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Hua da chao

An Analysis of the Play “Women Beat up the Emperor” and its Interpretation over the Course of Time

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Abstract

New historical dramas and rewritten traditional dramas were one of the few options left to criticize the political and social situation in China between 1958 and 1963. This paper is an analysis of the local opera *Hua da chao* (Women Beat up the Emperor) and its intended interpretation before and after the Cultural Revolution. It compares different versions of the play and examines how it was first used in the early 1960s to criticize the declining political climate within the Communist Party and demand the rehabilitation of Peng Dehuai. In a second step, it analyses the problematic rehabilitation of the play after the Cultural Revolution and looks at how the play was readapted in 1981 to match the official evaluation of Mao's and the "Gang of Four's" role during the Cultural Revolution.

Note: In this paper, the *pinyin* transcription system is used. Chinese characters are listed in a separate glossary at the end of the paper.

1. Introduction

The period between 1958 - the first year of the Great Leap Forward - up to the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 is understood as a stage of steady deterioration of the political climate within the Chinese Communist Party. It was during the late 1950s and early 1960s, a time of economic mismanagement and corrosion of Party unity, that the historical play, which had traditionally served as a last resort for remonstrance, regained significance as one of the few media through which the current situation of the country and the government could still be discussed. A wave of new historical plays (*xinbian lishi ju*) as well as rewritten traditional dramas appeared. Usually set in the emperor's court and evolving around the power struggles, they were by their very nature suitable to assess the situation within the centre of the government of the PRC. This was done via historical innuendo and by employing an established set of techniques that the authors who were involved in the debate usually adhered to.¹

The play to be analysed in this paper, *Hua da chao*, is part of this body of dramas that appeared during the period from 1958 to 1963. It is a rewritten *chuantong xiju* ("traditional play"), and although it does not fulfil the criteria to be considered a *lishi ju* ("historical play"), but was usually classified as a *gushi ju* (a play telling a story), it works with similar premises and interacts to a certain extent with both the new historical plays and other dramas of the time.

Hua da chao is interesting to analyse for several reasons. First of all, no extensive study of a comparable play exists. Discussions and detailed analyses of dramas of this period have so far focused first of all on *Hai Rui baguan* (Hai Rui is Dismissed from Office)² by Wu Han, the play that heralded the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, and second, on the new historical plays and rewritten dramas produced and staged within the theatrical circles of the key cities³ and written by "high-ranking political and cultural leaders within the Party"⁴ such as Wu Han, Tian Han and Guo Moruo, i.e. by people who possessed inside information about the political centre.

Hua da chao fulfils neither criterion. Originating in Henan and rewritten by a 34-year-old woman, it provides insight into dramas produced under different circumstances than the new historical dramas of the key cities. It did receive some attention and was performed

¹ Cf. Wagner, Rudolf G.: *The Contemporary Chinese Historical Drama. Four Studies*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1990. Introduction, p. 247.

² E.g. Fisher, Tom: "The Play's the Thing": Wu Han and Hai Rui Revisited". *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*. 1982. No. 7. Pp. 1-35. , which concludes that Wu Han did not use his play as an allusion to contemporary matters and did not intend a link between Hai Rui and Peng Dehuai.

³ Wagner. *Ibid.* P. 241.

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in Beijing and Shanghai and discussed in both cities as well as reviewed in theatre journals such as *Xiju Yishu*, the journal published by the Beijing Dramatists' Association, and *Wenyibao*, in which the Party published its policies on literature,⁵ but overall, it was a play of only moderate impact compared to the works discussed by the top politicians of the country.

Secondly, its theme constitutes the most extreme end of topics dealt with in historical dramas at that time - beating up the emperor. It was not the first play to beat up the emperor on stage, and it was not the most radical work in every single respect, but nonetheless it is highly provocative, and both its content as well as the reactions it triggered deserve a closer look.

Last but not least, having met with opposition not only during, but also *after* the Cultural Revolution, it is a noteworthy case for the study of the process of rehabilitation and the transformations the play underwent during the early 1980s.

This paper can roughly be divided into two parts. The first part will concentrate on understanding the play as rewritten and performed during the early 1960s. It will analyse how the play echoed the political situation by looking at the text directly and by comparing the changes and revisions made to it. In the second part, the rehabilitation of the play, the new version as well as the movie will be analysed more closely.

Although an attempt is made to place *Hua da chao* in context with similar works, the focus of this study is on understanding the interpretation and the evolvement of the play itself and its function to “use the past to serve the present” (*gu wei jin yong*) under different political circumstances and with different objectives.

2. The Play

2.1 General Overview

Hua da chao is a *yuju*, a traditional Henan Opera, dating back to the Qing dynasty, which was rewritten in the early 1960s. It is set in the Tang dynasty. The *hua* in the title probably stood for *hualian* in the original, a male role with a heavily painted face, and referred to Cheng Yaojin, the Tang emperor's high minister (hence the alternative name of the play, *Cheng Yaojin da chao*).⁶ In the rewritten version, it was meant to stand for *huadan*, a female role in traditional operas, associated with vivacious or immoral characters. *Da* means “to beat up”, and *chao* literally means “court”, but is mostly

⁴ Wagner. Ibid. P. 239.

⁵ Link, Perry: *The Uses of Literature*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000. P. 27.

interpreted as referring to the emperor. So the name can be translated as “Women beating up the Emperor.”

The earliest forms of Henan Operas developed in the middle of the 18th century.⁷ Although one review speculates that *Hua da chao* was written some 300 years ago,⁸ the play is probably considerably younger. What can be said for sure is that it was performed during the early 1920s⁹ by Ma Shuangzhi, a famous Henan opera actress and the teacher of Ma Jinfeng, who was to be the lead actress in the rewritten version later. Also, the original version was still staged in the 1950s shortly before the play was rewritten,¹⁰ in other words, people in Henan were familiar with the play to a certain extent.

The complete original version is not available in a written form. The earliest version was published in 1957 in *A Collection of Local Henan Operas (Henan Difang Xiqu Huibian)*,¹¹ and was the first adaptation by He Lingyun, a young female playwright from Henan born in 1928. He Lingyun had been working for the Luoyang Cultural Bureau since 1955, rewriting plays as her fulltime job.¹² Apart from *Hua da chao*, she had adapted various other plays centred around the emancipation of women.

The 1957 version is already a considerably shortened version of the original play, probably with some other minor changes made. In 1963, the same version was republished in *A Collection of Traditional Plays from Henan: Yuju (Henan chuantong jumu huibian: yuju)*¹³ as part of a larger project initiated in 1962 by the Henan government to preserve the traditional operas and make them more easily accessible.

The play was rewritten in December 1961 by He Lingyun and published in the journal *Juben* in February 1962.¹⁴ Altogether, there are ten different written versions of *Hua da chao*, three of which were published: the first version from 1957, the *Juben* version, and the tenth and final version, which was published in a separate edition in 1982 after the play was rehabilitated.¹⁵ Apart from those three, I have two more handwritten unpublished versions from the Luoyang Henan Opera Company, one from December

⁶ Cf. Zhang Peng: “Yuju ‘Hua da chao’ qiantan”. *Benliu*. 1962. No. 11. P. 41.

⁷ Zhongguo Xiqu Zhi Bianji Weiyuanhui: *Zhongguo Xiqu Zhi: Henan Juan*. Beijing: Wenhua Yishu Chubanshe, 1992. P. 73.

⁸ Zhang Zhen: “‘Hua da chao’ chongkan yougan”. *Renmin xiju*. 1981. No. 8. P. 38.

⁹ *Zhongguo Xiqu Zhi: Henan Juan*. Ibid. Pp. 73-74.

¹⁰ Ibid. P. 661.

¹¹ Yang Jinyu (oral narration) He Lingyun (written record): *Hua da chao*. In: *Henan difang xiqu huibian: Yuju di san ji*. Zhengzhou: Henan sheng jumu gongzuo weiyuanhui, 1957. Pp.37-65.

¹² *Zhongguo yuju da cidian*. P.249.

¹³ Yang Jinyu (oral narration) He Lingyun (written record): *Hua Da Chao*. In: *Henan Sheng jumu gongzuo weiyuanhui: Henan chuantong jumu huibian: Yuju*. Zhengzhou: Henan Sheng jumu gongzuo weiyuanhui, 1963. Pp. 289-330.

¹⁴ He Lingyun: *Hua Da Chao. Juben*. 1962. No. 2. Pp. 45-65.

1962 (fourth rewritten version)¹⁶ and one from January 1963.¹⁷

Before and after the play was published in *Juben*, He Lingyun received “assistance” from various intellectuals such as Zhao Xun, Zhang Zhen, Qu Liuyi, Liu Naichong, and Li Bing, who helped with rewriting the play and “added colour.”¹⁸ It is, however, not stated specifically to what extent other people contributed and how much was rewritten by He Lingyun herself. Zhang Zhen, who had been working for the editorial board of *Juben* since 1952,¹⁹ wrote an article²⁰ about the process of adapting the play that was published together with *Hua da chao*. He also wrote more reviews later, which suggests that he was probably fairly committed to the play.

The play was to be performed by the Luoyang Henan Opera Company, with Ma Jinfeng in the main role, an actress born in 1922 working for the Henan Opera country, who was named one of Henan’s five famous female actresses (*wu da mingdan*) in 1980 by the Henan Ministry of Culture.²¹

When Zhang Zhen suggested Yang Lanchun as director of the play, Ma Jinfeng personally went to Zhengzhou in order to persuade him. The prospective director, however, was not interested in staging *Hua da chao*. He had only been rehabilitated in 1961 after being purged as a “right opportunist” in 1959, and he had the suspicion that staging this particular play might cause him some more trouble. After the intervention of some leaders from the Henan Propaganda Department and the province’s Ministry of Culture, who endorsed the play and talked to Yang Lanchun, the latter agreed to directing *Hua da chao*.²²

Hua da chao was first staged on July 1, 1962 at the Xigong Shanghai Theatre in Luoyang. Later during that year as well as in 1963, the Henan arts journal *Benliu* organized several conferences for the play and published a series of articles discussing it.

In early 1963, the Luoyang Henan Opera Company was invited to Beijing to perform the play for the celebration of the Spring Festival. This was not the first time that *Hua da chao* was performed in the capital. The Anyang Henan Opera Company had done so before in September 1962.²³ On February 8 1963, the Dramatists’ Association convened

¹⁵ He Lingyun: *Hua Da Chao*. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1982.

¹⁶ He Lingyun: *Hua Da Chao (Fourth Version)*. Luoyang Shi Yuju Yi Tuan. 1962.

¹⁷ He Lingyun: *Yuju Hua Da Chao*. Luoyang Yuju Yi Tuan. 1963.

¹⁸ Zhang Pufu: *Luoyang Mudan Ma Jinfeng*. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1988. P. 130.

¹⁹ Ma Liangchun and Li Futian (eds.): *Zhongguo wenxue da cidian*. Tianjin Renmin Chubanshe.

²⁰ Zhang Zhen: “Du yuju ‘Hua da chao’”. *Juben*. 1962. No. 2. Pp. 66-69.

²¹ *Zhongguo Xiqu Zhi*. Ibid. P.76

²² Zhang Pufu. Ibid. Pp. 131-133.

²³ “Qie shuo yuju ‘Da chao’”. *Beijing wanbao*. 28.09.1962. P. 3.

a conference for the play chaired by Tian Han.²⁴ It was also staged in Shanghai by the Luoyang Henan Opera Company, where another conference was initiated by the troupe itself.²⁵ Apart from that, *Hua da chao* was adapted into five other forms of operas, such as *pingju* (a local opera of the North East) and *chuanju* (Sichuan opera), and was performed by more than 30 opera companies in various other provinces.²⁶ In some cases, He Lingyun's rewritten version seems to have served as the basis; in other cases, the play was possibly adapted independently of the 1962 *Juben* version.

After being criticized during the Cultural Revolution and rehabilitated in 1979, the play was restaged in Beijing in July 1981. A second conference was convened in the capital to thoroughly wipe the play clean of the accusations of the Cultural Revolution as well as new concerns that had been raised.²⁷ In 1982, the movie *Qi nainai* (Lady Cheng) was produced by the Hong Kong Golden Horse Film Company (*Xianggang Jinma Dianying Gongsi*) in cooperation with the Henan Performance Company (*Henan Sheng yanchu gongsi*).²⁸

Below, a summary of the play as published in *Juben* will be given. It must be noted that the play underwent quite a few changes before it was performed, and that the handwritten theatre drafts, to which the *Juben* version will be compared later, were much closer to what was actually performed on stage in the early 1960s.

2.2 Summary

In act one, young general Luo Tong returns victoriously after putting down an uprising and is rewarded for his merits.

In act two, while parading across his new fiefdom, Luo Tong is stopped by a sign erected by the emperor for the villain Su Dingfang, requiring all who pass by to dismount. This privilege was only granted to him because his younger sister is married to the emperor. Luo Tong decides to ignore the sign as it is undeserved and continues on horseback, but he is stopped by a servant of Su Dingfang's. Luo Tong insists that he would dismount for everyone except Su Dingfang, and asks the villain,

²⁴ "Xijujie Zuotan 'Hua Da Chao'". *Beijing Wanbao*. 10.02.1963. P.4.

²⁵ "Yuju 'Hua da chao' shi zhengli de jiao chengong de xiju". *Wenhui*. 14.05.1981. P. 2.

²⁶ "Yuju Yishu Zonghui" Bianji Weiyuanhui: *Yuju Yishu Zonghui*. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1993. P. 447.

²⁷ Feng Lisan: "Juxie juban yuju 'Hua da chao' zuotanhui". *Guangming ribao*. 24.07.1981. P. 2.

²⁸ Guo Lin: "'Qi nainai' banshang yinmu". *Xiqu Yishu (Henan)*. 1982. No.3. P.102.

Did you become an official because you have the talents of a bureaucrat or those of a general?

[No!] You exchanged the golden crown of the empress to obtain your official's hat.

