

Brecht and China: towards an ethical subject

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**NANYANG
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**BRECHT AND CHINA: TOWARDS AN ETHICAL
SUBJECT**

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Brecht and China: Towards an Ethical Subject

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Needless to say, all the errors that appear in the dissertation are my own.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE DOCUMENTATION

- BAP *Brecht on Art and Politics*, edited by Tom Kuhn and Steve Giles, translated
by Laura Bradley, Steve Giles and Tom Kuhn.
- BT *Brecht on Theatre*, edited and translated by John Willett.
- CP *Collected Plays of Bertolt Brecht*, edited by John Willett and Ralph
Manheim.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation on Brecht and China proceeds from a single idea: it is timely and of great importance to revisit the connection between Brecht and China in the context of twentieth-century intercultural theatre, to reflect upon Brecht's attitudes to Chinese thought and theatre, and his construction (or imagination) of China, and most importantly, to examine how he works Chinese thought into his inheritance of Western traditions on his reflection upon the issues related to Man. This study views Brecht's perception and usage of Chinese thought and theatre as continuing the tradition of the penetration of Chinese thought and culture into Western intellectual traditions. Brecht's example attests to two facts: that the incorporation of Asian thought into Western system of thinking is important to Western intellectual traditions, and, moreover, that "Eastern" and "Western" traditions are, instead of developing in unparalleled courses, more often than not intertwined.

Specifically, this study attempts to discover to what degree (and why) Brecht works classical Chinese philosophy (Confucianism and Taoism) and traditional Chinese theatre (his experience of watching Mei Lanfang's performance) into his effort to explore "a new human type" in theatre—a subject which is as yet little understood. Brecht mediates between Chinese and Western intellectual traditions in the following aspects: his understanding of language and consciousness, his redefinition of the audience/actor relation, his philosophical visions and finally, the notion of subjectivity and ethics evolved in his dramatic works. By contextualizing the discussion on Brecht and China in the history of the absorbance of Chinese thought into the history of Western ideas, this study understands Brecht's notion of Man as a product of *dialogue* between the Western and Chinese traditions in the first half of the twentieth-century literary scene.

INTRODUCTION

In 1992, based on Bertolt Brecht's play *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and Li Qianfu's Yuan *zaju*¹ *The Chalk Circle*, the Dongpo Theatre produced the *jingju* (Peking Theatre) version of *The Chalk Circle* for the ninth Arts Festival Week in Hangzhou. This adaptation of classical Chinese plays is interpreted by Wenwei Du as arising out of the need to "ease a theatrical crisis that has existed since the mid-1980s" in China ("Historicity and Contemporaneity" 223). He further suggests that this adaptation should be categorized into "radical adaptations where 'East and West' intertwine" (223). Interestingly this new version, with the lesson that, in Judge Bao's words, "True benevolent feelings are not inborn; the bonds between nonrelatives can be tighter than blood ties" (Du 223), follows Brecht's parable more closely than the original Chinese one. Du notices that this blend of the Chinese and the Brechtian makes this adaptation "untraditional" in the sense that favoring "a foster mother who cares" over "a biological mother who abandons" does not accord with feudal ethics as advocated in *zaju*. He reads this adaptation as a response to contemporary materialism rampant in today's China in which there emerges an unhealthy tendency that human relations have become based on monetary value. Finally he comes to the conclusion that "our limited vision within one historical and cultural context can be broadened when our history and tradition are examined from a cross-cultural perspective" (226).

What interests me is not the similarities (or differences) between these three versions in surface content or the Chinese director's concerns behind this adaptation, but the questions left out in Du's essay: Why is Brecht's adaptation more applicable than the original Chinese one in addressing the issues in contemporary China? Is it because Brecht's lesson is "Western" (implied by Du) or because, on the contrary, Brecht has adopted (and thus "preserved") traditional Chinese thought which was

undermined in contemporary China? Considering the fact that Brecht's *Chalk Circle* is a subversion of the biblical story of the judgment of Solomon in which, as is the case in *zaju*, the son is given to the biological mother, it would be simplistic to label Brecht's as "western", if for no other reason than that Brecht's adaptation launches a severe critique of Christian ethics. I agree with Du's conclusion that another perspective (such as the Brechtian) could provide us a "mirror" through which we could better understand our own culture and theatre tradition. Yet we must understand, in the first place, what "this mirror" is made up of and what another perspective means, especially when we are reminded that Brecht's perspective, as many critics have argued, is under the influence of Chinese thought.

In his book on twentieth-century Chinese-Western intercultural theatre, Min Tian has warned us of the tendency of "self-Orientalization" in "the Chinese anti-realist and anti-illusionist interpretation and practice of China's traditional theatre affected by Brecht's and Meyerhold's interpretations" (*Poetics* 11). When the whole idea of intercultural theatre is overwhelmingly embraced in China, Tian, in his suspicion of Erika Fischer-Lichte's view that the aesthetic function of intercultural theatre is a revitalizing and productive process, points out that Fischer-Lichte has ignored "its destructive effects on different theatrical traditions, which inevitably erode or redefine their cultural and aesthetic identities" (3). Both views (Fischer-Lichte's and Tian's) are well grounded, if a bit slanted. In the case of incorporating modern theatrical techniques from Brecht and other "Western" dramatists into experiments with new forms of traditional *xiqu* (traditional Chinese theatre)², "destruction" could be both affirmative and productive. For while innovations made with the theatrical expressions of *xiqu* inevitably lead to disruption of tradition forms, such disruption would also bring renewal and revitalization of such an old theatrical art. Nevertheless, such an enterprise is risky, for the fact that in globalization reconciling European influences with Chinese

culture in the Chinese context is a complicated issue. This is because questions concerning how to absorb Western thinking into Chinese intellectual tradition without threatening its dominant position in culture is largely dependent on the attitudes towards the potentialities of the Euro-American influence (treating them either as a menace or as a “liberating” force).

This dissertation on Brecht and China is ignited with a concern toward understanding the phenomenon of Brecht’s reception in China and, furthermore, of how to apply Brecht’s dramaturgy in the Chinese context in order to revitalize *xiqu* on the contemporary stage. The study proceeds from a single idea: it is timely and of great importance to revisit the connection between Brecht and China in the context of twentieth-century intercultural theatre, to reflect upon Brecht’s attitudes to Chinese thought and theatre, and his construction (or imagination) of China, to question to what degree Brecht’s view is western without denying the central influence of Western intellectual traditions in his work, and most importantly, to examine how he works Chinese thought into his inheritance of Western traditions on his reflection upon the issues related to Man. The study represents a small contribution to the dialogue between “East” and “West” and perhaps thereby to liberating peoples—“Occidentals” or “Orientals”—from the chains of ethnocentrism in giving due place of Chinese thought within the Western tradition. In contrast to Tian’s emphasis on the destruction of indigenous theatrical traditions in intercultural theatre, this study views Brecht’s perception and usage of Chinese thought and theatre as continuing the tradition of the interpenetration of Chinese thought and culture into Western intellectual traditions. In essence, Brecht’s example attests to two facts: that the incorporation of Asian thought into Western system of thinking is important to Western intellectual traditions, and, moreover, that “Eastern” and “Western”³ traditions are, instead of developing in unparalleled courses, more often than not intertwined.

The extensive collection of Brecht's work reveals that Brecht was familiar with the major trends in classical Chinese philosophy (i.e. Confucianism, Taoism, and Moism), even before he became acquainted with Marxism in the mid-twenties. His interest in China grew with the development of his theatrical aesthetics (one needs only mention the widespread Chinese references in his later plays). Brecht read Chinese poems: Li Po and Po Juyi especially appealed to him, and he retranslated some of Po Juyi's poems from Arthur Waley's English versions. He also incorporated Chinese theatrical techniques and set many of his plays either in China or included significant references to China and its culture,⁴ including two of his most important plays, *The Good Person of Szechwan* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. The *Tui novel* and *Me-ti: Book of Change*, two major prose fragments written in the years of his Danish and Swedish exile (1933-1940), address issues in a contemporary European context while employing extensive references to Chinese thought. Besides his interest in Chinese philosophy and theatre, he kept a close eye on the social and political situation in China and on more than one occasions showed his concerns with China's socio-political situation. And while he never visited China, according to a report from one of Brecht's friends (recorded in John Willett's *Brecht in Context*), Brecht was talking of Chinese exile towards the end of his life (223).

Nevertheless, nearly all critics who are concerned with the topic of Brecht and China are confronted with the same difficulties of assessing Brecht's relation with China. First, Brecht is vague about his connection with China: in his observation of Chinese theatre and his reflection on Chinese philosophy, he is ambiguous about his intentions and reluctant to clarify and/or justify his admiration for China. Secondly, besides his direct contact with the Chinese theatre (through Mei Lanfang's lecture-demonstration in Moscow and his meeting with the Chinese author and actor Tsiang in New York), his exposure to Chinese plays and poems was largely through

others' work related to China (either translations of Chinese plays and poems or literary works set in China): in the early years he read Richard Wilhelm's translations of Chinese philosophy, i.e. the *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Zi, Confucius' *Analects* and the works of Zhuang Zi, and Alfred Forke's translation of Yuan plays and his book on Mo Zi in German (Prophet 8), and later, with the help of Elisabeth Hauptmann, he turned to Arthur Waley's translations of Chinese poems and philosophy (Berg-Pan "Mixing Old and New Wisdom" 201, 205).

Comprehensive and admirable research have been conducted on Brecht's interest in Chinese thought, culture and acting, together with their impact on his dramaturgy and theatrical works. Two major studies of Brecht and China in English need to be noted: Antony Tatlow's *Mask of Evil* (1977) and Renata Berg-Pan's *Bertolt Brecht and China* (1979).⁵ Tatlow shows the significance of Chinese and Japanese thought in Brecht's life and texts while he, as Eric Hayot suggests, "at times hints at the presence of a Chinese [or more generally Eastern] Brecht in the shadow of the Western one" (55). Berg-Pan provides a more biographical study in which she argues that "Brecht studied Chinese literature, art, and philosophy in order to find a viable relationship between his political views, his literary talent, his integrity as an artist and his physical survival as a man" (ix). Even so, she still believes that Brecht's *Good Person of Szechwan* "draws heavily upon various "chinoiseries" (including quotations from Confucius, Chuang-tse, and Mo-tzu, as well as Po Chǔ-i)" ("Mixing Old and New Wisdom" 210). For them, even though the relationship is deep and significant, the ambiguities remain unsolved. Others have been less enthusiastic: Martin Esslin, for example, cautions that "these exotic and folk influences" from the theatre of China, India, and Japan, and the folk theatre of Austria and Bavaria "should not lead one to overlook the large extent to which the Brechtian theatre represents a return to the main stream of the European classical tradition" (*Evils* 129).

The inevitable question that critics find hard to liberate themselves from is: How to come to terms with Brecht's China and Western traditions, for a European dramatist who has deep roots in various Euro-American cultural and intellectual traditions, but at the same time strongly revolts against Western traditions, such as the "orthodox" theatre (especially of German classic stage)? This question is further complicated by the fact that Brecht, by contrast to his vagueness about China, always readily acknowledged his European influences (such as Piscator's). When shown an article accusing him of falling between two stools and being in a no-man's-land between East and West, Brecht told Erwin Leiser (a Swedish colleague), "This must be corrected. I am sitting on one stool, in the East. But it is unsteady. It has only three legs" (Leiser 22). Brecht's remarks suggest that even simply trying to understand him and his theatre as a "bridge" between East and West presents difficulties. Indeed the above dialogue may not clarify the ambiguities of his relationship to China, but it does suggest that his commitment to Asian cultures, including Chinese thought and theatre, is more than a chinoiserie or a disguise.

With this ambiguity in mind, I shall take up this critical challenge and sort out the relationship between the Chinese dimensions of his work and his European influences with a focus on the significant position of Chinese theatre and Chinese systems of knowledge in Brecht's critical thinking about theatre and his conception of "a new type of Man⁶." To verify Brecht's intention will turn out to be an unpromising approach. This study, besides tracing what prompts Brecht's interest in China and why such interest is sustained throughout his life, will also analyze parallels of thought between Brecht's works and that of various Chinese cultural and intellectual traditions. And while it is hard to indicate the precise sources of many of Brecht's ideas (given that they might be from either his European background and/or from his reading of Chinese texts), this very tension is part of what makes the comparison fascinating, as we shall

see how thought from different cultures forms a dynamic relation of collision and conflation. This fact also elucidates the significance of revisiting the subject of Brecht and China in the sense that Brecht's relation to China should be discussed in the context of the ongoing cultural dialogue (affirmative and contentious) between Euro-American traditions and Chinese traditions.

"Brecht's response to China," as Tatlow pointed out, "is a comparatively complex topic" ("Peasant Dialectics" 279). And while I do not intend to cover every detail and significance of this connection, I will focus on those aspects related to the concept of Man, for one reason that we should be long past the point of delineating every single detail of the connection between Brecht and China (Critics like Tatlow, Berg-Pan and others have done much of this work already.), and for another reason that Brecht's dramatic texts and theatrical representation are tied on the basis of his concept of man in human relationships. The main subject of Brecht's theatre, in his own words, "must be relationships between one man and another as they exist today" (BT 67). Brecht also indicated that his primary concern was to "investigate and find means of expression for [these relationships]" (BT 67) in response to the changing historical and political situations of his day. While on the surface, nearly all literary works seem to be concerned with issues about man, Brecht places the issue of subjectivity at the centre of his work by examining the essential constituents of the human subject (ethics, ideology, class and identity) in his critique of epistemology and aesthetics. As for his theatrical aesthetics, the ultimate purpose is to produce a new actor and audience who are able to "alter the world." A major point of inquiry for this study arises with consideration of the extent to which Brecht's interest in China informs his understanding of Man and human relations in aesthetic theory, dramatic work and theatrical innovation. Moreover, how far do these affinities explain the development of Brecht's notion of Man in his plays and in the theatrical innovations he proposed at the

actor/audience level? How did he reconcile his understanding of Chinese culture with the various forms of influence from Western intellectual traditions?

Specifically, I attempt to discover to what degree (and why) Brecht works classical Chinese philosophy (Confucianism and Taoism) and traditional Chinese theatre (his experience of watching Mei Lanfang's performance) into his effort to explore "a new human type" in theatre—a subject which is as yet little understood. Brecht mediates between Chinese and Western intellectual traditions in the following aspects: his understanding of language and consciousness, his redefinition of the audience/actor relation, his philosophical visions and finally, the notion of subjectivity and ethics evolved in his dramatic works. By contextualizing the discussion on Brecht and China in the history of the absorbance of Chinese thought into the history of Western ideas, I understand Brecht's notion of Man as a product of *dialogue*⁷ between the Western and Chinese traditions in the first half of the twentieth-century literary scene.

I am aware of the difficulties in positioning my arguments in the complexities of the cross-cultural phenomenon in twentieth-century intercultural theatre. Various theories and models have been advanced by critics and theorists. Theatre practitioners like Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, and Richard Schechner are committed to searching for the universal patterns and principles about the performance, while Bharucha, in opposition to their "ethnocentrism" in the practice and theory of intercultural theatre, declares that the "ethics of representation" should be questioned and accuses Western intellectuals of assimilating non-Western material without considering its aesthetic and social context (13-14). I share Bharucha's suspicion of borrowing traditional sources from their social, historical, cultural, political and ideological context. Hence, one of the important goals of this study is to investigate Chinese philosophy and theatrical tradition in its own cultural context outside the

Western conceptual framework. While I wish to trace Brecht's understanding of China, I shall also make distinctions between Brecht's perception of Chinese thought and its cultural meanings and intentions in the Chinese context.

Both Tian and Bharucha share the view that in intercultural theatre indigenous cultures are confronted with the menace from other cultures in the process of "mixing"; misunderstanding and appropriation seem to be unavoidable. What seems to me problematic is that they have ignored one fact, summed up by J.J. Clarke in his book *Oriental Enlightenment*, that the penetration of the cultural and intellectual traditions of South and East Asia into Western thinking has occurred over the course of historical time (through the age of Enlightenment to the twentieth century). Thus the function of intercultural theatre also "deconstructs" (or "constructs" from another perspective) and redefines Western intellectual traditions. What concerns me, therefore, is not the need to defend the essential meaning of cultural identities, but to unravel in Brecht's theory and work how Chinese philosophical and theatrical traditions have functioned as disruptive forces to destabilize Western traditions and ideologies that he rejects (which he also finds it difficult to disassociate himself from). Consequently, another purpose of this study is to deal with how Brecht compromises his Chinese "model" or "paradigm" (to borrow Tatlow's words) with Western intellectual traditions in his exploration of a new means of theatrical representation other than literary Realism—a dominant literary form that was mostly associated with bourgeois culture in Brecht's time.

We should bear three facts in mind. First, Western intellectual traditions is the ground from which Brecht's thoughts generate. Although I am going to argue against the view (as assumed by most critics) that Chinese thought is subsidiary and complementary in the formation of Brecht's ideas, it would be misleading to claim that Chinese thought has dominantly shaped Brecht's theory and plays. Second, Chinese influence on Brecht is not exclusive and static: while not measurable with the

development of his aesthetics, it develops and grows throughout the different stages of Brecht's life. And finally, despite his efforts to liberate himself from the canon and attempt to learn from Asian cultures, Brecht has already become so central to Western intellectual traditions that he has already greatly influenced Asian theatre innovators in their effort to bring new life to the traditional forms of theatre. As we shall see, considering the cultural interchange involved, the lines drawn between Asian traditions and Western traditions have been more blurred than is often supposed. Built upon the above understandings, this study, besides addressing the question of the influence of Chinese thought and theatre on Brecht, is also concerned with a comparison between Chinese influence and the influences from his European background.

Chapter 1 provides historical background and a theoretical framework for the discussion of the succeeding chapters. Without dismissing a Saidian model of Orientalism, I rely on Clarke's concept of "affirmative orientalism"—which argues that it is a constant theme in Western intellectual traditions to question its own indigenous traditions through the mirror of Eastern thought—to think about the contemporary modalities of Orientalism in relation to multicultural reality. While noting that Brecht adopted a dialectical attitude towards various traditions within Western cultures and Chinese traditions, I set Brecht off against Chinese cultural and intellectual traditions after giving a brief review of Brecht's indebtedness to Western intellectual traditions. My study of Brecht and China is contextualized in the Western intellectual traditions in historical encounters with Chinese culture with a focus on the interest in China prevalent in German writing in Brecht's time. This contextualization provides us with multiple perspectives (aesthetic as well as cultural-social-political) to think about what China means to Brecht, which, as we shall see, is far from a coherent discourse.

In Chapter 2, I focus on Brecht's ideas of language and consciousness with reference to Brecht's understandings of Confucius' teaching of "Rectification of

Names” and to his commitment to Marxist ideas concerning ideology and consciousness. I suggest that the central activity of the *Verfremdungseffekt* and the *gestus* is in accordance with his language strategies. While Brecht embraces the Marxist theory concerning the ideological position of the individual, it is Confucius’ meditation on language that provides a concrete method for Brecht to interrogate the connection between ideology and subject and to “demystify” (to borrow Althusser’s word) representation in its function in maintaining the illusions of individual consciousness. Accordingly, emphasis will be put on the ways in which Brecht integrates his understanding of Confucius’ use of language with the Marxist notion of language in order to “restore the truth.”

Chapter 3 evaluates the impact of Daoism and Mao Zedong’s perception on contradiction on Brecht’s concept of dialectics. While acknowledging Brecht’s commitment to the doctrine of materialist dialectics in Marxism, I suggest that we need to give attention to affinities and differences between Marxist dialectics and Daoist dialectics that Brecht is involved with. Only when Brecht’s theory and practice is recognized as a product of cultural interchange in which ideas from different cultures interact and mutually transform each other can we fully understand the development of Brecht’s notion of dialectics. Other than differences, it is commonalities between Chinese system of knowledge and Western cultures concerning the notion of dialectics that provides the premise from which Brecht develops his concept of “dialectic theatre.”

Chapter 4 and 5 center on Brecht’s dramatic plays. While realizing the predicament of man within capitalist production as a recurring theme in Brecht’s works, I examine the place of Chinese influence in Brecht’s configuration of the human subject and ethics. The plays discussed in Chapter 4 include some of his early plays and *Lehrstücke* (*Baal*, *In the Jungle of Cities*, *Drum in the Night*, *Man Equals Man*, *The*

Exception and the Rule and *The Measures Taken*). Issues that will be covered include the suspension of conventional causality and humanistic values, the relation of the self to an external reality, and the tension between the self and the collective and between individuality and class consciousness.

Chapter 5 deals with a clear development in Brecht's configuration of subjectivity, individuality, and ethics in his later works (in particular, *Galileo*, *Mother Courage*, *The Good Person of Szechwan*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, and *Mr Puntilla and His Hired Man*). His first plays are in this respect entirely destructive: his heroes are either, like Baal and Shlink, completely asocial, dismissive of bourgeois ethics and at the mercy of their "instincts and vitality" (Speidel 60); or they are, like Galy Gay, ready to surrender to the changing pressures and social relationships; or they are the young comrades in *The Measures Taken*, subjecting the self to the collective and refusing moral autonomy. Frederic Ewen notices that in Brecht's later plays "the human and humane element becomes dominant": *Mother Courage*, for example, "is now modified by a profound sympathy" (325). He calls this change of Brecht's attitude "Marxist humanism" (325). While Ewen's observation is shared by many other critics, his explanation is a subject of some dispute. Esslin, taking an opposing view, claims that Brecht's later plays are more an expression of his instincts and thus a demonstration of his failure to completely follow the discipline of Communism which "provided a technique of self-control, discipline, and rational thought" (225). Willett, however, emphasizing Brecht's humanist attitude (which is associated with romanticism), comes to the conclusion that it is "his natural sympathy" that gives "a new warmth" to his character and his later plays (*The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht* 86).

Addressing this long disputed ambivalence concerning Brecht's later plays, I suggest that a number of elements within Brecht's reflections on the very nature of ethical issues (such as "goodness") and its constitutional function in one's subjectivity

bear a close parallel to humanistic ideas from Chinese philosophy (chiefly Confucianism and Taoism). It is worth noting that Confucianism and Taoism, though not unifying in themselves, operate on different levels in Brecht's thinking. It is in this context that the relationship of Brecht's later plays to Chinese classical philosophy becomes crucial to a better understanding of Brecht's reconfiguration of the idea of the human subject. For while it may be an exaggeration to claim that Chinese influence plays a dominant role in Brecht's reflection on ethics and subjectivity (indeed, such an assumption would be just as misleading as negating the relation of Chinese thought to Brecht's work), my contention is that what Chinese thought offers is a clear means of challenging the dualisms that define traditional notions of human subjectivity (self/other, subject/object, good/bad, etc), and, thus, plays a crucial role in helping Brecht formulate his views. As we shall see, Brecht's "new type of man," following the principle of *tao*, albeit within a materialistic framework, is capable of ethical response, and understands multiple perspectives and dialectical practices.

Chapter 6 examines Brecht's frequent references to Chinese theatre, acting and philosophy in his theoretical writings. I argue that Brecht's theatre and Chinese theatre share a similar vision of an ideal actor and audience, though Brecht's is for political and social reason, whereas Chinese performance as represented by Mei is more for aesthetic aims. We shall also approach the issue of duality in performance, and resolve the entangled relation within the dichotomies in the Brechtian theatre such as emotion and reason, reality and illusion, identification and alienation, and performer and spectator.

Brecht's exploration of theatrical techniques with reflections on Chinese acting is implicated by its interculturalism. In the first appendix to *The Messingkauf Dialogues*⁸, he suggests that "the A-effect is an ancient artistic technique; it is known from classical comedy, certain branches of popular art and the practices of the Asiatic theatre" (99). One could equally argue for Brecht's deep connection with German

theatrical traditions. Indeed, many of Brecht's theoretical ideas, as Esslin points out, are anticipated by Racine and Diderot. Thus, though I examine the performance aspects between the Chinese theatre and Brecht's theatre with a focus on Mei's memoir and Brecht's famous essay "Alienation effects in Chinese Acting" ("Alienation Effects") (1936) in which he first used the term *Verfremdungseffekt*, I also make comparisons between theatrical ideas from Diderot and those of Chinese acting. The purpose of differentiation is not to argue from which category Brecht draw more influence, but to emphasize the creative dialogue between different cultures and how in the case of Brecht, Chinese thought is fruitfully absorbed in the western intellectual tradition both in its disruption of Western discourse on performance and its affirmation of that part of the Western system of thought to which Brecht are indebted.

CHAPTER 1

BRECHT'S PERCEPTION OF CHINA

A man with one theory is lost. He had to have several, four, many: He had to cram them into his pockets like newspapers, always the most recent ones; one lives well among them, one exists pleasantly between the theories. One has to know that there are many theories with which to grow; a tree also has several theories, but it defeats only one of them for a short time.

—Bertolt Brecht

...Brecht was receptive to a number of influences, and never rejected what he had once absorbed. He developed three or four quite individual dramatic styles, yet perhaps nothing was so individual as their continually varying mixture. This was not just willful, or mere wayward picking up of scraps: every strong influence which he underwent seemed proper to the state of his own development at the time, and in each case it is previously suggested in his own work.

—John Willett

To understand Brecht's work and theory, we must not begin by approaching him as a conventionally orthodox-Marxist or a staunch follower of Asian thought (to name just a few influences). Indeed, any effort at pigeonholing Brecht to any influence would turn out to be an obstacle in understanding the formation and development of his thought. Brecht's above declaration shows, first of all, his insistence on maintaining being free from restrictions of outside influences and his ability to appropriate many

models (of Western and Eastern intellectual thought) to express his political beliefs and ultimately to fulfill his artistic pursuits. It also reflects Brecht's fear of resting with any concluded result—perhaps it is such a fear that prompted him to appropriate his theory, rename his theatre, and revise his plays even to the last minute before the performance.⁹ Such an attitude poses difficulties for making Brecht's connection to China for the obvious question: How can we give due place of his use of Chinese thought within the multiple cultural heritages that he was indebted to?

In this chapter, I attempt to describe not merely the images of China in Brecht's time, but also the evolving images of China in historical times. The chapter is built on two premises. First, since Brecht disturbs any kind of rigid polarization, any study on Brecht and China should be conducted with reference to Brecht's European and American influences. (Chinese thought is not necessarily in opposition or contradiction with Western knowledge.) Second, Brecht's theory should be regarded as in the process of changing and developing, instead of as "a single, homogeneous body of doctrine" (Esslin *Evils* 111); so too is his connection with China. Only by posing the above question in such a broad manner is it possible to investigate how Brecht incorporated Chinese thought into Western traditions in both constructive and disruptive ways. By placing his observations within the interplay of Western culture and Chinese culture, Brecht avoided any inducement to affirming the superiority of Western culture over Chinese culture or a simple worship of the ancient truths of the East.

Brecht and Western Intellectual Traditions

Willett suggests that we can only understand Brecht's theoretical recommendations "in terms of the particular German [Austrian] tradition which he was revolting" (165-66). Nevertheless, the fact that Brecht rebelled against bourgeois naturalism in

the German theatre around 1920—a theatre, described by Esslin, “in which bombastic productions of the classics alternate with empty photographic replicas of everyday life,” (*Evils* 111)—does not suggest that he was completely negative about Western intellectual traditions. On the contrary, he openly acknowledged the various Western influences which shaped his work, so much so that he was even “accused of plagiarism and lack of originality” (Esslin *Evils* 106).

The various influences from European culture have played different roles in Brecht’s writing and text. In Tatlow’s effort to “defamiliarize this conventionalized Brecht,” he even argues for the impact of Nietzsche on Brecht and examines connections between Brecht’s work and the thought of Derrida and Levi-Strauss (*The Intercultural Sign* 10-16). As regards to the relation between Brecht’s writing and English literature, Esslin observes that “Kipling was the main source of the exotic, mythical Anglo-Saxon world which forms the background to a great deal of Brecht’s earlier writing” (*Evils* 100) and that Brecht held the Shakespearian models with reverence and admiration (*Evils* 107). Other elements of Brecht’s English influences have been delineated in Willett’s book *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*:

For he used English models, or else common European ones; he illustrated his opinions by citing Auden and Chaplin, Shelley and Swift, Hogarth and Low; he liked our traditional qualities of clarity and restraint. He worked, as we have seen, on Shakespeare and Marlowe, Webster, Farquhar, Gay and Synge; he was an addict of the English and American detective story, taking much of the tone and style of the *Dreigroschenroman* from Edgar Wallace and *Arturo Ui* from the old gangster films; even the Orientals he saw through Waley’s eyes. (217)

Emphasizing Brecht’s indebtedness to English models as compared to those from Italy, Russia, Poland and France, Willett claims that Brecht’s work shares more affinities

with the theatre and literature of the English-speaking world and thus should not be treated as strange or alien for the English reader. He even boldly suggests that “without the English heritage there would have been no ‘epic theatre’” (*Brecht in Context* 17).

Brecht’s relationship with German culture is more complicated: on the one hand, as Esslin has pointed out, “the German classics are always ruthlessly parodied” in Brecht’s theory and texts (*Evils* 107). Esslin further explains that “in formulating his theory of ‘epic’ theatre Brecht was reacting against the German classics’ theory of drama [those of Goethe and Schiller]” (*Evils* 113); on the other hand, Brecht continued German literary and theatrical traditions¹⁰ (although he has no intention to return to German classic tradition) and re-established them.

Despite the wide acknowledgment of the significance of Brecht’s relationship with Marxism, the influence of Marxism on Brecht was and still is a disputed topic. When aligning Brecht with other traditions (such as irrationalist traditions), Tatlow warns of the danger of rereading Brecht: “Such realignment can have a corrective purpose but cannot be taken too far without jeopardizing Brecht’s socialist perspectives” (“Brecht and Postmodernism” 218). Carney, echoing Tatlow’s emphasis on the predominant influence of Marxism on Brecht, declares that “Brecht’s theatre is only Brechtian as long as Brecht’s techniques are bound to an overall Marxist project” (2). Tatlow criticizes the criticism “as formulated by Esslin in the late 1950s and the arguments which came to the fore in Germany about twenty years later”:

Esslin and others explained Brecht's turn to Marxist analysis as a necessary compensation for his own fundamental nihilism. Marxism therefore offered Brecht necessary psychological strength and this enabled him to produce the later great plays. So though it may have been functionally indispensable to Brecht his Marxism, according to

Esslin, was essentially superficial. (“Brecht and Postmodernism” 216)

While not arguing against Esslin’s view of the position of Marxism in Brecht’s formulation of ideas, Tatlow simply writes: “the main distinction between such “English” and German criticism is that the latter has taken Brecht’s Marxism more seriously” (“Brecht and Postmodernism” 217). The degree to which Brecht committed himself to orthodox Marxism is a question in which there is still much room for debate. However, considering Brecht’s attitudes towards the socialist project and his thinking about man, Brecht’s influence by his Marxist teacher Korsch is not emphasized enough. (Indeed, we shall discuss Korsch’s influence in Brecht’s thinking about dialectics in Chapter 3.)

Recalling Brecht’s investment in various cultural traditions, it was never Brecht’s intention to strictly follow one system of thought. At least Brecht would not insist that his interest in other traditions lives under the shadow of the socialist component in his thought. Rather, when in discussion of Brecht’s connection with many theatrical, literary and philosophical traditions, it is more fruitful to understand this feature in his ongoing effort to find new expressions for man onstage. I suggest that Brecht has adopted a dialectical attitude towards various traditions. And while it would be overbearing to discuss all of the various influences upon Brecht found in his work (in the context of this study on Brecht and China), it is crucial for us to consider Elisabeth Hauptmann and Piscator, to whom Brecht was closely related. Later we shall see that it is his revolt against the theatre of naturalistic illusion (together with the pursuit of new artistic means) that links Brecht with many of his contemporaries.

