared up once and for all before we go any farther.

Lu: There you go again. Flying off the handle at the slightest excuse! Quite the young lade, aren’t you, with your airs and your tantrums!

Feng: Come on, out with it.

Lu: Now don’t be like that, my dear. (Seriously) I just want to warn you to be on your guard.

Feng: (sarcastically): What have I got to be on my guard for, now that you’ve cleaned me out?

Lu: Listen. I don’t think the mistress has been in a very good mood these last few days.

Feng: What’s that got to do with me?

Lu: it seems to upset her to have you around.

Feng: Why?

Lu: Why? Let me remind you of one thing or two. The master is years older than the mistress, and they don’t get on very well with one another.

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<sup>150</sup> Tan, 1984, P 299

Master Ping is only her stepson, and there's not much difference in their ages.

Feng: I know all that.

Lu: But do you know why no one ever comes into this room after dark, and why it's not even used in the daytime all the time the master's away at the mine?

Feng: Well it's because the room's haunted, isn't it?

Lu: Haunted? Oh yes, it certainly is. And I've seen the ghosts, too.

Feng: You have?

Lu: It was before you came. The master was away at the mine, and the mistress and the two young gentlemen were left alone in this big, gloomy house. This room was already haunted then, and Master Chung, who was still only a child, was afraid and insisted I should sleep at his door to keep him company. I remember it was the autumn. Well, one night, about midnight, he suddenly woke me up and said he'd heard ghosts in the drawing-room. He insisted that I should go and have a look. I was shaking in my shoes at the thought of it, but I was new here then, and I didn't dare disobey the young master.

Feng: So you went, then?

Lu: I had a little drink to steady my nerves, then I went round past the lotus-pond and crept up to the verandah outside this room. As soon as I got near the door, I heard a faint noise. It sounded like a woman sobbing her heart out....

Feng: (gazing tensely at him): What did you see?

Lu: There was a candle on this table here... There was just enough light to make out two ghosts all in black sitting side by side with their backs towards me. They looked like a man and a woman. The woman seemed to be leaning on the man's shoulder and crying, and the man sat with his head bent, sighing to himself... I managed to pluck up enough courage to put my face close to the window and give a little cough. The two ghosts sprang apart with a jerk and looked round towards me. Just for a moment I got a clear view of both their faces.—And then I really did think I was seeing things!

Feng: Who were they?

Lu: Well, the woman turned out to be—(glancing over his shoulder, then dripping his voice to a whisper) the mistress herself!

Feng: The mistress?

Lu: And the man—was Master Ping.

Feng: No!

Lu: Yes, it was him all right. He and his stepmother were the ghosts who'd been haunting the place nights.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Cao Yu, *Thunderstorm*, 1964, P 23

This conversation exposes a fact which happened clandestinely three years ago to the audience, so that we know behind the presented exterior relation between Fanyi and Sifeng these two women in the house are rival for loving the same person—Zhou Ping. It also tells why Fanyi does a series of things later in order to keep Zhou Ping on her side. For example she begs Zhou Ping not to leave her; she threatens Zhou Ping that she would do anything bad if he riles her; she insists to sack Sifeng from Zhous so she asks Sifeng's mother to come and have a talk with her. After that she uses her own son to stop Sifeng and Zhou Ping, and even in the end she calls Zhou Puyuan to stop Zhou Ping, which unveils the secret and draws the play into a tragic ending.

In Act two the past event appears clearly little by little: Noticing Zhou Ping who will leave home very soon, Fanyi asks him to take her but Ping refuses and confesses the real reason for leaving is because of her entanglement. Here through the conversation Cao Yu unhurriedly discloses the truth happened 30 years ago a little bit:

Fan: You're all the same, and your father's the biggest hypocrite of the lot. Years ago now he seduced a girl from the lower classes.

Ping: There's no need to go dragging up that sort of thing.

Fan: And you—you're the illegitimate child he gave her!

Ping (overwhelmed and helpless with astonishment): You're lying! What proof have you got?

Fan: Go and ask your "respectable" father yourself. He told me all about it one night fifteen years ago, when he was drunk. (Pointing to the photograph on the bureau) That girl was your mother. Your father turned her out, so she drowned herself.<sup>152</sup>

It is unpredictable for anyone that the dramatic plot appears after Sifeng's mother arrives. Shipping realizes that she comes back to the Zhous reminding a miserable experience for almost her whole life.

(Lu Ma still has the photograph clutched tightly in her hand.)

Feng: Just lie down here for a minute. I'll go and get you some water. (She hurries out into the dining-room.)

Ma: Oh, my God! ...So I'm dead. —But this photo, and this furniture... Can it be true? Oh, isn't the world big enough to—? To think that after all these years of misery my own poor child should have to go and find herself in his—his house of all places. Oh, God!

The plot happened next is even more unexpected, in the living room of

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, P 58-59

Zhou Shiping meet Zhou Puyuan and the detailed story appeared 30 years ago is exposed to the audience:

Ma(Shiping): Though I did know a girl by the name of Mei, but that was twenty-seven years ago.

Zhou: Oh? Tell me about her.

Ma: But she wasn't a lady, and not particularly clever—and not very well behaved either, by all accounts.

Zhou: Perhaps—perhaps you're talking about the wrong girl.—Though I'd like you to go on, all the same.

Ma: Well, this girl Mei threw herself in the river one night, though she wasn't alone: she was holding in her arms a three-day-old baby boy. She's been leading a rather irregular life, so they said.

Zhou: (wincing) Oh?

Ma: She was a low-class girl who'd been getting above herself. It seems she'd been having an affair with a gentleman's son by the name of Zhou, and that she'd had two sons by him. Well, a matter of three days after the second one was born, this young Mr. Zhou suddenly turned her out. The elder child was left with the family, but the new-born baby was in her arms when she threw herself in the river. That was on a New Year's Eve.

Zhou (with beads of perspiration on his forehead): Oh!

Ma: But she was no lady, only the daughter of a maid at the Zhou's in Wuxi. Her name was Shiping.<sup>153</sup>

Now most of the audience are very curious about what Shiping will treat with her daughter? Will she leave with her mother or go away with Zhou Ping? What about Shiping herself? In an interview I mentioned previously, Cao Yu praised: Ibsen who has talent to manage the play structure can stimulate audience's curiosity so that after act one they need to watch act two and after that they require act three or more. It can be said that by noticing and learning Ibsen's outstanding narrating skill by heart, Cao Yu successfully presented a tense plot in *Thunderstorm*.

### ***Peripeteia***

In addition, Cao Yu perceives that Ibsen often uses *Peripeteia*<sup>154</sup> in his plays when describing plots and it definitely matches the aesthetic habit of Chinese audiences

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, P 78

<sup>154</sup> *Peripeteia* is a sudden change of events or reversal of circumstances, especially in a literary work. In the dramatic plot, sudden transformations appear reciprocally between adverse circumstance and favorable circumstance

who require exciting scenes. Cao Yu knows the audience very well which attributes to his seasoned performance experience in Nankai Drama Troupe. He understands that the audience wants story, interlude, and exciting scenes.<sup>155</sup> The most impressive Peripeteia scene appears in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. There are three obvious Peripeteia scenes in the play: 1) After Helmer received the first letter written by Krogstad who wanted to threaten Helmer to keep his job, Helmer found himself stuck in a difficult position and knew that Nora falsified signature. He acted out of his normal character and blamed Nora because she dragged him into a humiliating condition. In this plot Helmer presented his selfish, coward and hardhearted character in front of the audience. 2) After Helmer received the second letter from Krogstad who was in love and said he would never bother Helmer again, Helmer headed off the crisis and called Nora "little lark"; "little squirrel" again willing to renew cordial relations. Even he said he will forgive the "evil follies" Nora had done before. It revealed Helmer's a hypocritical and chameleonic dissembler. 3) Nora realized she was only a doll in this family and decided to leave and then she slammed the door and left Helmer back to the hardship circumstance. On the contrary of Helmer's despicable and opportunistic figure, Ibsen successfully creates Nora, a kindhearted lady, who pursues individual personality and sacrifices herself for love.

The script of *A Doll's House* impressed Cao Yu deeply, because he not only read it through for many times, but also performed a role of Nora for several times when he was studying in Nankai Middle School and Qinghua University. He is so familiar with the Peripeteia scene shown by Ibsen in *A Doll's House*, and it is not exaggerated to say *A Doll's House* has been imprinted in his deep heart. In *Thunderstorm*, we can also find the similar scene in the development of the play. Peripeteia is used for presenting Zhou Puyuan's different compartments to Shiping which vividly portrays class conflicts and character nature. In Act two after Zhou Puyuan notices that Lu Ma (Shiping) is coming from Wuxi, he inquires immediately the information about a girl called Mei and furthermore he expresses the intention of renovating her grave. At this moment the audience could probably consider that Zhou Puyuan has a little human

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<sup>155</sup> Cao Yu, *the Postscript of Sunrise*, included in *the Collection of Caoyu Studies*, P33

kindness and think maybe he changes to be a gracious man after suffering guilt for decades of years. However, he is shocked by the news that Mei is still alive and now she is standing in front of him. Zhou (Suddenly stern) asks: “What did you come here for?”(P80) The sudden Peripeteia scene and opposite attitude make audience feel astonishing and tensional tone is presented also. The unspoken words for Zhou should be: Are you coming here for blackmail me? Shiping says: “I didn’t ask to come.” Zhou continues to ask: “Who sent you here, then?” Because he does trust Lu Gui who is such an insidious contemptible person. Then he gets Shiping’s answer: “Fate! Unjust fate brought me here” (P81), which disburdens him a little bit. In order to find out the real reason for her appearance, Zhou says coldly: “So you’ve found me, after more than twenty years.” Actually in Zhou’s inner heart he wants to know: what exactly do you want? Shiping responds indignantly: “But I haven’t, I haven’t been looking for you. I thought you were dead long ago. I never expected to find myself here today. It’s fate that meant us to meet again.” Zhou Puyuan is worried about Shiping who would probably tell everybody about it, therefore he changes his attitude and soothes Shiping: “Well, you might be a bit calmer about it. We’ve both got families of our own now. If you think you’ve got a grievance, let’s at least begin by dispensing with all these tears. We’re a bit too old for that sort of thing.” Furthermore, Zhou Puyuan uses sentiment method to move her heart: “Now, steady on. Let’s be sensible about it. I’m not as cold-blooded as you think. You don’t imagine anyone can stifle his conscience as easily as that? You’ve only got to look at this room: all your favourite furniture of the old days is here. I’ve kept it all these years to remember you by.”(P82) “I always remember your birthday. April 18<sup>th</sup>. So far as everyone here is concerned you were my lawful wedded wife. Remember how you insisted on keeping the windows closed because of your delicate health after you had Ping? Well, I still keep them closed in memory of you to help make up for the wrong I did you.” It seems that he is a real gentleman of moral integrity, but the true purpose for him to say these words is because he worries about Lu Gui: “On the contrary. You don’t seem to have altered much in temperament—Lu Gui strikes me as being rather a shifty character.” At this moment Shiping wakes herself up from the fond dream and tells

Zhou scornfully: “you’ve got nothing to worry about on that score. He’ll never know anything about it.” Shiping brings him a surprise news that Zhou’s second son she took 30 years ago works in Zhou’s mine and turns against Zhou. Everything becomes clear to Zhou Puyuan and he gets answer for whatever he wants to know, then he turns back his attitude and shows his true nature: “All right! Let’s have it! How much do you want?”(P83), it shows that he is eager to get rid of Shiping as soon as possible. Now it can be said that by using peripeteia technique the playwright can create very plump figures and make plots more attractive.