[...]

I earned my position because of my military merits.

Not like you...(sneers) Ha ha...

Do you not feel ashamed to be a "rouge and powder official?"²⁹

Su Dingfang is outraged and threatens Luo Tong that

I am an the brother-in-law of this dynasty's emperor!

Who does not respect me?

I only have to cough and even the spirits are afraid!³⁰

He then orders his housekeeper to force Luo Tong to dismount. The latter pulls the villain's moustache, beats him up and rides off. Su Dingfang deliberately tears and tramples his own clothes and leaves for the imperial palace to denounce Luo Tong.

In act three, the emperor is sitting on his throne praising the state of the empire, which thanks to him is perfect. Su Dingfang bursts in and accuses Luo Tong of wanting to start a rebellion, deliberately talking the emperor into believing that the attack was directed at the latter himself. Suspicious and paranoid Li Shimin is immediately convinced and has Luo Tong ordered to be executed.

In act four, Lady Cheng, the wife of the high minister Cheng Yaojin and the protagonist of the play, first enters the stage and introduces herself as a fearless (*tian bu pa*) lady who will take on anybody who wrongs her. She is on her way to a banquet to celebrate Luo Tong's enfeoffment, together with the wives and widows of the other high dignitaries of the state.

Act five takes place at the banquet and serves to highlight Lady Cheng's personality using various plays of words, trivial fights among the women, and other comical scenes. When Lady Cheng has just left to bring her servant some food, a soldier enters and informs the women of what has happened. The women decide to go to the court to pass a memorial and save Luo Tong. They elect Lady Cheng in her absence as leader of the mission, explaining that she is the only of the women with power and influence at the

²⁹ *Hua da chao. Juben*. Ibid. P. 46-47. All translated excerpts from the various versions of the play are quoted in the Chinese original in the appendix.

³⁰ Ibid. P. 47.

court, as all other founding members of the Tang except her husband are already dead. Lady Cheng first pretends to refuse to act as the leader in order to test whether the other women are willing to act on their own, but then happily takes on the responsibility.

In act six, Su Dingfang guards the gate in order to prevent remonstrators from getting inside. The other women do not dare to pass him. Lady Cheng comes and accuses them of being intimidated too easily. She asks them to guard the execution ground to protect Luo Tong. She herself wants to go see the emperor and announces that if he refuses to pardon Luo Tong she will “turn the court upside down and beat up the stupid emperor.”³¹ When Su Dingfang accuses her of interfering in petty issues, Lady Cheng declares that when “slandering ministers and trumping up charges against loyal people are the order of the day, it is an important state concern.”³² He argues that there are enough ministers at the court, and the fact that she as a woman intervenes is completely ridiculous. Lady Cheng kicks him and knocks out his front teeth in response.

In act seven, Lady Cheng explains to the emperor that his order to execute Luo Tong is against the law, as the young general did not attack the emperor himself. She asks him to consider Luo Tong’s merits and those of his father, Luo Cheng. The emperor does not give in and claims that Luo Tong is out of control and will dare to hit the ruler next. When both run out of arguments, he tells Lady Cheng that she as a woman ought not interfere in politics. Lady Cheng takes a chair and sits down directly facing the emperor, who is outraged and accuses her of wanting to start a rebellion. Lady Cheng takes up the chair and tries to hit the emperor, who, however, is able to escape and lock himself into his palace.

In act eight, the high minister Cheng Yaojin is on his way back home and can sense that something is not right.

In act nine, Cheng Yaojin returns and is greeted by his wife, who tells him what happened. She has Lord Cheng reconfirm that Luo Tong was absolutely right in the way he acted, and then reports how she tried to talk to the emperor, who first insulted her and then fled like a coward. Cheng Yaojin curses her as useless since she was not able to kill Li Shimin when she had the chance to. Thereafter, he leads his soldiers and the women to the palace in order to free Luo Tong.

In the tenth and final act, the Chengs first destroy the execution sword with the words

³¹ *Hua da chao. Juben.* Ibid. P. 55.

³² Ibid. P. 56.

“you will never kill loyal and honest people again!”³³ They ask some of the women to guard the execution grounds and take the others along with them in order to prevent the emperor from escaping again. Cheng Yaojin is convinced that the emperor will immediately set Luo Tong free once he remonstrates. When Su Dingfang sees Lord and Lady Cheng, he hides under the throne. The emperor receives the couple politely and offers Cheng Yaojin all types of rewards for his merits: he does not have to come to court for a hundred days and will receive gold and more land. Each time, Cheng Yaojin is about to thank him humbly and is only prevented from doing so by his wife, who immediately realizes what Li Shimin is planning. She reproaches her husband for being so subservient and explains to him that the seeming “rewards” of the emperor are only means to keep him away from government so that he can act as he wills and kill whom he wills. She reminds him that they only want to save Luo Tong. Cheng Yaojin threatens the emperor with his axe, which he was rewarded for his merits, and requests that he issue a decree for Luo Tong to be pardoned. However, the emperor deceives him by issuing a false decree, in which he stubbornly reaffirms that “even if you intercede [on Luo Tong’s behalf] again, I have decided to execute him and will not tolerate [remonstrance].”³⁴ When Cheng Yaojin finds out, even he becomes angry. The Chengs sit down on the throne together, declaring that “the emperor of our court is no good.”³⁵ Cheng Yaojin accuses him that “You believe slander, harm loyal and honest people, and bring the guiding principles of our dynasty into great disarray. I will first hit you stupid emperor and then get rid of the traitor.”³⁶ When Cheng Yaojin tries to hit him with the axe, the emperor wants to flee, but is prevented from doing so by the other women. Next, Lady Cheng tries to smash the emperor, who hides behind his throne. In the course of events, the throne is turned over, revealing Su Dingfang hiding behind it. Lady Cheng declares that remonstrance is useless with this emperor who does not listen. She proposes to pre-emptively avenge Luo Tong’s unpreventable death by killing Su Dingfang. Su Dingfang begs the emperor to set Luo Tong free; the emperor gives in under pressure. Cheng Yaojin requests that he announce Luo Tong’s pardon personally, as he does not trust him any longer. The emperor complies, and Su Dingfang is chased from court. At the end, Lady Cheng advises Luo Tong either to leave Su Dingfang alone the next time or to beat him to death. The emperor announces a banquet to reconcile his relationship with

³³ Ibid. P. 62.

³⁴ *Hua da chao. Juban.* Ibid. P. 64.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid. P. 65.

Cheng Yaojin.

2.3 The Characters

The Tang Emperor's name is not mentioned. He was generally understood to be Tang Taizong (Li Shimin), although the emperor referred to in the original play might actually have been Tang Gaozong. At least one of the Tang ministers who is mentioned as dead (Yuchi Jingde) actually lived longer than Li Shimin.³⁷ As the original play is not based on historical research, the emperor does not have to have been Tang Gaozong, but there is no proof that he was intended to be Taizong, either. There is a reference to Li Shimin's rule of *zhenguan*, but that was only added later in the revised play. One adaptation of the play into a Sichuan opera interprets the emperor as Gaozong,³⁸ but apart from that, there was a consensus in the 1960s and later that the Tang emperor was meant to be Li Shimin. Historically the second emperor of the Tang dynasty who reigned from 626 till 649 A.D., Tang Taizong is considered one of the greatest emperors in Chinese history, famous for his land reforms and reforms in the civil and military services.³⁹ In the play, however, Li Shimin is presented as a pathetic egomaniac who is controlled by a traitor and completely misjudges the political situation of the country. His character traits are exclusively negative: he is paranoid; Su Dingfang has no problem in nurturing his fear and making him believe that Luo Tong is trying to attack him personally and will start a revolt. He is a coward: when Lady Cheng attacks him, he flees and locks himself inside his palace. He breaks his own laws. He is dishonest: he tries to cheat the Chengs by issuing a fake decree and attempts to bribe his ministers in order to keep them out of politics. There is no mention of his having gained his throne because of any talents; he owes his position entirely to the merits of the founding fathers. However, he is not overthrown once the problem has been solved.

Su Dingfang, historically speaking a loyal minister of the Tang emperor, is the declared villain of the play. He introduces himself with the words: "My heart is like a ferocious tiger without fur. When killing people I do not need a knife!"⁴⁰ It is clearly stated and reiterated at various points in the play where his power derives from: he is a *qundaiguan* -

³⁷ Yuchi Jingde died in 658, eleven years after Tang Taizong. Cf. "Yuchi Jingde, Qin Jing yu Cheng Yaojin", in: Feng Junshi: *Xiju renwu yu lishi renwu*. Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1982. P. 61.

³⁸ Cao Jiang: "Shi qingnian chuanjutuan shangyan yizhi de xin xi 'Cheng furen nao chao'". *Chengdu wanbao*. 16.03.1963. P.2.

³⁹ Giles, Herbert A.: *A Chinese Bibliographical Dictionary*. Taipei: Cheng Wen Publishing Co. Ltd., 1975. Pp. 461-462.

⁴⁰ *Hua da chao. Juban*. Ibid. P. 46.

someone who got his power via his female relatives. Only because his sister is married to the emperor, does the latter favour him and grant him special privileges so that he has the power to tyrannize even the offspring of the high ministers. This position is completely unjustified in the eyes of the other protagonists. Su Dingfang manipulates the emperor by nurturing his fears. He schemes and accuses those who rightfully oppose him of planning to overthrow the emperor. He is hated at the court: everyone is glad when he is beaten up. He is a bootlicker and curries favour with the emperor by flattering him and by unconditionally affirming all that he says. Apart from that he is a coward, just like the emperor: he runs away when Lady Cheng beats him up and hides behind the throne when trouble arises at the palace.

Lady Cheng. Cheng Yaojin's wife and the main character of the play, is not a historical person. She is a fierce, resolute woman, and the only one who has the courage to stand up to the emperor and his treacherous minister. Her husband being the only of the *guogong*, the founders of the dynasty, who is still alive, she is the only one with influence at the court among the *gaoming*, the widows and wives of the high dignitaries of the dynasty. As far as her language and actions are concerned, she is the most radical of the characters. She refers to the emperor as "stupid little emperor" (*xiao hun wang*) throughout the entire play and makes clear from the very beginning that she will smash the court and beat up the emperor if he does not give in. As opposed to her husband, who falters and needs to be pushed, she never hesitates to put her words into action.

Cheng Yaojin, a loyal minister of Li Shimin, is the only founding member of the dynasty still alive at the time of the play. Historically speaking, he was also the one who died last of the ministers involved in founding the dynasty. The first thing we learn about him is that he is not there when the problem occurs. He is "overseas bestowing titles"⁴¹ (*haiwai fengwang*). When he returns, his wife and the widows of the other founding members all hope for him to be able to solve the problem. He, too, is rather convinced of himself. However, while he stresses that the emperor will set Luo Tong free if he remonstrates, he immediately bows and scrapes when Li Shimin tries to bribe him. The relationship between Li Shimin and Cheng Yaojin is not very good: upon learning that his wife did not manage to kill the emperor the high minister is disappointed. In the end, even Cheng Yaojin curses the emperor, sits on his throne and chases Su Dingfang away together with his wife. In his choice of words and with his actions, however, he is always outdone by Lady Cheng.

⁴¹ *Hua da chao. Juben.* Ibid. P. 59.

Luo Tong is the quick-tempered son of Luo Cheng, a founding member of the dynasty. He has just returned victoriously from a battle putting down an uprising, and has only been enfeoffed by the emperor shortly before being arrested and sentenced to death. He is convinced of himself and knocks Su Dingfang down without hesitation. His position, however, is earned, and his reaction to the villain portrayed as absolutely justified.

The other women are the widows of the deceased high dignitaries of the dynasty. They act on their own initiative, and they are willing to save Luo Tong even without Lady Cheng's leadership. In the last act, they announce that they will rebel, irrespective of what the Chengs told them to do. However, they are intimidated much more easily than Lady Cheng and therefore depend on her as their leader.

3. Analysis

3.1 Comparison to the Original Version

Guan Hanqing,⁴² a meta-play by Tian Han about a playwright from the Yuan dynasty writing a play set in the Han dynasty, can be said to have set the standards for using the new historical drama in order to discuss the contemporary situation.⁴³ Later historical plays did in fact apply the same or similar techniques to a large extent.

One of the rules that can be derived from *Guan Hanqing* is that “an important indicator of an allusion to touchy contemporary issues is a change imposed on the record of the past so that it matches the present.”⁴⁴ The same rule can be applied when comparing the rewritten version of a play to its original version. With a play that is not based on historical research, strong deviations from the historical record can possibly serve to strengthen or draw attention to a certain point (the “historical accuracy”, or rather inaccuracy, of *Hua da chao* was often addressed in reviews), but overall the play's possibilities for working with historical allusions is limited. Looking at the changes made to the original version obviously yields better and more concrete results in the case of a *gushi ju*.

Not every single change was necessarily made in order to match the present, and not every detail that remains identical with the original is innocuous by nature, but when analysing details of the play, it should always be kept in mind whether an alteration was undertaken or not. Therefore the most important differences between the “original” and the version from 1962 will be outlined below.

⁴² Tian Han: *Guan Hanqing*. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1961.

⁴³ Wagner. *Ibid.* P. 247.

The original version of the play had more than 20 acts, and begins with Luo Tong's setting out to put down the uprising.⁴⁵ The abridged version by He Lingyun from 1957 has 13 acts, i.e. a pre-selection had already taken place earlier without second thoughts about the contemporary meaning.

The character of Su Dingfang is considerably vilified in the rewritten version. In the original, he tries to avoid confrontation with Luo Tong, who is deliberately searching for trouble, blocks Su Dingfang's path several times and bullies him. Also, Su Dingfang originally does not have a direct link to the emperor. His sister is married to Li Daozong, a member of the imperial family and an official,⁴⁶ and it is only through Daozong that Su has the chance to see the emperor. Li Daozong is completely left out in the *Juben* version and all later version. Su Dingfang's sister is thus conveniently turned into the emperor's wife - and the traitor into his undeserved favourite. The plate (*xia ma pai*) is also an invention of the later version.