The list of his contemporary influences could be long: to name just a few, his Marxist teacher Karl Korsch, Erwin Piscator, his musical collaborator Kurt Weill, and Hauptmann. Perhaps the most disputed influence is Hauptmann. In his book *Brecht and Company* (1994), John Fuegi, after careful research, claims that much of Brecht’s

writing should be attributed to Elisabeth Hauptmann and Margarete Steffin. (For example, Hauptmann wrote 80 percent of *The Threepenny Opera* and Steffin has made great contributions to *Mother Courage* and *The Good Person of Szechwan*.) Nevertheless, even for those who do not agree with Fuegi's bold claims, Hauptmann's role in Brecht's is still readily recognized: she introduced Brecht Arthur Waley's *The No Plays of Japan* and translated two or three; Brecht's *Lehrstück He said Yes*, in Willett's words, "was almost word for word Hauptmann's translation of *Taniko* or *The Valley-Hurling* from Waley's collection" (*Brecht in Context* 21).

Brecht worked with Piscator in the Berlin Volksbühne and his theory of epic theatre was greatly influenced by Piscator's conception (Esslin *Evils* 17). Brecht repeatedly acknowledged his debt to Piscator, for example, in the mouth of the Dramaturg in *The Messingkauf Dialogues*:

The actual theory of the non-Aristotelian theatre and the development of the A-effect should be credited to the Augsburger, but much of it was also applied by Piscator, and in a wholly original and independent way. Above all, the theatre's conversion to politics was Piscator's achievement, without which the Augsburger's theatre would hardly be conceivable. (63-4)

Willett also points out that Piscator "taught him [Brecht] how radically the development of stage machinery and projections could transform the structural possibilities open to the 'epic' playwright" (*Brecht in Context* 104). Even so, Brecht's later theories of the epic theatre, as Esslin points out, diverge from Piscator's in the sense that "Brecht laid great stress on the poetic aspects of such a drama" (*Evils* 23). Even Piscator himself complained how different their theatre was (*Brecht in Context* 116).

However, even while we are reminded that Brecht never fully dissociated

himself from the European cultural traditions, Brecht's efforts to revolutionize the naturalistic theatre also contains influences from outside of the Western intellectual traditions. In fact, he has always acknowledged his debt to the most diverse sources from Western and Eastern theatrical conventions and traditions: the Chinese, Japanese, and Indian theatre. And while he was rather ambiguous about the Chinese thought in his works, he readily wrote the lines from the *Tao Te Ching* into his plays, and in his journals and essays abundantly referred to the thought from Confucius, Lao Zi and Mo Zi. Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, for example, best exemplifies his abilities to absorb multiple cultural elements into his own theatrical work, as Willett explains:

The plot and some of the language are Biblical; the 'Song of Chaos' Egyptian; the technique of narration and comment Japanese; the construction cinematic; the conclusion didactic; the wedding scene a reflection of the Marx brothers' *A Night at the Opera*; the soldiers an apparent recollection of *Mann ist Mann*; the atmosphere a cross between Brueghel and the pseudo-Chinese; the framework a commonsense, non-political issue debated in modern Georgia....And several of the later plays have a pedigree as complicated as this.
(*Bertolt Brecht* 123-4)

In this study I do not intend to disregard (or even diminish) the fact that Brecht is very much under various influences of those Western intellectual traditions stressed by Esslin, Willett and other critics, nor the Japanese influence considered by Tatlow. Rather, I will argue that Brecht's response to China is one of many mutually interacting and conflating cultural forces that helped Brecht form his ideas. Indeed, it would be an exaggeration to claim that Chinese influence had a dominant influence on Brecht just as it would be to claim that Chinese ideas have transformed Western culture and thought. However, it is also crucial to recognize the significant position of

China in this ongoing cultural dialogue between the West and China and within which the redefinition of each cultural tradition has taken place.

Orientalism as a “Self-Questioning Strategy”

To answer the question of how Brecht positions China within Western intellectual traditions, or more specifically, what role China has played within Brecht’s reflection of Western discourse on the human subject, we need to differentiate between the traditional philosophies of China and Western intellectual traditions which Brecht are involved with. While discussing Brecht’s incorporation of Chinese thought (such as Confucius’ use of language and Lao Zi’s critique of ethics), we should note how his interest in China is inextricably bound up with his critical inheritance of the Western discourse on subjectivity and ethics. Meanwhile, we should also readily acknowledge the commonalities between Chinese systems of knowledge and Western culture and tradition (for example, the parallels between the Marxist dialectics and the Taoist dialectics, and Diderot’s acting theory and Chinese acting). The purpose of comparison is not to argue to which category Brecht draw more influence; instead I mean to emphasize the creative cultural dialogue which exists between different cultures and to show how in the case of Brecht, Chinese thought is fruitfully absorbed in the western intellectual tradition both in its disruption and affirmation (and redefinition) of the Western system of thought in which Brecht has deep roots.

This study of Brecht and China will be contextualized in his encounter with China both from an aesthetic perspective and from a cultural-social-political perspective. That is, it attempts to examine Brecht’s use of Chinese thought and theatre as more than a coincidence, but, firstly, a outgrowth of his response to the global political and economic changes since the beginning of twentieth century, and secondly, the continuation of a long tradition of ideas from China penetrating into

Western systems of knowledge. Prior to our discussion, it is worthwhile to review some of the current theories—which intend to explain the Western fascination with the East—in a critical perspective.

Since Brecht's response to Chinese thought and theatre exists in a specifically European context, any discussion of Brecht and his encounter with Asian culture, however unique or nuanced it may appear, must necessarily be contextualized in relation to the debate of the West's relationship with Eastern thought—a topic that was initiated by Edward Said's seminal book *Orientalism*. In *Orientalism* Said summarizes the relationship between East and West as “a relationship of power, domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony” (5). Said's critique of Western representations of the Orient is an ambitious undertaking in that he desires to delineate a coherent history of Western representation of the Orient, in other words, a history of justifying the global authority of the West through reconstructing an imperialist knowledge of the peoples of the Orient as the conquered.¹¹ Although Said's main concern in *Orientalism* was with the cultures of the Middle East, it is widely accepted by scholars that Said's argument remain valid in the case of the “Far East” (Clarke 23).

If we remember Brecht's essay “Alienation Effect” which identified the V-effect in Chinese theatre, adopting a Saidian model to analyze Brecht's representation of Chinese theatre is tempting, especially given a primary concern with Brecht's identifying similar theatrical techniques in the Chinese theatre and various Western traditions (which disrupt the rules of the dominant naturalism of the European drama). In his aim to identify the universal theatrical practices in Europe and China, Brecht did not give particular attention to specific cultural identities. This emphasis on universality inevitably accords with Said's accusation of Eurocentrism in Western representation of other cultures and thus provides support for the Sadist

model of a universal narrative as defined and dominated by Western culture. Such a reading is not completely ungrounded, yet it turns out to be inadequate, reductive and slanted, for the very reason that it ignores that this representation could also be destructive (and constructive in another way) in challenging and, furthermore, redefining the speaker's cultural entity.

While admitting that colonial attitudes were one aspect of Orientalism, Clarke, in his historical review of the cultural encounter between Asia and Europe, notices "the historical discontinuities and changes in the focus of the West's attitude towards Asian thought that have occurred over the past few centuries" (10), and arrives at the conclusion that Western interest in Asian ideas has been more than out of a condescending and colonialist attitude. Clarke aims to emphasize "the role of Eastern thought within the broad Western intellectual tradition" which has been ignored by historians, and thus, to show that "throughout the modern period from the time of the Renaissance onwards, the East has exercised a strong fascination over Western minds, and has entered into Western cultural and intellectual life in ways which are of considerably more than passing significance within the history of Western ideas" (5). Instead of dismissing a Saidian model of Orientalism, Clarke proposes another notion of Orientalism as a "self-questioning strategy". According to his model, the otherness of the East is not merely perceived as a negative counterpart of the West or a conquered other to assert the Western self-glorifying superiority. Rather, Clarke argues that it is a constant theme in Western intellectual traditions to question its own indigenous traditions through the mirror of Eastern thought. Clarke's argument offers a useful way to conceptualize Brecht's involvement with China that takes place well within the Western traditions, which is, in Clarke's words, "draw[ing] Eastern ideas into the orbit of their intellectual and cultural interests, constructing a set of representations of it in pursuit of Western goals and aspirations" (10).

This study follows Clarke's path in emphasizing that the relations between different cultures is not one single story of exclusion and subjugation, it is also a story of interaction and penetration, where the boundaries between the so-called "Eastern" culture and "Western" culture is always in the process of re-division. While locating my discussion of Brecht and China within various trends of Western intellectual engagement with China in his time, I also want to take into account the West's historical relationship with China, in which the different views of China (and accordingly European perceptions of Chinese theatre) are generated. With an emphasis on cross-cultural dialogues, I wish to show that Brecht's perception of China (which, as we shall see, is far from a coherent one) is a direct response to general patterns of the image of China in his time as well as in historical times.

Evolving Images of China in the Western tradition

The evolving image of China in the Western tradition—reviewed within the framework of social, political, and economic developments in Europe and Asia—shall be roughly divided into four stages beginning from the fifteenth century until the first half of twentieth century in the context of my study (though we should always note that this categorization never depicts the whole picture): 1) The publication of *The Travels of Marco Polo* in the late thirteenth century inspired utopian expectations of the East and had great initial impact on Europeans for their voyages of exploration; 2) From the 1500s to the 1750s, especially during the Enlightenment, the cult of China flourished: China was elevated to an exalted height of perfection as an example of a state governed by a philosopher king; 3) From the 1750s to the break-out of World War I, with the intrusion of European powers into the East and the subsequent subjugation of Asian peoples, the assessment of Asia in general grew more negative; 4) From 1918 to the 1940s, the ending of the long period of European expansion and

imperialist hegemony is accompanied by the spreading influence of Socialism and a turning to a so-called “Eastern spirit” (Clarke 95-112). While I am tracing the many and multifaceted encounters between the West and China, I note that the Western attitude towards Asia is “schizophrenic”: at times predominantly permeated with a condescending, exploitative and imperialistic attitude (from the 1750s to 1910s), but, more often than not, as Clarke suggests, seeking “self-correction” through its interpretations of Asian ideas (from the fifteenth century to the eighteenth century, and since the twentieth century). As such, Said’s association of Orientalism with colonizing power fails to represent the whole picture.

Marco Polo brought back to Europe hard information about China for the first time (Rossabi 55-62). Polo’s thirteenth-century travels and adventures in China, India, and Persia were recorded in *The Travels of Marco Polo*, which exerted the most powerful cultural and historical impact on Europeans’ perception of other countries and cultures, and provided the prototype images of Asia in a great variety of situations. The tales of Polo were widely known during his era, and, obviously, Europeans were largely attracted by “the riches of the Orient” (Murphey 9) more than by the more advanced and varied civilization existing in Asia.¹² The era of initial direct contact did not have a massive impact on cultural transmission between East and West, but on the practical level, it did fire the Europeans’ desire for economic profits and the urge for the expansion of world market.¹³ More importantly, the image of these fabled rich civilizations in the East (India, China, the Spice Islands of Southeast Asia, Japan) which Polo described as hearsay, came to share commonalities with the Garden of Eden and Arcadia within the European consciousness (Schaer 5).

This partially explains why in the following centuries the utopian writings of Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), T. Campanella’s *City of Sun* (1623), and Bacon’s *New Atlantis* (1627), all situate their ideal city in an ambiguous geographic position in the

East, i.e. an island in the Pacific Ocean, or somewhere in the far-away Eastern land. Notably, even their writings differ from those of Marco Polo's time in that they are more interested in expressing their vision of the future of human society and their ideal organization of society through projecting an alternative political system and culture in an imaginary geographical "East".

Nevertheless, on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century stage, a respect for the East was still in a large degree "expressed through the spurious image of riches and plenty" (Mackenzie 181). Edward Mackenzie discusses how in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* and Dryden's *Alexander Feast*, the image of the East embraces riches and beauty and "was depicted as an ideal, contrasting strikingly with a disadvantaged West" (181). Asian merchandises, its artistic styles and techniques in arts, and its thought are all linked together in the minds of the Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth century (The term *Chinoiserie* itself signifies that this image of China is imaginary rather than realistic.). When discussing the affinity in the style of Rococo and ancient Chinese culture, Reichwein suggests that the ancient Chinese culture, through its merchandises such as porcelain, silk, tea and its thought (Confucianism, Taoism and Zennism), "revealed itself to the minds of that gracious eighteenth-century society in Europe a vision of happy living such as their own optimism had already dreamed of" (26).

It is during the Enlightenment that an interest in and enthusiasm for Chinese literature and ideas, especially Confucianism, first gained admiration among Europeans. The prevalent literary device for dealing with intercultural topics was defined by Leonard A. Gordon, as "making a fictional foreign observer the mouthpiece of his criticisms of European institutions and customs" (131-2). This literary device was utilized by Montesquieu, together with other writers of the eighteenth century, including Voltaire, Diderot, and Oliver Goldsmith. This is a

cunning technique, according to Gordon, as the critical distance made the author's voice and point of view more sensible, humane, convincing and allowed him a platform from which to "criticize the west," and "undercut authority and tradition at home" (132). Later we shall see how Brecht continues this tradition in his use of China, pointing to a strategy in which China is employed as a position from which to reflect upon Western intellectual cultures.

Regarding the introduction of Asian elements into Western theatre in particular, the adaptations of Chinese Yuan *zaju* *Orphan of Zhao Family* (the translated title is *Orphan of China*)¹⁴ during the Enlightenment are worthy of discussion. By serving as a compelling example of how Western utopian and Enlightenment traditions employ a Chinese model as the ideal polity (Gordon 131), the adaptation is indicative of the shifts in Western theatre tradition in which what the East could offer was more than stunning and novel set designs and costumes. Indeed, if we consider Brecht's use of Chinese sources in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *The Good Person of Szechwan* (both of which are loosely based on Yuan *zaju*: *The Chalk Circle* and *The Orphan of Zhao Family*), we begin to understand why discussion of Brecht's perception of China has to be historized.

The Orphan of Zhao Family was written by Ji Junxiang during the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368 AD). In 1731, Joseph Prémare first translated part of it and published the French version *L'orphelin de la Maison de Tchao* in 1735. Based on Prémare's translation, Voltaire composed his own version of the drama titled *L'Orphelin de la Chine* (1755), which caused a great stir in its production among French society. Voltaire's choice of adapting this Chinese play—and its subsequent great success—is not a coincidence (nor is it any indication of its quality as translation), but, rather, an indication of the general fascination among European scholars towards Chinese moral philosophy, as well as its political system. Traces of

Confucian thought are paramount in Voltaire's version. The story is about a boy taking revenge for his murdered family. Voltaire made a few alterations to the plot to highlight the irreconcilable conflicts between evil forces and justice. The play ends with the orphan finally taking his revenge on those who murdered his family, a typical ending for a Yuan drama in which the good and just are rewarded and the wicked is invariably punished in the end. However, Voltaire did not simply conclude by glorifying the human moral qualities of loyalty, bravery, etc., but further reduced them to the spiritual power of humanity and morality in conquering violence and injustice; in his own words, "the natural superiority of reason and genius over blind and barbarous force" (8). Consequently, it becomes increasingly apparent that he was exploiting a fictionalized China "in a frontal assault on the political and religious institutions of his day" (Clarke 44). From this perspective it is clear that the purpose of Voltaire's adaptation was three-fold: firstly, to compare Confucian morality with Christian ethics, as Voltaire and his contemporaries considered Confucian and his theories to advocate a cultivation of ethics, where virtue is instilled as practical, closely related to politics and reality, and "inculcated by action and dialogue" (Voltaire 9). Secondly, believing in the power of rationality as the legitimacy of authority, Voltaire, in the Enlightenment spirit, comes to the conclusion that the "tranquil and harmonious" political system of China was based on Confucian philosophy—a foundation of rational principles which prevails in all aspects of Chinese society (Clarke 43-6). Thirdly, Voltaire portrayed Kubla Khan as one who accords with the image of a philosopher king: rational, governing the country according to Confucian teachings, and observing laws.

Whereas various Asian theatrical techniques were imported by a wide range of Europeans and American theatre practitioners to revitalize their own theatre from the beginning of 20th century, in earlier periods the artistic achievements of Asian theatre

were largely ignored or depreciated, at least in part because of the incompatibility between Eurocentric rules for dramas and the unique and distinguishable theatrical expressions in Asia. Voltaire, for example, concludes that the Chinese original lacks craft since it fails to observe the classical unities in theatre (Voltaire 11). The significance of the adaptation of this Chinese play lies in European utilization of its thematic concerns and social values: in Voltaire's time the superiority of Confucian philosophy and its political system in China is introduced as a point of contrast to that of European society. The China in Voltaire's play is a continuation of this earlier ideal city tradition, and in Chapter 5, we shall see how Brecht, though out of different needs and aims, continued this tradition in the twentieth-century in his reflection upon man's relation to others and man's position in society.

The image of China, however, became predominantly negative in the following two centuries with the intrusion of European power into Asia and the subsequent change of power relations. After the 1750s European empires' influence in Asia became decisive (Malefakis 175). Through colonial wars with China, European power controlled the territories that produced the products which were of vital and increased demand in Industrialization. By the end of the nineteenth century, Asia had been penetrated on all sides by several Western powers. The abrupt expansion of Western intervention in Asia, according to Malefakis, was spurred by changing of power balances, combined with economic motivations (175). In turn, attitudes towards the East grew more complex, though generally more negative: "Non-Western cultures came to be dismissed as entirely stagnant, if not barbaric, while racism came to be cloaked with a new intellectual respectability" (Lewis 76).

In *The Spirit of the Laws* (1798)—Montesquieu's vision of Asia—China is associated with despotism. In Gordon's view, Montesquieu's vision of Asia could be categorized into the western narrative of despotisms in Asia beginning from Aristotle,

to Wittfogel's *Oriental Despotism* and finally to Marx (127-45). The drive to integrate the East into a stage of historical progress among Romantic writers would culminate in Hegel's theory of world history, in which he argues that Asia, including both China and India, represents the childhood of humanity, while the modern Germanic Protestant world, on the other hand, was the highest stage of "the unfolding of the development of the self-consciousness of freedom" (Goldman 148). Indeed, the practice of putting Asia into a Eurocentric scheme and agenda is in accord with the imperialist view of non-Western cultures. Consequently, the model of East-West relations during the colonial period dovetails with Said's study of the relations between Europeans and non-Europeans, since the development and maintenance of the European subject "requires the existence of another different and competing alter ego" (Said 35) to justify the act of colonization.

Even so, the cultural dialogue between West and East in relation to the theatre (both during the Enlightenment and Romanticism) was not of a monolithic discourse. When specifically discussing the stage, Mackenzie argues that commentators on the East "were capable of separating out attitudes towards religion and politics from approaches to the arts" (193). While admittedly "in the later nineteenth century the presentation of eastern characters, particularly Indian and Chinese, was unsympathetic," the success of *A Chinese Honeymoon* (1901), *The Cingalee* (1904) and *The Mikado* (1885) in Europe, though offering an unreal vision of the East, demonstrates a high regard for the arts and crafts of the East in their use of stage and props. "Thus the arts and crafts of the East, at least those which had secured the admiration of the West and influenced the artistic movements of the late nineteenth century, were repeatedly separated from their political and social contexts" (Mackenzie 194).

In fact, besides the increasing ethnocentrism and attitude of an unbridled

arrogance towards the East in Western writings, there still existed a high regard of Asian literature and philosophical thought. What primarily captured the Western Romantic imagination was the Indian and Japanese theatre. For example, Mackenzie cites a review of the pantomime *Harlequin and the Red Dwarf* in 1813 *The Times*, which “extolled the advantages of Orientalist scenery and Asian history” (183). In the review the East was not viewed as “the Other to be despised and conquered, but as illustrating all the characteristics most highly valued in the cultural fashions of the age” (184). While admitting that the East is “a generalized and stereotypical East”, Mackenzie also pointed out that the review suggests “a certain amount of escapism from the grinding and bitter warfare of Europe” (184).

To draw a tentative conclusion, the discourse of representation of Asia in Western writing is never stable and coherent. And yet while it is never clean of prejudices and bias, there also exists a strong fascination with Asian thought and culture. Although the focus of this study is on Brecht’s uses of China, we need to note that in the long history of the West’s cultural encounter with China, the influence of Yuan *zaju* and the literary device of adopting “a foreign voice” to reflect one’s own culture and tradition (which has emerged and still be part of the popular themes) has been carried through into the twentieth century by Brecht.

The following discussion begins with Said’s assumption that “no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author’s involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances” (11). When we discuss Brecht’s relation to China or Brecht’s understanding of China, we must take the historical background into consideration and associate Brecht’s response to the social and political circumstances in Europe with his interest in China. Meanwhile, we shall also situate the discussion of Brecht specifically within the contemporary contexts of cross-cultural theatre. These two contextualizations, in most cases, are overlapping.

Brecht's Perception of China

While we measure Brecht's response within the context of the Western reaction to China, such a response is best observed on two levels: synchronically and chronologically. On the one hand, we should see how Brecht's discourse (s) on China, formed in specific social contexts, both inherits and disrupts Western discourses on China more generally; on the other hand, we need to compare his perception of China with those of other writers in his time, especially left-wing German intellectuals and theatre innovators. One fact that we could be certain of at this stage is that, as Hayot points out: "There exists no metadiscourse on China with which to begin to think about not only Brecht's relation to China, but his own understanding of that relation" (55). Hence, instead of categorizing Brecht's China into certain Orientalist themes, we situate our discussion of Brecht's relation to China within the tradition, in Clarke's words, of Western deployment of the "East as a means of intellectual and cultural criticism" (107) and begin by investigating the literary movement and the socio-economic-political circumstances that Brecht was involved in.

In the early twentieth century, there emerges a new movement in art committed to adopting radical forms and attempting to find new artistic expressions unrestrained by the conventions of a previous generation. These artistic innovations on the early twentieth-century literary scene are accompanied more or less with an engagement with the cultural influence of the Far East. This influence may not be sufficient enough to herald the arrival of the Modernist movement in poetry, fiction and theatre, yet, as Zhaoming Qian suggests, the Far East (chiefly China) played a penetrating influence in the Modernist movement: first in pictorial art around the turn of the century and then in the Modernist movement in poetry (2-5). Clarke claims that Chinese thought and culture, after its eclipse in the Romantic period, "regained some

of its popular appeal through the series of translations of Chinese poetry undertaken by Arthur Waley (1889-1966)” which not only had a strong influence on modern poets such as Yeats and Pound, but also “has become once again an object of interest to Western scholars and philosophers” (98). Indeed, we only need to recall the profound effect of Japanese *haiku* and *tanka*, and the verse of China (such as the poetry of Bo Juyi) through Waley’s translation on modern poets like Brecht. On the modern stage, theatre directors and theoreticians who have shown an intense interest in performance traditions of Asian countries include: Edward Gordon Craig, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, and Jean Genet. It soon becomes clear that despite the abundant negative representations of Asia either in literary writings or characterization on stage, the perceptions (or misperceptions) of Asian cultures has served as important sources of inspiration in the Western theatre.

The renewed interest in China emerging in Western revolution in culture and thought can be seen as a direct response to changing historical conditions and relations within trans-cultural influences. The outbreak of the First World War (1914-1918) was an important turning point of the world history at the turn of the last century, essentially for how it was a struggle among Europeans for hegemony in the world order (Lee 411). Among historians, the consensus view is that the process of decomposition of the European imperial powers in Asia began with the outbreak of WWI (Lee 399, Malefakis 180) and as a consequence of WWI and the Great Depression of the 1930s, European control over Asia were gradually weakened: “in Asia the European colonial powers in large part ceased to act as such during the interwar period” (Malefakis 180). In fact, there was a strengthening of nationalist movements in Asian countries such as India, China and Korea. The eventual result was the dissolution of European control over the world, “the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia”, and “the rise of the United States in international politics and the

world economy” (Lee 399).

The popular view has it that there is a “prevailing sense of cultural crisis in the period preceding World War I” (Clarke 101). A growing disbelief in the superiority of their own culture among Europeans was, as critics like Clarke, Berg-Pan and Qian point out, linked with growing appreciation of the culture and arts of Asian countries (especially China). Qian emphasized the significant position of the Chinese influence in the Modernism of the 1910s and 1920s, and argues that Orientalism “helped to give expression and substance to a sense of deep cultural crisis and to loss of faith in the West’s idea of progress through scientific rationalism, and to a need for new modes of representation” (5). Berg-Pan, when explaining this general interest in China among the Germans, expressed a similar view by claiming that “Europeans had discovered that the Far East, and especially China, possessed values and a belief in humanity which they themselves had lost as a result of their intellectualism” (*Bertolt Brecht and China* 9-10).

In his discussion on Brecht’s interest in East Asian aesthetics and in ritual forms, Tatlow suggests the underlying reasons for this attraction towards other cultures as follows:

We respond to the forms of other cultures because they give us access to the unconscious of our own episteme. In such cases there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ except, on occasion, in a trivial positivist sense. What matters is what becomes culturally possible and why that impulse originally appears to have come from ‘outside.’ A response to other cultures meets a lack, of which we are perhaps only partly conscious, in our own. We then must ask why that need, or lack, exists. But to do this, we have to abandon forever the notion of cultural essentialism that still haunts the discourse when East and West meet or

analyze each other. We only learn from each other when we question ourselves. (*The Intercultural Sign* 29)

Tatlow implies that underneath this attachment is the constant theme in cultural exchange: the acceptance of other cultures is out of the “need or lack” in one’s own culture. Tatlow’s argument provides one possible explanation for Voltaire’s association with China as embodying a superior stage of human civilization and for Clarke’s summary of the Romantic imagination of the Indian culture: “a more fully realized human existence and a more holistic and spiritually driven culture” (60). In both cases, China (in Enlightenment) and India (In Romanticism) are employed as a “self-corrective strategy” in the Europeans’ reflection on their own cultures. During the Enlightenment the self-criticism was directed towards traditional institutions, customs and values, whereas, during Romanticism the exaltation of rationality was questioned and even rejected.

While there is much to support the idea that a spiritual crisis can be seen in the Modernist experiments of the early 20th century, I do not intend to misleadingly emphasize the salvational role of China (as a cultural other) in the project of “cultural regeneration or renewal” (in Clarke’s words) in Western civilization. In fact, the idea that classical Chinese philosophy produced thousands years ago could be used to address the problems of modern industrialized European societies (take Germany for example) would be suspicious, especially when we think about how these patterns of thought, even in modern China, were ever considered to be outdated and “reactionary” by the Left in the New Culture Movement (1915-1921). On the other hand, one’s cultural background does serve as the root of one’s ideas; in other words, the complete rejection of one’s cultural background is more of a gesture than a practice.

As we attempt to differentiate between various cultural traditions, it is also important to note that it is apparent commonalities between Chinese thought and

“lost” Western tradition which Western writers (like Brecht) aim to return to or to rediscover (consciously or unconsciously) that draws their attention to China. Two points need to be noted. First, although these disquieting historical elements anticipate the mood of change and questioning in Western cultural life that dominate the 20th century and the cultural and intellectual encounter between Europe and China, concerns and responses—which are inextricably linked into this agenda of breaking with traditions and searching for inspiration from other cultures—are varied and even divergent. It is reductive to assume that all Western scholars who are interested in China are pursuing similar agendas. We have already given a historical review to trace the specificities of China mainly in European writings. Thus it is necessary to make a distinction between Brecht’s response to China and the vision of China of his contemporaries. (For example, we shall assess in the next chapter Brecht’s retranslation of Chinese poetry through Waley’s translation and demonstrate how Chinese poetry means something different to Brecht.) Second, even within Brecht a variety of motivational factors were linked in his use of China, which simply cannot be generalized as a coherent story of his China. Nevertheless, as I shall suggest in this study, his China(s), integrated within his concerns of expressions of Man in the changing economic and social realities, does serve, to quote Clarke, as “an agency for self-criticism and self-renewal, whether in the political, moral, or religious spheres” (27).

As for the cross-cultural theatrical stage, the twentieth century saw the increasing popularity and veneration of Asian theatrical techniques and philosophical ideas, and considerable growth in comparative studies. This enthusiasm for Asia ideas was largely generated by discontent with the Realist theatre and the Stanislavsky method of acting (which, for each of them, is outdated and must be discarded), and a search for alternatives. They are all inevitably interested in theatrical innovations in

form and the incorporation of philosophical ideas underneath acting. Brecht appears to be the most representative figure in a growing trend towards engaging with Asian thought and theatrical traditions, especially so given that, as compared with other Western avant-garde anti-illusionist theatre practitioners such as Artaud, Craig and Meyerhold, Brecht shows a genuine interest in Chinese ideas and its philosophy as well as the social and political realities of contemporary China.

It is also notable that, unlike his contemporaries, Brecht deviates from the tradition of romanticizing tendency, which, according to Clarke, is “clearly present within orientalist discourse throughout its whole history” (20). One need only think about the sharp contrast between Brecht’s Szechwan in which “industrialization and the invasion of European customs” “are infringing upon the Gods (and upon the morals)” (*Journals* 76) and James Hilton’s Shangri-La, the fictional paradise in the mountains of Tibet described in *Lost Horizon* (1933). (Ironically, geographically Tibet and Szechwan are neighboring provinces.). Moreover, Brecht himself warned of the dangers of employing Chinese elements as simple disguises in his plays. On May 1930 when Brecht brooded over the *Good Person*, he noted that

some attention must be paid to countering the risk of chinoiserie. The vision is of a Chinese city’s outskirts with cement works and so on. There are still gods around but aeroplanes have come in. perhaps the lover should be an unemployed pilot? (*Journals* 30)

Indeed, if we compare his awareness of the conventions of Chinese culture with Artaud’s understanding of the Balinese culture, the divergence in their perception of Asian cultures is obvious. Artaud’s association of Balinese dance with his conception of the Theatre of Cruelty reflects an escape from rationalism and a stereotyped view of Eastern culture characterized with mysticism and exoticism. Nevertheless, Artaud still shares with Brecht a critical reflection upon Western culture, as both launched an

assault on traditional methods of rational inquiry.

Apparently, Brecht's choice of Chinese settings and references to Chinese sources is not, as has frequently been suggested, the result of a romantic disposition. We are reminded by Berg-Pan that the growing interest in China among the group of German left-wing intellectuals (which Brecht was inevitably involved with) are inseparable from the intellectual and political atmosphere in the years of the Weimar Republic. Within this context, the increasing interest in Chinese literature and philosophy was coupled with concerns of the sociopolitical situation in China. Of the twenties, Berg-Pan wrote:

...China came to be viewed increasingly as a setting in disguise for Germany where contemporary German political frustrations were aired. The revolutionary movement in China had become very powerful and its members fought both against Chiang Kai-shek and the intervention of foreign powers, notably Great Britain. German left-wing writers and intellectuals followed events in China with keen interest and declared their solidarity with the struggling Chinese people in numerous manifestoes, articles, and plays. ... Among the communists in Germany, the Chinese revolutionary movement had become even more popular than the Bolshevik October revolution. Reports of street fights between the Chinese communists under the leadership of Mao tse-tung and Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist forces were broadcast everywhere in Europe. (*Bertolt Brecht and China* 17)

Berg-Pan further ascribes this interest in the struggle for the liberation of China's oppressed working classes to its function in "stir[ring] up the hopes of Germany's working classes for a better world" ("Mixing Old and New Wisdom" 207). In fact, Brecht's political involvement and his commitment to the Marxist project did accord

with his interests in China.

