

Transforming Tradition

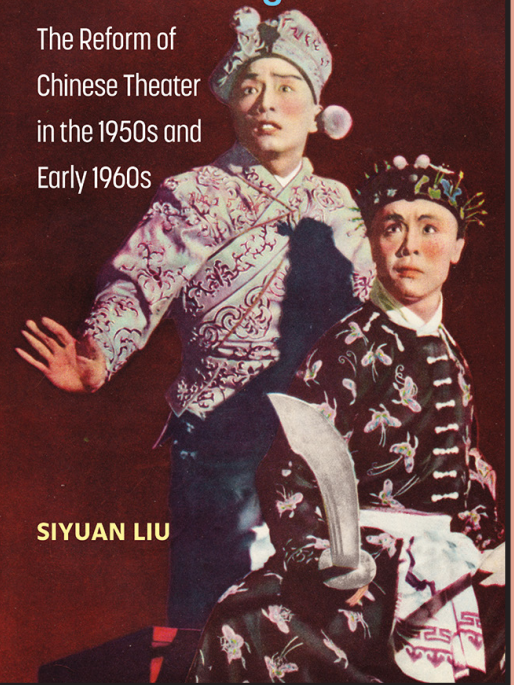
The Reform of Chinese Theater in the 1950s and Early 1960s

Shortly after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the PRC launched a reform campaign that targeted traditional song and dance theater encompassing more than a hundred genres, collectively known as xiqu. Reformers censored or revised xiqu plays and techniques; reorganized star-based private troupes; reassigned the power to create plays from star actors to the newly created functions of playwright, director, and composer; and eliminated market-oriented functionaries such as agents. While the repertoire censorship ended in the 1980s, major reform elements have remained: many traditional scripts (or parts of them) are no longer in performance; actors whose physical memory of repertoire and acting techniques had been the center of play creation, have been superseded by directors, playwrights, and composers. The net result is significantly diminished repertoires and performance techniques, and the absence of star actors capable of creating their own performance styles through new signature plays that had traditionally been one of the hallmarks of a performance school. *Transforming Tradition* offers a systematic study of the effects of the comprehensive reform of traditional theater conducted in the 1950s and '60s, and is based on a decade's worth of exhaustive research of official archival documents, wide-ranging interviews, and contemporaneous publications, most of which have never previously been referenced in scholarly research.

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