Lady Cheng (*Cheng Qi Nainai*), who is called *Cheng Si Nainai*⁴⁷ in the original, is less than willing to help, claiming that Luo Tong has always had a bad temper. In fact, she only agrees to lead the mission when the other women threaten to force all the food she has eaten at the banquet out of her again. Overall, Lady Cheng has much more comical than heroic traits in the original version.

After Cheng Yaojin returns from an excursion "stealing treasures in the Eastern sea"⁴⁸ (*donghai daobao*), he takes over and has no trouble solving the problem. The emperor immediately releases Luo Tong as soon as his high minister interferes and threatens to kill both him and the two ministers, Su Dingfang and Li Daozong. Afterwards, however, Cheng Yaojin apologizes to the emperor, and Lady Cheng admonishes Luo Tong for his bad behaviour. The emperor announces a banquet to celebrate Cheng Yaojin's return. Both Su Dingfang, and Li Daozong retain their positions.

Although many scenes from the original were kept, the rewritten version has a completely different focus. In the *Qing* version, there are no clearly good or bad characters. The emphasis is never on getting rid of Su Dingfang, who is called a

⁴⁴ Wagner. Ibid. P.35.

⁴⁵ He Lingyun: "Xie zai 'Hua Da Chao' chuban zhiqian", in He Lingyun: *Hua Da Chao*. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1982. P.69.

⁴⁶ Wright, Arthur F. and Denis Twitchett (eds.): *Perspectives on the T'ang*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973. Pp. 93 and 450.

⁴⁷ This is one of the most obvious changes. In the original, however, Lady Cheng was either referred to as *Cheng si nainai* or as *Qi sao*. The change of the name possibly served other functions, too, but it was probably undertaken in the first place to align the two names, seven as the luckier number displacing four.

⁴⁸ *Hua da chao*. *Henan chuantong yuju huibian*. Ibid. P. 320.

treacherous minister, but clearly fails to live up to that name. He does have a *bailian* (white face) and therefore is the declared villain in the original, but he does not trump up charges, and it is clarified that it was wrong of Luo Tong to beat him.

The emperor is also attacked verbally in the original. Cheng Yaojin charges that “there is no upright ruler in the imperial palace.”⁴⁹ But the emperor’s only fault in the original is overreacting in this one particular case. Apart from that, the legitimacy of his rule is not questioned. In the new version, however, the power situation at the court is presented as a *general* problem that is only manifested in the imminent conflict. The women say of Su Dingfang that “[he] always (*pingshi*) tyrannizes people, and today he is bullying us.”⁵⁰ Similarly, Lady Cheng accuses the emperor when he threatens to execute Lord Cheng that “you [always] go around chopping people’s heads off (*zhan lai zhan qu*).”⁵¹

Also, the conflict cannot be solved as easily. The role of Cheng Yaojin, who is the one in the original to threaten to beat up the emperor while his wife only stands by and watches, is considerably altered in the new play. The final act was completely rewritten to assign Cheng Yaojin the more passive part and reduce him to a secondary character incapable of acting without Lady Cheng.

From the changes to the original it can be inferred that four points received special attention. First of all, the generally bad political atmosphere, second, the villain, third, the imminent conflict brought about by the villain, and last, who is able to solve the conflict and how.

3.2 “Using the Past to Serve the Present”

3.2.1 The Political Situation

The economic situation is not mentioned anywhere in the play. The political situation, however, is a catastrophe. The emperor on the throne is incompetent, self-aggrandizing, and completely unaware of the disastrous state his nation is in politically. He is controlled by a scheming minister, whom he favours not because of his merits, but because of the personal relationship between the two. The villain enjoys special privileges (the sign), which he uses to “unhorse” those with real merits. Due to his paranoia that his position might be threatened, the emperor is very susceptible to the schemes and lies of the villain. He has distanced himself from his loyal ministers and exclusively listens to the traitor. The traditional path to politics via remonstrance or reasoning with the emperor has thus

⁴⁹ *Hua da chao. Henan chuantong yuju huibian*. Ibid. P. 329.

⁵⁰ *Hua da chao. Juben*. Ibid. P. 53.

been blocked. In this system, loyal people are supposed have to pay with their lives, in this case for justly attacking the villain.

The founding members of the dynasty are first of all characterized by their absence: all of them except one are dead, and the remaining one is gone at the beginning and has a lot less influence at the court than he himself believes. The other ministers of the new generation are not essentially bad. They, too, hate Su Dingfang; however, they are not willing or able to step in forcefully. In other words, injustice is happening, and those who theoretically ought to have the power and responsibility to intervene are not doing their job properly.

All of this can be counted as the “realistic” part of the play, which has some sort of counterpart in the contemporary situation. Eliminating the traitor and restoring justice, on the other hand, is clearly the “romantic” part of the play, which is usually meant to express the hope that the problem can be solved.

As mentioned above, the play is set in the *Tang* dynasty, which was a popular setting for historical dramas because the word *Tang* (the *Tang* dynasty) sounds similar to *dang* (the Party).⁵² If the presupposition of a play of words in this case is correct, the power struggles at the court thus describe the power struggles inside the Party in the “present”, i.e. the early 1960s. The reference to the contemporary situation is further reinforced by using words such as “today”, or “our dynasty”, “our court”, etc.⁵³, as in “the emperor of our court is no good”⁵⁴ (emphasis added). In *Hua da chao*, no excessive use of generalized statements with “today” is made, but there is a steady increase, with only a few in the *Qing* version, more in *Juben*, and yet some more in the stage drafts.

In accordance with the Soviet socialist tradition under Stalin, the emperor on stage in the PRC referred to the highest political leader in the country.⁵⁵ The identification of the Tang emperor with Li Shimin was useful in several respects: first of all, interpreting the emperor as Gaozong, a “weakling” who lost his empire to Wu Zetian, would not only have been extremely unflattering, but probably far too risky at a time when many people were aware of who the emperor on stage was meant to represent. More importantly, Li Shimin, did have quite a few parallels to Mao. He is often seen as co-founder of the *Tang*,⁵⁶ and considered the greatest emperor of his dynasty and one of the greatest in

⁵¹ *Hua da chao. Juben.* Ibid. P. 64.

⁵² Wagner. *The Contemporary Chinese Historical Drama.* Ibid. P. 102.

⁵³ Another technique applied in *Guan Hanqing* and later dramas. Cf. Wagner. Ibid. P. 47.

⁵⁴ *Hua da chao. Juben.* P. 64.

⁵⁵ Cf. Wagner: “In Guise of a Congratulation”. P. ?

⁵⁶ Cf. Bingham, Woodbridge: *The Founding of the T'ang Dynasty. The Fall of the Sui and Rise of the*

Chinese history. Mao is usually presented as one of the co-founders of the *dang*, and everybody, including himself, was convinced that he outshone the first four “generations” of party leaders (that is as defined by himself⁵⁷) by a large margin.

As for the less flattering parallels in the play, Mao was accused of having become “‘despotic and dictatorial’, [...] ‘vain and fond of credit’ and ‘biased in view and faith’”⁵⁸ to quote his own words from the Lushan plenum in 1959. All of these points aptly describe Li Shimin as portrayed in *Hua da chao*. There was considerable discontent in the Party at and even before the Lushan plenum about Mao’s “individual style”,⁵⁹ a problem which was targeted more directly in the revised version of the play from December 1962, as will be seen below.

3.2.2 The “Villain”

The evil counsellor controlling the emperor is characterized fairly explicitly: Su Dingfang derives his power and position from his special status he enjoys with the emperor because of his “younger sister,” who is married to the emperor. This detail is highlighted throughout the *Juben* version and even more persistently so in the later handwritten versions. It was Kang Sheng who in 1938 smoothed the way for Mao to marry Jiang Qing, who came from the same village as Kang himself, by vouching that she was not a *Guomindang* agent. Kang Sheng derived his power in Yan’an from his personal relationship with the Chairman through the latter’s wife, both of whom were indebted to him after he had intervened on their behalf.⁶⁰ By the time the play was performed, Kang Sheng and Jiang Qing went to watch plays together and were therefore associated with one another. The reference to Su Dingfang’s “sister” is already a fairly explicit allusion. It is much more direct than the references made in other plays in which the main villain was probably meant to refer to Kang Sheng. However, there are more parallels, almost all of Su’s characteristics matching Kang.

The play stresses that Su Dingfang does not deserve the sign erected by the emperor because of having no merits. Between 1950 and 1956, despite being a full member of the Politburo, Kang Sheng had stayed out of politics pretending to be ill after having been

T’ang. A Preliminary Survey. New York: Octagon Books, 1970. P. 120.

⁵⁷ Cf. Li Kwok-sing (compiler) and Mary Lok (translator): *A Glossary of Political Terms of the People’s Republic of China*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press. P. 62-63.

⁵⁸ Teiwes, Frederick: *Politics and Purges in China*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1979. P. 406.

⁵⁹ Teiwes. *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Cf. Byron, John and Robert Pack: *The Claws of the Dragon. Kang Sheng - The Evil Genius Behind Mao - and his Legacy of Terror in People’s China*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992. Pp. 145-149.

deprived of his important posts.⁶¹ According to MacFarquhar, most cadres could not understand why he occupied such a high position,⁶² which is exactly the point made repeatedly in *Hua da chao*.

Although he was demoted to alternate member in 1956, it was that year that he made his political reappearance. He was asked to edit the fourth volume of *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* and was put in charge of the work at the Central Party School in 1959.⁶³ He thus occupied a powerful position in the field of ideology as an “authority on theory (*lilun quanwei*),”⁶⁴ which, according to the *Critical Biography of Kang Sheng (Kang Sheng pingzhuan)*, he wanted to use to “intimidate those beneath him that he exercised leadership over.”⁶⁵ Kang Sheng flattered the Chairman both in person and by elevating Mao Zedong thought above the works of Marx and Lenin.

An article in the Beijing *Wanbao* announcing the premiering of *Hua da chao* in the capital mentions casually that Su Dingfang received the plate from the emperor while the country was still in the process of being unified.⁶⁶ Kang Sheng rose to power and was put in charge of the Social Affairs Department, i.e. the secret police in Yan’an. Regardless of this comment, the sign could refer to any of his positions, both past and present, basically anything that gave him power to exercise control over and “unhorse” others.

Just like Su Dingfang, Kang Sheng was very unpopular with many other members of the government, as he had made a considerable number of enemies during his time in Yan’an.⁶⁷

Kang Sheng also never had a problem with twisting around the facts when persecuting people for his own advantage, neither during his years in Yan’an⁶⁸ when he was head of the secret police, nor during the anti-rightist⁶⁹ and the anti-right opportunist campaign.⁷⁰ His role in the campaign against right opportunists, which will be dealt with below in more detail, has quite a few parallels to the “campaign” Su Dingfang runs against Luo Tong.

⁶¹ Ibid. P. 206.

⁶² Macfarquhar, Roderick: *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*. Vol. 3. *The Coming of the Cataclysm. 1961-1966*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press and Columbia University Press, 1997. P. 292.

⁶³ Cf. Zhongkan: *Kang Sheng pingzhuan*. P. 114.

⁶⁴ Ibid. P. 118.

⁶⁵ Ibid. P. 114.

⁶⁶ “Luoyang Shi yuju Yi Tuan jinwan shouyan ‘Hua da chao’”. *Beijing Wanbao*. 01.02.1963. P.4.

⁶⁷ Cf. Byron and Pack. Ibid. P. 222.

⁶⁸ Cf. Ibid. P. 181.

⁶⁹ Cf. Ibid. P. 229.

As could be seen from the comparison with the original play, Su Dingfang was intentionally turned into a scheming minister in the new version. Almost all features he has in common with Kang Sheng were newly written into the play in the 1960s or rewritten so that they matched Kang Sheng. Some of the parallels between Su Dingfang and Kang Sheng listed above might have been unintentional, but this does not detract from the overall picture.

3.2.3 The Conflict

After criticising the Great Leap Forward at the Lushan plenum, Peng Dehuai, Huang Kecheng, Luo Fu, and Zhou Xiaozhou were declared “right opportunists” and an “anti-Party clique” (*fandang jituan*). In the ensuing months, a campaign against right opportunists was launched against higher level cadres and extended to lower level cadres as well,⁷¹ who ultimately seem to have borne the brunt of the campaign.

Hua da chao was criticized during the Cultural Revolution, among other points, for “rehabilitating right opportunists,” a standard accusation. It would have been interesting to see whether Luo Tong was read as Peng Dehuai, which was mostly the case when plays were criticized for supporting or rehabilitating “right opportunists”, such as in the case of *Sun An Dong Ben*,⁷² but I do not have a more detailed explanation of this claim.

As opposed to *Sun An Dong Ben* and most other plays of the time, *Hua Da Chao* does not touch upon the issue of famine or other economic problems (except for a single subtle allusion as part of the emperor’s self-praising comment added later in 1962). The main conflict is clearly a political one.

There are a few parallels between Luo Tong and Peng Dehuai. Luo Tong is a general who has a problem controlling his temper and is demoted shortly after being rewarded for his merits. The repetition of phrases such as “Luo Tong is a loyal general!”⁷³ - which increasingly appear in the version from December 1962 - certainly also help to link the two.

The incident triggering the conflict is Luo Tong’s beating up Su Dingfang. An advocate of the Great Leap himself in the field of education,⁷⁴ Kang Sheng very likely did feel personally attacked by Peng Dehuai’s criticism. He played a very active role in attacking

⁷⁰ Cf. Byron. Ibid. P. 237-238.

⁷¹ Teiwes. Ibid. P. 429.

⁷² Lin Jinza: “‘Sun An Dong Ben’ shi yi chu peihe Peng Dehuai fandang de heixi”. *Xiju Zhanbao*. No. 12. 07.09.1967. P.3. In: *A New Collection of Red Guard Publications Part II*. Vol.32. P. 12615.