Like most German left-wing intellectuals, Brecht followed the news about China: the wars with Japan and the civil war between the Nanking government and the Communists in China. Brecht's first poem dealing with a "Chinese topic" is about the fall of Tsingtao (a German colony established in mainland China in 1898 and which was captured by Japan in 1914 after a three-month siege). In his journals Brecht specifically recorded his concerns about the progress of revolution in China in the year of 1948: a news clipping posted in his journal titled "Chinese Destiny" analyzes why the Communists with poor weapons were able to wrest their opponents with tanks and artillery and comes to the conclusion that "the old Clausewitzian contention that war is but an extension of politics" is particularly true to Chinese wars (*Journals* 413). In 1948 after reading an ode by Mao Zedong written during his first flight over the great wall, Brecht wrote: "my expectation of a renaissance of the arts, triggered off by the rising of the Far East, seems to be approaching fulfillment earlier than one might have thought" (*Journals* 413).

The evidence shows (and will continue to show as this project continues) that Brecht's motivation for using China as background may not be exoticism, but an intellectual and political concern. Nevertheless, for those plays which are set in China or include Chinese references, we still need to decide the degree of historical accuracy of Chinese elements in Brecht's plays. *The Measures Taken*, according to Willett, is based on Gerhard Eisler's experiences as a Comintern emissary in China: "He had been one of a group of foreign Communists—along with Heinz Neumann and Besso Lominadze—who took part in the short-lived Canton Commune of December 1927, and he later returned to China as political secretary of the Communist unions in Shanghai" (*Brecht in Context* 176-77). Tatlow further confirms the connection between Brecht's plot and historical truth in China by saying: "at this time the

Comintern agitators were branded as foreign agents by the anti-Communist Koumintang, appealing to the understandable anti-foreign resentment of the Chinese. This is why the Young Comrade endangers his colleagues when he removes the mask” (*Mask* 262). Nevertheless, the play is never intended for a realistic portrayal of Communist activities in China. *The Good Person of Szechwan*, though often considered as a parable, could be interpreted as reflecting the oppressive nature of imperialism and Capitalism system in China (implied by the fact that China was involved in the global tobacco industry since the later 19th century). Likewise, one would not deny the fact that China is more of a disguise than a meaningful historical entity in Brecht’s *Turandot* which deals with the role of the intellectuals. (However, we also note that the Chinoiserie in *Turandot* is dramatically distinctive from Schiller’s *Turandot* and Reinhardt’s 1926 Salzburg production of Gozzi’s *Turandot*.)

Even showing the same concerns towards Chinese sociological issues and a serious interest in Chinese philosophy like Alfred Döblin (who based his novel *The Three Leaps of Wang Lun* [1915] upon “careful research and historical documentation” [Berg-Pan 15]) and Sergei Tretyakov (who tried to depict a revolutionary China in *Roar China* [1913]), Brecht, however, took a different path from them. In his novel, Döblin depicted the rise and fall of a historically documented religious sect in the 18th century China. Berg-Pan differentiates the China shown in Döblin’s novel from previous images stating that “Döblin was the first to break with the established tradition in which China was used either as a metaphor for European institutions and concepts or as a country symbolizing peace and serenity” (*Bertolt Brecht and China* 16). Tretyakov’s *Roar China*, though containing “the familiar poetical Chinoiserie”, is set firmly in contemporary China which “portrays the outrageous behavior of European businessmen and militarists in China; their evident contempt for the Chinese eventually provokes a reaction among those long-suffering

people” (*Mask* 262).¹⁵ In this sense, the China in the writings of Tretiakov and Döblin differs considerably from the general image of China held by Germans.

Unlike Tretiakov and Döblin, Brecht never intended to portray in minute details life in China. On a closer look of Brecht’s plays which have Chinese sources or refer to Chinese social realities (such as *The Measures Taken* or *The Good Person of Szechwan*), we could easily find that Brecht never aims to give a realistic portrayal of definite historical events, and that by avoiding such portrayals, he demonstrates his rejection of literary realism. Nevertheless, both Tretiakov and Döblin had a great impact upon Brecht’s uses of China: according to Berg-Pan, Brecht saw the production of *Roar China* in Berlin in 1930 and “was impressed by the combination of politics and his new methods of dramatic expression” (“Mixing Old and New Wisdom” 208); he also showed great interest in Döblin’s interpretation of the Daoist concept of *wu wei* (the Taoist principle of non-contention) and praised “its ‘great dynamic force’ which brought everything into motion” (*Bertolt Brecht and China* 15).

Realizing the incongruities between Brecht’s interest in Chinese sociopolitical background and a refusal to depict a realistic China, Berg-Pan argues that China is assigned the function of “disguising German political problems under a ‘far eastern veil’” (*Bertolt Brecht and China* 5) due to the increasing tension in Germany between the rising of the Nazi and the communist movements:

For German left-wing intellectuals there was yet another reason for the ever-increasing interest in China as a subject matter for discussion on and off the stage. At a time when their own country was rapidly becoming more and more fascist and few opportunities were left to produce obviously political plays in the German theatres, only ideas disguised under a ‘Far Eastern veil’ could be effectively expressed. Brecht’s own four didactic plays, *The People Who Say Yes*, *The People*

Who Say No, The Measures Taken, The Exception and the Rule, were written under the immediate influence of the German Agit-Prop theatre. They have, in fact, little to do with revolutionary China but disguise Brechtian concerns under a rather transparent oriental guise....(*Bertolt Brecht and China* 21)

We are tempted to agree with Berg-Pan, partly because using China as a disguise seems to be the most effective strategy to confront the pressing and immediate problems in Germany. However, Berg-Pan's remarks do not provide us with a fully satisfying explanation, for the very fact that Brecht's concerns are not strictly limited to a German context. We shall be reminded that although Brecht has never been to China, his interest in the political and social situation in China is integrated with his general concerns of the human race under Capitalism in the general sense. Reviewed against an increasingly interconnected process of world economy and history, China, with its distinctive cultural traits, had begun to share increasing similarities with modern Germany economically, politically and socially; to borrow Tatlow's words, "China and Europe had begun to share a common history" (*Mask* 264), meaning the issues that Brecht deals with in his plays are equally important to China.

Likewise, Tatlow has warned us, when he discusses the geographical setting in *The Measures Taken*, that "[i]t would be a hardy literalist who wished to insist that Brecht wanted to portray the tribulations of the Communist Party in North-east China" (*Mask* 261). Tatlow's explanation is linked with the spirit of Brecht's theory of *Verfremdungseffekt*; however, surprisingly, Tatlow, in his argument that Chinese theatre are used as a model and an example for Brecht to follow, also suggests that China's "exoticism" is exploited in Brecht's plays, such as *Man Equals Man*, *The Exception and the Rule* and *The Measures Taken*, in order to "'make strange' human behavior" (*Mask* 261). He also reminds us of the necessity of "distinguish [ing]

different degrees of exoticism in Brecht's work" (*Mask* 260). In other words, we need to be aware that a Chinese setting in his play, aside from fulfilling the *Verfremdungseffekt*, has a different meaning (and function) than a British, American or Indian setting world: "the 'Chinese' setting cannot be compared with the 'India' of *Mann ist Mann*", because it is related to actual historical events in China (Tatlow *Mask* 261).

If we wish to assess properly Brecht's China, even when we acknowledge the importance of "Chinese presence" or the "Chinese dimension" in Brecht's critical thinking about Chinese theatre and its systems of knowledge (Jameson 3, 13 17; Tatlow *Mask* 3), the first measure taken is to avoid strictly categorize Brecht's use of China either to a superficial disguise or to a more substantial connection. Tatlow summarized the two difficulties in isolating and analyzing Brecht's response:

One results from the range of reference to 'China' in his work. We will need to distinguish between levels of engagement, between Chinese disguises and Chinese ideas. We can discern Chinese ideas where there is not mention of China and when Brecht appears to present a Chinese face to the world, there is often no Chinese substance behind it. The second difficulty lies in the nature of his interest in philosophy: the very reason why Chinese thought appealed to him makes it hard to assess its impact. Brecht was no systematist; he had a lively distrust of technical philosophy. (*Mask* 349)

Me-Ti: Book of Changes, for example, best demonstrates: firstly, the unlikelihood that Brecht would rely on a single philosophical theory as the overarching and guiding one of his career (neither any school of Chinese philosophy nor Marxism), and secondly, the fact that Brecht's perception and use of China is never unified or consistent, and more often than not, unsystematic and even contradictory. For while the title

references *Me-Ti* (the German translation of Mo Zi), the subtitle, *Book of Change*, is taken from Richard Wilhelm's 1924 translation of the *I-Ching: Book of Changes* (one of the oldest classic Chinese texts which contains the theory of *yin* and *yang*, the theory of complementary opposites). The book borrows the form of the Confucian *Analects*, in which every sentence begins with "The Master said" or "Me-ti said", but deals with various aspects of political and social developments in the Soviet Union. It is a mixture of Moism, Taoism, and Confucianism, as well as Marx, Engels, Hegel, Lenin and Korsch; Brecht manipulates and links these varied (either conflicting or conflating) traditions to express his political views. Indeed, the example of *Me-Ti* suggests that Brecht's use of China is complex and motivated by his philosophical vision, political concerns and artistic pursuits. This explains why, even though the readings provided by Tatlow and Berg-Pan are reasonable and justified in specific cases, it still is not possible to generalize a coherent understanding of Brecht's conception of China.

This study does not intend to raise the question of authority (such as the extent to which Brecht represents China accurately concerning its cultural and historical realities), or the question of intentionality (i.e., what is Brecht's purpose in setting a play in China?). In belief that Brecht's use of China depends upon the particular context, I suggest that we examine Brecht's relation to China by exploring his thinking about Man (under Capitalism). Brecht's reaction to the overwhelming naturalistic theatre, his search for a new theatrical expression, and his exploration in his plays all ultimately point to and center around his configuration of the human subject. And it is from this perspective that Brecht appears to have turned to China for four main things. First of all, China is as employed "an external point" or a critical position to reflect upon the Western cultures. (Even so, China is evidently more than Chinoiserie.) Secondly, Confucianism, Daoism and Moism provide Brecht varying

perspectives in his configuration of the human subject, even while it is the differences and affinities between Western and Chinese culture that enrich Brecht's understanding of man. Thirdly, in his effort to reject dramatic Realism, Brecht's quest for theatrical techniques finds common ground (albeit with notable differences) between Chinese *xiqu* and the Western theatrical traditions. Finally, Brecht's political commitment requires him to reflect upon universal issues that exist both in Germany and China and search for alternatives for the future of humanity. One should always note that these four aspects more often than not overlap and intersect in confusing and complicated ways.

My emphasis on the significance of Chinese thought and culture is not equivalent to the idea that Chinese cultural forms have the greatest influence in Brecht's reflection upon issues related to the human subject. Rather, to repeat, it is the interplay of Brecht's understanding of Chinese thought and his Western intellectual influences, as he does brilliantly in *Me-Ti*, that helps him to formulate and develop his ideas. The following five chapters will then examine how, in pursuit of his goals, Brecht draws Chinese ideas into a dialogical relation with Western intellectual and cultural interests, which thus enriches Brecht's configuration of Man exemplified in his philosophy and theatre.

CHAPTER 2

LANGUAGE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

The great buildings of the city of New York and the great discoveries of electricity are not of themselves enough to swell mankind's sense of triumph. What matters more is that a new human type should now be evolving, at this very moment, and that the entire interest of the world should be concentrated on his development. This new human type will not be as the old type imagines. It is my belief that he will not let himself be adapted by machines but will himself adapt machines.

—Bertolt Brecht

“Does Brecht have a theory of the Subject?” is a question that, no doubt, this study has to be confronted with. In his lifetime Brecht never theorized explicitly a notion of the Subject (and its relation to the external world), which means that any description of his views must be a reconstruction of bits and pieces of posited views scattered throughout his theoretical work and implicated in his plays. While serious attempts need to be taken to work out the major themes of the Brechtian theory of the subject (and to relate them coherently to his developing and largely inconsistent thought), we are certain of two facts: first, that Brecht is critical of the traditional epistemology of the notion of subjectivity and second, that his declaration that “the human being has to be seen as ‘the sum of all social circumstances’” (BT 46) (a direct quotation of the 11th Thesis on Feuerbach by Marx and Engels) demonstrates that he is tremendously influenced by Marx's concept of man. This chapter intends to show how Confucius' “Rectification of Names” articulates important aspects of Marx's later ideas about language and consciousness. We begin our discussion by exploring Brecht's questioning of Descartes' construction of a modern account of subjectivity.

Brecht's Thinking about Consciousness

Before becoming a Marxist and achieving insight into political dynamics, Brecht realized that the beginning of the 20th century witnessed the birth of the “New Man” and he felt the urge to come up with a new concept of this “New Man”. Underlying his concern with the issues of man lies his suspicion of the Cartesian Cogito. Brecht questions the validity of the famous Cartesian statement “Cogito, ergo sum,” saying, “The statement is only intended to be the foundation stone of an entire building. It does not validate itself” (BAP 92). Brecht contests the assertion that thought is “the verification and the assimilation-of-the-verification” of being, and claims that “there are many more kinds of being” (BAP 93). His attitude towards Descartes’ thesis is manifest in the following passage:

So we basically agree with Descartes when he doubts whether he can know things, that is to say, things which are nominalised, fixed and unchanging. However, we don’t assume that this depends on the nature of the human mind, but are of the opinion that this sort of thing does not exist in the way that, e.g., Kant claims, if we are to know it, or not know it. (BAP 93)

Brecht affirms the efficacy of human consciousness in the acquisition of knowledge and its dynamic role in activity; however, he also questions the relationship between human consciousness and the material world: namely, the privilege of thinking over all other forms of existence. Brecht rejects Descartes’ notion of a constituting consciousness which constructs the world around it. Furthermore, Brecht implies that one is always to a certain degree a prisoner of the Cartesian cogito.

In his theatre, Brecht hopes to do away with the type of subject, to borrow Stuart Hall’s conception of the Enlightenment Subject¹⁶, who is “a fully centred and unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action”

(275), for he believes that such an image is outdated. He is more interested in staging the social conditions in which the character plays the part. Accordingly, concerning the creation of characters onstage, he notes that the subjectivity of those heroes (like Othello, Hamlet, and Macbeth) “now seems like vulgarity and nothing more when measured on a massive scale” (BT 49). He also criticizes the characters in the old opera because their mental capacities are limited to an expression of personal feelings (such as “a timid mistrustfulness, and envy of other, a selfish calculation”) (BT 41). Apparently, as for the questions such as what does it mean to be a human subject? and what is the function of the individual as self-consciousness in solving social problems?, Brecht is not satisfied with the answers that the Cartesian statement has provided. Elsewhere we read:

To come back to our basic question: it is absolutely false, that is to say, it leads nowhere, it is not worth the writer’s while, to simplify his problems so much that the immense, complicated, actual life-process of human beings in the age of the final struggle between the bourgeois and the proletarian class, is reduced to a ‘plot’, setting, or background for the creation of great individuals. (Brecht *Aesthetics and Politics* 77)

Here Brecht states clearly his departure from those writers who fail to put emphasis on changing social conditions as the determining factor in an individual’s consciousness. Again, if we follow Hall’s proposal concerning the three conceptions of the subject (i.e., The Enlightenment subject, the sociological subject and the postmodern subject), we find that Brecht’s image of man most closely resembles to the sociological subject. The sociological subject, according to Hall, was based on a conception that the identity of the human person was not born with (and thus “autonomous and self-sufficient”) but is formed “in relation to ‘significant others’, who mediated to subject the values, meanings and symbols—the culture—of the

worlds he/she inhabited” (275). For Brecht, it is one’s social experience (the subject in relation to others) that determines one’s consciousness and action. Hence, Brecht is committed to focusing on his characters as in social circumstances: in Esslin’s words, “setting a play within its historical context, showing the social, political, and philosophical implications of the milieu and the conditions of the period it depicts, as well as the period when it was first performed...” (“Some Reflection on Brecht and Acting” 145).

We should note that this concept of the social being is not new: Aristotle described man as *zoon politikon* (social being). Yet Brecht goes beyond the view that the individual is a product of social practices. His awareness of class identity (together with class consciousness) suggests strong influences from Marx. In fact, Brecht expressed his attitude towards Marx’s concept of man by announcing that the human being has to be seen as ‘the sum of all social circumstances’ (BT 46). We could also see how Marx’s reflection in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* provides a footnote to Brecht’s remarks:

Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production.

Brecht, like Marx, adopts a material analysis of consciousness which suggests that people’s consciousness and action are related to material activity, which explains why he argues that dramatic conflict should focus on class conflict (such as that between the bourgeois and the proletarian class) instead of on the revelation of individual psychology.

Furthermore, like Marx, Brecht's understandings of social circumstances and consciousness are associated with his critique of capitalism. Realizing that the individual's consciousness is subject to the economic mode of production, Brecht writes:

Capitalism operates in this way by taking given needs on a massive scale, exorcizing them, organizing them and mechanizing them so as to revolutionize everything. Great areas of ideology are destroyed when capitalism concentrates on external action, dissolves everything into processes, abandons the hero as the vehicle for everything and mankind as the measure and thereby smashes the introspective psychology of the bourgeois novel. (BT 50)

Brecht suggests that in this new era, a social and historical perspective of the individual should be adopted in literary creation, by contrast to the predominance of "introspective psychology" in the bourgeois novel. The passage gestures towards an emphasis on the effect of the capitalist mode of production upon the human psyche, which echoes Marx's observation that "the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men—the language of real life" (*The German Ideology* 42). The passage also implies that this consciousness of the self is a false consciousness shaped and molded in a capitalist environment.

In fact, Brecht felt an affinity to Marx as early as 1927, after he read *Capital*:

When I read Marx's *Capital* I understood my plays. Naturally I want to see this book widely circulated. It wasn't of course that I found I had unconsciously written a whole pile of Marxist plays; but this man Marx was the only spectator for my plays I'd ever come across. For a man with interests like him must of necessity be interested in my plays,

not because they are so intelligent but because he is—they are something for him to think about. This happened because I was as hard up for opinions as for money, and had the same attitude to both: that they are not to be hoarded but to be spent. (BT 24)

Willett recalled that he was told by Hauptmann that Brecht became interested in the writings of Marx after finding it necessary to understand the operations of the Chicago wheat exchange in order to write his play—which was never completed—about “Joe P. Fleischhacker” from Chicago, whose story is set in the wheat market of that city (*Brecht in Context* 93-94). According to Willett, Brecht only wanted to study “a bit of economics” at that time, and that it was not until 1929 (after *The Threepenny Opera*) that “Brecht became genuinely committed on an emotional plane” (*Brecht in Context* 94). It is their shared concerns with the changed economic realities of mankind in the big cities and with the social perspective of human existence and consciousness that prompted Brecht to seriously study Marxism.

Nevertheless, the assumption that Brecht embraces Marx’s thinking of man without reservations is a simplification. Sean Carney, among others, suggests that Brecht is not a proper Marxist who firmly shares the orthodox class analysis that “class and class-consciousness define the effective determinant of the subject” (6). Brecht’s interest in behaviorist psychology reflects his concern with the varieties and complexities of individual consciousness and behavior (*Journals* 143). Brecht also cautions against the danger of slipping into reducing the individual to class. When he reads Wordsworth, for instance, Brecht warns of the danger of hazardously labeling Wordsworth’s poetry as simply “petty bourgeois idyll” since “within the petty bourgeoisie there are also other kinds of tendencies that conflict with those” (*Journals* 91). This does not mean that he rejects the idea that the petty bourgeoisie as a class perpetuates and consolidates a bourgeois subject, but rather, shows that he is also

aware of how contradictions permeate entities and how the individual's capacity for experience should count as much as Marxist's theories about class consciousness. We shall further explore the differing conceptions of subjectivity and ethics in Brecht and Marx in chapter 4 and 5. Enough to say that this understanding of Brecht's critique of Cartesian subjectivity and its connection to Marxist ideas about man provides us with a starting point for a discussion of the position of Confucius' use of language in Brecht's ideas about the human subject and language.

Consciousness, Language and the *Verfremdungseffekt*

When considering Brecht's theatrical innovations, especially his theories of the *Verfremdungseffekt* and the *Gestus*, Brecht scholars, more often than not, associate them with Marxism and Chinese theatre, especially Mei's performance in Moscow, ignoring the fact that Brecht's response to Chinese thought is interwoven meaningfully into his dramaturgy. To reevaluate such a relation, we must understand that Brechtian theory is not literary criticism, but, rather, "a theorizing of the workings of an apparatus of representation with enormous formal and political resonance" (Diamond 45), which, through disrupting representation, ultimately works upon the audience's consciousness. We shall first sort out the relationship between the spectatorial consciousness, ideology and language in the Brechtian theatre.

Brecht's theories of the *Verfremdungseffekt* and the *Gestus* are in accordance with his interrogation of the Cartesian notion of subjectivity and consciousness. Tatlow finds two kinds of alienation in Brecht: "a defamiliarizing of all-too-familiar, naturalized appearances by uncovering or explaining the structures behind them" and "an alienating confrontation with the unknown, through which the self questions presupposed or reified structures" (*The Intercultural Sign* 14). For Brecht, both the

Verfremdungseffekt and the *Gestus* eventually take effect on the consciousness of the spectators.

The thesis of the *Verfremdungseffekt*—the establishment of a critical yet active distance between the audience and the play performed—has, as warned by Althusser, “perhaps been too often interpreted solely as a function of the technical elements of alienation” (*For Marx* 146). What Althusser emphasizes is that “it is essential to go beyond the technical and psychological conditions to an understanding that this very special critique must be in the spectator’s consciousness” (*For Marx* 146-7). According to Althusser, in order to see anew social conditions through performance, the spectator’s consciousness must be accordingly transformed. To demonstrate what he means by the spectator’s consciousness, Althusser points out that we must relinquish two classical models of the spectatorial consciousness:

The first of these misleading models is once again a consciousness of self, this time the spectator’s. It accepts that the spectator should not identify with the ‘hero’; he is to be kept a distance....But then, no doubt, we must also reject the second model of the spectatorial consciousness—a model that will haunt us until it has been rejected: the identification model....If the consciousness cannot be reduced to a purely psychological consciousness, if it is a social, cultural and ideological consciousness, we cannot think its relation to the performance solely in the form of a psychological identification. (*For Marx* 148-49)

Here Althusser claims that the Brechtian theatre intends to disrupt the spectator’s consciousness of self while at the same time preventing the spectator from identifying with the “hero”. In order to see anew social conditions through performance, the spectator’s consciousness must be accordingly transformed. However, this

transformation is not imposed as Althusser repeatedly emphasizes, even though Brecht's plays have more often than not been seen as didactic: "It is within the play itself, in the dynamic of its internal structure, that this distance is produced and represented, at once criticizing the illusions of consciousness and unraveling its real conditions" (*For Marx* 146-7). Althusser's main concern with Brecht V-effect is with its disruptive function of the play on the spectator's consciousness in theatre. We shall follow his path but with a different focus on Brecht's notion of the very activity of language (in writing and in the space of stage) and its relation to social order and the consciousness of the spectator.

According to Carney, the theories of the *Verfremdungseffekt* and the *Gestus*, "draw[ing] their logic from the activity of language," are directed at disturbing the illusory nature of ideology and representation, and accordingly, the constructed nature of subjectivity (2). He further summarizes the disruptive force of V-effect via language in the operation of the human subject:

There is, ... within the *Verfremdungseffekt* an entire theory of socialization, subject-formation and the ongoing judgment of reality, tied to the ability of the human subject to be estranged from given or ideological thinking. Key to understanding the operation of the V-effect involves a comprehension of how language determines the human subject and is the precondition of human activity change. (15)

Carney suggests that in order for Brecht to dismantle the secure self-concept which is based on what Althusser terms as ideological consciousness (or "false consciousness"), the first step is to wrestle with language, which is what the very illusory idea of the self is constructed upon.

Willett understands Brecht's notion of the *Gestus* as "the essential attitude which underlies any phrase or speech" (*Bertolt Brecht* 97-8). While discussing how

Brecht's new style of language (i.e. irregular unrhymed verse), fitted his notion of the *Gestus*, Willett points out that "the notion that language itself is a form of gesture is not new" (98). His example is the attitude towards language held by J.J. Engle, director of the Prussian royal theatre at the end of the eighteenth century, whose letter 32 opens by referring to the 'resemblance which exists between the fundamental ideas of the art of gesture and that of declamation" (*Bertolt Brecht* 98). Nevertheless, Willett realizes that Brecht purposely developed this understanding into a conscious technique of writing and added that the *Gestus* is not attained through "giving elegant expression to the ideas and images" (*Bertolt Brecht* 98). Willett suggests that the *Gestus* aims to imply the basic purpose of speech without going into detailed explanations of how this is achieved.

In this sense, Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* and *Gestus* are bound to the activity of language, which itself is a fundamentally dynamic site for social, cultural, and most importantly, ideological recognition. In Brecht's experiments with language, while he embraces the Marxist theory concerning the ideological position of the individual, it is Confucius' "Rectification of Names" that provides a concrete method for him to interrogate the connection between ideology and consciousness and to demystify representation in its function of maintaining the illusions of individual consciousness. My interest, however, is with how Brecht gives a new perspective to both Marxism and Confucianism while conflating these two various traditions. It is this conflation of views that makes Brecht a worthy topic even in contemporary times. Accordingly, emphasis will be given to the ways in which Brecht integrates his understanding of Confucius' use of language with Marxist notions of language in order to "restore the truth."

Confucius' "Rectification of Names" and Brecht's Language Strategy

Brecht's interest in Confucius raises complex issues. On the one hand, he admired Confucius so much that he carried his portrait around the world and hung it on the wall of his flat in East Berlin,¹⁷ and in 1940, after reading Carl Crow's *Master Kung*, Brecht considered composing a play about the life of Confucius for children to act. (The project was never finished, but the first scene, called *The Jinger Jar*, has been preserved.) On the other hand, Brecht was deeply suspicious of Confucius' system of virtues which is attached to an even older set of cultural practices. He noted the inappropriateness of Confucius' teachings for the contemporary world; "the behavior he has in mind as acceptable could best be that of the patriarchal society of ancient China" (*Journals* 126).

Brecht generally disapproved of Confucius' reforms which were based on searching for a just prince and edifying him through practicing the ritual practices. In his unfinished play on Confucius, he was not interested in creating a historically accurate Confucius. What intrigued him was the dramatic irony within Confucius, who began his career as a tax gatherer for the prince and was "on the move for 20-30 years looking for a prince who will let him introduce reforms" (*Journals* 111). Brecht hoped to employ a playful attitude in depicting Confucius' tragic life through the insertion of comic moments; Brecht writes, "everywhere he [Confucius] goes they laugh at him. He dies convinced that his life has been a mistake and a failure.—you would have to handle all this in comic terms and interpolate his philosophy quite abruptly, the bits that still seem wise" (*Journals* 111). Brecht called Confucius "formalist" and recognized Confucius' reforms as idealist, as endorsing a wish to return to a primitive utopian community "where the myth of an era of paradise comes from" (*Journals* 126). Hence he came to the conclusion that the failures of Confucius lay in the fact that he "wants to reproduce the old behavior on the new basis" (*Journals* 126).

Considering the well-accepted view that “Confucius never actually espoused an ideology even remotely resembling Marxism” (Berg-Pan 89), the question arises: what, then, finally prompted Brecht to find the life of Confucius a worthy topic? Brecht’s answer is, “The scene where he [Confucius] composes the story of *Lu* sticking to the truth would in itself make the play worth the trouble” (*Journals* 11). This only raises more questions: What exactly is Confucius’ way of sticking to the truth? And how does Confucius’ method relate to Brecht’s philosophy of language and consciousness? Considering the fact that a German playwright and thinker who, despite his general disfavor of Confucius’ teachings (as manifest in his journal), still held such a high regard for him, the question should not be whether and to what extent Confucius is transformed in the text (since misunderstanding and misrepresentation are unavoidable) but how and why.

In his essay “Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties” (1935), Brecht elaborates what the truth is and a clever way (“cunning” in Brecht’s words) to achieve it in a time when truth is suppressed or concealed.

Confucius falsified an old patriotic calendar of historical events. He only changed certain words. When it said, ‘The ruler of Kun had the philosopher Wan killed because he said this and that’, Confucius replaced killed with ‘murdered’. If it said that such-and-such a tyrant had been assassinated, he replaced this with ‘executed’. By these means Confucius paved the way for a new assessment of history. (BAP 149)

The calendar referred to here is the Spring and Autumn Annals, the chronicle of the state of *Lu* in the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.E), which is compiled by Confucius. Confucius, in Brecht’s view, was cunning in spreading the truth among the commoners, changing the wording of the original text and replacing the original

words with what he saw to be more appropriate and accurate ones and thus representing history faithfully.

What this makes apparent is that language is one of Confucius' primary concerns, associated as it is with the social and moral order. Confucius' key notion of language is known as the "rectification of Names". In Book 13 of *The Analects*, when asked about the first measure to be taken in order to administer the government, Confucius replied that "It would certainly be to correct language" (159). He further explained why rectification of Names is imperative:

If language is incorrect, then what is said does not concord with what was meant, what is to be done cannot be effected. If what is to be done cannot be effected, then rites and music will not flourish. If rites and music do not flourish, then mutilations and lesser punishments will go astray. And if mutilations and lesser punishments go astray, then the people have nowhere to put hand or foot.

Therefore the gentleman uses only such language as is proper for speech, and only speaks of what it would be proper to carry into effect.

The gentleman, in what he says, leaves nothing to mere chance. (159)

What should be noted here is that traditional commentators usually do not put emphasis on language use (language and reality) but on the dichotomy of the normative and the actual (language and action). Every name contains implications in the social relationships of responsibilities and duties. There is an agreement between name and action (the king must act as he should). This passage indicates one of the most important tenets of Confucius: that is, that individuals should readjust their behavior according to the expectations of their social positions (social names). The necessity of the rectification of Names lies in the supposition that improper names not only distort the truth, but also have a direct effect upon action, hence reality.

Brecht's motivation to engage Confucius' language strategy was generated by his mistrust of the discourse of Fascist politics, as he discovered in Confucius' manipulation of language a method to seek for truth in disguise. "Confucius' cunning can still be used even today," Brecht realized, because there is such a close resemblance in "the conditions of life" between ancient China and contemporary Europe (BAP 149); according to Brecht's summary, "the oppression which serves the exploitation of the one [larger] section of the population by the other [smaller] section" remains possible (BAP 153). Elsewhere he wrote: "The ruling strata are using lies more openly than before, and the lies are bigger. Telling the truth seems increasingly urgent" (BT 107). Brecht's essay "*Five Difficulties*" is a direct response to Nazi slogans and speeches. Language is treated, both by the ruler in the state of *Lu* and by the Nazi in Germany, not as a transparent medium, but rather as a political tool to "mask" or even "distort" the truth, in order to maintain their hegemony over the people.

Brecht found in Confucius a language strategy of infusing judgment into the so-called objective narrative of history and thus a method to restore truth via language. Inspired by Confucius' cunning approach, Brecht similarly provides examples of how to demystify "abused" words in Germany.