## Characters

In *Thunderstorm* Cao Yu successfully portrays several vivid and visual characters, which also contributes to success of his plays. Cao Yu bases his drama creations on his experience in the real life. He has mentioned in an interview recorded by Wang Chaowen:

I wrote *Thunderstorm* when I was twenty-three years old; *Sunrise* at twenty-five and *Peking Man* at thirty. Why I can create those plays at that time? According to Chairman Mao, who said “Life is the only origin for literary creation”. I can’t agree more with that, however, the so-called “life” means the living we can touch and can feel in the daily time, so that I am so familiar with the characters as well as the plots in the plays I wrote...<sup>156</sup>

Cao Yu’s plays have played a significant role in Chinese modern drama for a long time from the 1930s till now. Regardless of whether Ibsen has influenced on Cao Yu or not, nor whether is it just a coincidence. Audience can find many vivid characters who are leading ordinary lives in Ibsen’s plays:

We observe in Ibsen’s plays real characters, real life and real background. Among the characters Ibsen creates there are no romantic heroes and heroines. They are only ordinary individuals. In his plays, Ibsen writes about everyday, real life. The setting is a familiar environment like the sitting room. Ordinary people in an ordinary environment speak everyday language and are engaged in ordinary matters. But behind the ordinary Ibsen creates extraordinary images. That is the art of great writer.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Cao Yu, *Cao Yu Tan Leiyu*, published in *Renmin Xijiu*, 1979, included in *The Collection of Cao Yu Studies*, 1985, P175

<sup>157</sup> Yu Shangyuan, *Yibusheng de Yishu (Ibsen’s Art)*, *Chenbao Fukan (Morning Post Supplement)*, 1928, P12

As far as I'm concerned, in a way both Cao Yu and Ibsen plays have something in common: describing the ordinary people and affairs in the real life, which I suppose is the reason why those plays are popular till present time.

The praiseworthy merits points in Cao Yu's *Thunderstorm* are particular languages: through the stage lines acted on the stage the audience can imagine every protagonist's age, position and character. What's more the languages in the *Thunderstorm* have strong emotional tones and the depiction of mentality arouses sympathetic resonance from the audience. The well-known female writer—Wan Fang who is Cao Yu's daughter recalls: "My father often enlightened me: human being is very complicated and also very precious. It is better for the writer to understand human being clearly and carefully"; "I believe that everyone can give himself (herself) a reason for doing something and for literary creation the writer should explore all the details hiding under the outside appearance. ..." <sup>158</sup>

Cao Yu pays great attention on depicting characters in his plays. Taking *Thunderstorm* for example, let us see how Cao Yu makes these characters vivid and compelling. Many Chinese scholars, such as He Chengzhou, Tan Kwok Kan, notice the similar patterns of characters are portrayed in *Ghosts* and *Thunderstorm*: "Each involves mainly two families, which are closely related to each other not just through the obvious employer-employee relationship but also through the hidden blood ties..." <sup>159</sup> Because He had already compared the characters in both plays one-to-one in his book, I will not contrast once again in my thesis but focus on Cao Yu's *Thunderstorm* and divide the main characters into two groups: Male characters and female characters.

### *Male characters*

According to the presence order shown on the stage, the first main character is Lu Gui,

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<sup>158</sup> Wan Fang, interviewed by *Renmin Wang Luntan*, 1996, which is recorded and published on: <http://culture.people.com.cn/GB/42496/42501/5159704.html>

<sup>159</sup> He u, 2004, P 185

as I mentioned in the previous paragraph he is Chinese Engstrand in *Ghosts*. In the beginning of Act one Lu Gui exhibits his underbred human nature: in order to pay the gambling debt he begins to squeeze money from his own daughter—Si Feng. At first he talks about the young master Zhou Ping with Si Feng and foxily implies that he needs money. Si Feng pretends she does not understand what he's talking about, so he turns displeased and hypocritically takes out a father feature to remind her behavior:

Lu: the night when I wasn't at home. You didn't turn up till midnight. What had you been doing all that time?

Feng (inventing an excuse): I had to hunt out some things for the mistress.

Lu: And what kept you out so late?

Feng(contemptuously): A father like you has no right to ask such questions.

Lu: Ho, getting superior, aren't we! You still can't tell me where you were, though.

Feng: Who says I can't?

Lu: Come on, then, let's hear it.

Feng: Well, as a matter of fact, the mistress heard that the master had just got back, and she wanted me to get his clothes out ready for him.

Lu: I see. (In a menacing undertone) And who was the gentleman who brought you home in a car at midnight that night?—the one who'd had a drop too much and kept talking a lot of nonsense to you? (He smiles triumphantly)

Feng: Well—er—

Lu (with a roar of laughter): No, you needn't tell me: it was our rich son-in-law, of course! To think that our rickety little hovel should be honoured by a visit from a gentleman in a car, running round after a servant's daughter! (suddenly stern) Now, tell me, who was it...<sup>160</sup>

By her own father's threat Si Feng surrenders and gives money to Lu Gui. In another scene Lu Gui plays the same trick with the mistress Fanyi, from time to time Lu Gui hits that he knows her past incestuous relationship with the young master Zhou Ping:

Fan: Why didn't you tell me earlier?

Lu: I meant to, only I—(lowering his voice) I saw you were having a conversation with Master Ping, I didn't like to disturb you.

Fan: Oh, so you—you were—?

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<sup>160</sup> Cao Yu: *Thunderstorm*, P 16

Lu: Me? Ho, I've been waiting on the master and his visitor in the main drawing-room. (Pretending not to understand her suggestion) Why, did you want me for something, madam?

Both Lu Gui and Engstrand are crafty servants, whose only aim is to inquire the secrets of other people so as to place the position of control over them.

Another male character is Zhou Ping, whose coward and flabby personality is shown visually in *Thunderstorm*. Similar as the complicated relationship between Oswald and Regina, Zhou Ping and his half-sister Si Feng are both falling in love with each other. But few years ago when Zhou Ping first came to Zhou residence from the countryside he saw how obdurate and autocratical his father was; besides he was short of mother love so that he showed sympathy to Fanyi and later love arose. Because of Zhou Ping's seducement the dead love revived from Fanyi's deep heart. However, the good times for Fanyi didn't last long Zhou Ping began to feel shame and regret, and then he decided to get rid of Fanyi. Almost at the same time he found Si Feng was his last straw so he fell in love with Si Feng resolvedly in order to break away from the abnormal relationship. Cao Yu mentioned the character of Zhou Ping in a conversation with Wang Chaowen:

Zhou Ping is definitely a scoundrel, I wish the actor who plays a role of Zhou Ping can show his contemptible character bit by bit to the audience. If you can think about it carefully, you will find Zhou Ping has not a bit of humanity at all. He seduced his stepmother and met her secretly in the midnights which were considered by the others as "ghosts" haunting around in the house. After a mess he left at home, he packs off and insists on leaving tomorrow morning but without taking the one he keeps on saying the true love—Si Feng together with him.<sup>161</sup>

Zhou Ping's unmanliness character presents in the first Act, when Zhou Puyuan orders Fanyi to take medicine. Although Zhou Ping is reluctant to obey his father's command, he still moves towards Fanyi and intends to kneel down in front of Fanyi complying with what his father tells. In addition Zhou Ping resembles Oswald for both of them are regarded as the "father's son". Except for both of them take after their fathers' appearances, Zhou Ping even talks and behaves inherit from his father. It can be found

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<sup>161</sup> Cao Yu, *Cao Yu Tan Leiyu*, included in *the Collection of Caoyu Studies, 1985*, P185

in the conversation between Fanyi and Zhou Ping in Act two:

Ping: That's an outrageous thing to say! You can't talk like that in a –a respectable family like Father's.

Fan (furious): "Father"! "Father"! To hell with your father! "Respectable"! From you of all people! (With a sneer) Eighteen years now I've been in this "respectable family" of yours. I've heard all about the sins of the Zhous—and seen them—and committed them myself. Not that I've ever considered myself one of you: what I've done I've done on my own responsibility. No, I'm not like your grandfather, or your great-uncle, or your dear father himself—doing the most atrocious things in private, and wearing a mask of morality in public. Philanthropists, respectable citizens, pillars of society!

Ping: Well, of course, you have the occasional black sheep in any big family, but our branch, except for me.

Fan: you're all the same, and your father's the biggest hypocrite of the lot. Years ago now he seduced a girl from the lower classes.

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Ping: You've no right to say that. You're still Chong's mother.

Fan: No! I'm not! Ever since I placed my life and my reputation in your hands I've shut myself off from everything else. No, I'm not his mother, no more than I'm Zhou Puyuan's wife!

Ping (icily): Even if you don't regard yourself as my father's wife, I still recognize myself as his son.

Fan (rendered speechless for a moment by this unexpected remark): I see, so you're your father's son. I suppose the reason you've made a point of not coming to see me lately is that you're afraid of your father?