⁷³ E.g. *Hua da chao*. Fourth Version. 1962.12. Ibid. P. 75.

⁷⁴ Zhongkan: *Kang Sheng pingzhuan*. Beijing: Hongqi Chubanshe, 1982. Pp. 120-133.

Peng Dehuai at the Lushan Plenum and was put in charge of the group investigating Peng Dehuai's case during the ensuing campaign against right-opportunists.⁷⁵ Apparently it was also Kang Sheng who launched the attack against other higher Party cadres.⁷⁶ In the play, Su Dingfang asks permission to overlook Luo Tong's execution, and the emperor grants him his wish.

Su Dingfang claims that Luo Tong has ambitions to overthrow the emperor, the phrase in the *Juben* version being "If he wins another battle, how can he not want to start a rebellion (*zao fan*)?"⁷⁷ As mentioned above, the critics of the Great Leap were accused of having formed an "anti-Party clique" (*fandang jituan*). The line was later in December 1962 changed to "How can he not want my lord's empire (*ta qi bu yao yao wo zhu jiangshan*)?"⁷⁸, i.e. the empire of the *Tang/dang*. Peng Dehuai was officially charged with planning to usurp the Party (*cuan dang*). Kang Sheng is known to have held forth about this accusation, commenting that Peng Dehuai's real name should have been "Peng Dehua" to suit his ambitions to get hold of China.⁷⁹

Nonetheless, it should not be forgotten that all of the major alterations were in the first place made with respect to the *villain*. Luo Tong's role and status, apart from the fact that he was turned into a more upright person, was hardly changed.

In any case, an exact one-to-one reading of Luo Tong as Peng Dehuai simply from looking at the *Juben* version is not possible. The main conflict is the bad political climate due to an ignorant ruler who lets his favourite tyrannize good people. Special emphasis is also put on the struggle against this "treacherous minister" who frames people on a regular basis. Luo Tong does not criticize mismanagement of the country and those responsible for the calamities; he only attacks the "treacherous minister" after being provoked. There were other "right opportunists" whose criticism of the Great Leap had attacked Kang Sheng much more directly than Peng Dehuai's.⁸⁰ The point is not that Luo Tong specifically referred to any other of the people declared "right opportunists", but that Kang Sheng attacked anybody who "pulled his moustache" or whom he felt

⁷⁵ Cf. Byron and Pack. *Ibid.* P. 237.

⁷⁶ Cf. *Ibid.* P. 238.

⁷⁷ *Hua da chao. Juben.* *Ibid.* P. 48.

⁷⁸ *Hua da chao. Fourth Version.* *Ibid.* P. 13.

⁷⁹ Byron and Pack. *Ibid.* P. 237-238.

⁸⁰ Such as Yang Xianzhen, for example, a philosopher, head of the Central Party School from 1955 to 1959, and thus a personal rival of Kang Sheng. As opposed to Peng Dehuai, whose criticism was mainly aimed at the chairman himself, Yang "concentrated his attacks on lower-level cadres and propaganda officials. [He] lay the blame on the 'bad company' with which Mao surrounded himself - 'sinister' people like Kang Sheng and Chen Boda." (Schoenhals, Michael: "Yang Xianzhen's Critique of the Great Leap Forward". *Modern Asian Studies.* 1992. No.3. P. 607) Yang Xianzhen was

threatened by, and seized the opportunity to brand his opponents as “right opportunists” and “anti-Mao” and eliminate those he considered his rivals by trumping up charges, both during and after the campaign against right-opportunists.

The *Critical Biography of Kang Sheng* states that Kang Sheng, among other reasons, “oppose[d] the ‘right opportunists’ so vigorously [...] in order to persecute those cadres who ‘did not obey’ him.”⁸¹ This sounds more like the problem described in *Hua da chao*. The incident with the plate and Luo Tong’s “purge”, is a reference to a general phenomenon rather than an exact allegory on a specific incident.

Hua da chao also emphasizes the necessity of rehabilitation of its victims, which was a politically highly relevant topic in 1961 and 1962. Between 1960 and 1962, a strong sentiment grew that those labelled as right opportunists had “been subjected to personal attacks, unjustly condemned, and victimized by frame-ups.”⁸² In fact, the publication of *Hua da chao* in February 1962 is either a coincidence or extremely timely, as the 7000 Cadres Conference, at which the Great Leap, Lushan, and the purge of “right opportunists” were reconsidered, was convened around the same time, from January 11 to February 7 1962.⁸³

When looking at the part dealing with Luo Tong’s “rehabilitation” and considering the time that the play was *staged*, it would make more sense to argue that the emphasis shifted and a strong emphasis was put on Peng Dehuai’s case later, as his rehabilitation was the one most relevant after the 7000 Cadres Conference, when it had become clear that Mao would not permit it.

For the 7000 Cadres Conference, Liu Shaoqi had prepared a written report, which was presented and discussed. This report, among others, addressed the Peng Dehuai issue and concluded that the former Minister of Defense could not be rehabilitated as opposed to the others who had been accused of being “right opportunists”, as Peng had tried to usurp the Party (*cuan dang*). According to MacFarquhar, there must have been a strong faction at the conference in favour of rehabilitating Peng Dehuai, which could be inferred from Liu Shaoqi’s style of argumentation. After giving his reasoning, he added that ““those comrades who do not understand the conditions don’t see matters clearly,””⁸⁴ showing that there must have been a strong dissenting opinion among the other cadres. However, they did not take hold. They thus fit the role of the younger ministers at the court, who

also purged as a right opportunist in 1959, with Kang Sheng in charge of his persecution.

⁸¹ “Zhongkan”. Ibid. P. 142.

⁸² Teiwes. Ibid. P. 431.

⁸³ MacFarquhar. *Origins*. Vol. 3. Ibid. P.

basically support Luo Tong and laugh at Su Dingfang, but are incapable of making themselves heard. The higher cadres come off even worse, as they represent the founding fathers, who are “dead” in terms of their resistance to Mao.

3.2.4 The Solution

The emperor can be read fairly easily as alluding to Mao, and there is a very high chance that the role of Su Dingfang is meant as an *ad personam* criticism of Kang Sheng. The fact that the *guogong* are all dead or too passive should be understood as a general criticism of the top Party leaders. Since Cheng Yaojin is turned into the equivalent of the ‘foreign minister’ of the Tang in the revised play, it can be argued that he was meant to be specifically read as Zhou Enlai, who also failed to stand up to Mao on the issue of Peng Dehuai’s rehabilitation. Cheng Yaojin still plays a comparably active part in trouncing the emperor, but he depends on his wife’s aid. It should be noted that there were suggestions made at the conference organized in February 1963 in Beijing to rewrite the play and completely omit Lord Cheng or attribute a much less active part to him.⁸⁵ The reason given officially was that he interfered too much with the development of Lady Cheng’s role, which is true. However, omitting Cheng Yaojin would have also fit the circumstances, as a year after the conference it had become clear that all of the top leaders, including Zhou Enlai, either preferred safety over standing up to Mao on critical issues or had their personal reasons for not wanting Peng to be rehabilitated.

When analysing the role of Lady Cheng, one thing that should not be overlooked is the fact that *Hua da chao* is a satire. The traditional roles of a helpless female and a male rescuer are reversed by putting Luo Tong in a helpless position and having a female heroine save him.⁸⁶ By leading the other women, she takes up the traditional role in historical dramas of the hero that the people need for help or guidance, as they are incapable of acting on their own.

In many reviews, Lady Cheng is portrayed as a woman from the countryside (*xiang xia da sao*)⁸⁷ who has retained her peasant qualities and not forgotten her origins despite contacts with the ruling elite. Although she is claimed to represent the “ideals of the people,”⁸⁸ or alternatively the peasants, Lady Cheng is very likely not meant to embody the *baixing* herself.

⁸⁴ Ibid. P.164.

⁸⁵ “Shoudu xijujie zuotan ‘Hua da chao’”. *Dagongbao*. 22.02.1963. P.3.

⁸⁶ Wagner. *The Contemporary Chinese Historical Drama*. Ibid. P. 314.

⁸⁷ Zhang Zhen: “Du yuju ‘Hua da chao’”. Ibid. P. 66.

The character of Lady Cheng was fiercely attacked as “unrealistic”⁸⁹ by reviews disapproving of the play, and this still appears to be the best interpretation for her role. Lady Cheng seems, in fact, not meant to be “realistic” in so far as there is no real life counterpart for her. She is there as a contrast to the ministers, and as the only one to make the “romantic” ending possible.

3.3 The *Juben* Version Revised

The handwritten theatre drafts from December 1962 and January 1963 were closer to what was actually performed on stage, or, more precisely, to what was performed in Beijing in February. The versions will be compared briefly both in terms of plot development as well as in terms of pitch.

The scene in which the problem arises is changed somewhat in both drafts. In the version from December 1962, Luo Tong does not beat Su Dingfang up, but only pulls his moustache and then rides off. Su Long, the housekeeper, suggests Su Dingfang pass a memorial, a plan the villain pursues with much enthusiasm. The scene in which Su Dingfang tears and tramples his own clothes is much more acted out than in the *Juben* version. In addition, he has Su Long smash the plate he received from the emperor. In the end, when threatened with being killed by Cheng Yaojin, Su Dingfang confesses everything.

The other handwritten version, which probably dates to January 1963, has Su Dingfang challenge Luo Tong to smash the sign after the latter pulled his moustache, and Luo Tong does so happily. In this version, just like in the *Juben* version, the villain is chased from court without giving a confession.

The scene in both revised versions in which the emperor praises himself is slightly shorter, but more to the point and probably the only subtle allusion made to economic problems: “Since I have ascended to the throne, there has been really good weather for crops (*feng tiao yu shun*). The war is over, the people are happy, and the country is at peace.” The comment about the weather is unnecessary information that has absolutely nothing to do with the play itself, and therefore must have been added deliberately as an ironic allusion to the disasters of the Great Leap years. It was, of course, omitted again when the play was rewritten in the 1980s.

The scene in which Su Dingfang bursts in is exaggerated nicely by having him sob

⁸⁸ “Shoudu xijujie zuotan ‘Hua da chao’”. Ibid.

⁸⁹ E.g. Xiang Pu: “Shi zhenshi haishi xuwei”. *Benliu*. 1963. No. 5. Pp. 55-57.

uncontrollably while the emperor tries to comfort him.

Both handwritten versions are much more explosive in terms of provocative scenes and language. Important statements are not only delivered once or twice like in the *Juben* version, but reiterated over the course of the play. Every opportunity is taken to tell the audience that Su Dingfang is an incompetent *qundaiguan* with a passion for killing loyal ministers, and that the emperor “listens to slander and hurts the loyal and excellent”.

When Luo Tong accuses Su Dingfang of deriving his power through his sister, he does so directly, saying: “Your sister sits in the West Palace. And because of her, you can tyrannize the officials.”⁹⁰

After Su Dingfang has successfully denounced Luo Tong, he says: “Luo Tong, you enjoyed beating [me up] this time, but I enjoy killing (*Ni zhe hui da de tongkuai, wo ye sha de tongkuai*).”⁹¹

A new scene is added in which Lady Cheng explains to the emperor, and to the audience for that matter, that

Su Dingfang’s power at the court is great, but he received it only because his sister is a concubine. He can neither stabilize the country by taking up a pen, nor can he ensure peace by mounting a horse. He has no merits, and yet he is favoured. Why was the plate set up in front of his door? If you ask me, destroying it is reasonable and justified.⁹²

When the emperor complains that sitting opposite him is against the law (*wangfa*), Lady Cheng tells him that he has no right to speak of law as long as he “favours treacherous ministers and kills the loyal.”⁹³ She pursues him when he flees, beating him with her shoe, a newly added scene humiliating the emperor, which is commented on in almost every review of the play.

After Cheng Yaojin returns, and before the women set off with him to the palace, there is a scene in which they assure Lady Cheng that they will do anything she commands them to, including killing. They announce that they have not used their weapons in many years, but will take them out again to fight the villain.

After the Chengs discover that the decree issued from the emperor is only meant to mock them, Lady Cheng commands the others to start crying in order to attract the emperor’s attention. The scene that followed will be translated below, emphasized passages

⁹⁰ *Hua da chao*. Fourth version. Ibid. P.7.

⁹¹ Ibid. P. 13.

⁹² Ibid. P. 49.

⁹³ *Hua da chao*. Fourth version. Ibid. P.53.

indicating deviation from the *Juben* version.

TANG EMPEROR: (unable to hold himself back) You are in the palace crying and creating chaos.
Have you all gone insane?

LADY CHENG: (angry) Who has gone insane? You listen to slander and kill the honest and the loyal. I think it is you that has gone insane!

[...] (A Short scene in which the women mimic the emperor and make fun of him)

TANG EMPEROR: (both embarrassed and angry) Come on, get out of the palace!

CHENG YAOJIN: Hold on, little emperor!

(sings) This empire was established because I fought for it.

LADY CHENG: (sings) Today, we are going to claim our share!⁹⁴

CHENG YAOJIN: (sings) The emperor of our court is no good.

If I, Cheng Yaojin, sat [on the throne], that would be just as good.

LADY CHENG: (sings) If I, Lady Cheng, sat [on the throne], that would be just as good.

(CHENG YAOJIN and LADY CHENG both jump forward and sit down on the throne)

TANG EMPEROR: How dare you!

(sings) You are turning the court upside down; you want to revolt.

You deceive me; you go against your superior, traitor!

I will order to have you executed.

[...]

CHENG YAOJIN: There is no sword in our court that will kill me.

You listen to slander, hurt the loyal, and bring the principals of our dynasty into great disarray. I will hold up my axe and split you in half, you foolish emperor who does not have the Way (wudao hunjun).⁹⁵

As can be inferred from the translated passages above, the version from December 1962 constitutes a much heavier attack on the emperor himself. Lady Cheng calls him insane, and Cheng Yaojin demands that the rule of the country be divided up and more power be given to the founding fathers, i.e. a demand for more “democracy” in the top leadership of the *Tang/dang* and less “individual style.”