Anyone in our times who says *population instead of 'Volk'* and *land ownership instead of 'soil'* is already denying his support to many lies. He divests the words of their lazy mysticism. The word *Volk* implies a certain unity and hints at common interests, so it should only be used in reference to several *Volker*, for only then is a commonality of interests conceivable. The population of an area of land has different, even opposing interests, and this is a truth which is suppressed. Thus anyone who says 'soil', and describes the fields to nose and eyes by

speaking of their earthy scent and their color, is supporting the lies of the rulers; for what matters is not the fertility of the soil, nor man's love of it, nor his diligence, but instead principally the price of grain and the price of labour. The people who draw the profits from the soil are not those who harvest the grain, and the scent of the clods of earth is unknown on the stock exchanges. They reek of something different. On the contrary, 'landownership' is the right word; it is less deceptive. For the word 'discipline', wherever oppression rules, the word 'obedience' should be used, because discipline is possible even without rulers and so has a more noble quality than obedience. And better than the word 'honour' are the words 'human dignity'. So that the individual does not vanish so easily from our field of vision. After all, we know what sort of lowlife will rush forward to be allowed to defend the honour of a people! And how wastefully those who are well-fed distribute honours on those who, in feeding them, go hungry. (BAP 149)

Thus, we can find two commonalities in the practices employed by Confucius and Brecht: first, they share the same notion of how language is related to reality and of how the activity of language as a system of signs works upon consciousness; and second, the critique of the text of a dominant discourse is to be formed from within the text itself. Both are intensely aware of the fact that language as a carrier of ideology could be the prison of the consciousness in which the illusion of the self is maintained. Yet instead of launching an attack upon the ideological position of language in a direct way, Brecht and Confucius, albeit out of different purposes, noticed the relationship between linguistic and social order, and exploited the very mechanism of language by drawing attention to power relation from which the writing

is generated.

The primary difference between Brecht and Confucius is best assessed by considering their different political projects and, accordingly, their different responses to the territorializations of power in their respective historical situations. Confucius believed that social disorders result from a failure in calling things by their proper names: “The systems of Names or Norms,” according to Yip, “was invented [during the Zhou dynasty] as the cement that held the feudalistic power structure together”. He further explained, “In order to facilitate the feudalistic rule, the clan system was rationalized according to various class stratifications with well-defined duties and rights” (60). Apparently, Confucius’ effort to restore Names was intended to enforce their originally associated proper mode of conduct and duties and, thus, to stabilize the social structure.

For Brecht, language not only has an effect upon action, but also reflects ideological consciousness, functioning upon the reader’s consciousness. By replacing the words folk, soil, and discipline with people (or race), privately owned land, and obedience, Brecht intends to demonstrate the underlying economic realities and suppression behind language. Realizing social realities is only the first step towards Brecht’s Marxist project of changing the world. Brecht’s language strategy is not only meant as an attack on Fascism, but is ultimately directed towards a transformation of consciousness (i.e. making subjects conscious of their social experience as engaged in production). The implication of his method is, firstly, that language is infused with ideology and is easily exploited by the ruling class to cover social realities, and secondly, that by pointing to the referred objects from within language, language as a self-contained system constructs the speakers or readers as subjects.

Brecht’s implications echo Emile Benveniste’s view that “[i]t is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a *subject*, because language alone establishes

the concept of ‘ego’ in reality, in *its* reality which is that of the being” (224). Brecht’s focus on the role of language in the formation of consciousness also reminds us of early twentieth-century philosophers (more or less contemporary with Brecht) such as Saussure, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger. Despite the fact that there are conspicuous differences underlying these attitudes towards language, they all treated subjectivity as constituted in (and bound by) language. Wittgenstein, for example, proclaimed that “*the limits of my language mean the limits of my world.*” Nevertheless, Brecht diverges from the abovementioned philosophers in their understanding of language in that besides considering consciousness as trapped in language, he is also concerned with the connection between consciousness and material activities (specifically class relations).

Here we see how Brecht allies himself with Marx and Engels’ observations about language and consciousness. For in addition to arguing for the determinant position of language in the formation of consciousness, Marx and Engels claimed that

Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness that exists also for other men, and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally as well; language, like consciousness, only rises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men.

(*The German Ideology* 49)

Three points need to be noted. First, consciousness of the self is recognized to be a result of the social interaction between the self and others. Second, Marx and Engels underline the social aspects of language as a tool for communication (i.e., just as language constitutes the subject, it also constitutes the social relation between the subject and others: in Dawes’ words, “[...]language is that specific instance of social relation that not only shapes social units as subjects, but also provides a medium in which the individual so formed can become conscious of himself as subject” [153]).

Third, Marx and Engels offer a materialist analysis of consciousness and language.

Brecht's language strategy reflects his rejection of a Cartesian conception of the subject, and an affinity with Marx and Engels' thinking about the social role of the subject and the relationship between language and consciousness in this formation of the self in relation to others. Brecht's principal aim is to produce a critique of the dominant ideology that man is trapped in. Brecht sides with Marx's observation that man's consciousness and language (referred to as "practical consciousness") is determined by the material, economic base. In Erich Fromm's book on Marx's concept of Man, he writes: "Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this state as the direct afflux from their material behavior. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of the politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people" (20). We see clearly how in Brecht's language strategy, although it is Confucius' use of language that provides him with a concrete strategy for critique by exposing the ideology behind words, his concern is formed within a Marxist framework and a corresponding belief in the social role of language in establishing the concept of consciousness and social order embodied in social labor. Thus his disruption of the consciousness of his reader is made within the very apparatus of language by exposing the economic relations (together with power relations) within which it operates.

The Strategy of Augmentation

For Brecht, there is more than one way to interrupt and dissolve the totality of linguistic representations. In his essay "On Restoring the Truth," he writes:

The thinker does not act like this simply in order to establish that deception and errors are being perpetrated. He wishes to master the nature of the deception and of the errors. When he reads: 'A strong

matrism is less easily attacked than a weak one', he does not need to alter it but to augment it: 'but it attacks more easily'. When he hears that wars are necessary, then he adds under which circumstances they are necessary, as well as: for whom. (BAP 133)

The strategy of augmentation is one that he develops by himself. Brecht explains how "deception and errors" are self-evident: when correct sentences are placed alongside incorrect ones, the ruptures appear in the context of the incorrect sentences and thus the illusion of correctness is exposed (BAP 133).

Brecht's adaptation of Arthur Waley's translation of the poem "The Big Rug", by the eighth-century Chinese poet Po Juyi, suffices to illustrate Brecht's language strategy of augmentation. I share Hayot's observation that "unlike many of his other translations, Arthur Waley's translation substantially modifies the original" (58). Waley's version reads as follows:

THAT SO many of the poor should suffer from the cold
What can we do to prevent
To bring warmth to a single body is not much use.
I wish I had a big rug ten thousand feet long,
Which at one time would cover up every inch of the city. (157)

Now compare Brecht's:

The governor, when I asked what was needed
To help those freezing in our city
Answered: A blanket, ten thousand feet long,
To simply cover over the slums.¹⁸ (qtd in Hayot 58)

Regarding Chinese style of verse forms, both translations move further from the letter of the original, which is a fourteen-line poem that discusses the poet's sympathy with

the poor. Critics like Jameson, Tatlow and Berg-Pan, while providing various interpretations of Brecht's motivations, agree that, by contrast to Waley's too-literal approach, Brecht's retranslation is more (to use Tatlow's words) "analogous to that of the Chinese poet" (*Mask* 142). Their view is best summarized by Jameson: "It turns out that without any knowledge of Chinese, Brecht's versions are more faithful to their originals than Waley's, since he restored to them the social dimensions and details that (equally instinctively, no doubt) Waley omitted" (32). By way of explanations, Tatlow argues for the convergence of political visions and poetic simplicity between Brecht and Bo Juyi, while for Berg-Pan, the affinity results from Brecht's agreement "with the world view expressed in all the poems he translated" and with the "attitudes and opinions (revealed in those poems) which Brecht himself cherished all his life and which echo Marxist-Socialist thought" (*Bertolt Brecht and China* 231). Unsatisfied with the explanations given by Tatlow and Berg-Pan on Brecht and Chinese poetry, Hayot suggests that in Waley's China, "a highly realistic, geopolitical object" serves as a contrast for Brecht's and Pound's China: "a 'China' accessible through nonscientific, mystical affinities and understandings that reach truths unavailable to purely scientific investigation" (65). Thus, Hayot attributes the affinity of Brecht's retranslations and the originals to "a certain binary understanding of the relationship between East and West", i.e. "mystical East and scientific West", as he argues that Brecht's translations are more "poetic" (67).¹⁹ The issue I raise here is not one of authenticity: of whether Waley's translation or Brecht's more faithfully convey the experience of the Chinese original. While following Berg-Pan's, Tatlow's and Jameson's argument that Brecht's retranslations of Chinese are more politically engaging and closer to Bo Juyi's social and political concerns as implied between the lines, I attempt to fill in the gap left by the shared silence by Tatlow, Berg-Pan and Jameson: of how, without any direct comment on political issues, Brecht yet makes

social critique possible.

Although Brecht did not directly discuss his principles of translation, his description of his collaboration with Charles Laughton in translating *Galileo* provides us some clues to his criteria of translation:

...we had to decide the gest of dialogue by my acting it all in bad English or even in German and his then acting it back in proper English in a variety of ways until I could say: That is it....We were forced to do what better equipped translators should do too: translate the gests. For language is theatrical in so far as it primarily expresses the mutual attitude of the speakers. (CP V5i: 133-134)

The difficulty is predicable. For while Laughton knows no German and Brecht knows little English, Brecht suggests that a good translator should be able to translate the underlying attitudes. Again, Brecht emphasizes the importance in exposing, through the working of language, the economic, social and political realities people are living in.

Comparing the two translations, we notice that, instead of following the monologue of the persona in Waley's version, Brecht grounds a gestural imprint in his retranslation: he introduces the character of the governor and transforms an act of complaining into a "distanced" conversation between the governor and "I". Brecht's version is gesturally richer since a power is constructed and questioned at the same time, leaving the question of literal faithfulness behind. Brecht defines the social gest as "the gest relevant to society, the gest that allows conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances" (BT 105). His introduction of the governor and the quoted speech makes social relations self-evident and offers them to the reader for critical contemplation. What matters is not the attitude of the speaker, which in Brecht's version sounds as if he is void of any critical attitude either towards the governor's

answer or the plight of the poor, but the social circumstances that Brecht injects in his translation. In order to restore the truth, it is, as Brecht does, more effective to bring the rupture to the “coherent” narrative by exposing the social circumstances and subjecting contradictions and ironies for scrutiny.

Compared with Confucius’ concerns about the correct uses of Names, Brecht’s language strategy is formed according to different aesthetic/political aims. Roland Barthes describes the function of Brecht’s language strategies as “shock”:

we must shake up the balanced mass of words, pierce the layer, disturb the linked order of the sentences, break the structures of the language (every structure is an edifice of levels). Brecht’s work seeks to elaborate a shock-practice (not a subversion: the shock is much more “realistic” than subversion); his critical art is one which opens a crisis: which lacerates, which crackles the smooth surface, which fissures the crust of languages, loosens and dissolves the stickiness of the logosphere; it is an epic art: one which discontinues the textures of words, distances representation without annulling it. (*The Rustle of Language* 219)

Brecht’s strategy of language demonstrates how his aesthetic theory and practice coincide with his political and philosophical vision of the world. Brecht’s “shock” ultimately leads to an awakening in readers from the blind acceptance of political implications together with the customary usage of language. According to Carney, “The ultimate function of Brecht’s aesthetic is to work upon ideology, whether thought or embodied, and through representation, to estrange or distance the ideological, to allow us to see it as ideological” (9). Waley’s literary translation is a revelation of the inner mind of the speaker, and of his complaints and disillusionment of the ruling government. In his version, Brecht “historicizes” the language of the

poem, draws attention to the ideological implications, and thus unveils how the individual's consciousness is constructed by the ideology behind the words. As a result, a critical attitude is engendered and the illusion created through language is undermined from within.

Confucius realized the problem of reference in writing history; for him, history is exploited and manipulated by the state power. Brecht, by contrast, was more interested in how language (together with other various methods such as painted panoramas, music and settings and lightening [BT 106]) could be employed (while fulfilling the V-effect in his new program of theatre) to reveal the mechanism of social relations and to transform the spectatorial consciousness. Brecht's working of language thus creates a moment of self-criticism, which suggests a critical attitude adopted towards "a theatre whose (ideological) material presupposed the formal conditions for an aesthetic of the consciousness of self" (Althusser *For Marx* 177). He attempts to transform ideological consciousness not through an attack from the outside, but through disruption from within the system of signs. This is how the Brechtian language functions (in the spirit of V-effect) in human subjectivity—a process which Althusser terms "a demystification of the consciousness of self" (For *Marx* 145).

Language is one of the important elements, together with music, costumes and lights, which Brecht employs to achieve the *Gestus* of performance onstage.²⁰ Brecht's notion of gestural language can be illustrated further by a short unpublished fragment headed "Representation of Sentences in a New Encyclopedia", in which Brecht prescribed the specific rules that guide one to expose the gesture via language:

1. Who is the sentence of use to?
2. Who does it claim to be of use to?
3. What does it call for?

4. What practical action corresponds to it?
5. What sort of sentences result from it? What sort of sentences support it?
6. In what situation is it spoken? By whom? (BT 106)

Brecht's theories of the *Verfremdungseffekt* and the *Gestus* deconstruct the activity of language which serves the role of an ideological vehicle. Bound to an overall Marxist project, Brecht finds the expression of the Confucius' rhetoric of language applicable in transforming the spectator's consciousness in his theatre.

CHAPTER 3

BRECHT'S DIALECTIC THEATRE

There is little doubt amongst critics and commentators concerning the general fact of Brecht's debt to Marxist dialectics or his intention to apply it to the theatre. Yet it would be a mistake to identify Brecht's notion of dialectics with Marxist dialectics—although it is very common for Brecht critics to do so. Three facts need to be clarified prior to our discussion of Brecht's dialectic theatre. First, Brecht's notion of epic theatre evolved in opposition to “naturalism,” but it is also, as Willett suggest, “designed for the existing bourgeois ‘apparatus’ and audience” (*Brecht in Context* 223). Second, Brecht's aesthetics of theatre, as is consistent with his belief in change, is an ever changing one; such is the case in his uses of the terms “epic,” “non-aristotelian,” and “dialectic” to define his theatre. Third, Brecht's aesthetic theory and practice were influenced by Korsch's understanding of Marxism. This chapter centers around the question: What does the term “dialectic” mean to Brecht in the constant flux of his ideas and opinions? I argue for the connection between Daoism and Brecht's specific version of dialectics in his theatre. While my aim is not to claim that Brecht depends on Chinese thought to formulate his theoretical statements about theatre, I attempt to demonstrate that certain Daoist ideas were central to Brecht's very concept of contradiction. Furthermore, I suggest that Brecht's notion of “dialectic” acquires a full meaning and function in Brecht's combination, appropriation, interpretation and use of the Daoist and Marxist concepts of dialectics from his own perspective. The conclusion of this chapter also serves as a premise for discussion of certain issues covered in the succeeding chapters: concrete Daoist contradictions in his plays (in Chapter 4 and 5) and the dialectic relation between empathy and detachment, emotion and reason (in Chapter 6).

The chapter begins by investigating Brecht's keen interest in Lao Zi's dialectics, which is followed by a full consideration of the transition of Brecht's

theoretical development from “epic theatre” to “dialectical theatre” with a focus on his theoretical essays. To question the nature of the particular form of dialectics he is designating in his “dialectical theatre,” I shall indicate how Marxist ideas (together with Korsch’s version of Marxist dialectical materialism) and Lao Zi’s dialectics help formulate the very form of his theatre and writing.

Brecht and Lao Zi’s Dialectics

The position of Daoism in Brecht’s work is a debatable subject among Brecht critics. Berg-Pan emphasizes the complementary function of the Daoist ideas in Brecht’s plays: in his words, Chinese philosophy “fill[s] gaps which Marx and Engels have left in their social philosophy” and these gaps include “matters relating to human psychology, to practical questions about how to earn a living, what to do when in love, how to avoid dangers, and other mundane matters which had escaped the attention of Marx and Engels” (“Mixing Old and New Wisdom” 206). The implication of Berg-Pan’s claim is that messages—such as “the least useful is the most fortunate”—from Daoism are simply examples of old Chinese wisdom which have no intersection with Marxism. Esslin, taking an opposing view, completely rejects the importance of the teaching of Daoism to Brecht’s Marxism:

This Taoist attitude of yielding to the flow of things, while recognizing its absurdity, coexisted in Brecht’s mind with, and below, the doctrine of the class struggle and the gospel of the violent transformation of the world. This in fact is the passive attitude, the yielding to emotion, the abandonment of reason he so feared in his youth, transformed into a mellow and profound philosophy. (*Evils* 243)

Esslin thinks that Brecht simply seeks a reconciliation between his demand for radical social change and “a yearning for the quiet, passive acceptance of the world” (*Evils*

243), a sentiment shared by Brecht and Lao Zi. By setting Marxism and Daoism in opposition, Esslin argues for the complexity of Brecht's works in the sense that Daoism offsets Brecht's radical demand for violent change.

Other critics argue for an analogy between the Marxist dialectic and the Daoist dialectic (which Tatlow considers to be "a peasant dialectic"). Indeed, Brecht's interest in Daoism and Marxism is perhaps not surprising, considering the fact that Mao Zedong is often known as integrating Marxism with Daoism in his war strategy.²¹ Underneath their obvious divergences—in Marxism, the dialectical method of observation is integrated with the historical materialistic view of history, whereas in Daoism, man's place in nature (and society) is aligned with the movement of *tao* (the natural process) in order to reach the harmony and balance of life—Marxism and Daoism do share a similar understanding of the dynamic interplay of opposites (taken out of their distinct historical, social, and philosophical contexts). Yet we should also note Brecht's interpretation and employment of Daoist thought in his specific work do appear to create a tension between his views and traditional Marxist principles.

Before Brecht began his serious study of Marxism, he already realized internal contradictions within the human subject:

Even when a character behaves by contradictions that's only because nobody can be identically the same at two unidentical moments. Changes in his exterior continually lead to an inner reshuffling. The continuity of the ego is a myth. A man is an atom that perpetually breaks up and forms anew. We have to show things as they are.²²

This passage, according to Willett's editorial note, was taken from an interview originally published in *Die Literarische Welt*, 30 July 1926. Here Brecht mentioned specifically how the form of men's lives should be approached in light of this constant process of change and internal contradiction. We find a similar view in "A Short

Organum for the Theatre [Short Organum],” when Brecht points out the connection between the V-effect and Marx’s method of dialectical materialism.

This technique allows the theatre to make use in its representations of the new social scientific method known as dialectical materialism. In order to unearth society’s laws of motion this method treats social situations as processes, and traces out all their inconsistencies. It regards nothing as existing except in so far as it changes, in other words is in disharmony with itself. This also goes for those human feelings, opinions and attitudes through which at any time the form of men’s life together finds its expression. (BT 193)

Here the concept of dialectics means no more than to contradict from within, a view that is closer to his earlier belief than a clear elaboration in Hegel’s sense (which Marx and Engels inherited).

As early as 1920 Brecht had begun to read Lao Zi’s *Tao Te Ching* and recognized an analogy between his ideas and those of Lao Zi, as he writes in his diaries: “But he [Frank Warschauer] introduced me to Lao Tzu, who agrees with me about so many things that he keeps on being astonished...For Warschauer: Baden & Lao Tzu” (*Diaries* 50). What are the “so many things” that Brecht and Lao Zi agreed upon? Berg-Pan argues that Lao Zi’s philosophy is concerned “for the fate of ordinary people and the fact of their exploitation” (*Bertolt Brecht and China* 74). Besides this general sympathy towards the common people, Brecht also used various different Daoist images and thoughts, nearly all of which are about human behavior—i.e. the image of process, the strategy of survival, the concept of goodness, the critique of virtues (*Mask* 455-75). However, it would be difficult to verify Brecht’s intention. We may well argue that Brecht’s observations of the contradictions inherent in human behavior are intuitive, or that he may get them from the Western intellectual traditions

(one only needs to mention the name of Nietzsche and Heraclitus). Yet it is not my purpose to argue from which cultural traditions Brecht draws more influence. Rather, it is the collision and conflation between Western and Chinese thought that make the comparison interesting to this investigation.

According to Brecht's perspective, everything is in perpetual flux; or, as Benjamin summarizes Brecht's understanding of history, "It can happen this way, but it can also happen in a different way" (8). It is for this reason that water imagery is so important in Brecht's work, since it indicates that the world and human consciousness accordingly is in a constant process of change. In *Man Equals Man*, when Galy Gay for the first time denies himself, Widow Begbick states in her song of mutability that

Often as you may see the river sluggishly flowing
Each time the water is different.
What's gone can't go past again. Not one drop
Ever flows back to its starting point. (CP 2: 23)

She suggests that the philosophical teaching that one should never attempt to

...hold on to the wave
That's breaking against your foot: so long as
You stand in the stream fresh waves
Will always keep breaking against it. (CP: 39)

Ewen proposes that Begbick is voicing the sentiments of an ancient Greek Philosopher, Heraclitus of Ephesus, when he said: "You cannot step twice into the same rivers, for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you" (137). We find, however, similar views expressed in chapter 8 of the *Tao Te Ching*:

The highest Good is like that of water. The goodness of water is that it
benefits the ten thousand creatures; yet itself does not scramble, but is

content with the places that all men disdain. It is this that makes water
so near to the Way. (17)

The implication of the potentiality for change reminds us of the ultimate aim of Brecht's theatre, which "sought not only to interpret the world but to change the world."

The water image means more than perpetual flux; it demonstrates an overarching paradox of Lao Zi's *Tao Te Ching*. We read in chapter 78: "Nothing under heaven is softer or more yielding than water; but when it attacks things hard and resistant there is not one of them that can prevail" (165). In his poem "Legend of the origin of the book *Tao Te Ching* on Lao Tzu's way into Exile," Brecht rephrases Lao Zi's thought in his own words: "The yielding water in motion gets the better in the end of granite and porphyry," a saying which implies the most basic paradox in Daoism: the weaker will conquer the stronger. All these indicate that although Brecht's perception of change and contradiction may not solely come from Daoism, reading Brecht's ideas of dialectics with reference to Daoism and Marxist dialectics provides us with more dimensions for exploring how Brecht's perception of dialectics functions in his understanding of Man. Indeed, comparing the Daoist paradox and Marxist dialectics, we find how Brecht swiftly reworks Daoism into Marxist dialectics in formulating his own ideas.

Lao Zi's notion of paradox derives from the theory of *yin* (the receptive and gentle force), and *yang* (the active one), as indicated in *I-Ching: Book of Change*. In this book, *Yin* and *yang* are configured as two significant concepts: they are two polarities within one entity, but it is also through their interactions that they engender the Ten-thousand Beings. According to Cheng, Lao Zi's concept of paradox is inseparably bound up with the interdependence and correspondence between Beings, since Beings, aside from being autonomous and isolated, are a living network

characterized by interchange. Cheng further concludes that “Because of this organicist conception of the universe, in Chinese philosophical thought relation rather than substance is emphasized; truth rises out of an intersubjectivity rather than out of the subject/object distinction” (17).

These two polarities within one entity are reflected in the Chinese notion of contradiction/paradox as *maodun*. The Chinese word makes no distinction between these two Western categories and hence refers to both of them. The Chinese notion of contradiction as *maodun* is composed of the two characters *mao* (spear) and *dun* (shield), which stands respectively for aggressive and defensive weapons in war. The etymological analysis embodies the mutual dependence of all opposites. Unlike the Marxist dialectic in which oppositions are emphasized, it is the complementary nature that is emphasized in Chinese thought. Furthermore, the opposites in unity embody the interplay of polarities. As Jeaneane D. and Merv Fowler explain: “contrary to most western thought it is not the triumph of good over evil, of light over darkness, of the divine over the demonic that is the Chinese goal, but the perfect balance between *yin* and *yang* polarities that enables the self to transcend them in activity. Evil is but temporary disharmony, just as night is the temporary suspension of day” (52). In other words, without its complementary opposite, nothing can be wholly one polarity. Lao Zi views the opposing concepts of beauty and ugliness, good and evil, full and empty, construction and destruction, subject and object as existing and acquiring their meaning in relation to the other, such that in different circumstances each could be transformed to its opposite.

Brecht has no knowledge of the Chinese language, nor did he live to read Jeaneane D. and Merve Fowler. Yet in Brecht, we see how he too questions the basic definitions of social ethics, making it imperative to reconsider the familiar concepts of human qualities (i.e. virtuousness, weakness, goodness) not as absolute categories, but

polarity in unity with their opposites. The individual in Brecht's later works is many faceted—good and bad, brave and cowardly, compassionate and cruel, exemplified in the characters of *Mother Courage*, *Galileo*, *Shen Teh*, and *Puntila*—despite the fact that the individuals are still products of social circumstances. The clear lines drawn between different social classes are blurred; moreover, there is no close link between one's social behavior and social class. Noticing the significance of the Daoist dialectic in Brecht's work of the late thirties and early forties, Tatlow identifies three related topics: "the critique of virtues, the strategy of survival and the problem of natural process" ("Peasant Dialectics" 281). In the next two chapters we shall pursue and elaborate the connection of the Daoist dialectic to Brecht dramatic works.

From Epic Theatre to Dialectical Theatre

Brecht used a theoretical vocabulary to describe his techniques of staging, acting and the intended social function of his work; he referred to his theatre as "epic" (as opposed to "dramatic") and "non-aristotelian," and in the last years of his life in Berlin, reckoning the inadequacy of the term "epic," he decided to substitute "dialectical" for "epic", a formal demonstration of his evolving method. Brecht wrote in the "Appendices to the Short Organum" that the concept of "epic" was "too light and too vague for the kind of theatre intended" (BT 276) declaring:

An effort is not being made to move from the epic theatre to the dialectical theatre... 'epic theatre' is too formal a term for the kind of theatre aimed at (and to some extent practised). Epic theatre is a prerequisite for these conditions, but it does not of itself imply that productivity and changeability of society from which they derive their main element of pleasure. (BT 281-2)

Brecht is aware that "epic" is more of a formal category, while he contemplated more

than a mere revolution of theatrical form. Willett suggests that Brecht came to the designation of “dialectical theatre” based on the later nine essays grouped as “Dialectics in the Theatre” (1948-55). In response to Willett’s observation, Peter Brooker studied the late work of Brecht and came to the conclusion that Brecht was undecided about his description of “dialectical theatre,” since, on the one hand, his nine essays failed to present a coherent argument (21), and on the other hand, they were not committed to print in his lifetime (26). In opposition to both views, Carney claimed that Brecht’s thought was informed by the dialectics as early as the 1930s (154). While I align myself with Carney’s argument, I suggest that it is essential to examine the issue of Brecht’s notion of dialectics from the following two aspects. First, we need to investigate what the two terms “epic” and “dialectic” mean in Brecht’s context. Second, in order to designate the specific version of Brecht’s dialectics, we must refer to Korsch’s and Lao Zi’s thinking about dialectics, both of which, as we shall see, helped to shape Brecht’s formulation of his aesthetic of theatre.

Brecht saw his theatre as for the new age, the “scientific age,” in which productivity has been made theatre’s “main source of entertainment” and “has been also taken to be its theme” (BT 186). The questions for Brecht arise, how could his theatre unveil the commodifications inherent in bourgeois societies? And how could these issues be addressed not only in dramaturgy but also on the performance level with “the whole radical transformation of the mentality” of the performer and spectator (BT 23)? In 1927, Brecht first used the phrase “epic theatre” in print. In the same year he published his essay “The Epic Theatre and its Difficulties” and explained that the epic theatre was a theatrical style laid down by the new school of play-writing. The basic meaning of “epic” (in Brecht’s use of it) is, as Willett summarized, “a sequence of incidents or events, narrated without artificial restrictions

as to time, place or relevance to a formal ‘plot’” (*Bertolt Brecht* 169). Brecht expounded the principles of the epic theatre and emphasized that “the essential point of the epic theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator’s reason” (BT 23).

Esslin suggests that we must understand Brecht’s theory of epic theatre as his counter-theory of the German classic theory of drama: “in 1797 Goethe and Schiller, the two giants of the German tradition, had jointly presented their point of view in an essay, ‘On Epic and Dramatic Poetry’” (*Evils* 113). Esslin also notes that much of Brecht’s theoretical ideas were anticipated by Racine and Diderot. Indeed, Brecht’s labeling of his theatre as “non-aristotelian” signifies that his theatre, counter to the Aristotelian concept of dramatic theatre, does not intend to invite audiences into believing that what is presented on stage is true. However, Brecht is hardly the first person to question and/or disturbs Aristotle’s tradition of dramatic theatre. Brooker points out in his article “Key Words in Brecht’s Theory and Practice” that the term “epic” was in use in German debates before Brecht adapted it. Furthermore, he listed several sources for Brecht’s “epic theatre”: “the political theatre of Erwin Piscator and German agitprop; the cabaret of Frank Wedekind and the work of the music hall comedian Karl Valentin; Charlie Chaplin and American silent film; Asia and revolutionary Soviet theatre; as well as Shakespeare and Elizabethan chronicle plays” (187).

What is clear is that Brecht’s concept of epic theatre is not only a revolution of the stage as theatre. As Tatlow suggests, “its purpose was ultimately *political*” (*Mask* 286). In Brecht’s 1927 essay “The Epic Theatre and its Difficulties,” an appeal to reason/rationalism (other than feelings) becomes an important features in his concept of epic theatre and is associated with his three specific concerns, summed up by Willett, “the unemotional (or *Sachlich*) approach, the new economic and social

subject-matter..., and...acting, as it were, in quotation marks and from foreknowledge, without ever pretending that cast and producers are unaware what is about to happen” (*Bertolt Brecht* 168).

Brecht emphasized that the epic theatre was a prerequisite for his theatre. Despite the fact that Brecht adopted the term “dialectical” very late in his life, we find Brecht dealing with dialectical concepts in his theoretical writings quite earlier than one might assume. In the article “The Film, the Novel and the Epic Theatre” (1930), for the first time he emphasized the idea of contradiction. The essay opens with the quotation, “Contradictions are our hope!” From that time the idea of contradiction became increasingly important in Brecht’s works. And in yet another article “The Question of Criteria for Judging Acting” (1931), Brecht reflects upon the contradictory nature of language:

For over and above the meaning of the individual sentences a quite specific basic gest was being brought out here which admittedly depended on knowing what the individual sentences meant but at the same time used this meaning only as a means to an end. The speeches’ content was made up of contradictions, and the actor had not to make the spectator identify himself with individual sentences and so get caught up in contradictions, but to keep him out of them. Taken as a whole it had to be the most objective possible exposition of a contradictory internal process. (BT 54)

By dealing with the innovation of play-writing and its relation with contradiction, Brecht is ultimately addressing the issue of language. As previously discussed (in Chapter 2), Brecht does not resort to effective renunciation of the old structure; instead, he solicits subversion from within the old structure by exposing contradictions and internal oppositions upon which the apparatus is founded. The

enterprise of his denunciation of bourgeois conceptions depends on the key idea of contradiction. In fact, the idea of contradiction not only works on the level of language, but is also central to Brecht's theatrical innovations on the part of the performer and spectator, and the composition of his dramatic works.

The operation of contradiction is inevitably related to the idea of subjectivity since the Brechtian theatre is intended to "divide its audience" (Brecht's words). Sartillot best summarizes the significance of contradiction in Brecht's epic theatre:

In the same way that Derrida's deconstruction cannot be reduced to a destruction of Western metaphysics, Brecht's epic theatre is not a destruction, an annihilation of dramatic theatre; rather, it should be regarded as a subversion of dramatic theatre, an inhabitation of its structures in order to reveal its contradictions. (121)

Echoing Sartillot's view, Jameson further claims that for Brecht the dialectic "is defined and constituted by the search for a discovery of contradictions" (79). Indeed, the dialectical method in Brecht's theatre, as Sartillot and Jameson suggest, could best be grasped by the construction of contradictions. However, does this suggest that Brecht's idea of dialectics amount solely to contradictions? In order to answer this question we shall roughly divide this discussion of Brecht's notion of contradiction into two categories: contradictions on the performance level (on the part of the spectator and performer) and contradictions within the text.