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Fan (coldly): Spoken like a true son of your father. (She laughs) His father's son! (Suddenly calm) Pah! You're both the same. Useless, cowardly creatures, not worth anyone's self-sacrifice! I'm only sorry I didn't find you out sooner!<sup>162</sup>

It is very clear in this conversation that Zhou Ping forces Fanyi to stop entangling him for the respectable family's sake and talks about moral ethic just like a copy of his father. On the other hand, Cao Yu depicts that Zhou Ping is scared of taking responsibility:

Fan: ...Your father may have made me have you, Chong, but my heart—my soul is still my own. (Pointing to Zhou Ping) He's the only one that's ever possessed my body and soul. But now he doesn't want me, he doesn't want me any more.

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<sup>162</sup> Cao Yu, *Thunderstorm*, P 60

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Ping: Oh, brother! Oh, my pity brother! If you still has a little bit mother love for him...

Fan: (heatedly): Copying your father now, are you? You hypocrite, you! .....Remember: it was you, and you alone, that deceived your brother, and deceived me, and deceived your father! (She looks at him with a contemptuous sneer)

Ping (to Si Feng): Take no notice of her. Let's get out of here.

Last but not least I would like to analyze Zhou Puyuan who is regarded as the mixture of both Mr. Alving and Pastor Manders<sup>163</sup>. Zhou Puyuan is the most successful male character presented in *Thunderstorm*: "Zhou is a representative of the so-called 'half-feudal and half-colonized society' in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in China."<sup>164</sup> Although Zhou Puyuan received education in Germany when he was young, he still keeps stubborn feudal conservative thinking. In *Thunderstorm* Cao Yu divided into three different lines when portrayed Zhou Puyuan:

1) The conflicts shown in his family reflect his despotic and authoritative personality just like a tyrant, besides he cares so much about family reputation. In the first Act: when he heard something about Zhou Ping's irregular private life, Zhou Puyuan reproached his son and reminded him to learn "a certain amount of self-respect"<sup>165</sup>. He gave his son a sermon of moral ethic: "I pride myself on having one of the most satisfactory and well-behaved families possible, and I think my sons are both good, healthy lads. I've brought the two of you up, and I won't have you giving anybody an excuse to gossip about you."<sup>166</sup> In another scene Zhou Puyuan reflects his hardhearted in his own family, Zhou Ping also agrees that "his word is law..."<sup>167</sup> In order to build up a "well-behaved" family Zhou Puyuan does not hesitate to take happiness and freedom away from the other family members. He forbids anyone including his wife—Fanyi to say no to his orders, because any idea which does not conform to his authority would be considered as "insanity" and "sick". He claims to

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<sup>163</sup> He, 2004, P185

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, P 188

<sup>165</sup> Cao Yu, *Thunderstorm*, P 49

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, P 52

Fanyi: “as a mother, you’ve got to be constantly thinking of the children. Even if you don’t particularly care about your own health, you should at least set the children an example by being obedient.”<sup>168</sup> When he heard from Shiping that his second son—Da Hai turns against to him and even sponsors a strike in his coal mine, it was absolutely unexpected for him to accept.

2) The conflicts between Zhou Puyuan and his own son—Lu Dahai develop to be a class struggle. It shows Zhou is a ruthless capitalist who has played tricks in his business so that he can get money unlawfully. From Lu Dahai’s mouth his wickedness is presented to the audience: “I know all about your record! When you contracted to repair that bridge over the river at Harbin, you deliberately breached the dyke”; “You drowned two thousand two hundred collies in cold blood, and for each life lost you raked in three hundred dollars! I tell you, creature, you’ve made your money by killing people, and you and your sons stand accursed for ever!”<sup>169</sup> For Zhou Puyuan, the relationship between Lu Dahai and him is not filiation at all but antagonist.

3) The relation between his former lover —Shiping sufficiently exposes his hypocritical nature. In order to console his conscience, Zhou keeps everything related to Shiping who was seduced by him 30 years ago and was deemed drowning in the river. For example, their first son was named as Ping for commemorating his “dead” mother; He keeps all her favourite furniture of the old days in Zhou’s living room, besides always keeps the windows closed because of her delicate health after bore Zhou Ping; Zhou still remembers her birthday and makes everybody in the house considering she were his lawful wedded wife; Even he plans to renovate her grave in Wuxi. However, it turns sharply when Shiping is standing in front of him alive: he asks icily why she comes and wants to give her some money for getting rid of her besides keeping her mouth shut.

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid, P 46

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, P 88

### *Female characters*

There is no exaggeration to say that the female characters, especially Fanyi in *Thunderstorm* portrayed by Cao Yu receive more favorable comments than the male characters and those are more successful. In the Chinese modern drama history, no one pays more attention on female character depiction than Cao Yu. In his plays most of his female figures which have well-defined personalities are unforgettable. As far as I'm concerned, probably it has a delicate connection with his performance experience. As everybody knows, Cao Yu had played the role of Nora in *A Doll's House* for more than once, which helped him to understand and conjuncture women's psychological activities. With this experience it reduced some difficulties for Cao Yu when he created those women characters. Liu Xiwei appraised in 1936—one year after the publication of *Thunderstorm*: “The most successful character and the most profound psychoanalysis in *Thunderstorm* do not belong to the depiction of male character but the female”<sup>170</sup>

Firstly I will concisely analyze Si Feng. As I referred in the previous paragraphs, Si Feng is a naïve girl who looks forward to pure love. The same as Regina in *Ghosts*, Si Feng falls in love with the young master besides she had intimate relation with him. Si Feng yearns for getting a better education just like Regina who studies French in order to match Oswald and raise her position. Comparing to Regina's canniness, Si Feng is more unsophisticated. Mother's visit makes her feel anxious because she is afraid of breaking Shiping's heart if she knows the relationship with Zhou Ping.

Secondly I will talk about the most tragic woman in *Thunderstorm*—Shiping. Actually she is a combination of the past Mrs. Johanna Engstrand and Mrs. Alving. On the one hand, as a housemaid in the rich family both of Mrs. Engstrand and Shiping had intimate relationship and had children with the young masters. In *Ghosts*, around 20 years ago Mr. Alving seduced his maid Johanna and then she got pregnant. In order to cover up the scandal, Johanna got married with Engstrand so the

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<sup>170</sup> Liu Xiwei: *Thunderstorm—Caoyu*, 1936, included in *The Collection of Cao Yu Studies*, 1985, P 541

baby—Regina turned to be a legitimate child. In the similar situation Shiping and the young master of Zhous fell in love with each other and they had two children—Zhou Ping and Da Hai. However, only three days after Da Hai was born Shiping was expelled with the dying child from Zhous because the family forced Zhou Puyuan to marry a rich lady. She had no way but suicide to choose after being a deserted woman, but she was saved and began to conceal her identity living far away from Zhous. She led a hard life and married several times. At present she is Lu Gui’s wife and bore him a daughter—Si Feng. On the other hand, as a mother Shiping has a lot in common with Mrs. Alving, because both of them pin their only hope in life on their children. Mrs. Alving knows all the follies her husband had done but in order to keep his reputation as a “pillar of society” she has to suffer her whole life in this “perfect” family. She puts all her hopes on her only son—Oswald and in order to keep him away from the insalubrious family she sent him to Paris when he was a kid. Out of her expectedness, by chance she witnesses her son’s folly just like a copy of his father after many years when he returns home for visiting:

[From the dining-room comes the noise of a chair overturned, and at the same moment is heard:]

REGINA. [Sharply, but in a whisper.] Oswald! take care! are you mad? Let me go!

MRS. ALVING. [Starts in terror.] Ah--!

[She stares wildly towards the half-open door. OSWALD is heard laughing and humming. A bottle is uncorked.]

MANDERS. [Agitated.] What can be the matter? What is it, Mrs. Alving?

MRS. ALVING. [Hoarsely.] Ghosts! The couple from the conservatory--risen again!

MANDERS. Is it possible! Regina--? Is she--?<sup>171</sup>

However the nightmare does not stop: Mrs. Alving tells all the exact truths of the Alving family to Oswald and Regina but to her surprise Oswald informs that he gets a brain disease very badly and he is capable to die at any moment. At last her depression turned to despair and she has no way to back down because she doesn’t know whether to let Oswald die or keep him suffering the horrible disease. Shiping is

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<sup>171</sup> Ibsen, *Ghosts*, 1924

a miserable Chinese mother who has resisted her whole life with unfortunate fate. Doesn't want her daughter to follow the miserable life as she did, Shiping forbids Si Feng to serve in the rich families. However, the fate plays a game with her, when she comes back from work after two years she finds Si Feng is working as a housemaid in a big family which she is scared the most. Misfortunes never come singly: Shiping can never imagine that Si Feng is now serving as a maid in the same family as she had worked 30 years ago. After few hours she noticed that her daughter falls in love with Zhou Ping—a bastard son of her, besides she is shocked by knowing the pregnant thing. The tragic mother decides to suffer all the agonies herself but keep the secret to her grave:

Lu Ma (in a low voice): Oh, God knows what this is a punishment for—what have I ever done to bring such a calamity down on our heads? –My poor children, they didn't know what they were doing. Oh, God, if anyone has to be punished, why can't it just be me? It's my fault and no one else's: it all began when I took the first false step. (Heart-broken) They're my innocent children; they deserve a chance in life. The guilt is here in my heart, and I should be the one to suffer for it. (She rises to her feet and looks heavenwards) And tonight, here I am letting them go away together. I know I'm doing wrong, but this way the responsibility will all be mine; all this trouble was caused by me in the first place. My children haven't done anything wrong: they're too good and innocent to do anything wrong. If there must be a punishment, let me bear it—alone...<sup>172</sup>

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Lu Ma: (looking from one to the other): When you go, you'd best go as far as you can and never come back. Once you've left tonight, you must never see me again as long as you live.<sup>173</sup>

Shiping is a great mother who fearlessly takes every consequence by herself alone, because she loves her children more than anything else in the world. According to the analysis of destiny tragedy, the person makes great effort to fight against the powerful miserable fate but fails afterwards can be seen as the value in the tragedy plays. The Chinese well-known esthetician, educationist Zhu Guangqian mentioned in his book *The Tragedy Psychology*:

If the misery falls down on a cowardly person, who meekly accepts and

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<sup>172</sup> Cao Yu, *Thunderstorm*, P 154

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, P 155

bears the pain, then it couldn't be a real tragedy. If he tries his best to struggle with the fortune but fails then the tragedy it is! ...Those who driven into the web of fortune exert their utmost strength to fight, however the farther they wish to get away from the misery the deeper they involved in.<sup>174</sup>

The fortune tragedy is not unconversant for us, we can find it in Sophocles' notable tragedy Oedipus, in which Oedipus King exhibits a series of human capable efforts and expands them to the limit so as to present the moving and tragic impact: Oedipus was the son of Laius and Jocasta, a fortune teller prophesied that Oedipus would kill his father and marry his mother, and thus brought disaster on his city and family. To avoid this calamity, the child was given to a herdsman who was told to kill him, however, the herdsman saved his life and took him to the king of Corinth. Many years later, Oedipus knows the truth and attempt to evade the dictates of the oracle, he decides to flee from home to Thebes on the other side of the mountains. As Oedipus was traveling to Thebes, he met a chariot, which, unbeknownst to him, was driven by Laius, his true father. A dispute arose over right of way, and the outcome was that Oedipus killed Laius. Continuing his journey to Thebes, by answering the riddle of Sphinx, Oedipus is appointed as the king of Thebans and marries the widow Jocasta (who was also his mother). Over the years, finally sees that at the crossroads he had killed his own father, and then he had married his own mother, who killed herself for shame. Oedipus blinds himself and leaves the city.