Judging from the changes, a considerable amount of rewriting had obviously taken place in order to reinforce the most important points. In addition to slight plot adaptations, attention is drawn to the problem itself both by simple repetition as well as a rising pitch. The play also becomes more threatening in tone towards the emperor himself. It should

⁹⁴ The phrase in Chinese is *jintian women yu ta lai fenjia*. *Fenjia* is usually translated as “to divide up family property and live apart”. Since Cheng Yaojin first emphasizes his own merits and then sits down on the throne, I have translated Lady Cheng’s passage as a demand for a proper share of the empire they fought for, and not as a declaration of their breaking off ties with the emperor, although this is probably also implicit in the statement.

⁹⁵ *Hua da chao*. Fourth version. Ibid. Pp. 78-80.

also be pointed out that apart from highlighting the main conflict, fairly few changes were made.

The version from January 1963, which very likely served for the performance in Beijing in February, is overall still politically more loaded and outspoken than the *Juben* version, but the most provocative of the previously added scenes, such as the new passage translated above including the demand for more “democracy” among the top Party leaders, were taken out again. There is a slight chance that the versions are not dated correctly, but if the dates as recorded on the manuscripts are correct, then someone decided at the last minute that it was not wise to call the emperor “insane” and to demand a redistribution of power on stage in the capital. In terms of dramatic involvement, the alterations made to the version from January 1963 are a clear step back. Therefore, other reasons than wanting to enhance the piece artistically were obviously at play.

4. Intertextuality

4.1 “Da chao xi” - Trouncing the Emperor

A play like *Hua da chao* did not appear out of the blue, but used certain premises laid down by its predecessors. The political situation is the same as in plenty of other plays written or rewritten around the time of the Great Leap, such as *Tang Wang Na Jian*, *Hai Rui Shang Shu*, and others, with an emperor in the centre who has stopped taking remonstrance from his loyal ministers and only listens to the *jianchen*, the treacherous minister. But the means with which the protagonists solve the problem are different.

There are some exceptions, but overall, the dramas became more daring as time advanced. In *Guan Hanqing*, for example, the emperor himself did not yet appear on stage.⁹⁶ The first play to beat the emperor, *Da Qianlong*, was published as early as April 1959.⁹⁷ In *Da Qianlong*, the emperor is on an inspection trip through the countryside, unaware of and indifferent toward the catastrophic social conditions prevailing. A young woman whom he tries to assault slaps him in the face. As opposed to later plays, however, the woman is unaware that he is really the emperor. Thus those plays appearing after the Lushan Plenum and during the early 1960s go a step further by creating protagonists fully conscious of whom they beat up. For *Hua da chao*, there are quite a few predecessors which beat up the traitor or the emperor himself. One examples of a play directed against the “traitor” is *Da Yan Song* (Beating up Yan Song), a traditional comedy performed by

⁹⁶ Cf. Wagner. Ibid. P.55.

⁹⁷ Zhao Wanpeng: *Da Qianlong. Juben.* 1959. No. 4. Pp. 48-60.

Zhou Xinfang in 1961 and 1962 in a revised version. It is set in the Ming dynasty under the Jiajing emperor and describes how the imperial censor Zou Yinglong tricks the treacherous minister Yan Song, a “conspirator who deceives the emperor, tyrannizes the ministers, and schemes to usurp the throne,”⁹⁸ into allowing him to beat him up when Yan Song tries to frame his next victim. Many of the terms used are identical to the ones in *Hua da chao*, but it is impossible to tell whether He Lingyun knew the play and or was asked to take it as inspiration. Another example is *Sun An dongben*,⁹⁹ which *Hua da chao* is modelled on to a great extent and which will be dealt with below.

Hua da chao appeared during the last months of a period in which the Hundred Flower slogan was propagated for a second time, but also continued to be performed after control had tightened again in September 1962 when Mao delivered his speech on class struggle, and was still staged shortly before the historical drama was to be attacked in March 1963. Although the emperor stays on the throne and is even praised as a “wise ruler who has the Way (*you dao ming jun*)”¹⁰⁰ by Cheng Yaojin at the end in all rewritten versions after late 1962, the characters in the play repeatedly suggest to overthrow or to kill him. Violence is not used as a last resort and after much consideration, but is presented as an option whose legitimacy is never questioned. In this respect, *Hua da chao* goes further than its predecessors.

4.2 Parallels of *Hua da chao* and *Sun An dongben*

In terms of interlinking of dramas, there are outstanding parallels between *Hua da chao* and *Sun An Dong Ben*, a play first staged as a Hebei Opera in 1959, and then adapted into a Peking Opera, published both in the journal *Juben* as well as in a separate edition in 1961.¹⁰¹ *Sun An dongben* merges two plays into one, and therefore consists of two plotlines.¹⁰² In the first part (*Sun An san zouben*), Sun An passes a memorial deploring the disastrous state of the economy and starvation among the peasantry as well as accusing the treacherous minister Zhang Cong, who is responsible for the problem. After remonstrating for the third time, Sun An is sentenced to death. In the second part (*Xu Long da chao*), the high ministers Shen Li and Xu Long, who have withdrawn from

⁹⁸ Wei Ming: “Da de hao - kan Zhou Xinfang tongzhi de ‘Da Yan Song’”. *Shanghai xiju*. 1962. No. 1. P. 7.

⁹⁹ Zhao Jianqiu, Yuan Jigao, Yang Hanqing, Shang Zhisi, Ji Genyin: *Sun An Songben*. *Juben*. 1961. No. 4. Pp. 59-74.

¹⁰⁰ *Hua da chao*. Fourth version. *Ibid*. P. 81.

¹⁰¹ Zhao Jianqiu, Yuan Jigao, Yang Hanqing, Shang Zhisi, Ji Genyin: *Sun An Songben*. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1961.

¹⁰² Meng Chao: “Zan bangzi xi ‘Sun An dongben’”. *Zhongguo xiju*. 1959. No. 22. P. 26.

politics, attempt to intervene on Sun An's behalf. Shen Li is stripped of his office by Zhang Cong. Xu Long also tries to remonstrate several times; however, finally realizing that there is no point in reasoning with the emperor, he takes up his axe, threatens the sovereign and hits Zhang Cong.

Both *Sun An dongben* and *Hua da chao* are plays in which the characters have moved from *ma huang*, i.e. cursing the emperor, to *da huang*, beating him up.

Mainly in the last act of *Hua da chao*, which was, as noted earlier, almost completely rewritten, various scenes and images from *Sun An dongben* reappear, which cannot possibly have been written into the play independently. In the last act, Xu Long first sits down on a chair opposite the emperor, which infuriates the latter, and then sits down on his throne. Both symbolical scenes also appear in *Hua da chao*. Cheng Yaojin has been awarded an axe for his merits; Xu Long has a hammer for the same reason; and both serve an identical purpose: to hit the dim emperor. Both ministers declare that they will use their weapon to "first beat the emperor and then eliminate/hit the traitor."¹⁰³ The quote used is almost verbatim. And last but not least, the villains of the two plays both hide - Zhang Cong under a table and Su Dingfang behind the throne. Both are revealed when Xu Long and Lady Cheng attempt to kill the emperor and their place of hiding is turned over in the ensuing turmoil. In both plays, the traitor is eliminated; in *Sun An dongben*, he is hit with the hammer and probably killed; in *Hua da chao* he is only chased from court. The emperor gets to keep his position in both plays.

The symbols, scenes and quotes that the two plays share correspond to each other in so much detail that the only reasonable conclusion to be drawn here is that He Lingyun had a copy of *Sun An dongben* right beside her on her desk while rearranging *Hua da chao*.

The fact that *Hua da chao* borrows excessively from *Sun An dongben* goes unnoticed in most reviews, except in a summary in the *Dagong bao* of the 1963 conference in Beijing, which notes that He Lingyun "moved" various details from other plays centred around the topic of trouncing the emperor (*da chao xi*) to her own play.¹⁰⁴

4.3 The Differences between *Hua da chao* and *Sun An dongben*

In the first place, the identical scenes were probably adopted because they produce an outstanding and provocative dramatic effect, which the authoress wanted to include in her own play. It is highly unlikely that they were consciously meant to fulfil any symbolic

¹⁰³ *Hua da chao. Juben. Ibid. P. 65, Sun An dongben. Juben. Ibid. P. 73.*

¹⁰⁴ Hua Jiamu: "Shoudu Xijujie Zuotan 'Hua Da Chao'". *Dagong Bao*. 22.02.1963. P.3.

functions, similar to linking Xie Yaohuan to Hai Rui by letting her carry an umbrella.¹⁰⁵ The “allusions” are much less subtle, and the verbatim quotes and identical scenes were actually reduced in number when the play was revised in late 1962 and early 1963, i.e. they were probably considered a stylistic weakness or an awkward interim solution in hindsight by the authoress and the other people involved.

But whether intended or not, the identical scenes directly link *Hua da chao* to *Sun An dongben* for anyone familiar with both plays, and by linking the plays, the differences between both works, which are probably much more significant in terms of the interaction of the plays, are highlighted, too.

Sun An criticizes the economic situation of the country. The play therefore has very clear parallels to Peng Dehuai’s criticism at the Lushan plenum. *Hua da chao* evolves around the “minor” problem in *Sun An dongben*, i.e. that of a scheming and manipulating traitor who talks the emperor into killing excellent ministers. Around the time of *Hua da chao*’s publication and performance, this was, in fact, the more imminent problem.

Secondly, in *Sun An dongben*, the ministers of the earlier generation have also withdrawn from politics and some overestimate their own influence. However, they are portrayed more positively than in *Hua da chao*. It is Xu Long who finally eliminates Zhang Cong. In *Hua da chao*, Cheng Yaojin needs to be pushed by his wife. Thus in *Hua da chao*, the ministers are passive and need help from others.

Also, the remonstrating ministers in *Sun An dongben* exhaust all other means first before trouncing the emperor. By the time of *Hua da chao*, people have clearly lost their patience. Lady Cheng considers violence as a legitimate option from the very beginning in case the emperor should not approve her memorial. Everything that has been tried in earlier plays - cursing the emperor, passing memorials, or sacrificing oneself - is to some extent already presupposed as useless.

In his study on the new historical drama, Wagner remarks of *Sun An dongben* with its clear elements of the grotesque that it is “psychological relief work,”¹⁰⁶ beating up the “emperor” (or the “traitor”) feeling good. This is also true for *Hua da chao*. Su Dingfang is beaten on every occasion, in one case before he even opens his mouth. The emperor is ridiculed, attacked with a chair, portrayed as a cowardly weakling and chased around the court with an axe. For all of this, the medium of the satire offers the perfect stage. Comical scenes such as the one in which the emperor is beaten with a shoe by a woman

¹⁰⁵ Wagner. Ibid. P. 114.

¹⁰⁶ Wagner. Ibid. P. 281.

were certainly added for no other reason than gloatingly humiliate him.

Plays such as *Sun An dongben* and *Hua da chao*, however, exactly because of their element of the grotesque, besides being “psychological relief works”, also convey the idea that all means have been depleted. The situation is desperate and no reasonable solutions are left. In *Sun An dongben*, this assertion still has to be established and justified, while in *Hua da chao* it is almost taken as a given.

It could be argued that despite of or exactly because of the “romantic” ending and because of introducing a fictitious character, who clearly lacks a counterpart in reality, as the only one who dares to stand up, *Hua da chao*, much more than *Sun An dongben*, ultimately expresses hopelessness rather than hopefulness that the problem can be solved.

5. Reception of the Play in the 1960s

This chapter will take a look at the reactions to a play with the provocative message that all peaceful means are useless, propagating open violence directed not only against the “villain,” but also against the ruler of the country as a solution to irresolvable contradictions. *Hua da chao* was certainly not meant as an appeal to literally take up arms. Nonetheless, there are various scenes in the play that were highly loaded and that must have triggered fairly extreme reactions. The focus of this chapter will be on the reception of the performance in Henan as well as to the staging in the capital by the Luoyang Henan Opera Company. Reviews of other performances will be neglected for the most part.

After being performed in Henan, the play, as expected, met with very divided reactions. As with all discussions of new historical and adapted traditional plays, the contemporary meaning of the play was not mentioned openly in any of the reviews or at any of the conferences.

The Henan arts journal *Benliu* published both articles praising the play as well as articles dismissing it for being “unrealistic” and too “disorderly.” Reviews opposing the play attacked it in three respects: historical inaccuracy, lack of inner logic, and problematic ideology.

The first included points such as the fact that Su Dingfang had historically been a loyal minister and that it was “unfair” and unhistorical to present him as a traitor.¹⁰⁷ Both in Henan and in Beijing it was suggested to change his name to turn him into a fictitious character and thus solve the problem.

¹⁰⁷ E.g. Zhang Kaida: “Zhenren zhenshi yu zhenren jiashi”. *Benliu*. 1963. No.5. P. 58.

A lot of reviews also defended Li Shimin, stating that he had been a very wise emperor. With all the critics delving into the topic of “historical accuracy,” painstakingly citing historical events and anecdotes, nobody pointed out that Li Shimin died before Yuchi Jingde. This can either be explained by actual unawareness of the historical dates or by the awareness of the implications of making such a remark. It does not become evident from the reviews themselves which one of the two it is.

Problems with inner logic include points such as the fact that Lord and Lady Cheng still insist on the emperor pardoning Luo Tong even after they have already attacked him and technically do not need his approval as they could simply take Luo Tong with them by force.¹⁰⁸ One review also points out that it does not make sense that so much emphasis is put on restoring Luo Tong’s original status.¹⁰⁹

Beating the emperor was attacked as being ideologically wrong, and Luo Tong’s behaviour was criticized, some people arguing that he deserved to be executed.¹¹⁰

Interestingly, the play was even accused of being misogynistic, as the disastrous political situation is originally Su Dingfang’s sister’s fault.¹¹¹

One review commenting on the reaction of the audience said that some of the spectators left the performance complaining that the play was “unreasonable” (*bu cheng hua*). Overall, however, very little can be said about the reaction of the audience.