Brecht explicitly addresses the issue of how dialectical thinking is employed effectively in the participants of a performance (in this specific case the audience):

In calling for a direct impact, the aesthetics of the day call for an impact that flattens out all social and other distinctions between individuals. Plays of the aristotelian type still manage to flatten out class conflicts in this way although the individuals themselves are

becoming increasingly aware of class differences. The same result is achieved even when class conflicts are the subjects of such plays, and even in cases where they take sides for a particular class. A collective entity is created in the auditorium for the *duration of the entertainment*, on the basis of the ‘common humanity’ shared by all spectators alike. Non-aristotelian drama of *Die Mutter*’s sort is not interested in the establishment of such an entity. It divides its audience. (BT 60)

In addition to revealing and even provoking social conflicts, Brecht’s theatre is keen to bring out the contradictions engendered by class conflicts rooted in the socio-economic base. Apparently, the only way to resolve this overarching contradiction is to change society, as Brecht repeatedly emphasized. Contradiction, as implied here, is concrete and “a moment in a process rather than a static structure” (Jameson 79). As for the dialectics on the performance level, the activity of the *Verfremdungseffekt* is essentially dialectical and has a substantial relationship with Daoism and Chinese acting. Chapter 5 focuses on the issue of duality in performance, and examines the entangled relation within the dichotomies in the Brechtian theatre such as emotion and reason, reality and illusion, identification and alienation, and performer and spectator.

In the succeeding discussion, however, emphasis will be put on the noticeable change of Brecht’s terminology and his attitude towards his later understanding of dialectics by referring to the nine essays titled “Dialectics in the Theatre.” While a Marxist dialectic is essential to Brecht, we should note that Brecht simplified his use of the theoretical vocabulary contradiction drawn from Marxist dialectics, and that in the process he narrowed down the more customary terms from Hegel and Marx. I argue that while Lao Zi’s dialectics (together with concrete Daoist paradoxes) had been informing Brecht’s thought since the 1920s, his investment in the dialectic is

informed by Korsch's interpretation of Marxist dialectical materialism, and later in his life, is extended by Mao Zedong's ideas of contradiction. I begin my discussion by differentiating Brecht's understanding of contradiction from that of philosophical Marxism.

The central idea of Marxist dialectical materialism is contradiction. In "Afterword to the Second Edition" of *Capital*, Marx explains his dialectical methodology:

In its rational form it is a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension an affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary.

(xxx)

What is obvious is that the Marxist dialectic is central to Brecht's world view. At the heart of Brecht's dialectic materialism the same idea of change, contradiction, and a materialist conception of history is stressed. Yet, while he follows Marx's emphasis on the transient and historical nature of social forms, Brecht, as a playwright, considers contradiction to be fundamental to understanding the principles of dialectical development, and is keener about unveiling concrete contradictions than exploring precisely how dialectical development of history (in Marx's sense) takes place within his plays. To provide a point of comparison, consider how in his *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels summarizes a Hegelian perspective on the dialectic method²³:

The law of the transformation of quantity into quality and *vice versa*;

The law of the interpenetration of opposites;

The law of the negation of the negation.

Tatlow noted that although Hegel is “the only philosopher to whom he [Brecht] gave more than cursory attention,” Brecht considered him a humorist and “made no systematic study of him” (*Mask* 364). In fact, these Hegelian ideas are never explored or consistently applied in Brecht’s plays or theoretical essays. This explains why Brecht critics are suspicious that Brecht is clear about the nature of the dialectic. Tom Kuhn and Steve Giles, for example, remarked in their edited collection *Brecht on Art and Politics* (2003):

On the one hand, he implies that the contradictory processes uncovered by dialectical thinking are themselves objective features of reality....

On the other hand, he construes dialectic as a mode of cognition, a way of perceiving and understanding reality, and argues that dialectical concepts do not reflect a dialectic which exists in nature. (63)

Perhaps discussing Brecht’s dialectic with reference to the meaning of the dialectical principle evidenced in Marx’s writing is more misleading (and less fruitful) than referring to Korsch, with whom Brecht had begun a close intellectual friendship in 1926 (when Brecht attended his lectures on Marxism) and maintained their lifelong relationship till Brecht’s death in 1956. According to Fred Halliday (in his introduction to Korsch’s *Marxism and Philosophy*), Brecht said that he chose Korsch and Fritz Sternberg as his Marxist instructors because they were not orthodox Party thinkers. Halliday recorded that it is Korsch’s *Karl Marx* that “inspired Brecht to try to rewrite the *Communist Manifesto*...and in 1945 Brecht sent his draft to Korsch for comment” (21). An investigation of the Korschian version of the Marxist dialectic and Brecht’s conception of dialectical materialism shall demonstrate that Brecht had relied heavily on Korsch’s reading of Marxist dialectical materialism in both his aesthetic

theory and practice.

In *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, when asked about how dialectical materialism plays in the theatrical theory, the Philosopher lists a few points:

The *self-evident*—i.e. the particular shape our consciousness gives our experience—is resolved into its components when counteracted by the A-effect and turned into a new form of the *evident*. An imposed schema is being broken up here. The individual's own experiences correct to confirm what he has taken over from the community. The original act of discovery is repeated.

The contradiction between empathy and detachment is made stronger and becomes an element in the performance.

Historicizing involves judging a particular social system from another social system's point of view. The standpoints in question results from the development of society. (100)

The first two points deal with the notion of contradiction—though on two different levels: whereas the first point suggests how contradictions within the individuals' experiences are, through the means of V-effect, exposed from within, the second one refers to the specific dialectical attitude (of empathy and detachment) adopted for both performers and audiences. The idea of historicization explains the purpose of Brecht's setting his plays in previous historical times: to enhance his audience's alertness in noticing the objective contradictions of the society as located in the hero.

In Korsch's *Karl Marx*—in which he summarizes his understanding of the basic principles of Marxism—we find nice parallels between Brecht's notion of historicization and Korsch's interpretation of Marx's principle of historic specification. Identifying it as the core of the Marxist dialectic, Korsch notes that Marx dealt with all economic, social and ideological concepts not through a general abstract

description, but through “a detailed description of the definite relations which exist between definite economic phenomena on a definite historical level of development and definite phenomena which appear simultaneously or subsequently in every other field of political, juristic, and intellectual development” (“Why I am a Marxist”). While I have my reservations about Kellner’s argument that the Korschian version of the Marxist dialectic is central to Brecht’s work (29), such a shared emphasis on comprehending social issues and phenomena as historically specific does indicate the influence of Korsch on Brecht’s conception of Marxist dialectics.

It becomes clear (from what has been discussed), firstly, that Brecht’s dialectics contains a simplified and incomplete presentation of Marxist dialectics; secondly, that while Marxist dialectics (and Korsch’s version of Marxist dialectics) identifies some important contradictions, such as the one between the exploiters and the exploited, it does not provide a specific perspective on contradiction; and thirdly, that although Brecht foregrounds contradiction as key to understanding the thematic issues of his plays, Marxist principle of dialectical materialism, however, has little concrete contradictions (based on observations of man, and of man’s relation to others) to offer. In one of his 1940 journal entries, he also elaborated on the concept of his theatre of dialectics with a sole emphasis on the notion of contradiction:

...it will probably be well nigh impossible to demand that reality be presented in such a way that it can be mastered, without pointing to the contradictory, ongoing character of conditions, events, figures, for unless you recognize the dialectical nature of reality it cannot be mastered. The a-effect makes it possible to enact this dialectical nature, that is what it is for; it’s what explains it. Even when deciding on the titles that determine the blocking, it is not enough to demand eg merely a social quality; the titles must also contain a critical quality and

announce a contradiction. They must be fully adaptable, so the dialectic (contradictoriness, the element of process) must be able to become concrete. The mysteries of the world are not solved, they are demonstrated. (*Journals* 120-21)

Here Brecht explains specifically what dialectic means in his theatre as: “contradictoriness” and “the element of process.” At the core of Marxist contradiction is the assumption that the central contradiction is the one between the *social* means of production within the capitalist system and the *individual* sense of property ownership within the same system (the bourgeois mode of production is identified by Marx as the last antagonist form of it) (Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*), yet Daoism is built on the contemplation of contradictions in practical contexts. As is consistent with Brecht’s claim that “truth is concrete,” Brecht declares that the dialectic must as well be able to become concrete. Specific Taoist contradictions appear widely in *Me-Ti* and Brecht’s plays, making it worth considering how the specific Daoist contradictions contribute to Brecht’s thematic concerns in his plays. We shall revisit this topic later; suffice it to say here that while Brecht’s dialectics is very much influenced by Korsch’s version of Marxism, it is Daoist specific examples of contradiction in the *Tao Te Ching* that provide concrete examples in Brecht’s plays. This journal entry also touches upon a disputed topic among Brecht critics, the dichotomy of emotion and reason. In chapter 6 when we discuss the experience of Brechtian audience and of Mei’s audience, we shall see how both share the same dialectical experience of emotion.

Lao Zi is one of the main sources of Brecht’s ideas about the role of contradiction, yet the impact of Lao Zi’s dialectic on Brecht’s work has not been adequately clarified. The *Tao Te Ching* provides the concrete contradictions applied in Brecht’s dramatic texts, and those contradictions are employed in Brecht’s instruction

on how the actor should prepare for a role. In the series of nine articles (consisting of a letter, notes and dialogues) under the general heading of “Dialectics in the Theatre,” Brecht explicitly addresses dialectical thinking and how it should be employed by the actor in rehearsal. We shall give a brief review of these essays to see how they relate to Lao Zi’s concrete paradoxes.²⁴

In “A Diversion on *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*,” Brecht points out the contradictory feelings Grusha has towards her interests and towards the child. In “*Mother Courage Performed in Two Ways*,” Brecht says that it is the contradictory roles of peddler and of mother which disfigure the character. These two pieces pose problems for interpreting the characters and for the theatrical treatment of characterization. At first glance, the contradictions in the two characters seem to be irrelevant; however, they point to one common observation of human virtue by Lao Zi: the relativity of the virtue of goodness and the paradox of usefulness.

In “A Letter to the Actor Playing the Young Hörder in *Winterschlacht*” Brecht points out the need for knowledge of history in presenting contradictory attitudes of fear and sympathy. “Another Case of Applied Dialectics” and the note “Conversation about Being Forced into Empathy” are two reported discussions of the contradictory aspect of performance; i.e. how to reconcile two opposing elements (emotion and reason) in presenting the inner conflicts of the characters. The contradictory principles in Brecht’s vision of staging and acting within the theatrical space (i.e., the dialectical relation between emotion and reason), as we shall see later, are already predicted in the Chinese theatre.

In his essay “Study of Shakespeare’s ‘Coriolanus’,” Brecht refers to Mao’s distinction between dominant and secondary contradictions and makes a connection with the Chinese political situation while analyzing with his company the initial conflict in Shakespeare’s play between the Roman plebeians and patricians and their

subsequent unity under Marcius Coriolanus in a war against the Volscians. The original conversation is as follows:

We shall have to go back to the classic method of mastering such complex events. I marked a passage in Mao Tse-tung's essay 'On Contradiction.' What does he say?

That in any given process which involves many contradictions there is always a main contradiction that plays the leading, decisive part; the rest are of secondary, subordinate significance. One example he gives is the Chinese Communists' willingness, once the Japanese attacked, to break off their struggle against Chiang Kai-Shek's reactionary regime.

(BT 261)

This quotation is often recognized as representing, in Brooker's words, "an addition to Brecht's canon of Marxist classics, and is in itself evidence of the extension and revision his theory was undergoing" (*Bertolt Brecht* 21-2). Tatlow even suggests that "Mao's affirmation of perpetual change," inspired Brecht, whose drama aimed "to awaken and stimulate awareness of contradiction," and one consequence of Brecht's reconsideration of dialectics "was his decision to change the description of his theatre from "epic" to "dialectical" (523). Noting the fact that Brecht died two years later after he read Mao's "On Contradiction" (written in 1937)—which he thought was the best book of 1954—it would be misleading to suggest that Mao's essay alone could make a tremendous influence upon Brecht's notion of contradiction. Yet Mao's thought on contradiction—which is an appropriation of the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Lao Zi—does enrich Brecht's concept of contradiction. As we can see in "On *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*" (1956), Brecht classifies the contradictions within that play into primary contradictions and other contradictions. He identifies the two primary contradictions as follows: "The more Grusha promotes the child's life the

more she threatens her own: her productivity tends toward her own destruction” (91); and “Azdak is the disappointed one who does not turn into the one who disappoints” (91). The other contradictions concerning characters such as the petitioners, the farmers and the architects are considered minor.

CHAPTER 4

BRECHT’S EARLY AND MIDDLE-PERIOD PLAYS

Closely observe the behavior of these people:
Consider it strange, although familiar,
Hard to explain, although the custom.
Hard to accept, though no exception.
Even the slightest action, apparently simple
Observe with mistrust. Check whether it is needed
Especially is usual....

—Bertolt Brecht *The Exception and the Rule*

As a playwright, Brecht seldom touches directly upon the content of his plays except in his editorial notes; remembering his systematic explanations and defense of his views concerning performance and dramaturgy, this leaves the impression that his innovations are fundamentally aesthetic/political/philosophical ones in dramatic theory. In fact, more often than not, his plays are analyzed as evidence of whether his theory is successfully “translated” into practice on the stage. Moreover, even when the political significance of his plays becomes a subject of critical readings, there exists a tendency to associate them with his complex relationship to Marxism and to the Communist Party. As a typical example, Ewen divided Brecht’s career into three phases: the first is characterized by “a strong anti-bourgeois revolt—under cover of nihilism, individualism, and cynicism”; the second exhibited “a closer study of the social nexus, behind these phenomena,” while in the third, beginning with the 1930’s, “he succeeds in synthesizing his political and social views—his Marxist studies—with his views of the nature and function of drama and the theatre” (208). Ewen’s interpretation is limited to Brecht’s commitment to the Marxist project, which, though important, is not the only determining factor in Brecht’s literary creation. As such, it becomes essential for us to go beyond the ideological implication (evident in Ewen’s

reading) which considers his plays as an application of Marxist ideas and thus reduces his plays to a critique of capitalism and the struggle against Fascism.

Despite the abrupt change in subject-matter and style between Brecht's early and late works, beneath this rigid categorization there is a considerable unity in his inquiries into the injustice and brutality of commercial society, which links his aesthetic pursuits to his political commitments. Notably, his preoccupation with the issues of Man—the relation between man and society, man and others, and man to himself, and its ethical dimension—stands to justify his suggested criterion that a work of art should “enrich the individual's capacity for experience” (BT 91). Indeed, while Brecht's exploration of issues related to man is often thought to be largely informed by his commitment to Marxism, this study explores the deep links between Chinese thought and Brecht's plays in his thinking about man. This chapter shall focus on his early plays and the *Lehrstücke*, while tracing connections and parallels between Chinese thought and Brecht's ideas and examining three thematic concerns: undermining Humanism and Subjectivity, the conflict between the collective and the individual, and class consciousness. Chapter 5 continues with the discussion of Brecht's plays (succeeding the *Lehrstück* period) and argues that Brecht owes much more to Chinese traditions than has been discussed in his explorations of the meanings of the ethical subject and his thought on social order.

The Critical Scene and Another Perspective

Brecht's works are generally accepted as “three-phase” (or sometimes even “four-phase”): from his earliest writing, through his *Lehrstück* period (1928-1930), and, finally, to his later plays (in the latter case, divided into his complex great plays written during his extended exile, and his work with the Berliner Ensemble in East Germany). Read within the context of his complex relation to the Communist

movement, Esslin claims that his political commitment to Marxism rectifies his earliest apoliticalism, asocialism and nihilism: rational claims of Communism discipline “the irrational forces within him [Brecht]” (*Evils* 225). Esslin’s view explains the development from Brecht’s earliest work to the *Lehrstücke*. Regarding his later major plays, Esslin reads them as resulting from an irreconcilable inner contradiction tormenting Brecht who could not easily find satisfaction with either Marxist tenets or the expression of his instincts. Therefore, Esslin comes to the conclusion that Brecht’s later works are more a demonstration of his failure in completely following the discipline of Communism which “provided a technique of self-control, discipline, and rational thought” (*Evils* 225). Willett, while identifying different elements of Brecht’s theatre, seems to agree with Esslin, stating that after the later 1930s, “the political and intellectual tension of his work seems to slacken” (*Bertolt Brecht* 81). Willett’s concern is not with the impulsive contradiction between rationality and emotional drive, but, rather, relies on the implication that it is “his natural sympathy” that gives “a new warmth” to his character and his plays (81). Elsewhere Willett calls this a tendency towards “less schematized moral-social arguments” (86). He further cites *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* as an example to illustrate how “the old romantic attitude towards blood and sweat, rags and tatters,” is combined with “almost undiluted argument and a rambling ethical parable” (*Bertolt Brecht* 86).²⁵ These readings focus on understanding these plays through Brecht’s conflicts with orthodox Marxism: one establishing Brecht’s own inner desire, the other, a humanist attitude that is associated with romanticism.

Those critics who pursue Marxist analysis focus on the issues of Man in Brecht’s plays, and re-examine Brecht in different areas. For instance, Althusser qualifies his own observations on Brecht by saying:

In this sense these plays [Brecht’s great plays such as *Mother Courage*

and *Galileo*] are decentred precisely because they can have no centre, because, although the illusion-wrapped, naive consciousness is his starting-point, Brecht refuses to make it that centre of the world it would like to be. That is why in these plays the centre is always to one side, if I may put it that way, and in so far as we are considering a demystification of the consciousness of self, the centre is always deferred, always in the beyond, in the movement going beyond illusion towards the real. (*For Marx* 145)

Althusser's Marxist reading of Brecht is engaged with a critique of the consciousness of Brecht's individuals in the struggle against the constraints of an outer reality. According to Althusser, the idea of one's consciousness and thus one's sense of being a subject is an illusion constructed by ideology. His analysis of Brecht's plays is insightful and significant because Brecht is, for the first time, positioned in the western intellectual tradition of antihumanism—a discourse that constitutes the preoccupation of postmodern criticism—despite the fact that Althusser's discussion makes no differentiation between the various stages of Brecht's plays.

Althusser's observation inspires an interest in reviewing Brecht against the backdrop of postmodernism, and many Brecht scholars have attempted to reassess Brecht's theatre and his theatrical practice within the context of the postmodern age. Critics like Elizabeth Wright, Astrid Oesmann, and Rainer Friedrich, albeit varied in their approaches, have engaged in probing the subject both in the early plays (*Baal*, *In the Jungle of Cities* [*Jungle*], *Drums in the Night* [*Drums*]) and as well as in the *Lehrstücke*. Wright shows how Brecht's most radical ideas appearing in earliest works have not fertilized his later work. In agreement with Wright, Friedrich draws attention to the ritualistic elements in *The Measures Taken* and argues that

the mature Brecht was too much of a rationalist to be co-opted, yet his

early work easily could be: carnivalisation, and the concomitant espousal of polymorphous perversity, are all-pervasive in his expressionist play *Baal* (1919); and his *Lehrstück*-theatre, the ‘theatre of the didactic play’ of the late twenties and early thirties, presents, ... the deconstruction of the subject *avant la lettre*. (284-5)

Even Jameson, while emphasizing that Brecht “prepares current notions of subjectivity and is a forerunner in this regard, rather than an old-fashioned personality—a centred or individualist subjectivity,” cites *Man Equals Man* as an example of “pre-Marxist” ambivalence about collective values (77).

While each of these critics notices an explicit rupture between Brecht’s earlier works and his later works regarding his thinking about important issues related to man, their explanations are varied and even contradictory. The dispute over Brecht’s thematic concerns and characters centers on Brecht’s understanding of Marxism and to what extent this understanding is evinced in his writing. The fact is that Brecht’s characters are hard to fit within a Marxist theory of social movements. Even in the *Lehrstücke*—which is usually conceived as evidence of Brecht’s full embrace of Marxist ideology—we could still note in his characters (such as the young rebel in *The Measures Taken*) the tension between the individual and the class interest. Relying on his methodology of observation, Brecht is more interested in pointing out contradictions within a single character within the capitalistic production relations. His later characters such as Puntila, Shen Teh, Azdak, Grusha, and Galileo all similarly display the contradictory qualities which cannot be unified into class or membership of a large collective. This contradiction is either dismissed as unimportant or cited as further proof that Brecht is not an “orthodox” Marxist.

Reviewing Brecht’s works within the context of his relationship with Asia, Tatlow and Berg-Pan noticed an interesting phenomenon (though one which at first

sight appears to be superficial elements and is unrelated to the above discussion); i.e., that more of his later plays begin to either have Chinese sources or have China as the physical setting of the plays. (Most of his early plays have an Anglo-Saxon background; while from 1933 three of his major plays are more or less based on ancient Chinese plays, *The Good Person of Szechwan*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Turandot*). Tatlow and Berg-Pan struggle with reconciling Brecht's fascination with China and the Marxist influence in Brecht's major concern of investigating and finding means of expression of the birth of a "new human type". While varied in their arguments, they each tend to agree with the assumption that Chinese philosophy offers observations about individual behavior and conduct, which, to quote Tatlow, "amount to modifications of what is reconcilable with dogmatic Marxist theory and political practice" (*Mask* 443). Tatlow's view is echoed by Jameson, "Chinese 'wisdom' is there to compensate for this lack [if not this incapacity] in Marxism, and to close the gap" (35). Indeed, it is generally accepted that classical Marxism (with its assumption that social class "is the only determining factor in the shaping of the subject" [Carney 23]) does not explicitly discuss the complex ethical dimension of human nature.

Such a perspective, although it appears to emphasize and affirm the significance of Chinese thought in Brecht's theatre, fails to understand that Chinese philosophy (as well as the whole idea of Marxism) does not designate an undifferentiated and coherent entity, but encompasses various schools (such as Confucianism and Daoism), each of which has its own distinct and even conflicting teachings. Emphasizing the complementary function of Chinese thought in Brecht's theatre requires an overgeneralization of Chinese culture. Secondly, Brecht studied Daoism and Lao Zi as early as 1920, and in 1925 wrote "The Great Confucius" and "The Courteous Chinese", in which he expounded upon his study of Confucius' social

ethics (Prophet 16). Evidence also shows that by the late 1920s, he had studied Confucianism, Daoism and Moism before he seriously engaged in the study of Marxism. It is also important to remember his own claim that he did not begin his serious study on Marxism until he failed in getting the necessary information for the distribution of the world's wheat for his drama project (Willett 93-4). All these suggest that his relationship to Chinese thought is at least as important as is the influence from Marx.

To explain the various inconsistencies in Brecht's dramatic works, Barthes proposes that there are two discourses in Brecht's oeuvre: "an apocalyptic (anarchizing) discourse concerned to express and to produce destruction without trying to see what comes 'afterwards'," which generates Brecht's first plays (*Baal*, *Drums*, *Jungle*), and "an eschatological discourse: a critique constructed with a view to ending the fatality of social alienation (or the belief in this fatality)," which generates all of Brecht's oeuvre after *The Threepenny Opera* (*The Rustle of Language* 212). I share the view with Wright and Barthes that Brecht's first plays display this attribute of "destruction", which, as Wright suggests, should be linked especially to a Western metaphysics of subjectivity. I also appreciate Barthes' suggestion that with the belief that the world is remediable Brecht provides a conceivable cure, and that, in striving to explain the fate of the modern Man, instead of following the spirit of deconstruction, Brecht holds a positive view of reconstructing subjectivity. But instead of claiming that Brecht finds the solution in Marxism (a dispute among critics) or Chinese thought (as Tatlow and Berg-Pan imply), I suggest that we must reject the search for either a "dogmatic" Marxist Brecht or a Chinese Brecht and arrive at an understanding of Brecht's plays according to his thought manifest both in his plays and in his theoretic work.

The recurrent themes of Brecht's oeuvre are varied, including war, crime, justice and social progress. Under this cloak lies Brecht's life-long preoccupation with the issue of subjectivity; he places it at the center of his work by examining the essential constituents of the human subject (ethics, ideology, class and identity), in his critique of epistemology and aesthetics. Such focused observations about Man are integral to Brecht's very concept of theatre as a means of educating and transforming society, since the Brechtian theatre is involved with the dismissal of "false consciousness" in the first place. The main subject of Brecht's theatre, in his own words, "must be relationships between one man and another as they exist today" (BT 67). Hence, to understand the dichotomy between his earlier characters and later ones, we must trace the development of Brecht's ideas of the human subject, which manifests itself both on the performative level and in his works as well, from the early plays, the *Lehrstücke*, to the larger-scaled epic dramas. Moreover, we must link this development with certain elements in Brecht's thought which reflects the interplay of his Marxist influence and his response to Chinese philosophical ideas (Confucianism and Daoism). We should also note, as mentioned earlier, Brecht's habit of picking up ideas he wants from any system of thought and mixing them into his work to serve his purpose. All these indicate that we must investigate and redefine Brecht's configuration of the human subject within cross-cultural contexts.

Through analyzing *Baal*, *Jungle*, and *Drums*, I will illustrate Brecht's rejection of the claim of bourgeois humanism and its primary stress on moral self-sufficiency and the exercise of reason and rational sovereignty, because of its inadequacy in defining the humanity of man. In his next plays *Man Equals Man* and the *Lehrstücke*, we shall notice the shift from a critique of bourgeois ethics and subjectivity to a concern with issues related to the dichotomy of the individual and the collective, such as the conflict between one's will, collective values, and the complexity of class

consciousness.

The Rejection of Bourgeois Humanism

Brecht's first four full-length plays (*Baal*, *Drums in the Night*, *In the Jungle of Cities* and *The Life of Edward II of England*), which he wrote in Bavaria before moving to Berlin in the autumn of 1924, are often cited to show Brecht's thought in his pre-political years, nicely summarized by Willett and Ralph Manheim as follows: "He undoubtedly had opinions, many of them progressive and even revolutionary, but they were far from systematic, and politics and economics were wholly absent from what we know of his reading" (CP 1: *Introduction* X).²⁶ Brecht's retrospective 1954 comment on *Baal* is often cited to support this observation of the immaturity of Brecht in his early twenties, "I admit (and warn you) the play is lacking in wisdom." (CP VI: 370). His earliest plays signal his efforts to depict the idea that both the individual and society are changed by capitalism—this change accompanies a cost to humanity²⁷—and, as such, that the plays exhibit one of the main concerns in Brecht's work. Brecht sets his characters within and against a Western totality of humanity; that is, against recognizing the subject as a fully present and autonomous entity and identity (Sartre 124). Moreover, by suspending conventional causality and moral values, his plays demonstrate a radical critique of bourgeois culture and humanistic values.

These plays are characterized by a disruption of the cause-and-effect narrative that dominates conventional bourgeois theatre. Thus any attempts to pry into the inner psychology of the character and afford a reason for their behaviours would turn out to be futile. In fact, the whole idea that principles of reason govern human conduct is questioned. The resulting vacuum in motivation destabilizes traditional notions of individual identity. *Baal*, disregarding all social conventions and values, procures

sexual satisfaction; Shlink starts a fight with Garga for no known reason; Jane's motives for abandoning her family are never cleared up. Brecht repeatedly emphasizes that, as he indicates in the programme note for the Heidelberg production of the *Jungle*, "the behavior of our contemporaries...is no longer to be explained by old motives (largely borrowed from literature)" (CP VIiv: 435). Elsewhere, Brecht writes:

...it ought not to surprise you if the newer plays show certain types of people in certain situations behaving differently from what you expected, or if your guesses as to the motives for a particular piece of behavior turn out to be wrong. (CP VIiv: 2)

Brecht's own explanation of his characters negates the effectiveness of conventional theories of motivation and dramatic action in analyzing his characters' behavior; it calls for another perspective articulated from a different philosophical ground to examine his characters.

Taking *Baal* as an example, one of the typical explanations is to make a link between Nature and Baal's unbound desire and sexual drive. Charles Russell reads Baal as "acting like the god of nature who rejected the social and religious morality created by the Judeo-Christian tradition which feared him" (213). He further claims:

The poet Baal is, in essence, a natural force, a human identity reduced to the uncontrolled urges of physical existence,... Ultimately, he is the inhuman, brute rhythm of nature, the amoral life force out of which humanity arises and by which it is always threatened. (213)

Russell's analysis echoes Esslin's claim that "Nature, the forest, and the sky thus stand for the forces of instinct and uncontrolled emotion" in Brecht (*Evils* 221). Their shared reading establishing humanity and Nature in opposition—though Esslin is more vague than Russell in this regard—represents the view that Brecht intends to

ridicule. Indeed, Brecht precautions those who have not learnt to think dialectically of the difficulties in reading *Baal*, and he also warns of the danger of reading *Baal* as “a glorification of unrelieved egotism and nothing more” (CP V1i: 369).

Yet here is an individual standing out against the demands and discouragements of a world whose form of production is designed for exploitation rather than usefulness....He is anti-social, but in an anti-social society. (CP V1i: 370)

The fact that Brecht directs the attack toward society suggests his belief in the social dimensions of individuals. He further suggests that motives, such as the urge to own women or the means of production or objects of exploitation, “can come to an end since they can simply be organized away” (CP V1iv: 436). Here we are presented with an alternative perspective to think about the relationship between subjectivity, nature and society. Through abandoning the principle of causality and motivation for man’s action and conduct, Brecht writes against the celebration of individuality together with humanity prescribed by the bourgeois tradition. Beneath this denunciation of psychological motivations as the driving force of human behavior, lies Brecht’s radical rejection of, firstly, the concepts of rationality and autonomy as the foundation of an Enlightenment Subject, and secondly, the notion that our psychological motivations are controlled by ourselves. Indeed, their motivations for dramatic action are illogical and vague. Even as we fail to attribute certain human qualities to them, neither can we recognize them with a fixed identity.

Brecht’s emphasis on the sociological subject engages with the process of subject-formation. In *Drums*, we see how Brecht’s concern with the decentering of the unified subject in *Baal*, *Jungle*, and *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* is replaced by a renunciation of the appeal to subjectivity in experiencing the world. Kragler’s presence (after he returns from the war) is a paradoxical absence: we are

given no personal information about him; no characters in the pub recognize his identity except Anna who, though once engaged to him, ironically, could remember nothing about him except her possession of a photo of Kragler. Moreover, the recognition of Kragler's existence is unreliable, since Anna's memory of Kragler's physical features is fading away. She expresses her fear of the loss of her memory:

You were with me a long while at the beginning, your voice hadn't yet died away. When I walked down the passage I brushed against you and in the fields I heard you calling from behind the sycamore. Even though they wrote that your face had been shot away and two days later you'd been buried. But the time came when it changed. When I walked down the passage, it was deserted, and the sycamore had nothing to say. When I straightened myself over the washtub I could still see your face, but when I spread the things on the grass I lost sight of it and all that long while I had no idea what you looked like....(CP 1: 20-21)

Anna's fear poses the question: What makes up a person? Is there an essence to the subject as a fully present identity and entity? Brecht implies that the recognition of the subject is not defined from within but manipulated by other people and by society. Finally Kragler has to come to accept this fact that he is "nobody." When he walks into the bar and meets with the revolutionaries, he replies "Nobody" when asked about his name and hence becomes a subject that is deprived of its own sense of identity. The fact that one's identity is always and already in the grip of forces beyond our conscious control is highlighted by the fact that Kragler is excluded from the Balickes' world even while he is recognized within the circle of the rebels. Kragler finds himself in disaccord with either of the two competing ideologies in the political and economic transition following the war—as represented by the Balickes and the

rebels in the “Zibebe”. Kragler cannot be integrated into any established social categories because there is no such a thing as self-sustained subjectivity. Astrid Oesmann makes the same observation (as I did above) and suggests that this reveals “the fictional nature of representational subjectivity” that one is projected (142). And while I am skeptical—for the fact that Brecht had not began his studies of Marxism—that Brecht, as Oesmann suggests, places emphasis on how ideology transforms concrete individual into subjects through an imaginary movement of recognition, Oesmann is certainly right to point out how the notion of subjectivity is imagined in *Drums*.