Oedipus tries all his best to avoid the tragic matters, but has to face the reality that he can not change anything. Both of Mrs. Alving and Shiping experience the fortune tragedy: they make all the efforts to protect their children and try to build up a healthy and peaceful live for their children, but both of them are beat down by the fate at last.

Another fate tragic woman in *Thunderstorm* is Fanyi who tries to save herself on her own. Under the autocratic domination from Zhou Puyuan, Fanyi seems "abnormal" in Zhou's family because the feudal bourgeois rules restrain Fanyi to develop her

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<sup>174</sup> Zhu, 1927, published on the web: <http://www.dabuluo.com/Article/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=314>

freedom and joyful life. Unlike an emancipatory woman she was, after got married with Zhou Puyuan, Fanyi lost her heart little by little for pursuing perfect life but prepared for withered her life till death. Her fortune reversed three years ago when Zhou Ping came to this house from the countryside. Zhou Ping's abundant of emotion and passion wake her up from the darkness, besides the concern and sympathy shown by Zhou Ping moved Fanyi. Regardless moral ethic or incestuous sin Fanyi gave all including her life, reputation, her body and soul to Zhou Ping with no hesitation. Ping seduced her on an evil way of "half stepmother, half mistress"<sup>175</sup>, but he throws Fanyi off and falls in love with Sifeng, which indeed enrages Fanyi. She tries her best and makes all the efforts to win Zhou Ping back, however, she is stuck in the web sewn by fortune and in the end she hardly gets rid of it. Her tragic image is not coward surrender but a failure after an utmost struggle. As what did Zhu Guangqian refer, the crucial part for tragedy contains both tremendous grief and the manners for treating pains. No rebellion no tragedy.

Fanyi resembles Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts* and Hedda Gabler as well. Like Mrs. Alving, Fanyi came from a declined bourgeois family and got good education when they were girls. Both of them have progressive thinking but after marriage they have to retrain themselves to be good wives and good mothers. Although at the beginning both of them showed passion in their new lives and had tried to reject the disaster conservative family rules, in the real society they have to give up and behave in accordance to the traditional philosophy as the other female does. After the first departure from the evil family, Mrs. Alving returned home and surrendered to protect the resplendent appearance of the Alvings. In the similar condition Fanyi passively bears Zhou Puyuan's control though she had her own nature. Year by year her enthusiasm extinguished: "Your father let me down. He tricked me into coming here—the same old wiles. There was no escape for me, and so I had Chong. All these years he's been the hateful tyrant that you saw this morning. He gradually ground me down until I became as cold and dead as a stone..."<sup>176</sup>, The existence of Fanyi for

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<sup>175</sup> Cao Yu, *Thunderstorm*, P 59

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, P 59

Zhous is used for keeping an outer appearance of well-behaved ideal family. Just like what He Chengzhou says, Fanyi shares something in common with Mrs. Alving, who feel “dissatisfied and disappointed” in the marriage but have no other choice than “endure” the despairing life.

In the preface of *Thunderstorm* Cao Yu tells that Fanyi is “the most characteristic of thunderstorm”<sup>177</sup> Actually Fanyi’s thunderstorm-type of character resembles Hedda Gabler: Zhou Ping abandoned her and falls in love with Sifeng which reminded Fanyi that she lost control over him so that she decided to get even with ZhouPing for what he had done to her. Zhou Ping’s cruel heart drives her to crazy so she destroys Zhou Ping just like Hedda Gabler destroys Løvborg. Having been living in Zhous for almost 20 years, Fanyi had “resigned myself to my fate, and wait to die.”<sup>178</sup> If Zhou Ping didn’t show up in Zhou’s Residence or if he didn’t seduce his stepmother, there won’t be any rebellious behaviors by Fanyi at all. Zhou Ping’s passion and sympathy aroused the dead unruly spirit from Fanyi’s heart, and she gained courage to fight against Zhou Puyuan and his “well-behaved family”. Once Fanyi wanted to rebel against his authority, but her disobedient behaviors will be called as “sick” or “insanity” by Zhou Puyuan. Facing to Zhou Ping’s betray, Fanyi warns him owing a debt for her time and again:

Fan (with a sneer): Take care! Take care! Don’t drive a disappointed woman too hard. She’s capable of anything.

Ping: I’m prepared for the worst.

Fan: All right. Go, then! But be careful—(looking out of the window, half to herself) there’s a storm coming!<sup>179</sup>

Fanyi has her words and collects all the energy to act like a powerful thunderstorm, in the Act Four Fanyi reflects her utmost rebellious and subversive:

Zhou Puyuan: Don’t pretend you’re mad! You’re playing the fool with me!

Fan: But I am mad. And I’d rather you left me alone.

Zhou (annoyed): All right. Now go on up to bed. I want to be left on my

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<sup>177</sup> Cao Yu, *The Preface of Thunderstorm*, included in *the Collection of Cao Yu Studies*, 1985, P 18

<sup>178</sup> Cao Yu, *Thunderstorm*, P 60

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, P 92

own here to have a rest.

Fan: Oh no. I want to be left here on my own to have a rest. You'll have to get out.

Zhou (glowering at her): Fanyi, I'm telling you to go upstairs!

Fan: (contemptuously): I don't wish to. You hear? I don't wish to.<sup>180</sup>

The audience can easily find that the position between Zhou Puyuan and Fanyi who has been dominated reverses in this scene. In the following scene she uncovers all the follies and hypocrisy committed by the Zhous; as well as tore the mask of the fake “respectable family”. Cao Yu vividly portrays a unique character for Fanyi: “When she loves, she loves with a fiery passion, and when she hates, she hates as fiercely, with a hatred which can destroy; yet on the surface she appears quiet and wistful, and when she stops beside one, it is like a leaf falling by one's side...”<sup>181</sup> which more or less leads to a tragic consequence. Like the other tragic women, in Ibsen's plays finally Fanyi has to face the disaster although she has her own nature and refuses to do “just as I'm told by anybody”<sup>182</sup>, even she was regarded by her son—Zhou Chong as “the most courageous, the most imaginative, the most sympathetic of mothers”<sup>183</sup>. She can not depart completely from the old family like Nora does.

## Symbolism

Actually Ibsen's creation style is not only realistic, in the early period of his career his works more or less showed off obvious romanticism appearance, because mostly he used Scandinavian myth and historical legend story as his production sources. In the middle time of his career Ibsen's plays presented realistic dramatic characters, and most of his plays in this time reflected the contradiction of social reality. In the late period of his career Ibsen was regarded by other people as the founder of modern drama in that his works in this phase expressed mystery and symbolic messages. In his early time for drama creation, Cao Yu noticed the symbolistic drama technique

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid, P 132

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, P 28

<sup>182</sup> Cao Yu, *Thunderstorm*, P 57

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, P 34

used in Ibsen's late period dramas. In a creative way Cao added several symbolic elements in his dramas so as to advance the theme from criticizing realism to a combination of both realism and symbolism. It helps the reader and audience to deeply think the real world, the humanity and the real life. The symbolism characters expressed by Cao Yu in his plays indeed impel the effect of Ibsen's late symbolistic plays in China. Because for a long time, Chinese society used to ignore or deny Ibsen's plays created in the later phase for they considered those plays were short of "inspirer" realistic contents. Cao Yu absorbed abundant symbolistic drama style from the western playwrights, especially from Ibsen, besides he used symbol technique to excavate the character deep inside his protagonists and the actual psychological activities as well. There are many good examples in Ibsen and Cao Yu's plays, such as, the wild duck, the ghosts, the mountain, the sunrise, the thunderstorm, and others. At present many Chinese scholars have studied and compared the symbol elements in Ibsen and Cao's plays, for instance, He Chengzhou makes a intensive analysis about the symbol—thunderstorm in CaoYu's *Thunderstorm*, besides he also convictively compared the weather depictions in both plays in his book so that I will not do the same work in my thesis but add some understanding about the symbolic atmosphere description. Cao Yu had said that he paid great attention to exaggerate the stage atmosphere, namely combine the nature phenomenon with the development of play scenes so as to present the relationship between different characters. Cao Yu strengthens tensional tones in many plots so that the audience will fidget along with the development of the play all the time. In the first act, the sultry summer and the dark clouds are bestrewing all over the sky, which indicate a thunderstorm is forthcoming near the corner. The bad weather sets off anxiety and restless from the protagonists' deep hearts. In the second act, dark clouds have already bestrewing in the sky and when Shiping comes on the stage the thunder starts. The third act happened in Lu Gui's home, in which almost everyone appears on the stage. Along with the conflicts intensifying, the weather becomes even worse: the thunder crashes frequently and it starts to pour. In the last act, everyone returns to the Zhous and the tension intensifies step by step inside everybody's mind, no one can really calm down

because they feel something bad impending. Finally the deafening thunder is heard and the miserable ending comes: three young people died and two women go crazy. It is very impressive that from the very beginning till the ending scene the audience can sense the intensive atmosphere continuously all the time, which the achievement is offered by Cao Yu. Every time it thunders, the audience will get nervous immediately. Some scholars said that in a way Cao Yu is a little bit “merciless”, because he knew the audience will predict the tragic plots happened in the following scene but still let the wretched omens come true.