These are only some of the more outstanding remarks. It should be noted that the larger part of the debate was centred around details of the performance and conducted in a tone astonishingly dry and matter-of-factly considering the explosive content of the play. To a great extent, the comments made in reviews simply play to the current tendencies in politics. A review from September 1962, for example, remarks that *Hua da chao* “to a certain extent also reflects class struggle.”¹¹²

The play was usually described as “unique” (*dute; bie ju yi ge*). The tone of the reviews in favour of *Hua Da Chao* is comparably defensive. For example, Zhang Zhen stresses in his review published together with the play in *Juben* in February 1962 that when Cheng Yaojin sits down on the throne and curses the emperor, this is exactly the type of struggle found in comedies, “and nothing else (*er bushi biede*),”¹¹³ which is emphasized twice.

¹⁰⁸ Liu Song: “Shitan ‘Hua da chao’ de ji ge wenti”. *Benliu*. 1963. No. 2. P. 30., and Xiang Pu: “Shi zhenshi haishi xuwei - tan ‘Hua da chao’ zhong Cheng qi nainai de wutai xingxiang”. *Benliu*. 1963. No. 5. P. 57.

¹⁰⁹ Liu Song. *Ibid.* P. 31.

¹¹⁰ Mu Ding: “Dui ‘Hua da chao’ de ji dian lijie”. *Benliu*. 1963. No. 3. P. 48.

¹¹¹ “‘Hua da chao’ zuotanhui jiyao”. *Benliu*. 1963. No. 9. P. 61.

¹¹² “Qieshuo yuju ‘Da chao’”. *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Zhang Zhen: “Du yuju ‘Hua da chao’”. *Juben*. 1962. No. 2. P. 68.

Also, most reviews both before and after the Cultural Revolution start out by citing a variety of other traditional *da chao* plays, which was probably meant to underscore *Hua da chao*'s innocuousness as part of a tradition having nothing to do with current politics. When the play was discussed in the capital after the performance in February 1963, the overall assessment appears to have been more positive and affirming, although many still pointed at the "flaws" in the play, such as the false representation of Su Dingfang. However, *Hua da chao* was officially declared to be a "folk comedy" (*minjian xiju*) that could not be judged by the standards of a historical drama. Similar to previous reviews, the play was said to "reflect the ideals [and hopes] of the masses (*renmin qunzhong*)," as in the eyes of the people a bad emperor could be trounced.¹¹⁴

Appearances were kept that the discussions were merely about a piece of art. The openness with which *some* of the remarks about logical gaps were made in *Benliu* might actually suggest unawareness rather than awareness of the contemporary meaning, but that remains speculation. On the other hand, there were remarks such as the one in the *Xinhua ribao*, declaring that "traitors hurting the loyal, and powerful officials envying famous generals" are a common phenomenon for which there are examples "in almost every generation."¹¹⁵ Apart from a few comments like this, it does not become evident from the reviews themselves whether the authors were aware of the contemporary significance. It can, however, be assumed that most of the people joining in the discussion were aware of the fact that they were not merely examining historical subject matter or a traditional play with no reference to the present.

6. The Criticism during the Cultural Revolution

During the Cultural Revolution the play was branded as an "exceptionally big poisonous weed" (*te da du cao*).¹¹⁶ It was attacked on wall newspapers (*dazibao*) and during "criticism sessions" in Henan,¹¹⁷ as well as criticized within the theatrical circles of the capital.¹¹⁸ It appeared in red guard publications on the "criminal record" of Tian Han¹¹⁹ and of the journal *Juben* in 1967.¹²⁰ While attacks on *Sun An dongben*, a Peking Opera,

¹¹⁴ Hua Guimu: "Shoudu xijujie zuotan 'Hua da chao'". *Dagong bao*. 22.02.1963. P. 3.

¹¹⁵ Bai Jian: "Tan yuju 'Hua da chao' de zhengli he yanchu". *Xinhua ribao*. 02.06.1963. P. 3.

¹¹⁶ Feng Lisan: "Juxie juban yuju 'Hua da chao' zuotanhui". *Guangming Ribao*. 24.07.1981. P.2.

¹¹⁷ Zhang Pufu: *Luoyang mudan Ma Jinfeng*. Ibid. P. 140.

¹¹⁸ Zhang Zhen. "'Hua da chao' ruci boming". *Renmin xiju*. 1981. No. 8. P. 38.

¹¹⁹ Zhongguo Juxie Lianhe Doupizu Cailiaozu: "Da pantu fangeming xiuzheng zhuyi fenzi Tian Han zuixinglu". *Xiju Zhanbao*. No. 10 and 11. 27.08.1967. P.2. In: *A New Collection of Red Guard Publications Part II*. Vol. 32. P. 12606.

¹²⁰ Zhongguo Juxie Jinggangshan geming zaofantuan: "Zalan Liu Shaoqi Zhou Yang fangeming fubi de qiaotoubao - jiu juxie zhuang duo fei julebu". *Mao Zedong sixiang zhandou xiju*. 16.09.1967. P. 2. In:

can be found frequently and *Sun An dongben* is sometimes even mentioned directly after *Hai Rui baguan*, I have not been able to find a separate attack on *Hua da chao*, neither from Henan nor from Beijing, although it certainly exists.

The accusations can partially be reconstructed from reviews and other works written after the Cultural Revolution. *Hua da chao* was labelled a “counterrevolutionary black play through and through.”¹²¹ He Lingyun, Ma Jinfeng, and Yang Lanchun were all criticized.

Apparently, the characters of the play were matched up with real life counterparts, as this approach (‘*dui hao ru zuo*’) was criticized as “making groundless accusations” in the conference to justify the restaging of the play in 1981, but the article does not specify how detailed the decoding was.¹²² According to a review published after *Hua da chao*’s rehabilitation in *Renmin Xiju* in 1979,¹²³ *Hua da chao* was called potentially more dangerous than the play whose criticism is regarded as the prelude to the Cultural Revolution - *Hai Rui baguan* (Hai Rui is Released from Office) - as “the core problem in ‘Hai Rui is Released from Office’ is being ‘released from office’, while the core problem in ‘Women Beat up the Emperor’ is ‘beating up the emperor,’” which needless to say is worse. The criticism of “beating up the emperor” was read as “beating Beijing”. The play thus “viciously attacks the Central Committee of the party led by Mao Zedong” and “tries in vain to overthrow the rightful rule of the proletariat.” In addition, the play “rehabilitates right opportunists,” a claim that has already been discussed above in detail and seems to be a correct assessment. None of the accusations come unexpected or are unique to this play, and it should perhaps be noted that while the notion of “beating up the emperor” was rewarded with the classification as an “exceptionally” poisonous weed, the play itself does not seem to have attracted exceptional attention.

7. After the Cultural Revolution

7.1 Reversing the Verdict

In the late 1970s, the stand towards the people and works criticized during the Cultural Revolution was ambivalent. Intellectuals such as Wu Han, Deng Tuo, and Tian Han, who had been purged for criticizing Mao and the top Party leadership, were rehabilitated not

Xinbian Hongweibing ziliao. Vol. 26. P. 10179.

¹²¹ Zhang Pufu: *Luoyang mudan Ma Jinfeng*. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1988. P. 141.

¹²² “Renwei Ma Jinfeng biao yan chuse”. *Beijing wanbao*. 10.07.1981. P.4.

¹²³ Zheng Cong: “‘Hua Da Chao’ ruci boming.” *Renmin Xiju*. 1979. No. 6. P.46.

for their outspokenness, but for their obedience to the Party.¹²⁴ For *Hua da chao*, a similar path was ultimately chosen, and the play was adapted to eliminate all controversial items and reflect the line adopted by the Party.

The “rehabilitation” of the play was not uncontroversial, and reviews of the play together with its newly rewritten version reveal a lot about the ambiguous stand *Hua da chao* had. The “Gang of Four” had charged that the play attacked Mao and the Central Committee. But even with the part of the message of the play as decoded during the Cultural Revolution that was politically correct by the time it was scheduled for rehabilitation, it was impossible to openly acknowledge that the “Gang of Four” had been right with their reading of the play.

The play was “rehabilitated” during the first half of 1979, probably in May or June, possibly earlier, and was shown on television.¹²⁵ Although it was performed again in other provinces afterwards,¹²⁶ it took another two years before it was restaged in Beijing. The occasion was the anniversary of the founding of the CCP in July 1981. The Luoyang Henan Opera Company stayed for one and a half months and performed *Hua da chao* more than 50 times.¹²⁷ On August 4, it was also performed in the *Zhongnanhai* compound.¹²⁸ A newly revised version of the play, written in March 1981 and published afterwards in 1982, probably served as the basis for the performances.

Judging from the defensive tone of the articles justifying the play’s restaging, opposition to the play increased rather than diminished up to the point of the performance in the summer of 1981, when it seems to have been officially decided that the play “maintained ‘artistic innocence’ (*yishu tianzhen*)” and was “very cute.”¹²⁹ From looking at the changes the play was subjected to before the performance, and from looking at the counter-arguments and matching them up with the political situation at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, there were two problems that came together. The first problem applied to other plays as well, and therefore cannot have been the decisive point. There was uncertainty on how to deal with criticism of the Chairman. The problem was solved later by rewriting the character of the emperor so as to match the correct

¹²⁴ Wagner: “‘In Guise of a Congratulation’”. Ibid. P. 46.

¹²⁵ Zheng Cong. Ibid.

¹²⁶ E.g. ‘Cheng furen da chao’ in Sichuan. “Gui zai renzhen, hao zai ronghui...”. *Chengdu ribao*. 27.11.1980. P. 3.

¹²⁷ Yang Lanchun: “Cong wutaiju ‘Hua da chao’ dao dianying ‘Cheng qi nainai’”. www...

¹²⁸ Ma Jinfeng: “Cong renwu chufa, cong shenghuo chufa -- wo yan Cheng qi nainai de dainty tihui”. In: He Lingyun: *Hua da chao (Yuju)*. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1982. P. 90.

¹²⁹ “Renwei Ma Jinfeng biao yan chuse - shou du xiqu jie zuo tan yuju ‘Hua da chao’ deng.” *Beijing wanbao*. 10.07.1981. P.4.

evaluation of Mao. Especially the movie, which does not have to but *can* be understood as the final version of the play, criticised Mao to the exact same degree as the *Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China*,¹³⁰ which was published in late June 1981.

The central issue, however, that set *Hua da chao* apart from other plays seems in fact to have been the problem of “beating” and the threat of overthrowing the government. There were political tendencies in 1979 and 1980 that the play was not in line with.

Following the Third Plenum, Peng Dehuai and others were rehabilitated posthumously on December 25, 1978. The beginning of 1979 was marked by relative freedom in the fields of politics and literature. The great majority of plays were rehabilitated and the Hundred Flower slogan was propagated again. However, in March 1979, after Deng Xiaoping had decided to crush the Democracy Wall movement and Wei Jingsheng had been arrested, the grip on literature also became tighter again.¹³¹ The government lamented an increase in violence directed against their authority. An editorial in the *Renmin ribao* wrote that “‘attacking government offices, beating cadres, ... and sabotaging work discipline, production, and society’ were posing a serious threat to public order.”¹³² Repressive actions against those “creating chaos” were announced.

This was not the right political climate for a play legitimating outright violence against the government in order to get one's will. The play seems to have been rehabilitated fairly late compared to other pieces, and when it was scheduled for rehabilitation, there was a faction arguing that it “encouraged creating disturbance” and was “detrimental to ‘stability and unity’ (*anding tuanjie*).”¹³³

What then were the arguments in favour of the play? First of all, it had been attacked by the “Gang of Four”; rehabilitation was necessary to send the right sign. Second, if *Hua da chao* was harmful to current politics, would other plays such as *Hai Rui baguan* not be harmful as well? The implied answer was, of course, no.¹³⁴ Apparently, the argument of having to reverse the “Gang of Four's” verdicts was still stronger than all counter-arguments.

¹³⁰ *Resolution über einige Fragen zur Geschichte der KP Chinas seit 1949*. Chinesische Dokumente. Beijing: Verlag für Fremdsprachige Literatur, 1981.

¹³¹ Link, Perry: *The Uses of Literature*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000. Pp. 18-19.

¹³² Baum, Richard: *Burying Mao. Politics on the Age of Deng Xiaoping*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994. P. 67.

¹³³ Zheng Cong. *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

After the *Gengshen* reforms in mid-1980¹³⁵ there was another conservative backlash.¹³⁶ In December, the campaign to “oppose bourgeois liberalization” was launched. The focus was again on suppressing outbreaks of public anger and on “ensuring stability and unity’ (*baozheng anding tuanjie*).”¹³⁷ During this time, *Hua da chao* was still performed, in Sichuan, for example,¹³⁸ but overall, the conservative backlash, which again targeted anarchy and “chaos” and advocated the suppression of strikes and criminal activity by harsh means, certainly did not improve the play’s stand.

Just like the article written around the time of the rehabilitation, the justification in *Renmin Xiju* in August 1981 for performing the play in Beijing still had only marginally to do with the play itself. *Hua da chao* had been correctly “rehabilitated” because other plays that had been attacked, such as *Hai Rui baguan*, *Li Huiniang*, etc. had also been rehabilitated, and all charges against them by the “Gang of Four” had been proven wrong. Second, arguing against the accusation that the play might stir up trouble, the article wrote that “plays beating the emperor” (*da chao xi*) had been performed for some 300 years, but there had never been a case in which a literary work had actually led to the downfall of an emperor.¹³⁹ The fact that two years after the “rehabilitation” the argumentation was still this defensive in tone shows that there was still considerable opposition against the play.