The negation of subjectivity comes with a rejection of the idea of humanity in a bourgeois sense. Kragler is denied his humanity by his fellow beings. When he attempts to persuade others that he is “flesh and blood,” still alive from Africa, he is met with antagonism from nearly all the people at the bar. He is identified with ghosts and animals (hyenas and swine). Later Anna says to Murk, “He [Kragler] stood in the middle like some animal. And you beat him like an animal” (CP 1: 37). Thus the idea of subjectivity is inexorably associated with questions such as: What is humanity if the fictive identification of one’s identity turns out to be misrecognition? And, on which ground should moral imperatives be built? Earlier we discussed how it is that by denouncing motivations, Brecht also dismisses bourgeois ethics. In *Drums*, he twisted the traditional notion of morality still further:

One of these venereal diseases is pregnancy. Murk, whose rootlessness is due to the woman’s indifference—a very common pestilence that can truly be compared with those in the Bible—goes and infects her with a child. His conduct is moral: in occupying her troubled mind he improves his economic standing. But morality is there to prevent miscalculations. And the woman behaves immorally. She thinks she

will get more from that atmosphere of obscene sexuality: from lying with Kragler when in a pregnant condition. (CP 1: 65)

This passage indicates that Brecht still holds to a belief in morality. However, this does not mean that the subject coheres, especially given that he challenges traditional moral values by judging Murk moral and Anna immoral. Kragler's return embodies a moral test for Anna, while her preference of Kragler to Murk turns out to be a failure of this test, because, according to Brecht, she is lying with Kragler when she is pregnant with Murk's child. Considering the fact that our sympathy generally resides with Anna and Kragler, Brecht implicitly undermines the notion of good and bad. By contrast to the suspension of moral judgment in *Baal*, *Jungle* and *Mahagonny*, *Drums* is more revealing than his previous works because, through his denial of moral values as absolute truth claims and further, his modification of morality under specific historical circumstances, he shows his belief in certain assumptions of morality, although he does not make an effort to clarify them. Such a perspective on morality is further explored in his later plays (which we shall discuss in Chapter 5).

Although it was not until 1926 that Brecht began to read Marx, his earlier plays demonstrate an intuitive affinity to Marx. Like Marx, Brecht's reflection upon man's relation to society (and to others) and his critique of bourgeois ethics all suggest that he has a keen interest in how individuals are constituted by outside forces. Furthermore, though he may not by this time have figured out how human conditions are related to capitalism as described in *Capital*, he did realize that man's economic existence had transformed the nature of Man's relations to others. As Brecht wrote, the conception of *Jungle* is "that under advanced capitalism fighting for fighting's sake is only a wild distortion of competition for competition's sake" (CP VIiv: 438). Based on this observation Brecht dismisses the bourgeois moral values as unchanging and implies that conceptions such as subjectivity, identity and ethics must not remain

divorced from concrete historical circumstances—an idea that sounds very much like Marx's.

It is interesting to note that twenty years after *Baal*, Brecht, through telling the story of the Chinese god of Happiness, identifies the theme of *Baal* as: “Humanity’s urge for happiness can never be entirely killed” (CP 1i: 370). It is the message about this Buddha that keeps “haunting” Brecht, as he recalls in his journals:

There is a carved wooden Chinese figure, two or three inches high and sold in thousands, representing the fat little god of happiness, contentedly stretching himself. This god was to arrive from the East after a great war and enter the devastated cities, trying to persuade people to fight for their personal happiness and well-being. He acquires followers of various sorts, and becomes subject to persecution by the authorities when some of them start proclaiming that the peasants ought to be given land, the workers to take over the factories, and the workers’ and peasants’ children to seize the schools. He is arrested and condemned to death. And now the executioners practise their arts on the little god of happiness. But when they hand him poison he just smacks his lips; when they cut his head off he at once grows a new one; when they hang him from the gallows he starts an irresistibly lively dance, etc., etc.. (CP 1i: 369-370)

Later in his diaries he mentions that he “bought a little Chinese amulet in Chinatown for 40 cents. From what he describes we could speculate that this Chinese god is the Buddha of Happiness. (In the history of China the rebels usually entitled themselves to the rebirth of this Buddha in order to gain support from the common people). Surprisingly, this passage, by equating *Baal* to the fat little god of happiness in fighting against the society for happiness, demonstrates Brecht’s continued sympathy

with Baal (despite the fact that Baal's means are immoral and dirty) and also his accusation of the society and the very concept of bourgeois individuality (which ruins Baal). The same theme is expressed in *Mahagonny* with an explicit message that the pursuit of happiness is an illusion in a capitalistic society.

Brecht's story of the Buddha and his belief in the pursuit of happiness reflects that he does not completely reject the idea of individual morality and autonomy. The pursuit of happiness is conceived by him as a means for individuals to find the impetus to live and gain self-realization. Brecht does not lament the decline of "a broad stratum of humanity"; rather, he realizes that "the stratum of humanity had its great period". Elsewhere, Brecht writes that "Humanity defined in bourgeois terms must give up its bourgeois features if it is to maintain its humanity" (BAP 97). The question arises, what is humanity without bourgeois features? Recalling Brecht's exploration of his "new human type," it is discernible that Brecht is exploring what a new human type is going to be like: "What matters most now is that *a new human type* should now be evolving, at this very moment, and that the entire interest of the world should be concentrated on his development" (CP 2: 263). Regarding the relationship between this new human and machine, Brecht believes that "it is my belief that he will not let himself be changed by machines but will himself change the machine; and whatever he looks like he will above all look human" (CP 2: 263).

The Collective and the Individual

In *Drums* one of the characters in the bar says, "Show the man what a man's made of!" The question—what is a man made up of?—is also raised in *Man Equals Man*; however, the question is rather one of identity formation than humanity. Of all Brecht's earlier works, *Drums* and *Man Equals Man*, with its emphasis on the social dimension of the individual's identity, do the most to introduce the issues that he

pursues in the *Lehrstücke*: the role of outer forces in the formation of identity (in *Drums*) and the absolute primacy of the collective over the individual (in *Man Equals Man*). This section, while examining issues centering around the relationship between the group and the individual in *Man Equals Man*, investigate the extent to which Chinese thought matters in his reflection upon the fate of man at the mercy of compulsions.

The first version of *Man Equals Man*, written in 1924-1925, antedates Brecht's first reading of Marx. It raises the issues related to identity as subjected to change, and, as we mentioned, the topic of the relationship between the group and the individual. In this play Brecht suggests, first of all, that the construction of identity is linked with the age of industrialization and subject to the demands of the changing social configurations; and secondly that the myth of fixed identity is coming to an end. The play follows, as Michelle Mattson describes it, "the destabilization, deconstruction, reconstruction, and [at least] temporary restabilization of the packer Galy Gay" (31). Man is objectified, like a car, waiting to be taken apart and reconstructed. One of the characters, the canteen proprietress, Widow Begbick says:

Herr Bertolt Brecht maintains man equals man

—A view that has been around since time began.

But then Herr Brecht points out how far one can

Manoeuvre and manipulate that man.

Tonight you are going to see a man reassembled like a car

Leaving all his individual components just as they are. (CP 2: 38)

Her remarks embody a paradoxical message: in order to acquire a renewed identity, one has to give up his individuality and surrender oneself to the viewpoints and expectations of the group. As the play progress, Brecht works out the notion that identity as a concept is unstable and relative: as noted by Mattson, "identity is

constituted out of a complex network of social forces and signifying practices” (32) rather than out of an essence from within. The process of Galy Gay’s identity construction is in accordance with the denial of his earlier self. When Jesse acts as a philosophical analyst of Galy Gay’s subjectivity, he may not be aware (though of course Brecht would be) that he is voicing a sentiment shared by Nietzsche—that man is not divinely formed and thus is not the center of the world and meaning:

According to Copernicus. i.e., man is not in the centre. Take a look at him, now. Is that what is supposed to stand in the centre? It’s antediluvian. Man is nothing. Modern science had proved that everything is relative. What does that mean? Table, bench, water, shoehorn—all relative. You, Widow Begbick, me—relative. Look into my eyes, Widow Begbick, it’s an historical moment. Man is in the centre, but only relatively speaking. (CP 2: 42)

Copernicus, in Donald Eugene Hall’s words, “helped inaugurate a scientific revolution that pointed out man’s lack of centrality in the universe” (17). This whole new discovery offers new means that we consider man’s position in the universe. Jesse realizes that man’s existence is historical and relative. Indeed, Galy Gay’s transformation carefully invites this theory of the individual as destroyed and reconstructed according to the collective will. Galy Gay’s identity as a *solider* is reinvented after Galy Gay—an ordinary man who is sent to buy a fish for his wife—denied his past and his name when his life was threatened, and finally he, now as *Solider Jip*, even gave a funeral oration for himself (as Galy Gay).

According to a surface reading, Galy Gay’s transformation does suggest the unmediated opposition between the collective and the individual. In *Man Equals Man*, we notice Brecht’s concern with the phenomenon of the mass over the individual. This concern is accompanied with an obvious criticism of the collective will in a

general sense, since Brecht asserts in his notes to the 1937 edition that the play could also be set in Germany, with Galy Gay's transformation taking place at the Nazi party rally at Nuremberg. In *Man Equals Man* there is a notable suspicion of the potential destroying power of the collective, yet in *He Who Says Yes* and *The Measures Taken* the same de-emphasis of the individual role within the collective seems to suggest a different implication about the power of the collective.

It seems, then, that when Brecht composed this play, he was more concerned with the strategy of survival in a negative circumstance than with the corruptive function of the sense of collective to subjectivity. Here I align myself with Mattson's analysis on *Man Equals Man*: "Although Brecht harbours no illusions about the destruction of autonomous individuality within capitalist production relations, he refuses to admit that the autonomous individual is equal to the total demise of the individual" (33). Galy Gay's transformation should not be simply read as a humanistic accusation of the antagonism between society and the individual; instead, it should be seen as reflecting Brecht's examination of the limits of subjectivity. Brecht gives a detailed analysis of his character Galy Gay:

You will see that among other things he is a great liar and an incorrigible optimist; he can fit in with anything, almost without difficulty. He seems to be used to putting up with a great deal. It is in fact very seldom that he can allow himself an opinion of his own. ... I imagine also that you are used to treating a man as a weakling if he can't say no, but this Galy Gay is by no means a weakling; on the contrary he is the strongest of all. that is to say he becomes the strongest once he has ceased to be a private person; he only becomes strong in the mass. And if the play finishes up with him conquering an entire fortress this is only because in doing so he is apparently carrying

out the determined wish of a great mass of people who want to get through the narrow pass that the fortress guards. No doubt you will go on to say that it's a pity that a man should be tricked like this and simply forced to surrender his precious ego, all he possesses (as it were); but it isn't. It's a jolly business. For this Galy Gay come to no harm; he wins. (CP 2: 264)

Brecht conceives Galy Gay's victory as one of preservation of one's physical and mental survival among the masses, despite the fact that the cost of survival (and preservation) is an abnegation of the autonomy and conformity to the collective. Survival becomes a necessity. Brecht's understanding of Galy Gay would share something with Lao Zi's concept of *wu wei* (non-contension) in the *Tao Te Ching* (whether Brecht assimilated Lao Zi's would be another issue).

The submersion of the personality is an important strategy of survival (or in other words, preservation of identity) that Lao Zi advocated. In book 11 of *Tao Te Ching* Lao Zi provides the most specific example of the necessity of the loss of one's self in order to achieve its fullness in the collective:

Third spokes will converge in the hub of a wheel;
But the use of the cart will depend on the part of the hub that is void.
With a wall all around a clay bowl is molded;
But the use of the bowl will depend on the part of the bowl that is void.
Cut out windows and doors in the house as you build;
But the use of the house will depend on the space in the walls that is
void.
So advantage is had from whatever is there;
But usefulness rises from whatever is not. (22)

The interplay of Lao Zi's concept of paradox is best demonstrated in the three cases:

the void in space enables movement, the hollow in a bowl and house that is receptive. In fact, Lao Zi's metaphor of spoke and wheel perfectly explains Brecht's claim that once Galy Gay has ceased to be a private person, he becomes strong in the mass. Lao Zi suggests adopting a dialectical vision of the collective/individual dichotomy, upon which Brecht surely agrees. In his poem "Going down Early to the Void," Brecht, quite in the spirit of Lao Zi, develops the notion of the void and applies it on the human level functional void in man.

Going down early to the void
Up from the void I'm filled anew.
When will nothingness I've stayed
I again know what to do.

When I love, or when I feel
Then it's just a further drain.
But I plunge into the cool
And am hot again. (*Poems* 431)

His message is twofold: the absence of prejudice permits full realization of one's potential, and the mental and affective emptiness empower one with love. Whereas in Lao Zi, void is presented for actual usefulness, for Brecht the void is not a negation of subjectivity, but opens the possibility for fullness as a human.

Although Brecht in his analysis of Galy Gay does not make a connection to Lao Zi's passage or refers to his poem—in the latter case it wouldn't be possible, because the poem was written much later than *Man Equals Man*—we find, however, a similar question of the boundaries and opposition between the opposing logical concepts. At least, it demonstrates that Brecht's view on the relationship between the individual and the collective is not a predicable choice between an either-or question

with only two alternatives: the individual's surrender to the collective (and thus the resulting loss of its original identity if such a thing exists) or the threat of death which results from total rejection from the collective.

The Complexity of Class Consciousness

In *Man Equals Man*, Brecht fuses the strategy of survival with his thinking about the individual and the collective, and implies one's agency (self-awareness) is maintained through identification with group consciousness. In the *Lehrstücke* period, the issue is further complicated by the Marxist influence on Brecht: in *Man Equals Man* the collectives are armies, while in *The Measures Taken*, for example, they are classes. In accordance with the Marxist belief in economic interests as the dominating factor in determining the social being, Brecht's *Lehrstücke* reflect his thinking about the complexity of class consciousness, such as class structure and class consciousness in *The Exception and the Rule*, and the conflict between class interests and individual autonomy in *The Measures Taken*, *He Who Says Yes*, and *He Who says No*. A controversy has arisen around Brecht's ambivalent attitude towards the tension between the search for self and conformity to the class.

To discuss Brecht's *Lehrstücke*, we must make a distinction between Brecht's study of Marxism and his attitude towards party-line politics. In the *Lehrstück* period, Brecht systematically studied Marxism and scientific socialism, got involved in the Workers' Movement, and began writing *Lehrstücke* (learning plays).²⁸ His *Lehrstücke* are often perceived as his most dogmatic and didactic Marxist plays; Esslin, for example, describes "Brecht's conversion to an austere didactic creed" of Marxism (*Evils* 46). He further ascribes Brecht's preoccupation with the submission of individuality to the mass to the difficulties of Brecht's response to the Communist Party:

...in those years when the new barbarism of the Nazi movement already loomed on the horizon, the Communists seemed to many German intellectuals the only effective counter-force. That is why the need for the individual to divest himself of his freedom in the interests of a higher cause forms the recurring theme of the '*Lehrstücke*.'” (*Evils* 43)

However, we are also reminded by Esslin that Brecht learned Marxism through his own study and in consultation with Döblin, Hanns Eisler and Korsch (who, though having remained a Marxist, had been expelled from the German Communist party as early as 1926) (*Evils* 31). The fact that Brecht never joined the Communist Party implies his suspicion of party-line doctrines. Hence, linking *Lehrstücke* with his belief in Marxism can give rise to a misunderstanding of his work. For example, the message of *The Measures Taken* has been interpreted by Eva Horn as indicating an abnegation of the individual and the vindication of party discipline, and thus an apologia for totalitarianism and mass murder (38-55). Similar arguments have been advanced against *The Exception and the Rule*, which Tatlow summarizes: “it is Communist propaganda, showing justice as bourgeois, unashamedly class justice and vitiated with prejudice” (*Mask* 279). Brecht, however, explicitly rejects such accusations in his journals; “[I] reject the interpretation that the subject is disciplinary murder by pointing out that it is a question of self-extinction”, he writes, continuing: “I admit that the basis of my plays is marxist and state that plays, especially with an historical content, cannot be written intelligently in any other framework” (*Diaries* 372). Ironically, in spite of Brecht’s defense of his play, *The Measures Taken* was not favored by the Soviet government and was banned from public performance.

The purpose of *Lehrstücke*, as described by Esslin, is not “to arouse emotion by depicting the fate of individuals” but to “teach social attitudes by showing the

highly formalized actions of abstract social types” (*Evils* 42). Marxism provided Brecht with the tools to investigate not only human behaviors and feelings, but also morality and its relationship with economic conditions. However, to assess Brecht’s concerns in these plays, we must, as Brecht himself implies, interpret them within the Marxist framework, yet disassociate them from the discussion of Brecht’s attitude towards and party disciplines in Germany and the Soviet Union. (Ironically, although *The Measures Taken* and *He Who Says No* are both based on Arthur Waley’s translation of a Japanese noh-play *Taniko* [*The Valley Hurling*], the influence of the Japanese theme and content is nearly ignored by critics.) As a playwright other than a party member, Brecht is more interested in presenting and discussing problems concerning the relationship between the individual and the class than preaching the primacy of social relations over individual consciousness.

There is a deficiency in the Marxist theory of subjectivity wherein individual accounts of experiences are always and already shown to be determined by class, family, culture and language, a view exemplified in the words of Thomas C. Heller and David E. Wellberry. “The internal logic of these structuralist [in a broad sense] arguments,” they write, “negates the normative power of autonomous individuality by reducing subjective consciousness to the artifact of a self-replicating, superpersonal mechanism” (7). Indeed, Marx is often accused of subsuming “individuals” and “essential human identities” under the artificial entities “class” and “history.”²⁹ Althusser also admits that “there is nothing in Marx that could provide the foundations of a theory of the psychic” (*Rethinking Marxism* 21). Stressing the exclusivity of the ideological subject, Marx did not explain the varieties of individual consciousness and behavior. This complaint leveled against Marxism is echoed by both the Freudians and neo-Freudians as well.³⁰

It is clear that Brecht would not share the Freudian theory of the psychic, nor would he be interested in delving into the inner life of his characters, if we are reminded of his argument that dramatic conflict should focus on class conflict instead of on the revelation of individual psychology. Yet his belief in the Marxist notion of the individual as the product of social practices does not lead him to a total negation of individual autonomy. In his working journal, Brecht records his reservations concerning the emphasis of the mass over the individual. When his son Steff was working on a school essay concerning the English revolution in the seventeenth century, Brecht remarked on his understanding about the materialistic method and dialectics.

he (Steff) is forced to realise that the dialectical method always deals in masses, always resolves everything into masses, treats the individual as a part of the masses, even if it does go so far as to convert the part in its turn into a mass. (*Journals* 132)

This journal entry was written in 1941, after Brecht had finished his last *Lehrstück*. In fact, the most thorough elaboration of Brecht's thoughts on this issue is recorded in *The Messingkauf Dialogues* (written between 1939-1942). One could argue that Brecht's thought might have changed dramatically, and yet we can still see in the *Lehrstücke* that he had begun to think about how to reconcile the tension between the social man and its status as an individual.

Accordingly, we see in Brecht's *Lehrstücke*, to varying degrees, a continual antagonism between the masses and the individual. Brecht wrote *He Who Says Yes/He who Says No* and *The Measures Taken* based on the Japanese Noh Play, *Taniko*. The original story reflects a certain religious belief of the Japanese society: A boy, intending to pray for his mother's illness, takes a journey with a group of priests. During this journey he develops a cold, and thereby endangers his travelling

companions. In accordance with the law among the priests, he consents to be hurled into a valley and buried alive.³¹ According to Esslin, upon the request of a group of school boys who thought there was no need for the boy to be killed, Brecht rewrote the play and called it *He Who Says No*. Esslin further records Brecht's defense of this rewriting:

The answer that I gave was false, but your question was even more false. He who says *A* does not have to say *B*. He can also recognize that *A* was wrong.... And as to the great ancient custom, I see no reason in it. Instead I require a new custom, which we must introduce forthwith, namely the custom to think anew in any new situation.
(*Evils* 44)

Esslin interprets Brecht's rewriting as "a passionate plea for the rethinking of ossified beliefs" (*Evils* 44). Leaving aside Esslin's judgment of Brecht's explication of his purpose in writing these two plays, Brecht's defense at least demonstrates that by deliberately avoiding giving a solution in such a condition—when the individual's interest and the collective will are in conflict—he intends to provide such a topic for discussion in a new social condition.

In *The Measures Taken*, he continues to pursue "this custom" in another new situation pre-communist China. The dramatic action of the play is presented in narrative by the four communist agitators upon returning to Moscow after a difficult mission meant to organize the workers in China. They explain to the Control Chorus representing the Central Committee of the party in Moscow why they executed one of their own (with his consent) in order to save their mission. The play concludes with the chorus reassuring them that they have taken the right measure. At first sight, *The Measures Taken* seems to convey, in David J. Grossvogel's words, "a political message that was easy to read—the need for self-effacement and commitment to an

ideological discipline” (19). Tatlow, however, holding a different view, has noted that “conservative critics have always viewed the didactic plays with suspicion and *Die Massnahme* was thought to demonstrate the wickedness of Communist morality by its advocacy of expedient executions.” Tatlow further points out that Brecht did not “intend to advocate such measures” (*Mask* 279).

To assess Brecht’s message in this play, we must examine it on the performance level, because the presentational performance matters in the narrative of the play. Throughout the play two collectives are present and make their voices heard: the Central Committee of the party in Moscow and the group of the Four Agitators, while the young comrade is impersonated jointly by the members of the collective. When comparing the different dramatic presentations in *The Measures Taken* and *the Reception and the Rule*, Tatlow observes that while *The Reception and the Rule* requires an audience to criticize its conclusion and precludes its participation, *The Measures Taken* “encouraged ritual participation” and “requires assent to its conclusion, though not to the behavior which makes it necessary” (*Mask* 281). Tatlow suggests that although Brecht does not approve of acts of violence by members of the proletariat, he appears to ask for an audience’s understanding of the necessity of sacrifice depending upon the specific conditions. While Tatlow notices the significance of dramatic presentation in the *Lehrstücke*, he ignores the fact that this dramatic representation, instead of serving to convey this message, undermines its legitimacy.

Grossvogel, though noticing the implications manifest through the stage performance, states that “this argument—the necessary effacement of self—is contaminated by the stage and changed into something quite different: the dramatic representation of the quest for self” (19). Despite the fact that Brecht presents death as the consequence of the most important movements of the proletariat class, the

performative void of the subjectivity of the young comrade (who gives consent to his death) calls out for a critical re-evaluation of the surface message: the conformity to the collective (accompanied with a cost of the individual's moral autonomy) as virtue. In fact, the presence of the four rebels and the Central Committee of the Party, coupled with the absence of the young rebel, constitutes a shaking foundation for the legitimacy of the performance of the two collectives. In spite of Brecht's efforts to identify his intentions as Marxist in *The Measures Taken*, Brecht undoubtedly retained his doubts of an absolute authority of social class. In this sense, I agree with Erich Speidel's interpretation of the death of the young rebel, that "we nevertheless witness the reappearance of the individual trying to assert his moral autonomy, and getting destroyed in so doing" (52).

While Brecht does recognize the complexity of class consciousness within individuals in the *Lehrstück* period, it is only in his theoretical work *The Messingkauf Dialogues* that he focuses on it more fully. Recognizing a social and historical perspective of the individual, Brecht commented (in the mouth of the Philosopher) that,

The new theatre appeals to social man because man has helped himself in a social way technically, scientifically and politically. It exposes any given type together with his way of behaving, so as to throw light on his social motivations; he can only be grasped if they are mastered. Individuals remain individual, but become a social phenomenon; their passions and also their fates become a social concern. The individual's position in society loses its God-given quality and becomes the centre of attention. The A-effect is a social measure. (*The Messingkauf Dialogues* 101)

For Brecht, the individual, first of all, historically and socially bounded, exists as part

of the social structure of the society. This passage also indicates that the Brechtian theatre shall deal with social motivations: the individual's passion and fate as conditioned by their social circumstances.

Regarding theatrical representation, the Brechtian Philosopher specifically, without contradicting his Marxist standpoint, raises the question that the writer is inevitably confronted with: Whether a Marxist writer should be more concerned with the behavior of individuals or with that of the masses:

However, there is one reservation. This dogma deals above all with the behavior of great masses of people. The laws it propounds apply to the movement of large human units, and although it has a good deal to say about the individual's position within these units, this refers normally only to the relation between those masses and the individual. But in our demonstrations we would be more concerned with the behaviour of individuals to one another.³² (27-28)

While Brecht's is aware that "people's consciousness depends on their social existence" (28) and describes the function of his theatre as awakening social consciousness in the audience, he, as his persona suggests, is inevitably concerned with the behavior of the individual. We have already seen in *The Measures Taken* how Brecht struggles with the conflict between one's moral choice and belonging to a larger collective.

Moreover, Brecht also realizes that the applicability of the principles concerning social types and social behavior varies from individual to individual. Or in other words, there is no rigidly established link between one's behavior and social class. Consider Brecht's analysis of the behavior of a peasant:

...you think that a peasant acts in a specific way in the given circumstances, then take a quite specific peasant and not one who has

been selected or fabricated for his willingness to act in precisely that way. It's better still if you can show the law applying differently to different peasants. (*The Messingkauf Dialogues* 75)

Brecht continues to write, warning of the dangers of adopting a mechanical view of the concepts such as class and individual:

Laws only provide you with extremely broad averages, summaries, guides. The concept 'class' for example is a concept that embraces a great number of individuals and thereby deprives them of their individuality. There are certain laws that apply to class. They apply to the individual only in so far as he coincides with his class, i.e. not absolutely; for the concept of class is only arrived at by ignoring particular features of the individual. You're not representing principles, but human beings. (*The Messingkauf Dialogues* 75-6)

Generalizations do not exclude diversity. The class and the individual—as two categories—form a dialectical relation: the term class is used very ambiguously in the language, and relates only those individuals through their shared characteristics; however, each individual exhibits various features that simply cannot be all unified in the class concept. This is why Brecht emphasizes the importance of portraying individuals instead of class types such as the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Such an understanding gives rise to the questions: How to understand the incompatible features as demonstrated in individuals and the class that they belong to? How to explain certain common moral values or behaviors exhibited in two individuals from different classes, such as the proletariat and the bourgeoisie?

Brecht gives a careful thought on these questions and arrives at the conclusion that although in a class society it is necessary to stress class struggles and social relations, we must note that individuals cannot be reduced to a unified mass:

The workers' opponents aren't a unified reactionary mass. Nor is the individual member of the opposing classes a unified, packaged and guaranteed hundred-per-cent hostile body. The class struggle has infected his own inner self. He is torn apart by his interests. Living as one of the mass he is bound to share the mass's interests, however isolated his life. (*The Messingkauf Dialogues* 90)

Further, proceeding from this observation, Brecht shows his awareness of how contradiction permeates individual as social beings, and that bourgeois and proletarians, albeit from two antagonist classes, could share common aims depending on specific conditions. To better illustrate his thought, Brecht describes a scene from Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin*:

In the Soviet film *The Battleship Potemkin* there were even some bourgeois who joined in the workers' applause when the sailors threw their officer persecutors overboard. Although this bourgeoisie had been protected from the social revolution by its officers it had never managed to assimilate them. It was always frightened of (and experiencing) infringements of its own authority. So bourgeois and proletarians occasionally joined together to vote against feudalism. And this meant that these bourgeois came at such moments into genuine and enjoyable contact with the progressive proletarian elements in human society; they felt themselves to be part of humanity as a whole, solving questions in a large-scale and powerful manner. It shows that art can create a certain unity in its audience, which in our period is divided into class. (*The Messingkauf Dialogues* 90)

In Carney's reading, this passage shows that "art can allow a member of the bourgeoisie to momentarily betray her class background and transcend her own

ideology, to experience a non-ideological collectivity, the Marxist promise of a common motive” (26). Indeed, Brecht does not only advocate the transformative power of art in the socialist movement, but also comment on the phenomenon that the concept of class consciousness is not fixed and unchanged. Under certain circumstances, individuals of two antagonist classes could form a group in the name of a common motive.

The concerns of class consciousness occupy paramount significance in the *Lehrstücke*; however, after 1930 he quickly moved away from the concerns of his earlier work and the *Lehrstücke*, and began to deal with issues related to the individual, such as subjectivity and ethics within the capitalist system. As Willett observes, “He will present, for instance, the good poor man or the bad rich man, without going into detailed explanations of what makes them good or bad” (*Bertolt Brecht* 81). Willett and Jameson, albeit reviewing Brecht’s later plays within the Marxist framework, come up with different interpretations: Willett argues that “[t]here is a strong flavor of such stylized and class-conditioned virtue in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and the *Good Person of Szechwan*” (*Bertolt Brecht* 81), while Jameson stresses the inner contradiction between Marxism and Brecht’s own views concerning ethics and identity:

Marxism is thus a doctrine of the aggregates, a statistical doctrine from which any equivalent for ethics is excluded—leaving aside the implicit and explicit critiques to which it has studied the traditions of ethical philosophy, and indeed leaving aside Brecht’s own reservations about philosophy as a form. (*Brecht and Method* 35)

Instead of participating in this dispute over whether Brecht’s later plays are under the strong influence of Marxism, the succeeding chapter, then, discusses how Brecht incorporates ideas from Chinese classical philosophy (chiefly from Confucius,

Mencius, Lao Zi, and Zhuang Zi) and Western intellectual thought (including Marxism) in the development of his ideas on subjectivity and ethics.

CHAPTER 5

SUBJECTIVITY AND ETHICS

Explaining the political usefulness of non-aristotelian drama is

children's play; the problems begin in the aesthetic sphere, a whole new artistic experience in the theatre has to be put across. It is a question of taking away the metaphysics, of earthifying the artistic experience. Man is no longer the pawn of supernatural forces (the fates, who still control the plot on Broadway today,) nor of his own 'nature'. The new theatre creates (and derives its life from) the joy of conveying human relationships.

—Bertolt Brecht

This chapter attempts to explain the inconsistent understanding of the human subject as it can be found in Brecht's work, from his early plays, the *Lehrstücke*, to the large-scaled epic dramas. I suggest that his later works demonstrate a reassertion of humanism (informed by Chinese classical philosophy)—a trait that marks a point of departure from his early works and *Lehrstück* theater. I shall mainly use *The Good Person of Szechwan* [*The Good Person*] and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* [*The Chalk Circle*] as examples to investigate how Chinese thought (in particular, Confucianism and Taoism) offers Brecht a means to challenge those dualisms that define Western notions of human subjectivity (self/other, subject/object, good/bad, etcetera). Furthermore, I will analyze in what ways Brecht's "new type of man," following the principle of *tao*, albeit within a materialist framework, is capable of ethical response, and understands multiple perspectives and dialectical practices.