### **Foreshadowing**

Next I want to write something about another dramatic technique that Ibsen used in his famous plays, and which has also been found in Cao Yu’s *Thunderstorm*. It is called foreshadowing skill. Sometimes in my opinion the foreshadowing prop can be ignored when the plots develop, however, when the final scene comes it presents its significant relation with the ending and at this moment all of the audience understand the inner-connection between the foreshadowing prop and the ending. Sometimes when the same prop shows time and again the audience would feel an indescribable anxiety. The foreshadowing technique helps to add the intensifying atmosphere that the writer wants to present. Like the pistol used in *Hedda Gabler*; the fire used in *Ghosts*, the creepage electricity is used by Cao Yu. In the *Thunderstorm*, not only the thunderstorm plays a very important role to magnify its tragic theme, but also the creepage electricity that He Chengzhou didn’t pay attention or mention in his article. The creepage electricity appears more than 5 times in the whole play but why Cao Yu used the same prop so frequently? I think the reason would resemble in Ibsen’s plays. Each time it appears to remind the audience something will happen so it definitely increases the intense tone to the play: 1). Fanyi heard about the electricity needed to be fixed and she asked someone to repair it. 2). After Sifeng lost her job in Zhou, Fanyi asked Lu Gui to call the electric-repairer 3). Lu Gui tells that he has already called repairer. 4). Zhou Puyuan asked if the electric is repaired but the servant replied

that because of the heavy rain, the repairer would come next day. 5). Shiping found Sifeng and Zhou Ping were falling in love, because of shame Sifeng wanted to suicide but when she thought about Zhou Ping her hand drew back from the creepage electricity. Cao Yu hides electric problem in 5 different places which set a mat for the tragic ending—Si Feng and Zhou Chong died because of electrocution. In *Ghosts*, I find the similar examples: the orphanage destroyed by fire is not a sudden accident for the audience; Ibsen set mats several times for this consequence in the earlier acts. 1). Mrs. Alving and Pastor Manders were talking about whether to pay for fire-insurance before. 2). Paring caught fire before. 3). People said he used to leave match everywhere. Readers won't feel uncomfortable or strange when the consequence happened if this important mat set before vividly. It likes a package, author shows it to the readers naturally, and he opens it when apex of the play appears.

## Summary

Despite Cao Yu said once in the interview: "Ibsen is not only a playwright, but also a thinker."<sup>184</sup> In my opinion Cao Yu regarded Ibsen as an outstanding playwright much more than a thinker according to my previous analysis. Here are some evidences to support my point:

- 1) Cao Yu read the Collected Plays of Ibsen in English, in a way missing or misinterpreting caused through Chinese translation section did not influence his first-hand read.
- 2) At the time when he knew Ibsen and his plays, Chinese intellectuals had already shifted their attention from regarding Ibsen as a pure thinker to a dramatist.
- 3) *A Doll's House's* script was the first Ibsen's play for Cao Yu to read, when the famous drama director—Zhang Pengchun guided him to act Nora in Nankai School.

Besides Cao Yu studies and absorbs Ibsen's artistic techniques and praises his

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<sup>184</sup> Cao, *the Collection of Cao Yu Studies*, 1985, P 118

aesthetic achievement more than anything else. Although Cao Yu set a good example and built up a foundation for Chinese modern drama creation in the 1930s, the creation custom did not pass down or continually develop further. One of the reasons would impute to the Sino-Japan War happened during 1930s and 1940s. In the chaos most of the Chinese writers began to create abundant plays related to the social reality in order to contribute their energy to inspire the Chinese people. As a result the Chinese drama creation in that period of time had a large percent of “war” spirits which caused a bias for literary creating, especially drama. Those dramatists had to leave their familiar subjects and tried to grab the unconversant ones; in consequence they can hardly write excellent works and wasted their time on it. Ouyang Yuqian had once mentioned that drama could never be used only for political propaganda, which means the playwrights should avoid adding any emotional tones to literary productions or the literary acts would extinguish someday.

1930s is an unforgettable period of time for the Chinese people, because China suffered a careworn period: on the one hand externally China faced to a national incompatible intensification, for in 1931 Jiu Yiba Shibian (The September 18<sup>th</sup> Incident) broke out in China and Japanese army invaded in Chinese Northeastern area; on the other hand internally China also faced to a class struggle intensification, the fights of both working class and peasant class revolting against both capitalist and landlord raised one after another.

The development of Chinese modern drama was not interrupted in this turbulent period, on the contrary Chinese modern drama absorbed and utilized advanced western drama more actively but it had shifted to emphasize particularly on realistic aspect from all-embracing every school of drama style. In the mean time modernistic drama in China was fading out bit by bit. Because the time circumstance summon, Chinese modern drama turned its keynote from the past romantic sentiment to indignation and resistance. In addition Chinese modern drama undertook an important accountability to awaken Chinese people’s consciousness of live or die and also it had responsible for saving nation. One obvious character of the contemporary Chinese

modern drama is: combine modern drama together with the requirement of Chinese society and the masses as well; plant modern drama in the Chinese ethical soil in order to adapt the Chinese reality. Chinese modern drama used western drama for references and at the same time transformed foreign artistic style by complying with the rule of Chinese traditional artistic spirit and poetic intelligence. It can be said that Chinese modern drama is an innovative dramatic type welcomed by Chinese people.

In the first half of 1930s, Japanese aggression extended to many provinces in China and the war was on the verge of breaking out. Chinese dramatic groups appealed to resist against the aggression of Japan and save China from extinction. In 1936 several dramatists declared to create and perform “National Defense Drama” besides they mobilized every single patriotic dramatist to use drama as weapon to launch movement about “defense Japan and save China”.

The Chinese well-known dramatists, such as, Tian Han, Xia Yan, Hong Shen, Chen Baichen, Yu Ling united together and devoted themselves into the movements. In order to accommodate the urgent current circumstance they promptly staged dramas in good time so that Chinese modern dramas played an important role for educating and encouraging people, and mini-type one-act plays grew and became popular and at that time it was followed by some other kinds of plays, such as, Street Play, Square Play.

A well-known event in Chinese history happened in the seventh of July 1937. It is called Qi Qi Shibian (The July Seventh Incident) or Lugou Qiao Shibian (The Lugou Bridge Incident), which indicates the war between Chinese and Japanese Army, broke out. Chinese modern drama continued to develop but was treated by the Chinese dramatists as arms to support the War of Resistance against Japan. Chinese modern drama gained an unprecedented development. Set Chong Qing, Yan’An and the occupied Shanghai separately as centre, Chinese modern drama came into being a territorial pattern. From 1937 the war began till 1945 the war ended, Chinese modern drama had turned into one of the most active, most flourish, most realistic and most

demotic type of art among the variety of Chinese arts. During this period of time Chinese modern drama basically presents a realistic feature, which accords with society, needs and complies with will of the people.

## **Chapter Six 1949 - present: Ibsen and his plays in China**

The Chinese intellectuals regards a decade of years from the Sino-Japan War till 1949 the New China was founded as a period of set-back for Ibsen and other western literature. Because during this period, the Chinese people suffered the chaos of wars: first was the war fighting against Japanese invasion<sup>185</sup> and second was the civil war<sup>186</sup> between Chinese Communist and Kuomintang. During the special moment almost all the cultural activities, such as, literary creation and modern drama performances were focusing on the political use and many dramatists even gave up their aesthetic skills but devoted themselves to the national defense. At that time Chinese modern drama was used as a weapon to encourage the ordinary Chinese people and advocate the defensive spirits. Up till the year when the New China was founded and announced her independence, the central subject for dramatic creation was still occupied by the politics perspective. After 1949 Ibsen came back with his plays and appeared in front of people's eyes, however, there have been several rises and falls for Ibsen and his plays taking place in China from 1949 till now.

### **1950s—1970s**

It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that Chinese modern drama resuscitated. Many western dramatists, such as, Stanislavski received praise from a wide scale in China and many dramas written by the western playwrights such as, Tolstoy, Chekhov, O'Neill, Ostrovsky, etc were performed on stage again in China, but it seems that everyone forgot Ibsen thus only two performances were shown on stage before 1970s: First, Ibsen's plays returned to China in 1956 and it was considered by some Ibsen scholars, like He Chengzhou as the first rebirth of Ibsen in China. In order to celebrate

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<sup>185</sup> The Sino-Japan War lasts for 8 years from 1937 to 1945

<sup>186</sup> The Civil War lasts for 4 years from 1945 to 1949

the fiftieth anniversary of Ibsen's death, Zhongguo Qingnian Yishu Juyuan (China Youth Art Institute) directed a new edition of *A Doll's House* and put it on Beijing stage. It has to be mentioned that Norwegian government and Chinese government have established diplomatic relations since 1954, and from then on the association between two countries has increasing year by year. The performance of *A Doll's House* in 1956 also invited Ibsen expert from Norway to participate in the performance rehearsal; before the performance was shown, the director—Wu Xue had a chance to visit Norway and collect information of Ibsen, what's more he learned valuable experiences about how to stage performances from the Norwegian comrades. The performance received a large-scale of favorable comment: “a production with a perfect cast and acting”<sup>187</sup>, later in 1995 the actress—Ji Shuping, who played a role of Nora wrote an article named as “*Wo shi Zenyang Banyan Nuola de*” (*How I play the role of Nora*) to recall the 1956 performance.