A look at the summary of the conference that was convened on July 8 by the Dramatists’ Association confirms this. As opposed to the earlier conference, when summaries of conferences had always presented the dissenting opinions, in 1981, everybody unanimously praised *Hua da chao*. A summary of the conference was first published in the *Beijing wanbao*,¹⁴⁰ and two weeks later in the *Guangming ribao*.¹⁴¹

The article in the *Guangming ribao* explains that the conference was held because the play had been “branded as an ‘especially big poisonous weed’ during the ‘cultural revolution,’”¹⁴² which had “very strong implications that still influence [the perception of the play] today”¹⁴³. In order to solve the problem, first of all, the problem of “beating up

¹³⁵ Aimed at eliminating “feudal elements” (mainly Hua Guofeng) within the government and an attempt at democratisation and fighting corruption so as to avoid a crisis such as the one taking place in Poland at the time. Cf. Baum. Ibid. Pp. 99-104.

¹³⁶ Cf. Baum. Ibid. P. 110.

¹³⁷ Cf. Baum. Ibid. P. 112.

¹³⁸ Cf. Shu Ren: “Gui zai renzhen hao zai chuhui”. *Chengdu ribao*. 27.11.1980. P. 3.

¹³⁹ Zhang Zhen: “‘Hua da chao’ chongkan yougan”. *Renmin Xiju*. 1981. No. 8. Pp. 38-39.

¹⁴⁰ “Renwei Ma Jinfeng biao yan chuse”. *Beijing wanbao*. 10.07.1981. P.4.

¹⁴¹ “Jujie juban yuju ‘Hua da chao’ zuotanhui”. *Guangming ribao*. 24.07.1981. P. 2.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

the emperor” was addressed, and everybody agreed that the play’s main theme was not “beating up the emperor,” but that it only “[borrowed] ‘beating the emperor’ to extol to see what is right and have the courage to do it, and to criticize nepotism, and trusting only one side.”¹⁴⁴ Everybody also agreed that “seeing ‘beating the emperor’ and saying that it [propagated] anarchism without making any distinctions”¹⁴⁵ equalled using the methods of the “Gang of Four.” Guo Hancheng remarked that it was a play about the “internal contradictions within the ruling class of the feudal society.” Again, the contemporary meaning as intended in the original was denied.

There is only one review that makes an attempt to link the characters of *Cheng Furen Nao Chao* (the Sichuan opera version of *Hua da chao*) to contemporary politicians, or at least mentions both in the same review. The review itself is not that remarkable, as it is a standard denunciation of the “Gang of Four,” but direct connections between *Hua da chao* and the Cultural Revolution were not made on a common basis. However, it is much easier to read between the lines of reviews published after the Cultural Revolution, a time when ample use was made of unsubtle historical allegories from the side of those who had the upper hand¹⁴⁶. Although a link to contemporary politics is denied on the surface, reviews speak of “rehabilitating (*ping fan*),”¹⁴⁷ not of rescuing Luo Tong.

All of these comments ultimately did not refer to the play as it had been performed in 1963, but to its new version from March 1981. This revised version was republished in a separate edition in July 1982, together with comments by the writer, the main actress and the director.

He Lingyun included a detailed description of the process of rewriting the play. Her comments on the differences between the Qing version and the version published in 1982 make it seem as if the version from 1962 and 1963 had never existed.¹⁴⁸ Another detailed outline in the Henan edition of *Xiju yishu* on the rewriting of the play comments briefly on the differences between the play and the movie, but of course also completely ignores the disparities between the version from the 1960s and the one from after the Cultural Revolution.¹⁴⁹ The fact that the play had needed rewriting in order to be republished was never publicized in any manner; the 1980s version was implicitly passed off as identical to the one from 1962.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Such as allegories used to undermine Hua Guofeng’s legitimacy. Cf. Baum. Ibid. P. 93.

¹⁴⁷ Zhang Zhen: “‘Hua da chao’ chongkan yougan”. Ibid. P. 38.

¹⁴⁸ E.g. the emperor’s reaction to Su Dingfang’s accusation. Cf. He Lingyun: Pp. 69-70.

¹⁴⁹ Wang Zengfu: “Qiantan yuju ‘Hua da chao’ de gaibian”. *Xiju yishu (Henan)*. 1983. Additional 38

7.2 The 1982 Edition

As mentioned above, the last rewriting of the play took place in March 1981, i.e. after the trial of the “Gang of Four,” but before the official evaluation of Mao’s role in the history of the Party had been released.

When looking only at the published versions of the play, the differences are immense. This seems more extreme than is actually the case, as a large part of the gap between the *Juben* version and the one from 1982 is bridged by the stage drafts from the 1960s. The 1982 edition is to the largest extent based on the version from December 1962 as far as plot and dialogue are concerned. That said, the alterations that *were* made were decisive. When Su Dingfang hears of Luo Tong’s victory, he panics and says: “I cannot just leave it at that. If he is not eliminated, there will be no foothold for me in the dynasty!” Subsequently, an extra scene is added in which Su Dingfang and his servant are plotting how to get rid of Luo Tong. The incident with the sign is no longer incidental, but planned carefully by Su Dingfang. The new version thus makes clear from the very beginning that it is “precisely [Su Dingfang’s] inexperience, incompetence, narrow-mindedness, and wild ambition that [leads] him to scorn competent people whose ability might overshadow [his] and make [him] lose [his] foothold”¹⁵⁰ to borrow the quote about the “Gang of Four” from 1976 intended to explain why they had attacked cadres. According to both Luo Tong and Lady Cheng, Su Dingfang does not only “tyrannize the ministers below,”¹⁵¹ but also “deceives the emperor above”¹⁵² him. Thus, as opposed to the earlier version, not only the ministers, but also the emperor is portrayed as Su Dingfang’s victim.

This already implies that the emperor was “rehabilitated” in the new version of the play. He is portrayed as a ruler who is essentially good and is only tricked by his treacherous minister. As opposed to the earlier version, he does not rush to conclusions or trusts Su Dingfang blindly, but asks him questions and has him adduce proof for his claims first. Even after he has seen everything and has heard the charge that Luo Tong wants to overthrow him, he still ponders whether it is really justified to execute the young general. Also, the high minister thinks much more highly of his emperor. When Lady Cheng tells him that she did not have the chance to smash the emperor to death because the latter fled,

material 1. P. 104-106.

¹⁵⁰ Ji Xin: “The Rise and Fall of the Gang of Four.” In: Ji Xin: *The Case of the Gang of Four*. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books Ltd., 1978. P. 16.

¹⁵¹ *Hua da chao*. Beijing: 1982. Ibid. P. 7.

Cheng Yaojin heaves a sigh of relief instead of calling his wife useless. In the last act, Li Shimin does not have to be forced to release Luo Tong. When the Chengs reveal what has really happened, he is more than ready to admit his mistake and make up for it, delivering a full-scale self-criticism.

The language directed against the emperor is considerably less radical: the term *hun wang* is used more conservatively, and comments such as “the emperor of our dynasty is no use” are left out altogether. Also, in the *Juben* version, Cheng Yaojin still wanted to “first trounce the emperor and then eliminate the treacherous minister”. In 1982, he only wants “to split the imperial desk”¹⁵³ before getting rid of Su Dingfang. All aggression and radical language is directed against Su Dingfang; the emperor’s only fault is trusting the treacherous minister’s “evidence.”

Lady Cheng’s arguments when trying to convince Li Shimin of setting Luo Tong free in act seven were also altered considerably. Needless to say that with strong public discontent about “children of high-ranking often [being] shielded from criminal prosecution by paternal intervention”¹⁵⁴ and other forms of corruption and nepotism, Lady Cheng does not argue that “Luo Tong is the descendant of the loyal general Luo Cheng, [...] how can you execute [him]?”, but emphasizes strict adherence to the law instead, and, of course, argues that Su Dingfang cannot be trusted. After accusing the latter of not deserving the plate, Lady Cheng also does *not* suggest that it is justified to destroy it, but asks instead,

Do you have any proof? You cannot take Su Dingfang’s word for proof! [He] is a malicious wolf who takes conspiring for a game. [...] He creates rumours, twists the facts and frames people. He only uses you to execute Luo Tong. Your Highness! You have to investigate thoroughly and must not under any circumstances trust only him!¹⁵⁵

The final scene when Su Dingfang confesses his crimes is turned into a small-scale “show trial,” in which he is questioned by Lord and Lady Cheng, who also interrogate his housekeeper and accomplice Su Long. The scene was without doubt intended to bear similarities to the trial against the “Gang of Four,” which had only taken place two months earlier. Together with the emperor’s new tendency to ask for proof, it also helped

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ *Hua da chao*. Beijing: 1982. Ibid. P. 58.

¹⁵⁴ Baum. Ibid. P. 141.

¹⁵⁵ *Hua da chao*. Beijing: 1982. Ibid. P. 37.

to propagate the new ‘rule of law.’¹⁵⁶

All the names of the acts are changed, which is fairly insignificant except in two cases. The seventh act, which used to be called “Turning the court upside down” (*Nao dian*) is called “Turning the court upside down and beating up the emperor” (*Nao dian da chao*). The last act, which used to be called “Beating up the emperor” (*Da chao*) is renamed “Reversing unjust verdicts and eliminating the traitor” (*Xueyuan chujian*). This shows that while the “beating” in *Hua da chao* was originally meant to indicate both the seventh and the last act, in the new version, it only refers to Lady Cheng’s lifting up the golden chair for the split of a second. After that scene, the emperor is not attacked again. Various reviews address the problem of “beating the emperor,” justifying why the sovereign has to be attacked at all. Both Yang Lanchun and He Lingyun defend the necessity of the scene in their comments to the new edition. Yang Lanchun comments on his “rights” as a director that while he can have a different understanding of the play and rearrange it, *Hua da chao* cannot under any circumstances “do without ‘beating the emperor.’”¹⁵⁷ He Lingyun even resorts to citing the name of the play as the reason why the scene in the seventh act could not be omitted.¹⁵⁸ This reconfirms the assumption that beating the “government” had caused problems.

The image of the emperor is slightly better than the verdict passed one Mao a few months after the play was rewritten, which perhaps can be attributed to the PLA campaign launched in early 1981 to improve Mao’s image.¹⁵⁹ The fact that the 1981 *Resolution* had not been published becomes apparent when comparing the stage version to the movie.

Although the tenor if the play is on criticism of the Cultural Revolution, the earlier campaigns can still be considered part of the problem. Especially the role of Su Dingfang as a conspirator who denounces people for fun still has a lot in common with the official denunciations of Kang Sheng, which appeared after the summer of 1980, when he could be attacked by name for the first time.¹⁶⁰ But, as opposed to the earlier versions, he was only a small part of a broader phenomenon.

Also, not all of the changes reflect the attack on the “Gang of Four” and the

¹⁵⁶ The legal system was thoroughly reformed in 1979 and the “legal anarchism” of the Cultural Revolution was denounced. Cf. Baum. *Ibid.* P. 84. Around the same time, the ‘rule of law’ appeared as a common motive in modern dramas, mostly in connection with eliminating corruption. Cf. Link: *The Uses of Literature*. P. 270-271.

¹⁵⁷ Yang Lanchun: “Cheng qi nainai nao jindian, Tang wang mengxing jiu Luo Tong.” In: He Lingyun: *Hua da chao*. P. 87.

¹⁵⁸ He Lingyun “Xie zai ‘Hua da chao’ chuban zhiqian”. *Ibid.* P. 69.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Baum. *Ibid.* P. 123.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Link. *Ibid.* P. 27.

“rehabilitation” of the emperor; some of the alterations were made in order to match other lines of politics, such as adherence to the law, fighting corruption and nepotism, and, most of all, behaving orderly.

7.3 The Movie

Overall, the movie is still geared to the printed version of the play from 1982, that is apart from the last act and a few other meaningful alterations. The rehabilitation of the emperor is more consistent with the official evaluation of Mao, which had been published by the time the movie was produced.

The emperor’s accordance with Mao’s and especially the Party’s role in general as defined by the 1981 Resolution becomes most obvious in the last act, which will be briefly summed up below, but is also visible throughout the earlier acts.

After having founded the dynasty, the emperor has settled down and mainly occupies himself with beautiful women, i.e. he is committing some serious mistakes. This greatly impairs his sense of judgement, but he is unaware of that. Just like in the script version, when Lady Cheng remonstrates on Luo Tong’s behalf, the emperor becomes very angry, shouting at her, “My mind is as clear as a mirror! I do not need your advice!”

The allusions to the “Gang of Four” become increasingly unsubtle. Su Dingfang finally gets his new name that had been requested by reviews since the early 1960s. He is called Su Sanjiang, which not only rhymes with his original name, but also conveniently serves as a reminder who the villains in the play are meant to represent, since three (*san*) plus Jiang [Qing] equals four. His ambitions are made clear from the beginning. The first thing we see of him is the huge painting in his office of a hawk reaching out with his claws for a mountain surrounded by rivers, i.e. the emperor’s *Jiangshan*, his empire. He has to pay the price for scorning intellectuals - he cannot read properly.

The emperor’s wife, who never appeared in person in any of the stage versions, plays a more active part in the movie. She is the one initiating the conspiracy against Luo Tong by sending Su Sanjiang a letter reading, “[Luo Tong’s] victory strikes me like a storm. Our dream is ruined. If we do not pull the weed up by its roots, how then can we take over the country!” The notion that the villains not only want to eliminate their enemies, but have ambitions to usurp the country is mentioned for the first time in the movie. When Su Sanjiang complains to the emperor about Luo Tong, his sister is the first to point out that beating up a relative of the emperor means to “beat the sovereign and to go against one’s superiors.” She further reaffirms Su Sanjiang, acts insulted by Luo Tong’s

comments and demands that the emperor investigate and take action against the young hero.

In addition, the movie constitutes a full rehabilitation of the formerly passive ministers. They do not lack courage the way they do in the play. When Luo Tong is convicted, a substantial part of them appears readily before the court to “guarantee that Luo Tong is innocent.” This is not surprising taken the fact that a substantial part of those who were originally criticized for not interfering still lived to write history.