Prior to our discussion, we need to review in what ways these two plays are related to China. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* was based on Yuan *zaju* *The Chalk Circle*, written by Li Hsing-tao, in which Hai Tang, a prostitute, when tested by the device of chalk circle in court, is judged the real mother because she cannot bear to hurt her child. It was first translated by Julien and his translation was later adapted to

a German one by Klabund.³³ While Brecht's dramaturgy could have been taken from the judgment of Solomon and the Chinese play (the device of the chalk circle was applied for judgment both by Solomon and Judge Bao), *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* deviates from them in that the judgment favors the illegitimate mother. Noticing this divergence, Berg-Pan argues that "Brecht changes the system of values transmitted by the Chinese play," and, furthermore, by suggesting that the real significance lies in the prologue, she implies that the message is irrelevant to Chinese thought: "The society shown therein is a socialist society where unorthodox ideas will be allowed to exist and where rewards are distributed according to merit rather than ancient right and title" ("Mixing Old and New Wisdom" 222). Likewise, although she acknowledges that Friedrich Wolf's *Tai Yang Awakes*³⁴ (influenced by Klabund's *Chalk Circle* and performed in Berlin in 1925) provided Brecht material for his play *The Good Person*, she points out that Brecht was less interested in the Chinese revolution *per se* and claims that China in Brecht's *Good Person* "is used primarily for purpose of alienation" and the play "draw heavily upon various 'chinoiseries,' including quotations from Confucius, Chuang-tse [Zhuang Zi], and Mo-tzu [Mo Zi], as well as Po Chu-I" ("Mixing Old and New Wisdom" 209).

In both cases Brecht neither intends to follow the original story or borrow the system of values as advocated in the Chinese play, nor provides a realistic perspective to Chinese themes or political and social realities. By contrast to Berg-Pan's above claims, Tatlow argues that "we must now show how the universal parable [of *The Good Person*] with its Chinese patina is, in fact, related to fundamental Chinese ideas" (*Mask* 469). Indeed, following Tatlow's advice, we should shift our attention from those surface connections to Chinese ideas underneath Brecht's dramaturgy. Tatlow has shown (in his discussion on Brecht's *Chalk Circle*) the similarities in plot structure and characterization, and the two writer's (Brecht's and Li's) views of the

political efficacy of art. I wish to pursue such an important connection in Brecht's investigation into issues of subjectivity such as, his critique of ethical values, position of man in society and in connection with other members of community as manifest in his later plays—the areas that Tatlow has not fully covered.

Brecht's Concern with Ethics

For those critics who hold the view that the thematic concerns of Brecht's work could be categorized into the youthful nihilism and mature communism of the *Lehrstücke*, his later works present a problem. And while many critics, having noticed an explicit rupture between his earlier works and later works, share the view that ethical problems become the main concern in his later works (Introduction to *The Good Person of Szechwan* IV), it is quite clear that Brecht concerned himself with ethical problems throughout his life. Moreover, attempts to reread Brecht's early plays and his *Lehrstücke* have predominantly focused on his portrayal of the destabilization of the individual.³⁵ In fact, before Brecht left Germany in the year of 1933, he had already begun to question the conventional concepts of ethics. For instance, when Brecht talked about unemployment in Germany, he concluded that

the ethical needs of these social strata need not be satisfied ethically. the satisfaction of their material needs is ethical enough. ... without satisfaction of material needs no ethics, and that is acceptable. but: ethics for the satisfaction of these needs is not acceptable. material needs as ethical, ethical ones as material, this is not grasped. all sorts of material for the book of change. (*Journals* 30)

This passage from Brecht's journal provides a key to one of the themes of the Brechtian theory of ethics. Here Brecht, though unintentionally, expounds the poignant lyric—"Food is the first thing. Morals follow on." in *The Threepenny Opera*

(1928)—a formulation that bears close affinity with the Confucian saying “Food before morals.”

We should be wary of forming a stable and monolithic discourse of Brecht's understanding on his new type of man, especially considering the fact that his ideas were in the process of changing and developing. The plays Brecht wrote in the early and mid-1920s are characterized by his rejection of the concept of the individual as integral to bourgeois ethics.³⁶ His use of a Marxist configuration of subjectivity (particularly in his *Lehrstücke*) is typically misunderstood as signifying his belief, in such a case, of class over ethical issues.³⁷ Althusser, however, justifies this perspective with his analysis of the ideological consciousness, which serves as the root of totalitarian enslavement:

If we carry our analysis of this condition a little further we can easily find in it Marx's fundamental principle that it is impossible for any form of ideological consciousness to contain in itself, through its own internal dialectic, an escape from itself, that, *strictly speaking, there is no dialectic consciousness*: no dialectic of consciousness which could reach reality itself by virtue of its own contradiction; in short, there can be no ‘phenomenology’ in the Hegelian sense: for consciousness does not accede to the real through its own internal development, but by the radical discovery of what is *other than itself*. (143)

Althusser's implication is that a consciousness of the self is, firstly, an image of ideological consciousness and, secondly, a false consciousness that includes pretensions to “exhaustive self-recovery and self-representation in the form of a consciousness of self” (*For Marx* 143). Althusser's Marxist reading of Brecht is engaged with a critique of the consciousness of Brecht's characters as subject to the economic mode of production. However, it will become clear, when we speak of the

dynamic of Brecht's later plays, that Althusser's presumption is one-sided, as he makes no differentiation between the various stages of Brecht's work.

Brecht is decidedly vague in his reestablishment of ethics. As a Marxist, he accuses capitalism of neglecting the full development of human beings, saying that "thus we also find the crippled, one-sided, empty human beings", and going on to assert that we should fight for "a fulfilled human world" which "develops humanity in those individuals engaged in the fight" (BAP 238). Elsewhere he writes:

Capitalism does not only dehumanize, it also creates humanness, namely in the active struggle against dehumanization. Even today human beings are not machines, they do not function as simply a part of machinery. (BAP 238).

This reveals Brecht's emphasis on the autonomy of the individual and suggests his suspicion of the economic basis of human nature. The passage may not be sufficient to prove that Brecht has departed from a Marxist view of subjectivity and humanity in many important ways. However, it has become apparent that a sole reliance on Marxist moral philosophy fails to explain Brecht's moral picture.

There is a clear development in Brecht's configuration of subjectivity, individuality and ethics in his later works. His first plays are in this respect entirely destructive: his heroes are either, like Baal and Shlink, completely asocial, dismissive of bourgeois ethics and at the mercy of their "instincts and vitality" (in Speidel's words); or they are, like Galy Gay, ready to surrender to the changing constellation of pressures and social relationships; or they are the young comrades in *The Measures Taken*, subjecting the self to the collective and refusing moral autonomy. Ewen notices that in Brecht's later plays "the human and humane element becomes dominant": *Mother Courage*, for example, "is now modified by a profound sympathy". He calls this change of Brecht's attitude "Marxist humanism" (325).

While Ewen's observation is shared by many other critics, his explanation is a subject of some dispute. Esslin, taking an opposing view, claims that Brecht's later plays are more an expression of his instincts and thus a demonstration of his failure to completely follow the discipline of Communism which "provided a technique of self-control, discipline, and rational thought" (*Evils* 225). Willett, however, emphasizing Brecht's humanist attitude (which is associated with romanticism), comes to the conclusion that it is "his natural sympathy" that gives "a new warmth" to his character and his later plays (*Bertolt Brecht* 86). Addressing this long disputed argument concerning Brecht's later plays, this chapter, while not attempting to minimize the influences as stressed by the above critics, focuses on the place of Chinese influence in Brecht's reconfiguration of the human subject and ethics—a subject that is yet little understood.

It should be noted that although, as Carney suggests, Brecht is not a proper Marxist who firmly shares the orthodox class analysis that "class and class-consciousness define the effective determinant of the subject" (6), he never discarded his earlier assumption that human beings have to be seen as "the sum of all social circumstances" (BT 46). Brecht takes dealing with the problem of how the autonomy of individuality is threatened within capitalist production relations as a constant task in his plays. Yet we find that a concern with ethical problems and their relation to human subjectivity continues to mark the plays he wrote in his later years, in particular, *Galileo*, *Mother Courage*, *The Good Person of Szechwan*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, and *Mr. Puntila and His Man Matti*. Furthermore, a closer examination of these works suggests a number of elements within Brecht's reflections on the very nature of ethics issues (such as "goodness") and its constitutional function in one's subjectivity bear a close parallel to humanistic ideas from Chinese philosophy (chiefly Confucianism and Taoism). It is in this context that the relationship of

Brecht's *Good Person* to Chinese classical philosophy becomes crucial to a better understanding of Brecht's reconfiguration of the idea of the human subject. To this end, his consideration of such issues in his later works is perhaps best seen as a product of an ongoing dialogue (both affirmative and disruptive) between Western intellectual traditions and the philosophy of humanism within the Chinese tradition. In "negotiation" with Marxism, Confucianism and Taoism, though not unifying in themselves, operate on different levels in Brecht's thinking. For while it may be an exaggeration to claim that Chinese influence plays a dominant role in Brecht's reflection on ethics and subjectivity (indeed, such an assumption would be just as misleading as negating the relation of Chinese thought to Brecht's work), my contention is that what Chinese thought offers is a clear means of challenging the dualisms that define traditional notions of human subjectivity (self/other, subject/object, good/bad, etc), and, thus, plays a crucial role in helping Brecht formulate his views. As we shall see, Brecht's "new type of man," following the principle of *tao*, albeit within a materialistic framework, is capable of ethical response, and understands multiple perspectives and dialectical practices.

Goodness and Friendliness

In his notes to *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Brecht identifies the primary contradiction of the play: "The more Grusha does to save the child's life, the more she endangers her own; her productivity tends to her own destruction" ("On *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*" 91). It turns out that this is a theme best summarized in Shen Teh's desperate confession to the gods in the *Good Person*: "goodness to others and to myself could not both be achieved" (105).

The Good Person of Szechwan (1943) tells the story of a prostitute named Shen Teh, who is rewarded with a gift of money for her kindness by three gods who

have come to earth in search for a “good person”—something that turns out to be very scarce. Shen Teh shows a natural tendency to be good. As Peter Ruppert observes,

In *The Szechwan* the dialectical incompatibilities centre on the interests of Shen Teh. As the good woman of Szechwan, she is kind, generous, compassionate and loving. Her goodness is a natural unfolding of herself; she shares her possessions freely, loves spontaneously, and reveals a genuine desire to help others. The significant values that emerge from her actions are friendliness, cooperation, peace, equality.

These values flow effortlessly, without conscious deliberation. (38-39)

Similar virtues can also be found in several other of Brecht’s fictitious characters, for example, Grusha, who sacrifices her own security and happiness for an unrelated child, and Azdak, who, in the disguise of shrewdness and carelessness, judges in favour of the poor and the oppressed. Berg-Pan suggests a close affinity between Brecht’s view of human nature and those of Mencius, a follower of Confucius.³⁸ Unlike Confucius, who asserts that goodness is an ideal quality to be attained with life-long strenuous efforts, Mencius regards goodness as a quality innate in all men. In one of his essays, Mencius relates the famous The-child-in-the-well example:

When a child falls down a well, witnesses to the event will immediately feel alarm and distress, not to gain friendship with the child parents, nor to seek the praise of their neighbours and friends, nor because they dislike the reputation [of lack of humanity if they did not rescue the child]...

The feeling of commiseration is the beginning of humanity; the feeling of shame and dislike is the beginning of righteousness; the feeling of deference and compliance is the beginning of propriety; and the feeling of right and wrong is the beginning of wisdom. (The *Mencius* 2A:6 in

Chan 65)

Berg-Pan suggests that Brecht very likely knew this passage, since it reminds us of the inner activities going on in Grusha when she decides to save the child and later gradually develops love for him (88).

The manifestation of true human nature is, in Mencius' metaphor, like the growth of a tree. Only when it is forced to grow by outer forces does it lose its potential to grow naturally. Likewise, the natural goodness in human nature cannot develop fully as a result of external influences. The metaphor of the tree reminds us of the conflicting identities of Shen Teh and Shui Ta resulting from the opposition between "goodness to oneself" and "goodness to others," as illustrated by Wang's story.

In Sung there is a place known as Thorn Hedge. There catalpas, cypresses and mulberries flourish. Now those trees which are nine or ten inches in circumference are chopped down by the people who need stakes for their dog kennels. Those which are three or four feet in circumference are chopped down by rich and respectable families who want planks for their coffins. Those which are seven or eight feet in circumference are chopped down by persons seeking beams for their luxurious villas. And so none reaches its full quota of years, but is brought down prematurely by saw or by axe. That is the price of utility.
(69-70)

Wang is probably the only one who shows genuine concern for Shen Teh. His story is taken from *Zhuangzi*, an anthology of early Taoist writings. The message is that the least useful is the most fortunate. Wang, however, concludes by saying that the least good is most fortunate. Wang's modifications of the implication of the story echoes Mencius' claim about how, like the growth of a tree, human's innate tendency towards

virtue is always threatened by outside destructive forces.

It is this natural virtue that is discernible in Brecht's later characters. When they are not exposed to negative circumstance, they cannot bear to see the sufferings of others. Besides the two mentioned good women, Grusha and Shen Teh, even the various negative characters in Brecht's plays still demonstrate innate goodness. For example, Mother Courage displays the loving traits of a mother to her own children despite the fact that she is a war profiteer who also sacrifices her children to her commercial instinct (although she does not mean to do so); or Mr. Puntila, when drunk, overflows with kindness, although he reverts to a different type when he is sober. It is in Puntila's drunkenness, his most natural state loose from the chains of societal restraints, that he is seen to manifest his innate virtue. In attempting to explain this characterization in Brecht, both Tatlow and Berg-Pan suggest that Chinese philosophy offers observations about individual behavior and conduct which, to quote Tatlow, "amount to modification of what is reconcilable with dogmatic Marxist theory and political practice" (*Mask* 443). Their view is echoed by Jameson, "[...] Chinese 'wisdom' is there to compensate for this lack [if not this incapacity] in Marxism, and to close the gap" (35). Such a reading is reasonable for two obvious reasons: first, that classical Marxism (with its assumption that social class "is the only determining factor in the shaping of the subject" [Carney 23]) does not explicitly discuss the complex ethical dimension of human nature, second, that it rejects any appeal to universal and normative moral principles in a class society. However, it is also true that Marxism contains similar visions of how class society has separated/alienated humans from their "nature" as a species-being.

All the characters show that their innate goodness only deteriorates when they are forced into violent competition by a desire for money—a major negative cultivating influence on the characters. Brecht's optimism regarding human nature

coincides with that of Mencius, both of whom believe that goodness is the natural condition of mankind. Here we should note the extent to which the Mencius' view of moral deterioration is in tune with the Marxist view that it is external constraints that prevent a man from developing all his potentialities. Brecht, swiftly linking Marx with Chinese thinkers, suggests that it is the capitalist system that makes men evil, and insinuates the possibility that their innate human nature will fully manifest itself once they are governed in a classless society: Brecht seems to leave the issue open in the end of the *Good Person* with a strong hint that "the world should be changed" "to help good people to a happy end" (109).

Another quality, friendliness, is stressed in Brecht's poem "Legend of the Origin of the Book *Tao-te-ching* on Lao-Tzu's Road into Exile."³⁹ The poem opens with a bleak picture of the man and his last journey: infirm and despondent over the presence of "wickedness," Lao Zi was leaving the country forever. This is a society in which "goodness had been weakening a little" (*Poems* 315). The teachings of Lao Zi are, rather, a direct consequence of turmoil in society. Brecht is well aware of the similarity between the corrupted society, in which Lao Zi and Confucius lived, and modern Germany. The poem offers an occasion to discuss the role that friendliness plays in a society where human relationships are abused.

There are different versions of the original legend of how Lao Zi puts down his thoughts on paper at the request of the customs official. According to one of the versions, Lao Zi has to compose a book to bribe the "keeper of the pass" in order to pass the border. The most popular version is that this customs official is well educated and recognizes him as soon as he arrives. Realizing what a great loss it will be if Lao Zi were to leave the country forever without leaving behind any work, he asks him to write down his thoughts. The modification that Brecht makes to this poem concerns the interaction between Lao Zi and the customs man. In Brecht's poem the customs

man does not know the name of Lao Zi and is obviously an impoverished government man; as the poem puts it, “surely not of the race of conquerors” (*Poems* 315) The customs official simply becomes interested in Lao Zi’s remarks about water without the awareness that, in Hayot’s words, “it might be culturally important” (71). Brecht points out the theme of this poem in the last stanza,

But the honour should not be restricted
To the sage whose name is clearly writ.
For a wise man’s wisdom needs to be extracted.
So the customs man deserves his bit.
It was he who called for it. (*Poems* 315-16)

Brecht concludes that we should praise the customs man as well. For Hayot, the poem “ends with a thoroughly Brechtian critique of bourgeois intellectual production, which gives all credit to the thinker and none to those who ask for thought, and use it” (72). While both Tatlow and Berg-Pan emphasizes the connection of this poem to Brecht’s personal experience (his exile in Denmark), Tatlow, however, aligns himself with Benjamin’s reading (although he does not intend to do so), notes that Brecht’s representation of friendliness—a quality that emphasizes the caring quality in human relationships—point towards deeper influence from Chinese philosophy. According to Benjamin, for without the quality of friendliness, even with the wisdom of Lao Zi and the customs man’s desire for knowledge, it would not be possible for him to elicit the wisdom of Lao Zi. Friendliness comes from both sides: from the official who kindly provides food and accommodation and from Lao Zi, who responds to the request of the customs official. Benjamin further claims that Brecht values friendliness as fundamental to human relationships:

‘The classics,’ an old Chinese philosopher has said, ‘lived in the darkest and bloodiest times and were the friendliest and most cheerful

people that have ever been seen.’ The Lao Tzu of this legend seems to spread cheerfulness wherever he goes. His ox, undeterred by the old man’s weight on his back, is glad of all the green grass it can find. His boy is cheerful when, in order to explain Lao Tzu’s poverty, he puts in dryly: ‘A teacher, you see.’ The customs official by his toll-gate is in a cheerful mood, and it is this cheerfulness that inspires him with the happy idea of asking for the results of Lao Tzu’s research. Finally, how could the sage not be cheerful himself? At the first turning of the road he put out of his mind the valley which only a moment before had made him glad. What would his wisdom be worth if he could not also forget his anxiety about the future almost as soon as he felt it?

(Understanding Brecht 73)

It is undoubtedly this quality of friendliness and goodness in Chinese society that ignites Brecht’s interest in Chinese thought. Esslin states that Arthur Waley’s translations of Chinese poetry made a impression on Brecht, partly because “the gentle politeness of the Chinese, the undogmatic authority of their classical teachers represented for him the ultimate Socialist ideal of friendliness as the basis of human relations” (*Evils* 105). In Brecht’s characters goodness and friendliness are interlocked, and their meaning lies in the fact of acknowledging each other’s needs by responding to them. Nevertheless, this perspective is inadequate to explain how the characters (such as Galileo, Mother Courage, Lucullus, Shen Teh, Grusha, Mr. Puntila, and Schweyk) are constructed as a combination of complex and even contradictory qualities, which runs like a motif through his works succeeding the *Lehrstück* period where moral standards are often questioned and even suspended. The following discussion will make a distinction between Confucian goodness and Taoist goodness to demonstrate how Brecht reworked conflicting Chinese philosophical traditions with

Western thinking (particularly Marxism) in the formulation of his own ideas.

Redefining Goodness

Characters like Shen Teh and Azdak are often considered by Brecht scholars to be the type of split characters. Ruppert reads Shen Teh as “two sides of the same person, split between self-interest and a desire to help others” (36). Realizing that the figures in the later plays also share this doubleness, Anne Herrmann gives a Marxist reading of the play and stresses how the unification of the contrasting qualities is nonnegotiable: “Here the split subject embodies neither a mimetic doubling nor a division which can be restored; rather, it represents divisiveness as the symptom of a capitalist system in which moral goodness and economic survival are mutually exclusive” (143). In agreement with these remarks, Tatlow suggests that these kinds of characters are destructive since “such thinking resists prescriptions;” that this unreliability “irritated the cultural bureaucrats and ideologies because such thinking resists prescriptions” (*The Intercultural Sign* 19).

Other critics argue for the unity of Brecht’s characters. Shlomo Biderman describes the succession of contradictory roles Azdak takes—“accused, convict, judge, oppressor, oppressed, freedom fighter and collaborator” (135), and arrives at the conclusion that Azdak is portrayed as a characterless man and “being characterless ensures that he is a thinking man” (135). The unity in Azdak, according to Biderman, is based on the annulation of individual identity. Willett, on the contrary, argues that “the unity of the figure is constructed by the way in which its individual properties and characteristics contradict each other” (196). Willett’s confirmation of this unity provides a starting point for this discussion of Shen Teh’s subjectivity and its relation to ethics, yet the study will take a different path by emphasizing how the Taoist concept of the “unity of opposites” illuminates Brecht in his understanding of

morality and identity. Clearly, this identification of the relations of opposites in the constitution of the subject will require us to adopt a different kind of perspective to observe the character on stage, namely, a Taoist notion that the natural human condition is one of flux and is paradoxical.

Tatlow, in his discussion on *The Good Person*, reviews the two traditions of ethics in Europe: Plato's theory of goodness and Christian goodness, and concludes that "These two positions, goodness as the prerogative of an understanding elite and goodness as a matter between any individual and his conscience, his will or his God, have in common the assumption that the attainment of goodness is independent of social and economic conditions" (*Mask* 469). Indeed, within western culture the legitimacy of the words good and evil has often been questioned (one needs only mention Nietzsche, Foucault, de Man and Lacan). Nietzsche, for example, argues that Christianity provides a set of moral rules for self-justification. To illustrate his rejection of Christianity as a slave morality which categorizes things rigidly as good and bad, Nietzsche quotes sarcastically in his essay "On the Genealogy of Morals," "Let us be unlike those evil ones. Let us be good. And the good shall be he who does not do violence, does not attack nor retaliate, who leaves vengeance to God, who, like us, the patient, the humble, the just ones" (179). Nietzsche's critique of moral values is based on his belief that "the value of these values themselves must be called into question" (153). Brecht shares with Nietzsche a critique of the blind acceptance of Christian premises in his consideration of morality and a reevaluation of moral values, but it is more in the spirit of Lao Zi that the Brechtian characters go beyond the "good/evil" or "good/bad" distinction while at the same time showing an innate "goodness."

Lao Zi, like Mencius, believes that human nature tends towards the good. However, Lao Zi does not prescribe the specific conducts associated with the quality

of goodness as Confucius does. As regards the title of his book *Tao Te Ching*, the word *tao* means “the way,” a term that is also used by Confucius and Mencius, but that, within the context of Taoism, implies the essential process and natural order of the universe characterized by the harmony of opposites. Moreover, *te* means “virtue” and the compound word *tao te* means “ethics.” Thus, the literary translation of the book’s title is “The Canon of the way and the virtue.” The movement of *tao* is expressed in two aspects: the interdependence of opposites (i.e. there would be no good without evil, no love without hate, no male without female) and the alternation of opposites. However, the paradoxes are best understood as correlatives that are not mutually exclusive but, rather, represent the natural flow of the forces of reality. (Note the analogy between the Taoist paradox and the Marxist dialectics.) It is in this sense that Lao Zi associates authentic and ethical action with the movement of *tao*. In contrast to the Confucianists’ argument for innate goodness as a justification for their advocated traditional virtues, Lao Zi suggests that goodness and friendliness issue from a spontaneous source and simply should not be reified into, in Eric Sean Nelson’s words, “arbitrary rules, static hierarchical relations of subordination, and unresponsive rituals” (304). Here we notice how Lao Zi’s standpoint is echoed by a similar line of thought in the Marxist critique of objectivism in ethics, defined by E Kamenka as “the presented impartiality and universality of moral injunctions and codes” (4).

From this perspective, while goodness and friendliness remain deeply instinctive, this does not mean that they must correspond to specific moral principles. Apparently, the gods in the *Good Person* would think otherwise. “When we do find people who are halfway good, they are not living a decent human existence,” says one of the gods, when they fail to find one more good person besides Shen Teh. “Terrible is the temptation to do good” (25), says the singer in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, and

this line summarizes the difficulty of being good in a wicked society while retaining one's coherent identity. "Your original order to be good while yet surviving," says Shen Teh to the gods in the *Good Person*,

Split me like lightning into two people. I
Cannot tell what occurred: goodness to others
And to myself could not both be achieved.
To serve both self and others I found too hard
Oh, your world is arduous! Such need, such desperation!
The hand which is held out to the starving
Is quickly wrenched off! He who gives help to the lost
Is lost for his own part! For who could
Hold himself back from anger when the hungry are dying?
Where could I find so much that was needed, if not
In myself? But that was my downfall! (105)

Shen Teh's remarks are often cited as evidence for the two dominant readings of the fate of Shen Teh. As Willett would have it, "in a competitive society goodness is often suicidal" (84). On the other hand, Ruppert finds it symptomatic of the "dialectical opposition between self and society, between personal happiness and collective well-being" (36). Both views, however, ignore one important moral narrated by Shen Teh, i.e., that "The load of commandments forced me into the sludge" (104). Here again arises the question of the nature of ethics (a question posed in all the plays by Brecht, from *The Baal* to *The Measures Taken*, and most persistently in the *Good Person*); that is, on what foundation are our moral principles built?

It is notable that the legitimacy of moral values as prescribed by the commandments is not questioned in the beginning of the *Good Person*. When Shen Teh first meets the gods, she admits that she does not obey the commandments and

thus fails to be a good person. The gods dismiss her excuses as the doubts of an essentially good person. According to the logic of the play's opening, the commandments by the gods are supposed to be the ideal moral standard for the people to follow. At this point in the play goodness is assumed to be an abstract quality that is in strict opposition to evil. The moment when the gods acknowledge Shen Teh as a good person, ironically she ceases to function as an ethical subject. Now she is Shen Teh with the attribute of "goodness"—a moral object who is class-bound and constrained by bourgeois ethics. From the beginning, Shen Teh is uncertain whether she could be a good person as the gods request: "How can I be good when everything is so expensive" (11)?

In her pursuit of goodness, Shen Teh eventually has to invent Shui Ta. When Shen Teh plays the role of Shui Ta, she carries a mask implying that Shui Ta is not part of good Shen Teh. Realizing that "the good have no means of helping themselves and the gods are powerless," She states that "the good cannot remain good for long in our country" (48). Eventually Shen Teh realizes that what is hard is to be a person abiding by god's commandments, at which point she questions the legitimacy of god's commandments: "the divine commandments are not much use against hunger" (48). In fact, she directs her attack upon the whole moral system as endorsed by the gods:

So why can't the gods make a simple decision
That goodness must conquer in spite of its weakness?—
Then back up the good with an armoured division
Command it to: "fire!" and not tolerate meekness? (49)

Even Wang realizes how ridiculous the commandments are since, "she [Shen Teh] failed in her love because she obeyed the commandment to love her neighbors" (70). Near the end of the play when the gods finish their search disheartened, even they begin to question their own commandments:

... our commandments seem to be fatal! I fear that all the moral principles that we have evolved will have to be cancelled. People have enough to do to save their bare lives. Good percepts bring them to the edge of the precipice; good deeds drag them over. (98-99)

It would appear that a closer investigation of the gods' commandments as narrated by Shen Teh is required:

Of course I should like to obey the commandments: to honor my parents and respect the truth. Not to covet my neighbor's house would be a joy to me, and to love, honor and cherish a husband would be very pleasant. Nor do I wish to exploit other men or to rob the defenseless. But how can it be done? Even by breaking one or two of the commandments I can barely manage. (10)

The commandments reminds us both of the ten commandments of Moses—which serve as the foundation of morality and law in Western society—and of specific norms regarding personal behaviors prescribed by Confucius. The difference is that ethical ideals and methods are conveyed more indirectly in Confucius's texts. Moreover, it should be remembered that Brecht has been critical of Confucian moral teachings. Later the first god suggests that business is a hindrance to moral integrity: “Were the Seven Good Kings in business? Did Kung the Just sell fish? What has business to do with an upright and honorable life” (40)? Seven good kings and Kung (Confucius) are all considered to be the ideal of *Junzi* (“gentlemen”) who through learning and self-cultivation achieves moral nobility. According to Confucius' teachings, the profits from commerce are acknowledged to be in opposition to the cultivation of morality and humanity in *Junzi*. As Confucius says in *The Analects*, “A gentleman takes as much trouble to discover what is right as lesser men take to discover what will pay” (45). As such, it becomes interestingly apparent that Brecht refuses fully endorse

either bourgeois ethics (the gods) or Confucian ethics. By radically recasting “moral principles”—something that is an essential element of “knowing yourself” (Foucault’s term)—Brecht untangles the relations between the subject and ethics.

We find that Brecht’s critique of Christian ethics and Confucian ethics has its roots in Marxism and Taoism. Both have situated authentic ethics in a realm beyond the bounds of rules and principles. Consider the following passage from the *Tao Te Ching*,

That is why it is said: “After Tao was lost, there came the ‘power’;
After the ‘power’ was lost, then came human kindness.”
After human kindness was lost, then came morality,
After morality was lost, then came ritual.
Now ritual is the mere husk of loyalty and promise-keeping
And is indeed the first step towards brawling. (79)

This indicates clearly the four yardsticks guiding human life including human ethics and activity, with the *tao* as the highest standard to be fulfilled, and ritual as the lowest, maintaining the organization of authority-driven social relationship—an indication of the decay of the spirit of the *tao*. For Lao Zi, such a celebration of ethics codified in rules, norms, and conventions, not only organizes hierarchical social relations, but also reflects the degradation of *tao* into man-made hierarchical relations (Nelson 304). Like Lao Zi, Marx also rejects the concept of ethics as prescribing a set of general moral principles and, further, critiques making the ethical instrumental. As Marx wrote in the *German Ideology*, “The Communists do not preach morality at all” (267). The difference is that whereas in Taoism it is “the natural” (*tao*) that is favored over “the artificial” (morality), in Marxism it is Marx’s “free man” that serves as the basis of ethics, philosophy and all human activities.⁴⁰ Thus, while the Taoists say that Taoist virtue aligns with natural processes such as the flow of water, Marx’s

materialistic critique of morality is accompanied by a prophecy: only when man is liberated from the “contradictions” of capitalism into Communism can he recognize himself as a social being, and thus achieve true freedom, realize his potentialities and, ultimately, become an ethical subject.

The example of Shen Teh reveals how morality fails, yet Brecht appears to share with Chinese philosophers an optimism for humanity. Shen Teh’s question of the validity of the Commandments invites a skeptical reconsideration of such an assault, and the question: what is goodness? Such specification is difficult, however, when it becomes clear that Brecht is coming to terms with a perception of goodness which is closer to Lao Zi’s idea. Shen Teh describes the good people she came across:

There are still friendly people, for all our wretchedness. When I was little once I was carrying a bundle of sticks and fell. An old man helped me up and even gave me a penny. I have often thought of it. Those who have least to eat give most gladly. I suppose people just like showing what they are good at; and how can they do it better than by being friendly? Crossness is just a way of being inefficient. Whenever someone is singing a song or building a machine or planting rice it is really friendliness. You are friendly too. (36)

As discussed earlier, friendliness (or benevolence) and goodness are two fundamental qualities that, in most cases, would be interchangeable in a Chinese context. In contrast to the gods’ displeasure that there is only one good person in this world, Shen Teh finds that the world is not in want of friendly people. One could simply say that Brecht sings the song of class solidarity (with Shen Teh as his mouthpiece), except that this would diminish our impression of Shen Teh’s capacity for analyzing the complex issues related to humanity in a ruthless world. In fact, Shen Teh not only gives due recognition of the integrity of other ethical subjects (“an old man” and

“you”), but also implies “ethical responsiveness” in Taoism—clarified by Nelson as “worldly attunement and responsiveness and of the non-hierarchical and reversible relationality that prediscursively and pre-cognitively constitutes ethical immediacy” (303-4)—as a means of establishing a relationship both within oneself and between oneself and others. Consider Grusha, who, unlike Shen Teh, does not think of disciplining herself with codified morality (from the moment she “steals” the child). She does things in the most natural way and thus produces motherhood within herself. Both Shen Teh and Grusha embrace an attitude that emphasizes the ethical experience very much in tune with the Taoist attitude of ethics.