Second, Shanghai Xiju Xueyuan (Shanghai Theatre Academy) performed *A Doll's House* in 1962, which was directed by Xiong Foxi. This performance was believed as “an attempt to reproduce Ibsen's play in a style as close and faithful as the original version.”<sup>188</sup>

After the short rebirth, Ibsen went downhill again in China. There were no more other performances of Ibsen's plays before the 1976, because Ibsen's plays were treated as full of sensitive topics in decades of years. The political movements appeared one after another and all of the movements appealed: “the artistic productions should submit politics use”; “politics stands first and foremost” and others. Hu Shi was also convicted because he propagandized Ibsenism which was regarded as an absolute individualism in that period. Individualism was animadverted as the chief criminal for all the evil behaviors in Wenge period (the Cultural Revolution). Most of the Chinese intellectuals scared to stir up trouble so they kept Ibsen away from their productions. This embarrassing situation lasted for almost 10 years till the end of the Cultural Revolution. There is another reason for Ibsen fading away from China between the

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<sup>187</sup> A comment was described by Cao Juren in 1956, quoted from “*The Second Time I Saw A Doll's House*”, 1963

<sup>188</sup> Tan,2001, P 203

1950s and the 1970s: Nora was not as popular as before when she first appeared in front of Chinese audience's eyes. In the period of Cultural Revolution Nora lost her position in China because the Chinese people thought they won the place over bourgeois and most of Chinese women gained freedom by taking part in the revolutionary movements. It seems like Nora as a woman pursuing liberty was no longer important for them when they holding freedom in their hands. Here I have to say that Ouyang Yuqian's predictive critique comes true: any dramatic performances lack of concern for artistic excellence however based on political subjects and related to contemporary revolutionary struggles will definitely fail.<sup>189</sup> Wangning also referred in this essay that the eternal drama arts should be the ones with aesthetic and art spirit but not the fashionable ideologies.<sup>190</sup>

The second rebirth of Ibsen in China appeared in 1978 for commemorating the 150 anniversary of Ibsen's birth, Cao Yu praised Ibsen's achievement to Chinese modern drama, both from the dramatic and the aesthetic perspectives, besides Cao extolled Ibsen as a friendly bridge connecting Chinese and Norwegian people. Actually China re-opened its door to the world in 1970s after the end of Cultural Revolution, many western theories and philosophy conceptions inflow like stream in China. Although several Chinese intellectuals brought up Ibsen's achievements to China again, very few valuable literary critiques or studies were presenting out. Up till the 1980s the Ibsen's plays indeed returned on the Chinese stage.

### **In the 1980s when Ibsen and his plays regained Chinese people's attention**

In the 1980s the relationship between China and Norway increased and developed even much closer. By grace of the Norwegian Prime Minister Odvar Nordli visiting China in 1980, Ibsen and his plays regained Chinese people's attention. From then on many Ibsen performances revived in China, for example, in 1980 the first TV programme of Ibsen play was produced and broadcasted in China, in 1983 *Peer Gynt*

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<sup>189</sup> Actually this comment was given by Ouyang Yuqian when he recalled the failure of the Evolution Troupe.

<sup>190</sup> Wang, 2003, P75

was first and foremost performed in China by Zhongyang Xiju Xueyuan (Central Drama Academy). However, this time Ibsen returned with a new look, seven years after the end of Cultural Revolution, a new age came and Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* was a new attempt for Chinese people to accept Ibsen from a very different view: because decades years ago Ibsen was regarded as the rebellious thinker or realistic writer. From the first time Ibsen was introduced to China till 1980 are almost 80 years, during which Chinese people were so familiar with Ibsen's social problem plays as well as his realistic and symbolic codes. *Peer Gynt* was a stranger for Chinese because they had never seen Ibsen as a romanticist poet before. Some people even doubted *Peer Gynt* was Ibsen's original work. The director of *Peer Gynt*—Xu Xiaozhong admitted “The first time we read this play, we were puzzled by it and wondered whether it was really written by Ibsen...”<sup>191</sup>; Furthermore, the performance faced a lot of difficulties for presenting to the Chinese audience, according to Xiao Qian's recollection:

The play was produced under very difficult circumstances. None of the directors, stage designers and actors had seen any production of the play before. They had only very little information about the play...it was really a creative performance with Chinese characteristics.<sup>192</sup>

The first complete Chinese translation version of *Peer Gynt* in the mainland China was finished and published by Xiao Qian in 1983. In fact early in 1942 when Xiao Qian watched a performance of *Peer Gynt* in London, he was eager to exhibit this play to the Chinese people and then he published an essay on *Xianggang Dagongbao* (*Hongkong Takungpao*) in order to introduce the ironic image of *Peer Gynt* to China. After the New China was born Xiao Qian had suggested Pan Jiaxun translating this play, unfortunately it ended up with nothing definite because of the wavy historical reason. Finally Xiao Qian decided to translate *Peer Gynt* in person so that the director Xu based his performance on Xiao's translation. Xu invited Xiao Qian to adept the whole script so that he compressed the original 38 scenes to the present 21 scenes

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<sup>191</sup> Xu, 1983, P44

<sup>192</sup> Xiao,, 1983, P 10

besides he modified the Scandinavia troll to Chinese legendary Zhu Bajie (the pig in Journey to the West), and adapted the Troll King to Mei Houwang (the monkey in Journey to the West) in order to present a familiar story for the Chinese audience to understand. By watching the performance Xiao Qian was impressed and said: “this performance is adapted according to the understanding and appreciation of the Chinese people living in the 1980s, besides it is definitely a creative performance and a Chinese feature show”<sup>193</sup>

### **1990s - present**

From the 1990s till present Ibsen’s plays have frequently been put on Chinese stage and have appeared in the critique articles. In 1995 the Chinese Central Experimental Theatre invited a Norwegian actress Juni Dahr to China and she acted *Ibsen’s Women* in Beijing, the performance aroused a big reverberation by the Chinese audience. In the same year together with the Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland visiting China, the well-known Norwegian National Theatre was also invited to China and they brought the Norwegian edition *Ghosts* to Beijing and Shanghai. Therefore this is the first time for the Chinese audience visually got to know how Ibsen plays are presented in his motherland, besides it improved the cooperation between Norway and China especially from the literary perspective.

It is remarkable that by 1995 along with Pan Jiaxun’s *Yibusheng Wenji(The Collected Works of Ibsen)*<sup>194</sup> was printed and published by People’s Literature Press. All of Ibsen’s 26 plays have been published in Chinese. Later the Chinese Translator Union awarded this book an “excellent translation” title. It is good for dragging people’s attention back from Ibsen’s social problem plays to his other successful plays. Obviously up till the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the most welcomed Ibsen’s play in China is *A Doll’s House* according to its largest number of Chinese translation versions were produce, and it was followed by *Ghosts, An Enemy of the People, The*

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<sup>193</sup> Xiao, 1983, P10

<sup>194</sup> Pan Jiaxun et al, *Yibusheng Wenji (The Collected Works of Ibsen)*, People’s Literature Press, Beijing, 1995

*Master Builder, The Wild Duck, Hedda Gabler and The Pillars of Society.*<sup>195</sup>

In the year 1997, Chinese Central Experimental Theatre put *An Enemy of the People* on stage. The director Wu Xiaojiang changed the story background to the contemporary China which experienced some environmental pollution. The performance was very successful and received high comments from a wide scale. The performance group also performed in Oslo on the invitation to celebrate the “Ibsen Stage Festival”. In the following year 1998, director Wu re-edited Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* and adapted the story happened around 1930s in a city of Northern part of China. Besides he modified the time from the Christmas to Chinese Spring Festival. An impressive adaptation is he invited Norwegian actress Agnete Haaland to play the role of Nora. This is the first time for Chinese theatre to attempt bilingual performance for Nora speaks English and sometimes Chinese, while Chinese Helmer speaks Chinese and sometimes English with his wife on stage. This performance successfully presents the conflicts between two cultures, and the different philosophies. It was performed several times in Beijing and later also staged in Shanghai in 2001.

Then in the 21<sup>st</sup> century comes more and more performances, translation works and international seminars related to Ibsen revive and develop in China following a favorable track. For example, in 2000 *the 9<sup>th</sup> International Ibsen Academic Seminar* was held in Bergen, Norway; in 2001 *Ibsen and Arts: Painting, Sculpture and Construction International Seminar* was held in Rome. In 2002 *Ibsen and China: Tending towards an Aesthetic Construction Seminar* was held in Shanghai. In order to celebrate the 100 anniversary of Ibsen’s death a series of grand commemorative activities, as *The 11<sup>th</sup> International Ibsen Conference* was held in Oslo, later in the same year, *The 4<sup>th</sup> International Ibsen Symposium in China* was held in Shanghai in November. An Ibsen fever exploded and spread in Norway, in China and all over the whole world.

Furthermore in the past few years there are several Chinese-feature performances of

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<sup>195</sup> The data is collected from He Chengzhou’s book and also from Tan Kwok Kan’s book.

Ibsen plays attract people's attention from the worldwide, such as, *the Event of An Enemy of the People*, directed by Nanjing University. Shanghai Xiju Xueyuan (Shanghai Drama Academy) presented *Ghosts* and adapted *Peer Gynt* in Beijing Opera mode and the most impressive performance is edited by Hangzhou Yue Opera, which re-edits *Hedda Gabler* in a new style. Yue Opera edition of *Hedda Gabler* received a favorable comment not only from China but also from Norway: It was staged in Oslo at the invitation for the 100 Anniversary of Ibsen's death in 2006 and even the Queen of Norway had an interview with the performance group after the show.

### **Yue Opera Edition *Hedda Gabler***

I watched this performance on DVD, which was recorded in Hangzhou, China in the year of 2006. In the following paragraphs I would like to talk about my understanding of this new *Hedda Gabler*. Indubitably this performance is quite a Chinese way to present Ibsen's plays today, which means the director adapted Ibsen's drama in a Chinese ancient time and combined a representative western drama with the Chinese traditional opera.