Below, the final act, which was changed almost completely, will be summed up as it nicely illustrates the new reading of *Hua da chao*.

After beating their way into the palace and destroying the emperor’s sword, the Chengs and the other women kneel down to greet the emperor courteously. When Lady Cheng wants to hand him a message, he refuses to take it and bursts out: “You have already fought your way into the palace and destroyed my sword. Why don’t you just kill me?” This, however, is not the intention of the Chengs; they want to keep him. With tears in their eyes and trembling voices they begin to sing about his earlier years when he fought great battles and founded the dynasty. However, ever since the dynasty was established he has only seen the palace from the inside. They finally ask, “Our emperor, we miss you; where are you?” Li Shimin, moved to tears, steps forward and with a dramatic “I am here!” accepts the letter. It is the message that his wife sent to Su Sanjiang planning Luo Tong’s downfall. The emperor immediately realizes his mistake, and, hugging the Chengs, delivers a very theatrical self-criticism. Luo Tong is called in to be “rehabilitated” and to regain his original status. Finally, Su Sanjiang is brought in and begs the emperor for forgiveness. The emperor, however, is relentless and leaves him to Lady Cheng’s mercy, who beats him and literally kicks him out. Justice has been restored and everybody is happy. The emperor’s wife, who might have spoilt the happy ending by not begging for mercy and being generally uncooperative, is tactfully left out in the final act.

Portraying the fight against those who had by then been officially declared criminals and advocating the struggle for rehabilitation of their victims, the play offered a perfect opportunity to praise current politics after the Cultural Revolution. Its formerly “romantic” ending had fulfilled itself by the time the play was rehabilitated. It was not difficult to slightly alter its reading and turn it into a tool to propagate the official party line towards the Cultural Revolution (and earlier purges) as well as praise the pledge of

the Party to learn from the past experience.

According to the new interpretation, the emperor is basically a great leader who fought and won many battles during his early years and has had countless other great contributions for the dynasty, but he has settled down, came to be controlled by his wife and her collaborators and committed serious mistakes both as a result of the manipulation as well as his own weaknesses. As opposed to the stage version, a considerable part of the responsibility for his mistakes also lies with the emperor himself. The evaluation of Mao according to the *Resolution*, which concludes of the Chairman that

Comrade Mao Zedong was a great Marxist and a great proletarian revolutionary, strategist and theorist. It is true that he made gross mistakes during the "cultural revolution", but, if we judge his activities as a whole, his contributions to the Chinese revolution far outweigh his mistakes. His merits are primary and his errors secondary¹⁶¹

is almost identical. Just like Lord and Lady Cheng sing about the emperor's earlier contributions for the Tang dynasty, the new generation of party leaders chose not to "kill" Mao when assessing his role in the *Resolution*, but to add a chapter on his pre-1949 achievements and to keep him for legitimating their own rule.

It makes sense to think of the emperor in the 1980s versions not as Mao alone, but as the Party or as fulfilling a double role, representing both Mao, who was deceived and committed mistakes, as well as the new generation of Party leaders, who are making a self-adulating entry in the last act to do the self-criticism for their emperor, who unfortunately did not live to deliver it himself. In the role of the Tang emperor, they rehabilitate all those who were wronged, promise to do better in the future, and thus demonstrate that the *dang* is still legitimate to rule.

8. Concluding Remarks

The analysis has focussed on the play itself and its changes, not on the people who were involved in its making. This does leave a wide gap in so far as very little can be said about who was the driving force behind the play and the changes that were made when readapting it. However, it can be constituted that younger Party members, such as He Lingyun and Ma Jinfeng, although very likely under the guidance of people who had more insight into politics or closer ties to the theatrical circles of the key cities, did

¹⁶¹ "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China (abridged)." <http://english.cpc.people.com.cn/66095/4471924.html>. 11.10.06.

contribute a share to the battle on stage. While there is indication that He Lingyun was influenced and supported by others, there is no evident reason to suggest that she was merely the puppet of somebody else or did not know what she was doing when rewriting the play.

The play also demonstrates the interconnectedness of theatrical circles over the country. The new historical dramas' influence extended to cities in the provinces away from the political stage of the CCP centre, where people decided to follow the example of playwrights in Beijing. *Hua da chao* employs similar techniques to a fairly large extent, although some of the possibilities open for the new historical plays, miniscule changes of historical details, for example, in order to draw attention to a certain point, cannot be applied to a *gushi ju*.

The general political situation and the basic conflict bear strong similarities to the situation in other historical or rewritten plays. Furthermore, in the process of rewriting the play, scenes from other plays were incorporated. By combining all those elements, one of the most provocative plays of the 1960s was created, the explosiveness of which is also reflected in the reactions.

Hua da chao was at no point in time accepted without fairly strongly dissenting voices. When Yang Lanchun was asked to direct the play, he already suspected he would get himself into trouble. After the first performance, and also after being staged in the capital, *Hua da chao* always caused fairly strong resistance, although the discussions still remained within the usual framework. During the Cultural Revolution, it was, as expected branded as a counterrevolutionary "poisonous weed" directed against the leaders in Beijing. After the Cultural Revolution, it was again in conflict with current politics and was accused of promoting social unrest.

As could be seen above, the rewritten version from 1982 was no less of a political statement than its counterpart from the 1960s, although this time much less subtle and completely in tune with official Party decisions.

Hua da chao's intended reading was not changed completely, but the focus was shifted considerably to make the play reflect the new line of politics. It were both the new developments in politics after the Cultural Revolution was over as well as a few well-placed deliberate alterations of the text that ultimately turned *Hua da chao* from a play questioning the legitimacy of Mao and other top leaders into a play fully affirmative of the Party and all its decisions. Scenes and actions that were not compatible with the current evaluation of the Cultural Revolution and the preceding years were rigidly cut out

or rewritten.

Hua da chao, and very likely the vast majority of other rehabilitated plays, was deprived of the possibility to voice a dissenting opinion. Censorship of the “rehabilitated” plays must have been more rigorous than it had ever been before; *Hua da chao* in its 1982 version did criticize Mao, but not an inch beyond that which was officially permitted. It no longer provided a platform to discuss politics (or, more precisely, evaluate past politics), but could only reproduce the version of past that had been agreed on and was robbed of exactly the function it had fulfilled twenty years earlier.

The analysis of the rehabilitation process in the particular case of *Hua da chao* thus highlighted three broader problems: First, *what type* of content was seen as problematic in the plays; second, *how* were plays that conflicted with current lines of politics dealt with, and third, *as what* were plays finally rehabilitated, not only in the sense of what was written about them publicly, but primarily in the sense of the alterations that were made in silence. These are general questions that would be worthwhile extending to other rehabilitated plays as well, but which clearly go beyond the concern of this paper.

9. Glossary

baozheng anding tuanjie	保证安定团结
Beijing	北京
Beijing wanbao	北京晚报
Benliu	奔流
bu cheng hua	不成话
Chen Boda	陈伯达
Cheng furen nao chao	程夫人闹朝
Cheng qi nainai	程七奶奶
Cheng si nainai	程四奶奶
Cheng Yaojin	程咬金
chuanju	川剧
chuantong xiju	传统戏剧
da chao xi	打朝戏
Dagong bao	大公报
dang	党

Da Qianlong	打乾隆
Da Yan Song	大严嵩
Dazibao	大字报
er bushi biede	而不是别的
gaoming	诰命
Guangming ribao	光明日报
guogong	国公
Guomindang	国民党
gushi ju	故事剧
gu wei jin yong	古为今用
Hai Rui baguan	海瑞罢官
Hai Rui shangshu	海瑞上疏
haiwai fengwang	海外封王
Hebei	河北
He Lingyun	何凌云
Henan	河南
Henan Sheng yanchu gongsi	河南省演出公司
Hua da chao	花打朝
Jianchen	奸臣
Jiang Qing	江青
jintian women yu ta lai fenjia	今天我们与他来分家
Juben	剧本
Kang Sheng	康生
Li Bing	李冰
Li Daozong	李道宗
lilun quanwei	理论权威
lishi ju	历史剧
Li Shimin	李世民
Liu Naichong	刘乃崇
Luo Cheng	罗成

Luo Tong	罗通
Ma Jinfeng	马金凤
Mao Zedong	毛泽东
ming jun	明君
minjian xiju	民间喜剧
Mu Guiying guashuai	穆桂英挂帅
Naodian dachao	闹殿打朝
Peng Dehuai	彭德怀
Pingju	评剧
Qi nainai	七奶奶
Qing	清
Qu Liuyi	曲六乙
qundaiguan	群带官
Renmin ribao	人民日报
Shanghai	上海
Su Dingfang	苏定芳
Su Sanjiang	苏三江
Sun An dongben	孙安动本
Tang Gaozong	唐高宗
Tang Taizong	唐太宗
Tang wang najian	唐王纳谏
te da ducao	特大毒草
Tian Han	田汉
wangfa	王法
wansui	万岁
Wu Han	吴晗
Xianggang jinma dianying gongsi	香港金马电影公司
xiao hun wang	小昏王
Xigong Shanghai Juchang	西工上海剧场
Xiju Yishu	戏剧艺术

Xu Long	徐龙
Yan'an	延安
Yang Lanchun	杨兰春
Yang Xianzhen	杨献珍
yishu tianzhen	艺术天真
yuju	豫剧
Zhang Cong	张从
Zhang Zhen	张真
xueyuan chujian	昭雪除奸
Zhao Xun	赵寻
zhifenguan	脂粉官
Zhongnanhai	中南海

10. Appendix

P. 8

你做官是凭文采或枪刀？

金凤冠你换来鸟纱帽，

[...]

您罗爷封王位是刀枪所挣

哪像你... .. (冷笑) 嘿嘿

做一个脂粉官不觉脸烧。

(*Hua da chao. Juben. P. 46-47.*)

我本是当朝国舅谁不敬？

我咳嗽一声鬼神惊。

(Hua da chao. Juben. P. 47)

P. 9

闹他个天塌倒流

(Hua da chao. Juben. P. 55)

谗臣当道，陷害忠良，此乃国家大事

(Hua da chao. Juben. P. 56)

P. 10

我叫你再不能把忠良屠杀

(Hua da chao. Juben. P. 62)

若在讲情，定斩不容

(Hua da chao. Juben. P. 64)

咱们朝无有好皇帝

(Hua da chao. Juben. P. 64)

P. 11

你信谗言害忠良朝纲大乱，

我先打你昏君后除奸#

(Hua da chao. Juben. P. 65)

P. 12

心似猛虎未长毛，

杀人何须用钢刀。

(Hua da chao. Juben. P. 46)

P. 13

海外封王

(Hua da chao. Juben. P. 59)

P. 15

东海盗宝

(Hua da chao. Henan chuantong yuju huibian. P. 320)

皇府金殿无正主

(*Hua da chao. Henan chuantong yuju huibian. P. 329*)

这个奸臣平时横行霸道
今天欺到咱们头上来了
(*Hua da chao. Juben. P. 53*)

斩来斩去
(*Hua da chao. Juben. P. 64*)

P. 17

咱们朝无有好皇帝
(*Hua da chao. Juben. P. 64*)

P. 20

罗通本是忠良将
(*Hua da chao. Fourth Version. P. 75*)

倘若再打一个胜仗，岂不要造反么
(*Hua da chao. Juben. P. 48*)

他岂不要我主江山
(*Hua da chao. Fourth Version. P. 13*)

P. 24

你妹妹驾坐西宫院
仗急着你妹妹欺压群僚
(*Hua da chao. Fourth version. P. 7*)

罗通小娃娃，这一回你打得痛快，我杀得也痛快呀！
(*Hua da chao. Fourth version. P. 13*)

P. 25

苏国舅在朝中权大势重
全仗凭他的妹翠花宫
一不能杀，二不能战 无功受宠
下马牌为何要立他门庭
依我看，砸碎那下马牌情理公平
(*Hua da chao. Fourth version. P. 49*)

奸臣受宠忠臣被屈杀
昏君前讲什么体统王法
(*Hua da chao. Fourth version. P. 53*)

Pp. 25-26

唐王： (忍无可忍) 嘟，来这金殿哭哭闹闹，莫非你们疯了？
程七奶： (怒问) 谁疯了？你听信谗言屈杀忠良。我为你才是疯啦。

[...]
 唐王：(害羞成怒) 来呀,与我赶下殿去。
 程咬金 下站,小唐童呀!
 (唱) 这江山本是俺打来的天下
 程七奶 (唱) 今天咱与他来分家。
 程咬金 (唱) 咱朝没有好皇帝
 我咬金坐坐也不差。
 程七奶 对。(唱) 七奶奶坐坐也不差。
 (程咬金、程七奶二人跃身坐龙案上)
 唐王 大胆!
 (唱) 大闹金店您想造反
 欺君犯上是逆臣。
 孤王传旨将你斩。
 [...]
 程咬金 咱朝中无有斩我的剑一根
 你信谗言害忠良朝纲大乱
 执板斧劈死你无道昏君。
 (*Hua da chao*. Fourth version. Pp.78-80)

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有道明君
 (*Hua da chao*. Fourth version. P. 81)

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先打昏王后除奸
 (*Hua da chao. Juben*. P. 65)

先打昏王后打奸
 (*Sun An dongben. Juben*. P. 73)

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上欺天子下压群僚。
 (*Hua da chao*. Beijing: 1982. P. 7)

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我先劈你龙书案后再除奸臣
 (*Hua da chao*. Beijing: 1982. P. 58)

下马牌被砸碎有何凭证?
 苏定方一面词不足为凭
 [...]
 苏定方心毒狼阴谋玩弄
 [...]
 造谣言挑是非栽赃陷害
 假借你手斩罗通
 万岁! 你要查清文明,
 切不可偏信偏听。
 (*Hua da chao*. Beijing: 1982. P. 37)

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