Chinese Opera is an art form representing Chinese traditional culture. The most outstanding characteristic is the core of its performance, which display four skills by the actors: song (chang), speech (nian), dance-acting (zuo) and the combat (da), which encompasses not only actual fighting with fists, swords but also acrobatics as well. The stage in Chinese traditional theatre is usually empty of set designs, and Chinese artists rely heavily on their stylized action of opening a door and stepping over a threshold to give the audience an impression of the stage as a room. As has been mentioned by Chen: "A table and two chairs are about the only two 'constructions' which a Chinese traditional theatre needs for its stage"<sup>196</sup> The stage setting can be

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<sup>196</sup> Chen, P28

changed from an outdoor space into an indoor space and can also be divided into two spaces: one is inside the house; the other is outside the house with two players staying in the two spaces separately. Although presenting on the same stage, they pretend to be alone without anybody being present on the stage. These two characters in the play may stand close to each other, or walk toward to each other, but they are not supposed to look at each other because in the imagination of the audience they are set in two different spaces. That is to say in the Chinese traditional theatre players can act every single space on the same stage without having to change the set. Second, according to William Sun, the director in Chinese *Hedda Gabler*, who mentioned in a TV interview: “Chinese traditional opera tells stories by presenting dance and songs.”<sup>197</sup> He adapts Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* in a Chinese traditional opera way which means converting paragraphs of oral dialogues in Ibsen’s original text to rhythms and melodies. He also adds flashbacks on the stage to present the complicated hidden psychological reactions inside the characters. While in the western traditional theatre, the designer built a truly existed stage with houses, churches, streets, walls, etc. And the stage set in the Western theatrical tradition would be a room with three sides made up of painted and shaped objects, while the fourth wall is left open for the audience to watch what is going on the stage. It is called as the box stage. In short, in western traditional theatre one space puts the one set of stage into the right performance and the plot of the play is mainly presented by dialogues and actors’ movements

Although western traditional theatre differs from the Chinese in many ways, they share the same intention to leave free imagination space for the performance. Both Chinese and western traditional theatres hide some information and plots behind the stage. An example is given by Jack Chen: “a whip about three feet long indicated a horse, and an actor entering with a whip in his right hand will be immediately understood to be riding. Carrying a lantern or a candle indicates that it is evening or dark, and pulling on an oar indicated rowing a boat...”<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Taken and recorded by CCTV after the Performance in Oslo

<sup>198</sup> Chen, P 26-29

We can not ignore the important elements on the stage, such as, props, set, costume, make-up, etc. It is mentioned by McAuley, in the book of *Space in Performance: making Meaning in the Theatre*, props, set, lighting, music and sound effects function primarily in relation to the actor, which means every object on the stage could not be unnoticed because every thing has its own function. McAuley also said, “The set conveys a limited amount of information in the absence of the actor, as has just been stated, but becomes a powerfully expressive instrument when occupied and activated by actors”<sup>199</sup>

Sometimes audience can imagine or identify the characters by the presenting costume and props as well. This performance didn't use so much furniture or props: only sword, long gown, wine cup, manuscript, wooden stool, etc., which in my opinion helps spectators focus their attention totally on the play-actors' performance. What's more, audiences have to imagine what is hidden behind the plot through the actors' costume and props they used. McAuley referred that the objects on the modern stage are “frequently used to express information about character, social context, place, lifestyle, status, period, etc.”<sup>200</sup> It is rational because in this performance I can imagine who Haida (Hedda) is, who Governor Bai (the Judge Brack) is and who Wenbo (Lovborg) is, etc., despite of not understanding the Yue Opera language. Haida wearing a purple long dress with a sword in her hand when she firstly presents on the stage. Audience would understand the story happened in the ancient time of China. It is also can be recognized that Simeng (Tesman) is a wealthy young man according to his silk clothes and nobler crown. Decorated by gem, the dress and personal adornment show Governor Bai has a magisterial look. After scene changed, Haida reappears on the stage dressing herself in a red long dress with the special design of the sleeves which are longer than the usual dress. It is not hard for a Chinese opera fan to realize that an exciting highlight would be shown in the coming scene. Because when the audiences see a particular costume they have a definite idea of how the actor will use it and then they will expect the emergence of this costume function.

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<sup>199</sup> McAuley, P 91

<sup>200</sup> McAuley, P174

Music is another important element on the stage to express the hidden information or character's emotion, which help audience to understand the plot through the sense of hearing. There's an example shown in the Yue Opera edition of *Hedda Gabler*: when Xiya (Thea) tells Haida that she and Wenbo are getting together. After astonishment, Haida is walking around the house along with a pressing rataplan played by the Chinese drum. This kind of music emphasizes a series of psychological actions inside Haida's deep heart and expresses that she is at a loss for knowing what to do. Silence is another way to convey the function of music. Sometimes theatre needs silence to leave a space to the audience and help them to imagine.

What's more, there's an irreplaceable factor—lighting, on which people should have to pay more attention on the stage. Lighting, as McAuley mentioned, is “the principal means utilized in contemporary theatre to set the revealing dialectic in motion”<sup>201</sup> and in the live performance it can also enhance mood and atmosphere. But let us not put this analysis in a rash, first looking back to the history of theatre lighting development would help people to understand why this element is the foundation for presenting a performance. The first breakthrough of lighting technique was happened in 1817<sup>202</sup> when gas substituted candles and oil lamps as a source of illumination. The disadvantages, however, were an appalling smell and a greatly increased danger of fire from the naked jets of flame. Due to the electric incandescent<sup>203</sup> lamp invented in 1880 by Edison, theatres were equipped with this new kind of illumination. As a result of lighting revolution during almost a hundred years, the scenery had been better and better lit and more and more visible than before. It also helped audience concentrate their attention on the stage as a result it made these spectators keep quiet during the performance.

The co-relation between actors and spectators exists in the performance: on the one side, audiences want to be able to see the details of actors' facial expression and every movement as well. On the other side, the actors also expect the spectator's careful

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<sup>201</sup> McAuley, P 76

<sup>202</sup> Patti P. Kenneth M, 1984,P384

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, P436

attention, because of this they realize the audiences are attracted by their performance. There're two kinds of audiences in the theatre. One is an engrossed audience and the other is absent-minded. McAuley quoted a recalling of John Gielgud, who memorized "a thrill of performing to a rapt audience: the sensation of an audience suddenly concentrating, with not a murmur in the auditorium, is a great moment...knowing that you are holding the audience completely, in total command of the battlefield"<sup>204</sup> this metaphor visually shows how important the spectators' attention to the actors of the theatre.

### **Importance of audience's responses to the performance:**

Whether a performance is successful or not can be evaluated by the responses related to these two kinds of audiences. If most of the spectators begin to show their weariness, such as, whisper with other people or sleep on the seat, etc., which means the performance is not charming enough to grasp audiences' eyes and it can be judged that this is not a good production. It is time for me to return to the performance, and discuss what did the audience react in the performance. Because it is a recorded DVD performance, I could not see the reactions from the audience. It is fortunately that the sound is recorded when the performance is ongoing, so that I have good opportunity to feel and find whether the audience likes the performance or not by listening to their sound reaction. First I have to introduce a different fact compared with the western audience. Besides to enjoy the beautiful gesture and movement presented by the actors, in Chinese performances especially in the Chinese opera there's another criterion which is called the music for voices to judge the actors' performance in Chinese operas. Most of the audiences are theatre fans and they have abundant and professional experience of Chinese opera. Their responses to the Chinese operas will bravo for the good performance and boo or whisper for the bad performance. I noticed there're several applauses and bravo sounds during the performance in Chinese

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<sup>204</sup> McAuley, P 261

*Hedda Gabler*, for example, in the plot of Haida burning manuscript of Wenbo, Haida utilizes her long sleeves to express her complicated psychological activities, after she finishes this section I heard the audience automatically applaud and bravo through the sound recorded in the DVD.

Chinese *Hedda Gabler* is a good example of successful using theatre elements to reveal the hidden information in the product. Chinese traditional theatre has in general placed more emphasis on music, words, and actors than scenery, lighting and stage properties. However, this *Hedda Gabler* utilizes not only the traditional Chinese factors, but also combines other western theatre's elements to make the performance substantial. The actors use facial expression, movement, dialogues, singing, dance, etc. to attract audience's attention. An element—dialogue plays as the foundation of the performance. In the first scene Simeng persuades Haida not to play with the sword all day long. She responds nobly that cooking and doing embroidery do not fit for her ladylike status. Simeng doesn't give up and persuades Haida to draw pictures or play instruments. She answers in a depressing mood that nobody will enjoy her painting and nobody will know which music she plays. According to this short conversation, people will understand how lonely she is and why she enjoys to play with her sword but not like a normal housewife. This dialogue could also be seen as a clue to her finally suicide, because Wenbo insists on returning his sword to her and she considers this motion means snatch her only interest in this world.

Besides the dialogues using, I will bring up the light element again. In the very beginning Wenbo emerges in Haida's dream and they play with swords together, which people could aware that they are perfect match. Here director uses light to divide dream and true life, when light becomes dark it means Haida is dreaming of her past happy life with Wenbo. However, bright light draws Haida back to the reality which is very boring. There are several changes of bright and shade light to present Haida is suffering her life in her new house. In the scene of burning Wenbo's manuscript light is also utilized and music as well to illustrate Hedda's jealous,

hysterical and subversive personality. When Haida tears the manuscript apart and sits on the ground, the light changes to be bright and white which projects Haida's shadow on the backdrop. Along with the drumbeat beating more and more quickly, Haida becomes mad then loses her mind and finally tears the manuscript into pieces. Then the singing arises and Haida stands up to dance, in the meantime so much black paper falls down from the ceiling of the stage to mimic paper ash of the burned manuscript. It is very beautiful to see Haida dancing with the long sleeves, first she plays one-arm sleeve then according to the music playing harder and stronger she plays both arms sleeves. The red sleeves represent flaming fire and Haida's jealous heart. There are two climaxes in this performance, except the burning manuscript scene, it is also happened at the end when Haida kills herself with sword in front of all the audience. In this act Haida plays her long sleeves again, her movement becomes stronger and stronger, her rhythm becomes faster and faster, which expresses her psychological reaction changing from jealousy to anger, from soft to strong, from hysteria to destruction. Audience could easily realize that she becomes hopeless and has no other exit to escape, then they will understand why she suicides herself finally. The way of suicide presented by Haida is quite different from the other Heddas who are always killed by the gun, while Haida ends her life with a Chinese sword. At the moment when she draws the sword out of her body red sleeves represent her blood splashing out of herself and the whole backdrop becomes red which means her blood splashing on the wall.

The actress Zhou Yujun who acts as Haida accepted a TV interview<sup>205</sup> said that

There are so many elements of theatre, such as, costume, music technique and dance, etc. representing Chinese traditional cultural imagines and this performance attracts so many audience even the foreign friends to attend, which illustrates that the method used to combine beautiful Chinese culture with Ibsen's plays receives a warm welcome response from the world.

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<sup>205</sup> Taken and recorded by CCTV after the Performance in Oslo

Sometimes it is regarded as hybridization<sup>206</sup> when the combination made between Chinese and Western theatres under the different cultures. Each culture represents its own unique characteristic which is different from other countries. People living in this culture naturally since they were born, However, Pavis mentioned that the world is becoming international which is “in the process of moving from its nationalistic phase to its cultural phase and it is preferable to distinguish cultural areas rather than nations”<sup>207</sup> I agree with his idea and I think no matter what changes or combinations happen in the society, no matter what method to present in the theatre. To help audience appropriately identify the characters presenting on the stage is vital for theatre to present plays and hold them up in the remodelings in the society. Chinese *Hedda Gabler* is a successful attempt to present Ibsen’s plays today, I think following this performance there would be many other adaptations in broad scales to present Ibsen’s dramas.

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<sup>206</sup> Pavis, P 8

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, P 5

## Chapter Seven Conclusion

In last 100 years, Ibsen has exerted an unusual influence in China from both literary and social aspects. I focus my essay on Ibsen in China, especially his reception and influence and analyzed according to the time sequences. In the first part of the thesis I particularly indicate and explore the social and historical background when Ibsen was first introduced in China. Besides I analyze how the Chinese people accepted him and in which aspects Ibsen influenced on Chinese people. Then in Chapter three and four I particularly discuss how Ibsen was defined in China: as a dramatist or as a revolutionist. Starting from the 1920s it caused a wide disputation. I use two chapters for discussing the booming time of Chinese modern drama and it is also the blossom period for Ibsen in China. After that I illustrate that owing to specific historical reason in China, Ibsen had experienced several times of raises and falls since the end of 1930s. In the recent decades Ibsen plays return to the Chinese stage and many literary critiques and several international Ibsen seminars appear in China.

The status of Ibsen in China has been changed times since Ibsen and his plays first appeared in China. Ibsen was first and foremost introduced in China with his famous voices: “I am first and foremost a human being” by Nora and a slogan: “the most powerful man is the one who stands most alone...” given by Dr. Stockmann’s. Ibsen’s famous social problem plays, such as, *A Doll’s House*, *Ghosts*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Pillars of Society*, became very popular in China in this period. Chinese people found Ibsen’s plays hid the spirit of rebellion, searching for freedom, purchasing liberation which were lost in most of contemporary Chinese people’s minds. Many Chinese intellectuals were addicted to Ibsen’s problem plays because they needed reforming spirits in the revolution period. Wang Zhongxiang emphasized in his article that Ibsen and his plays had made positive effects on Chinese people for

almost 100 years. He contributed to the Chinese people with some advanced thinking, such as, fighting for freedom, confronting conformism, women emancipation. Under the contemporary social circumstance, Ibsen's plays were utilized as a literary weapon, by many Chinese progressive intellectuals. The image of Nora impressed the Chinese people so deeply that Nora was treated as an idol that represented spirits of fighting and pursuing freedom. In brief, from the very beginning the spirits presented in Ibsen's social problem plays were expanded and exaggerated by those progressive literates, while his aesthetic art and outstanding drama techniques were undoubtedly reduced, even disappeared. According to the facts I listed and the analyses given in the essay, we can find how those contemporary people accepted him, and it is not difficult to believe that Ibsen was misunderstood and misestimated by the Chinese people at that time. In consequence Ibsen was once denominated as revolutionist or social reformer, particularly in the period of May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, Chinese revolutionary people treated Ibsen's social problem dramas as revolutionary samples and Ibsen's social problems plays attracted more attention than his other plays for the Chinese people.

When translations of Ibsen's dramas were published, several critiques and articles about Ibsen's dramas appeared. It seems like a blow of Ibsen's thinking and plays appearing in every corner of the whole nation. At the same time another turning point appeared in that era, which caused a genuine reform of Chinese drama. In the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, new drama was advocated highly by the Chinese dramatists. Many Chinese intellectuals, such as, Hu Shi, Ouyang Yuqian, and Guo Moruo created their own social problem plays by imitating Ibsen's Nora. Hu Shi's *Zhongshen Dashi* was regarded as the first Chinese social problem drama. It was also criticized as an imitation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Afterwards some other Ibsen-type problem plays which reflected social contradictions and discussed social problems (such as, morality, education, marriage and poverty) emerged one after another in the Chinese literary field. Around May 4<sup>th</sup> period the impact on Chinese problem drama by Ibsen manifests in the following aspects:

1) Ibsen's social problem dramas mainly reflect individual liberty and personality independence; criticize evils in the capitalistic society, such as, unequal marriage relationship, hypocritical morality and family. May 4<sup>th</sup> "Problem Drama" highly developed this thinking. Hu Shi's first female protagonist Tian Yamei was regarded as Nora's Chinese sister who announced love, freedom and individuality in Hu's masterpiece *Zhongshen Dashi*. Hu Shi's play was followed by Ouyang Yuqian's *Pofu*. Yu Suxin, a progressive, freethinking Chinese woman, like Nora, re-evaluates her position in the marriage.

2) It is well-known that Ibsen's problem dramas focus on unmasking gloomy truth of the society, particularly on those issues related to morality, family, law and relationship between individual and society. Most of his plays select daily life and usual affairs happened normally in the capitalistic society as his subjects. By describing the daily true life, Ibsen manifests various evil issues appearing in the real society and brings his social questions forward in his social problem plays. Hu Shi had mentioned in his essay *Yibusheng Zhuayi* that he praised Ibsen because "he tells us the truth, describing the various evil situations of society so that we can have a close look at them"<sup>208</sup>. Since the first Chinese problem drama - *Zhongshen Dashi*, the Chinese intellectuals began to select morality, love, marriage and family issues as their main concern for creating literary works.

3) In most of Ibsen's problem dramas, heroines are often portrayed to be the positive images and moreover they are always depicted as the progressive females who pursue individual freedom and personality independence, such as, Nora, Hedda Gabler. On the contrary, the male characters represent cowardice and depraved dissemblers, such as, Mr. Alving, Helmer, Bernick. The Chinese problem dramas uphold to delineate the ordinary people, especially concerned about those petty bourgeoisie intellectuals in China. Their dramas approve the liberal female to seek freedom and at the same time condemn the male protagonists who pretend to be the gentlemen with moral integrity.

4) Ibsen inserted the dialogues between the characters into his social problem dramas,

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<sup>208</sup> Hu, 1918, published in *Xin Qingnian*, 1918

by which Ibsen managed to express his opinions towards the marriage, family and social issues. This technique also can be found in the Chinese May 4<sup>th</sup> social problem dramas, for example, the discussion about love, the discussion about ethic morality presented in *Zuo Wenjun*.

Ibsen's social problem dramas are regarded as the paragon in the European realistic literature. Yu Shangyuan admires Ibsen's realistic works and said:

Apart from the realistic dialogues, we observe Ibsen's plays real characters, real life and real background...In his plays, Ibsen writes about everyday, real life...Ordinary people in an ordinary environment speak everyday language and are engaged in ordinary matters. But behind the ordinary Ibsen creates extraordinary images. That is the art of great writers.<sup>209</sup>

Chinese problem dramas cling to the contemporary period and promptly reflect the real problems in the ordinary life. They imitate Ibsen's realistic writing methods to describe the true life and reveal the real living situation, as well as manifest the social actuality vividly. Chinese problem dramas become maturity gradually at the same time. Chinese authors use them to depict characters and emphasize the reality of their lives. In addition they also tried to improve the language using in the scripts in order to make them more real.

In a meanwhile, some dramatists stood out and encouraged people to focus on Ibsen's aesthetic art achievements. Their opinion was quite different from those Chinese literary giants. Actually at the beginning Lu Jingruo referred to regard Ibsen first as a dramatist however, it was not until the 1920s when some Chinese dramatists, who gained education from America, presented to re-read Ibsen plays and re-evaluate Ibsen from the dramatist aspect. Besides those Chinese dramatists also told the people that in a certain extent Ibsen was misunderstood and misrepresented. For instance, people ignored the dramatic structure or poetry in Ibsen's plays. Many Chinese people neglected the characters' psychological feelings, as well as the image-building skills. They only emphasized to present the social problems and publicized the individualism. A discussion on whether regarding Ibsen as a thinker or as a dramatist in China lasts

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<sup>209</sup> Yu, 1928, P 12

for many years.

Regarded as the father of Modern drama, Ibsen plays a very significant role in China. He helps China to establish and develop its own modern drama. There are many Chinese dramatists who learn the dramatic techniques and aesthetic depiction skills from Ibsen. In the essay I take Cao Yu for instance and illustrate how those Chinese dramatists learn and use Ibsen's drama techniques. In the 1930s the representative Chinese playwright—Cao Yu drew people's attention. He is regarded as the closest Chinese modern writer to Ibsen. In the Chapter five I particularly analyze Cao Yu and use his masterpiece—*Thunderstorm* as a material generally compare Cao's *Thunderstorm* with Ibsen's major plays. And then I discuss how Ibsen influences Cao Yu and his dramatic creations through the hidden connections. By analyzing, I find several similarities to Ibsen's plays in Cao Yu's plays, especially in his *Thunderstorm*. Cao Yu used not only Ibsen's Retrospective method for reference but he also accepted Ibsen's other drama techniques and combined them to create his own plays, such as, using symbol; suspenseful expression and retrospection. At last of this Chapter I obtain an opinion that Cao Yu treated Ibsen as a gifted artist more than a thinker. Cao Yu made a tremendous contribution to the development of Chinese modern drama, just like the title I posed for the Chapter four, from the 1930s to 1940s was the blossom age for Ibsen-style dramas spreading in China and Cao Yu's effect can not be neglected.

Despite Ibsen had raises and falls for several times since the beginning of Sino-Japan War till the end of the Cultural Revolution, when China re-opened its door to the western, close and frequent co-operations happened between China and the western countries. At this time, Ibsen came back to China with a new point of view. In the recent twenty years, lots of literary critiques and seminars related to Ibsen come out in China, and many Ibsen plays perform as well. In the end of Chapter six, I illustrate a recent performance of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* in order to prospect the development of Chinese modern drama as well as the progressive direction of Chinese Ibsen studies. This performance is re-edited by Chinese Yue Opera, which can be seen a perfect

mixture including both Chinese and Western elements.

In recent years the topic related to “Ibsen in China” arouses more attention not only in the Chinese academic circle but also in the western scale. The Chinese Ibsen studies has tried to draw distance from the western advanced achievements. In a way, Chinese scholars will continually enrich and perfect the existing study contributions and expect to get more valuable efforts for the research on Ibsen in China, from the acceptance and development aspects.

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