The Relativity of Good and Bad

The gist of the social message underlying the *Good Person* depends on a priori acceptance of the very existence of two opposing personas within one person, each demonstrating qualities that would be exclusive from each other. Such a distinction would automatically require that Shen Teh acquire those qualities as opposed to those in Shui Ta. But is Shui Ta the very opposite of Shen Teh? To our surprise, Shui Ta is also capable of feeling pity and sorrow for the poor, but he simply does not take action to show his compassion. Instead, he quotes a Chinese poem—interestingly here Brecht uses Waley’s translation instead of his own version—on the miserable conditions of people living and laments that “nothing has changed...” since the eleventh century;

That so many of the poor should suffer from cold what can we do to
prevent?

To bring warmth to a single body is not much use.

I wish I had a big rug ten thousand feet long,

Which at one time could cover up every inch of the city. (23-24)

Does the gods' declaration that Shen Teh is a good person automatically define all the others as bad people? Wang says that Shui Ta was not a wicked man and does not believe that he could kill Shen Teh. Wang, the water-seller, turns out to be cheating in his business, but he shows genuine concern for Shen Teh, insisting that he will find out Shen Teh's whereabouts. Even Shui Fu, who exploits the poor people and breaks Wang's arm, confesses that he is attracted by the goodness of Shen Teh's heart and is willing to help her feed people by providing shelter in his building for Shen Teh's dependents driven out by Shui Ta. Despite the fact that Shu Fu wants to win her heart, the fact that he makes her out a blank check and demands nothing in return manifests something of his goodness. Shu Fu stands up to the audience and asks the audience what they think of him. He asks the audience: "Could one be more unselfish?" (57)

As the gods complain about their search for the good people, the third god says,

Our search is not progressing well. Now and again we come across a good start, admirable intentions, a lot of high principles, but it hardly adds up to a good person. When we do find people who are halfway good, they are not living a decent human existence. (71)

The gods' complaint points to the fact that no one is good in their strict sense of the term. Brecht's own comments on the elements of good and evil from when he was drafting the play help to clarify his thinking:

...the material presented many difficulties, and in the (roughly) 10 years since I first tackled it I made several false starts. the main danger was of being over-schematic. li gung had to be a person if she was to become a good person. as a result her goodness is not of a conventional kind; she is not wholly and invariably good, not even when she is being li gung. nor is lao go conventionally bad, etc. (*Journals* 128)

The names of Shen Teh (li gung) and Shui Ta (lao go) are spelt differently in his working journal. The idea of relativity of good and bad expressed by Brecht echoes Lao Zi's teachings:

It is because every one under Heaven recognizes beauty as beauty, that
the idea of ugliness exists.

And equally if every one recognized virtue as virtue, this would
merely create fresh conceptions of wickedness. For truly "Being
and Not-being grow out of one another;

Difficult and easy complete one another.

Long and short test one another;

High and low determine one another.

Pitch and mode give harmony to one another.

Front and back give sequence to one another".

In Chapter 58 of *Tao Te Ching* we also read,

When the ruler looks repressed the people will be happy and satisfied;
When the ruler looks lively and self-assured the people will be carping
and discontented.

"It is upon bad fortune that good fortune leans, upon good fortune that
bad fortune rests."

But though few know it, there is a bourn where there is neither right
nor wrong;

In a realm where every straight is doubled by a crooked, and every
good by an ill, surely mankind has gone long enough astray? (123)

Here we see how Brecht shares Lao Zi's criticism of the definitions of good and bad (or rather the distinction between good and bad) as absolute truth claims. Recognizing the relativity of good and bad, Lao Zi argues for the complementary nature of the

opposites, i.e. that the act of defining something good immediately indicates something else is bad. In the *Tao Te Ching* Lao Zi frequently points out that only in a badly governed country are virtues necessary. We see, for example, in *Mother Courage* this idea is vividly explored, as Mother Courage sarcastically reflects on virtue: “All virtues which a well-regulated country with a good king or a good general wouldn’t need. In a good country virtues wouldn’t be necessary” (39). In the case of Azdak, evil actions are undertaken because of good intentions. However, it turns out that Azdak’s career as a judge is glorified as “an age of justice.” Brecht explains why Azdak appears to be a mixture of good and bad:

I knew I couldn’t just show that the law as it exists has to be bent if justice is to be done, but realized I had to show how, with a truly careless, ignorant, downright bad judge, things can turn out all right for those who are actually in need of justice. That is why Azdak had to have those selfish, amoral, parasitic features, and be the lowest and most decrepit of judges. (*Journals* 311)

Azdak’s decisions are usually right morally: he protects the rights of the oppressed and the poor. But in professional terms, he is a “bad” judge since he disregards the laws (which are associated with authority). Azdak is a “good” “bad” judge, who “twists” the laws while valuing the basic principle of “ethical responsiveness” in human relationships. The example of Azdak not only implies Brecht’s faith in our moral command of ourselves, but requires us to adopt a dialectic conception of moral categories to view his characters.

Recognition of the relativity of good and bad does not justify the ethical confusion in a corrupted society. As we can see in characters such as Shen Teh, Azdak and Grusha, Brecht insists that some form of humanism is necessary for the preservation of human rights, although he does not specify what that humanism

consists of. His articulation of the Taoist ethics—and their integration with certain of his Marxist beliefs (such as the materialistic concept of history)—becomes, then, the central aim of these works.

Reconfiguring Subjectivity

The story of Shen Teh raises the question as to the character's personal identity. In the Epilogue one of the actors appears before the curtain with the provocative remarks: "...consider as you go/what sort of measures you would recommend/To help those good people to a happy end" (109). Thus the audience is confronted with the question left out in the play: how to change society in order that it should be possible for good people to live a happy life? Perhaps, above all, Brecht suggests a demand for a new subjectivity, which has to come after the socialist revolution. However, here lies the dilemma: how can the subject, despite all its illusions, make himself the measure of all things when he is in fact the expression of outer forces? "The demand [*exigence*] for an identity," Foucault insisted, "and the injunction to break that identity, both feel, in the same way, abusive" (Introduction XVIII). Such a demand of deconstruction and transgression is "abusive" because it assumes in advance what one must do when the social forces are changed, but Brecht evades specifying this new concept of subjectivity for a changed society.

Brecht's rejection of a unified, unchanging identity does not suggest his belief in ontological destruction. Taking Shen Teh as an example, the only tool that can assure her of her continued existence is the mask which she uses to disguise her identity as Shen Teh; however, the mask is itself a paradox.

The etymology of the mask is disputed, but located between ways of enmeshing on the one hand, and masquerading on the other. The mask is a means to deprive the character of individuality, in order to enable

an objectification or universalization; and yet the mask is far from concealing the person; rather, it becomes the person in the very moment of adoptive stillness...as an instance of depersonalized impersonation, the mask remains an oxymoron and serves as the visualization of a lasting paradox; and yet it works as an interface, and as such opens up an area of communication between actresses/actors and roles, between the inner life of the soul and what is selected to become visible of it on stage. (Kolb 87)

The paradox of mask is that, according to Martina Kolb, it cannot completely fulfill its task of “blotting out” subjectivity and individuality: on the contrary, it only functions when Shen Teh, in disguise, takes necessary measures to ensure her survival through all hardships and, furthermore, makes her spontaneous actions of human kindness and compassion practicable. As the paradox of the mask demonstrates, the seemingly battered subject and negation of subjectivity only imply a reassertion of a unified being. Kolb’s claims provide a starting point for us to pursue what is left out in his discussion: the connection between this paradox of subjectivity and ethical issues.

Shen Teh’s confusion of identity emerges acutely out of her struggle with the moral problem. Caught between two images of herself—kind and innocent Shen Teh, and tough and ruthless Shui Ta—she exemplifies the dilemma of how to think about the individual in the fabric of human relationships. This rejection of the rigid categories of moral judgment indicates a dialectical view of human existence, and moreover, implies a new perspective to anchor images of the self.

Tatlow observes that “Belief in a stable ontology is, of course, only ‘traditional’ within Western culture” and he further points out how East Asia, especially philosophical Buddhism views ontology differently (23). We should add

that in Taoism “there exists no ontologically fixed self” (to borrow Tatlow’s words of philosophical Buddhism) that would result from the interaction of seeming opposites. The famous story of Zhuang Zi’s dream of being a butterfly elucidates this ontological instability:

Once Chuang Chou [Zhuangzi] dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn’t know he was Zhuangzi. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuangzi. But he didn’t know if he was Zhuangzi who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuangzi. Between Zhuangzi and a butterfly there must be *some* distinction! This is called the Transformation of Things.

(49)

Indeed, there exists no such conception as ontology in ancient China; it is therefore hard to arrive at the conclusion that the autonomy of the self is determined. Similarly, Brecht’s characters take subject positions confronted with moral dilemmas in various situations, a fact which explains why it is that on more than one occasion Brecht manages to disturb the opposition between these two points of view. In the beginning Shen Teh consciously makes a differentiation between Shen Teh and Shui Ta, as she emphasizes to Sun: “if you like me, you can’t like him” (63). “It is impossible for him to be where I am” (65). Soon, however, Shen Teh finds she is unsure of her identity given by the gods. Near the end of the play Shen Teh admits that “Shui Ta and Shen Teh, I am both of them” (105). She continues saying,

... I could feel how gradually altered and
My lips grew tight and hard. Bitter as ashes
The kind word felt in my mouth. (106)

Her degree of self-knowledge, or awareness of agency, varies and is in constant

construction and manipulation of identity imposed by the gods. Shen Teh finally has to settle on the fact that she does not have the same type of relationship to herself when she constitutes herself as a moral subject. The attitude is not to replace one identity with another but to embrace a dialectical view of the conditions where things including identity are not seen as fixed and unchangeable, and thus readily accept oneself as existing in a state of flux. In Taoism there is no a priori theory of the subject or a rigid standard of moral behaviors. This self-reflection needs to acknowledge the relation of subject positions (or different forms of the subject) to ethical choices. Undoubtedly there are conflicts between these different positions of the subject. Confronted with various ethical choices, a person, in each different case, establishes a different relationship to oneself. In this formulation, we see Brecht engage in a re-examination of morality, of the relationship between ethics and subjectivity, and of the knowing subject.

It should be emphasized that Brecht does not appeal to some archaic mode of morality or ethical practice but aims to make visible a Chinese conceptualization of ethics that might illuminate on contemporary issues related to man in Germany. Ancient Chinese society during the Warring States Period (403-221BC) was characterized by disorder and chaos. Yet it is within this very context that Confucianism and Taoism emerged with their shared aim to restore order of society and restore humanity. Brecht wishes to vindicate a moderate humanism, a view that attributes significant but not absolute autonomy and self-knowledge to human subjects, a view that supplies flexible relationships between ethical choices and subject positions. It is not his desire to suggest a preference of Chinese “wisdom” over Western thought, but, rather, to contribute to a mode of thinking informed by Chinese philosophy.

A New Human Relationship

A reconsideration of the influence of Chinese thought within Brecht's ongoing speculation about the nature of human relations and its social construction in the *Chalk Circle* becomes necessary, for, instead of demonstrating human conduct as an ensemble of social relations, the play implies Brecht's configuration of new social relations as embodied in concrete individual conduct. Azdak's judgment offered us nothing less than a new way of thinking about human relationships (especially that of mother and child).⁴¹ As we shall see, Brecht's view of the value of things is neither fully Marxist nor Daoist, but a mixture of both.

In accomplishing his aims, Brecht uses the device of the "play within a play". The prologue is set in the Soviet Union towards the end of the Second World War. Members of two collective farms in the Soviet Union—one of sheep breeders, and the others of fruit growers—quarrel over the ownership of a destroyed valley. An expert from the capital settles the dispute peacefully, offering the land to those who can make the valley more useful to the community: those who irrigate it so that it can bear fruit. To illustrate the ethics of the decision a Georgian folk-singer is invited to sing the old legend of the chalk circle. Brecht takes this already available material, a classical Chinese play, and adapts it to serve his purpose. In Brecht's version, the story is set in feudal Georgia. As a play it falls into two distinct but not completely separate parts: the flight of Grusha and the judgment of Azdak. In an insurrection Grusha, a kitchen maid, saves the Governor's child (abandoned by the mother) and takes it with her, fleeing the city northward. When the war is over, the Governor's wife returns and attempts to claim the baby back. Azdak settles the case by giving the baby to Grusha because she is the one who really cares for Michael.

The arguments of Grusha and the Governor's wife (who is represented by two lawyers) deal almost exclusively with the bond between mother and child. The first

lawyer of the Governor's wife argues as follows:

Of all bonds the bonds of blood are the strongest. Mother and child—is there a more intimate relationship? Can one tear a child from its mother? High Court of Justice! She has conceived in the holy ecstasies of love. She has carried it in her womb. She has fed it with her blood. She has borne it with pain. (88)

The lawyer's argument evokes the notion of the "natural" mother, with its association of an instinctual bond between mother and child based on conception and birthing. The blood-tie argument indicates that the bond between mother and child is the most natural and basic in human relationships. The trial becomes an opportunity for Brecht to address important issues concerning human relationships.

In the *Chalk Circle* traditional order (law and social norms) in feudal Georgia are represented as of oppression and tyranny, a deterioration of "ethical responsiveness" (303)⁴². Therefore, we could see how eager the lawyers are to conclude the case according to both the law and social norms. In fact, the blood-tie argument, in Michael Freeman's words, "is often little more than a quasi-scientific veil for a property justification" (203). For the Governor's wife, retaining Michael is essential in order for her to retain the land and thus the revenue of the estates, since he is the only living heir. Her argument, according to Freeman, is a perfect example of Locke's acquisition of property by the mixing of labour (203).

Here we find a strong resemblance between Brecht's question of law and order and Lao Zi's suspicion of Confucius' "ritual" in guiding human relationships. Like Brecht, Lao Zi situates authentic ethics in a realm beyond the positive law. The most natural human relation (in accordance with *tao*), once it is institutionalized (ritualized), is put into written law of its associated rights and responsibilities. However, as Lao Zi would have it, this is not an indication of the progress of human civilization; instead,

it implies a step backward, since it is already one third removed from the truth of the *Tao*. Azdak's response is that "The court is touched by the mention of the estate. It's a proof of human feeling" (89). The irony, however, is that this mother-child bond is not a proof of human feeling, but on the contrary, a denial of it. The very institution of this bond and responsibility accordingly is a proof of the degradation of the *tao* into the fourth stage, next to "power", human kindness and morality.

While the example of Shen Teh reveals how morality fails, in Grusha the quality of "ethical responsiveness" is fully exemplified. Consider Grusha's conduct of illegally appropriating the child; on the one hand, she breaks laws (and thus breaks the order of "ritual" in Lao Zi's sense) which is intended for the benefit of human beings; on the other hand, in doing so she creates a new order, superior to the old one, based on *tao*. Unlike Shen Teh—who tries to ingratiate herself with her fellow citizens and with the gods in her observation of the gods' commandments—Grusha never thinks of disciplining herself with codified morality. She does things in the most natural way and thus produces motherhood within herself. Facing the accusation of the two lawyers, Grusha's response is quite simply "He's mine:"

I brought him up according to my best knowledge and conscience. I always found him something to eat. Most of the time he had a roof over his head. And I went to all sorts of trouble for him. I had expenses too. I didn't think of my own comfort. I brought the child up to be friendly with everyone. And from the beginning taught him to work as well as he could. (88-89)

The difference between the claims of Grusha and the Governor's Wife is that Grusha understands instinctively the most important quality a person should have—one which Brecht always values in Chinese culture—friendliness. Hence, it is not surprising, when Azdak announces that he is obliged to "choose a mother for the child" by

employing the device of the chalk circle (such that the one who pulls Michael out of the chalk circle will be the mother), Grusha, however, cannot see the child harmed and lets him go: “I brought him up! Shall I also tear him to bits? I can’t!” This is the natural flow of her feeling as a human being.

Azdak’s final allotment of the child to Grusha expresses Brecht’s idea of *tao* before “ritual” (law and legality). He deconstructs the notion of the “natural” relationship between mother and child, and replaces it with a view that “ethical responsiveness” precedes morality and instinctual bonds: even apart from the criterion of biology, people yet play caring roles for each other. Grusha brings her human kindness into play and makes the child her own through sacrifices, as Ewen realizes: “Each act of benefit to the child jeopardizes her own chances of escape or survival” (412). We see how the idea of humane feelings is stressed before material comforts and luxuries in the thoughts of Grusha before Azdak renders his judgments:

He [Michael] who wears the shoes of gold

Tramples on the weak and old

Does evil all day long

And mocks at wrong.

O to carry as one’s own

Heavy is the heart of stone.

The power to do ill

Wears out the will. (93-94)

Thus Grusha actually—through her acquisition of social maternity—creates an order (with the disorderly tramp Azdak) and a new set of human relations based on ethical responsiveness. The seeming victory of the proletariat mother over the biological upper-class mother may point to a new human relationship of ethics.

But what then are we to make of Azdak's final departure? Does it perhaps reflect Brecht's pessimistic vision of the world he is living in or symbolically point to a future in which there is no age of justice—no judicial reign will be required—since “friendliness” shall prevail and everything follows its natural course according to the *tao*? To understand Brecht's blueprint for a better society, we must take a look at the Prologue.

Above we mentioned that Brecht refuses to represent a better world both in ancient China (in which Confucius and Lao Zi lived) and contemporary cities. Esslin declares that Brecht's plays “never give concrete evidence of the feasibility, or even the nature, of the Utopian state he aimed at” (*Evils* 240). Conditions in Brecht's cities are generally characterized by injustice, exploitation, poverty and human degradation. Take Brecht's Szechwan for example, Brecht's Szechwan described by the gods as “uninhabitable.” Such an observation—that Brecht does not depict a utopian hope in the concrete images of life in his plays—encourages the view that Brecht's plays “are wholly negative: attacks upon the existing order” (*Evils* 240).

Ruppert has sought to refute Esslin's view, and to evoke a new perspective from which to consider Brecht's utopian vision which, according to him, “is not based on the complete resolution of contradictions as in the more traditional patterns” (41). He concludes that “failure in the past by some of Brecht's critics to recognize these utopian implications no doubt stems from a curious disregard of Brecht's ‘Marxist aims’ and ‘the genuine humanistic hope’ manifest in the Szechwan and other plays” (41). When we look at life as it is represented in the Prologue, it would appear that Brecht's imagination of a utopian life finds a most similar concrete image, as Brecht emphasizes that the new and special aspects of the behaviour of settling the dispute “could not have existed in Grusinia at any other time, and still could not exist in many other countries of the world today, because the ownership of a valley would have been

‘settled’ by wars” (“On *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*” 89).

In his review of the productions of *The Chalk Circle*, Hans-Joachim Bunge discusses two productions—one in Berlin with the Prologue and the other one in Frankfurt without the Prologue—centering around the legitimacy of the deletion of the prologue. The negative views, for example, as Bunge recorded, critique the Prologue for “its immense display of comrades true to the communist line,” or as “Bolshevistic wrapping paper” (125). Indeed, at first sight Brecht’s Prologue appears to be communist propaganda in that it situates the story in Georgia and suggests a possible existence of a new social order there. This understanding explains why many directors prefer to shorten or drop the prologue, since, as Tatlow points out, it “is often considered an impossible idealization of political reality” (*The Intercultural Sign* 24).

Ruppert suggests that a new perspective should be adopted in investigating the utopian implications in Brecht’s plays; yet, as we can see, the utopian values are not necessarily associated with “Marxist aims,” and there are other alternative models to communism and capitalism. As regards the meaning of the Prologue, Tatlow provides a way to rethink its message: “Reading one play across another has the effect of differently positioning both” (*The Intercultural Sign* 24). While we tend to solely notice that, in Tatlow’s words, “This play within a play, expressly located in the world of legend and romance, takes devices from East Asian theatre to visualize and structure its narrative” (24), what is usually ignored is that the utopian hope, as we have discussed, is embodied in the characters of Grusha and Azdak rather than in the two collectives in the Prologue. The singer also reminds us that it is the “wisdom” from China which should be valued and recognized as settling the dispute of problems in a “pre-communist” Soviet Union. In the fictional world of the play within the play, Grusha and Azdak demonstrate the spirit of *tao* and a possible new human

relationship based upon it—something that Brecht worships more than the socialist law (remembering how the judgment of the territory is ultimately against the law of the Soviet Union). The *Chalk Circle* approaches the imaginative task of conceiving and embodying an alternative reality; a reality set in the socialist Soviet Union, but informed by wisdom from a legend of ancient China. Ironically, the ancient Chinese do not offer an attractive and plausible alternative. Lao Zi ultimately lacks confidence that human beings could ever hope to reach the ideal situation of the *Tao*. We only get a glimpse of the ideal country imagined by Lao Zi in Chapter 80 of the *Tao Te Ching*, which describes an imagined human society in the primitive status.

I suspect that Brecht intentionally refuses to adopt representations of a better world at all. And that while he does address utopian questions, such as, how to relocate the property in a peaceful and harmonious way, Brecht's play is not functionally utopian. Perhaps, we need to be reminded of Paul Ricoeur's belief in the efficacy of utopian thinking at this moment; that is, that the function of utopia is to shatter the present order because its destabilizing function exposes the "credibility gap in all systems of legitimation, all authority..." (17). This is how Brecht participates in utopian discourse while refusing to provide a depiction of a communist world.

CHAPTER 6

BRECHT AND CHINESE TRADITIONAL *XIQU*

Right in the middle of it, I stopped for a second and said: "Brecht, you know your theory of epic theatre—maybe you don't want me just to sing it the way I sang it—as emotional as 'Surabaya Johnny' has to be

done?”. He said: “Lenya, darling, whatever you do is epic enough for me.”

—Lotte Lenya

When the great actor Wang Xiaonong (1858-1918) played the scene, at the turn of the century, the upper part of his body thoroughly and completely impersonated the drunken poet, but the lower part played the horse, sober and steady. So, may we not say that the upper part is Stanislavskian, while the lower part follows Brecht? The dialectical combination of opposites, sobriety and inebriation, sanity and insanity, is what makes the traditional Chinese theatre so enchanting.

—Huang Zuolin

There exists among Brecht scholars a dispute over the role of Chinese traditional theatre *xiqu* in shaping Brecht’s dramatic theory, especially his concept of *Verfremdung*. Brecht’s 1936 essay “Alienation Effects” seems to validate the idea that Chinese acting⁴³ influenced Brecht’s dramaturgy, for it gives a name to Brecht’s seminal theoretical concept, that of *Verfremdungseffekt* or V-effects (variously translated as alienation effect or A-effect). Later, in his two essays “On Experimental Theatre” (1939) and “A Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect [Short Description]” (1941), Brecht also noted the similarities between his concept of epic acting and the kind of acting which was used in *xiqu*. Nevertheless, many critics have argued that Brecht’s concept owes in different degrees to various other literary influences such as the film theory of Montage and the theories of Formalism. While acknowledging that the V-effect exists in the Chinese theatre, Brecht has indicated that it is not uniquely Chinese.

This chapter attempts to reassess the connection of Brecht's concept of V-effect to Chinese influence in Brecht's vision of the style of acting that was necessary for his theatre. However, I do not mean to imply that Brecht's discussion of qualities of the *Verfremdungseffekt* (after he watched Mei's performance in 1936) depends entirely on Chinese acting, but what we are sure of is that Chinese theatre—despite the fact that its literary and performance traditions are different from Brechtian theatre—as Tatlow suggests, “drew his [Brecht's] attention to certain possibilities which he had not before seen so clearly” (*Mask* 317). Based on this assumption, I suggest that the Chinese theatre helped him to (1) envisage a new relationship between actor and role, actor and audience and (2) to formulate a full and dialectical meaning of *Verfremdungseffekt*, especially on the paradoxical elements such as reason and emotion, and reality and illusion. Other than discussing the parallels of Brecht's theatre and Chinese theatre in formal structure and plot structure (which Tatlow has covered in his book *Mask*), my focus is on the techniques of *xiqu* as embodied in Mei's performance.

From *Entfremdung* to *Verfremdung*

In discussing Brecht's aesthetic development, Brooker has warned us of the danger of misreading Brecht: “The most damaging yet most common error ... has been to see it as fixed and unchanging, and to view it therefore as either dogmatic, communist-inspired abstraction or revered holy writ” (“Key words” 185). Indeed, not only did Brecht's terminology change from *Entfremdung* to *Vefremdung* (both of which are usually translated as “alienation”), it is also likely that his emphasis would have changed in particular artistic and social circumstances. In the essay “Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction” (about 1936), Brecht first employed the term *Entfremdung*, the same term used by Hegel and Marx. He describes it from the

perspective of the spectator:

The spectator was no longer in any way allowed to submit to an experience uncritically (and without practical consequences) by means of simple empathy with the characters in a play. The production took the subject-matter and the incidents shown and put them through a process of alienation: the alienation that is necessary to all understanding. When something seems ‘the most obvious thing in the world’ it means that any attempt to understand the world has been given up. (BT 71)

The following summarized logic of effects by Brecht is, similarly, also taken by critics undifferentiatedly as that of the *Verfremdungseffekt*: “What is ‘natural’ must have the force of what is startling. This is the only way to expose the laws of cause and effect. People’s activity must simultaneously be so and be capable of being different” (BT 71). In his editorial note to the essay “Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction” Willett suggests that this essay bears no evidence of Brecht’s visit to Moscow.⁴⁴

It was soon after this essay that Brecht coined the term *Verfremdung* after watching the famous Chinese *xiqu* performer Mei Lanfang’s performance in Moscow in April 1935, together with Tretyakov, Sergei Eisenstein, and Viktor Shklovsky.⁴⁵ Despite the fact that his knowledge of the Chinese theatre was limited, Brecht thought he saw in Chinese aesthetics a model for his idea of theatre and wrote the essay “Alienation Effects” with a long descriptive analysis of Mei’s acting. We know from his essay that Brecht at least saw “*Dayu shajia*” (The Fisherman’s Revenge) and a private performance by Mei. To judge to what degree the revision of the term from *Entfremdung* to *Verfremdung* shows that Brecht’s concerns (in his scheme for his new theatre) are linked with his observation about Mei’s acting style, we must sort out the actual history of his concept of *Verfremdung* and find out the diverse designations of

the two terms.

The idea of shattering illusion and reminding the audience of the artifice of the performance has been a tendency of Brecht since the outset of his career. Willett points out that these ideas were not unique to Brecht: “the methods ... were partly those of the ‘theatrical theatre’ as practiced by the pre-1914 avant-garde whose outstanding figure was Meyerhold” (*Brecht in Context* 235). In fact, the earlier quotation of Brecht’s explanation of *Entfremdung* may serve well as a paraphrase of Willett’s summary of the function of Meyerhold’s theatrical devices, which aims to “remind the audience that it is in a theatre and not taking part in real life” (*Brecht in Context* 235). In his theoretical development, Brecht, however, moves beyond the restrictions of formal considerations. In his essay “The Street Scene” (1940), Brecht explains the *Verfremdungseffekt* as “a technique of taking the human social incidents to be portrayed and labeling them as something striking, something that calls for explanation, is not to be taken for granted, not just natural. The object of this ‘effect’ is to allow the spectator to criticize constructively from a social point of view” (BT 125). Here Brecht emphasizes that the *Verfremdungseffekt* is not a form of thinking, but an ideological position, as Carney read it, “a critical turning back upon or rereading of one’s own thought that displaces that thought and distinguishes the uncriticized thought as ideological” (19). Carney interprets the *Verfremdungseffekt* as introducing a dialectical turning back upon ideological thinking” (Carney 19). A comparison of Brecht’s theoretical statements about *Entfremdung* and *Verfremdung* illustrates that the latter puts more emphasis on the political function of theatre as social criticism.

As regards Brecht’s term *Verfremdung*, Willett in particular cites the Russian formalist device of defamiliarization coined by Shklovsky as its main source (BT 99).⁴⁶ Although he considers Brecht’s use of this new phrase in describing Mei’s

acting, Willett argues that the *Verfremdungseffekt* “appears to be a precise translation of Shklovsky’s term *priem ostranenniya*—‘the device of making strange’” and in fact, Brecht adopted Shklovsky’s formulation as a description first of the Chinese methods and then of his own (*Brecht in Context* 236). Willett justifies his claim by referring to Bernhard Reich’s memoir in which Reich noted that he first heard the term *Verfremdung* used in 1936 by Tretyakov with Brecht present (*Brecht in Context* 236). Brooker, however, claims that Brecht’s conception and use of *Verfremdung* entails “a degree of political insight which thoroughly radicalised the formalist device of ‘making strange’” (“Key Words” 192). The aesthetic form in the Brechtian theatre, when enacted, sought to articulate the social and political dimension of his plays. Indeed, as compared with Brecht’s concern with the function of art as “laying bare society’s causal network” (BT 109), Shklovsky’s theory was engendered out of a more purely aesthetic vision.

Another of Brecht’s purported inspirations comes from Marx’s theory of *Entfremdung*, which refers to the estrangement of the workers from their labor and human nature. The estrangement is manifested in the worker’s relationship to “the products of his labour” and “the relationship of labor to the act of production within the labor process” as a systematic result of capitalism. According to this perspective, this estrangement defines man as alien to his nature and subjected to social conditions; or, in Marx’s words, “The estrangement of man, in fact every relationship in which man [stands] to himself, is realized and expressed only in the relationship in which a man stands to other men” (“Estranged Labor” in *Economics and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*). It becomes clear that Brecht’s terms *Verfremdung* and *Entfremdung* bear little resemblance to the political-philosophical-psychological aspects of *Entfremdung* as used by Marx. Such a fundamental difference from Marx’s *Entfremdung* prompts Willett to declare that *Verfremdung* “is certainly not of

Marxist-Hegelian descent” (*Brecht in Context* 237). Brooker also notes that “Brecht’s debt to Marx...was less to the concept of alienation than...to the methods of dialectical materialism” (“Key Words” 193).

Until 1936 Brecht used *Entfremdung* to describe his theory and technique. In “Alienation Effects,” we find that he uses another word, *Befremdung*, but in a different sense.

When one sees the Chinese acting it is at first very hard to discount the feeling of estrangement [*Befremdung*] which they produce in us as Europeans. One has to be able to imagine them achieving an A-effect among their Chinese spectators too. (BT 95-96)

While differentiating the use of *Befremdung* from *Verfremdung*, Brecht gives implicit indication that he knows that *Verfremdung* is not *Befremdung*. This strangeness of seeing something new or unusual for a European audience (but not for a Chinese one) that Brecht describes with *Befremdung*, bears no correspondence to the concept of *Verfremdung*.⁴⁷ In such a case, Brecht’s invention and use of *Verfremdung* must have designated a different strategy of alienation. One might ask, what is the difference between the *Entfremdung* produced in his experiments before 1936, the feeling of *Befremdung* in seeing Mei’s performance, and the *Verfremdungseffekt* that occurs in Mei’s acting as he describes it?

It has become a commonplace of scholarship on Brecht and Chinese theatre to point out the limits of Brecht’s ability to dissociate his feeling of *Befremdung* from the effects of *Verfremdung* when it comes to understanding and interpreting Chinese culture. Berg-Pan among others has argued that the ritualistic codes of Peking opera seem so natural to the Chinese audience that they would not feel the same way as Western audiences (*Bertolt Brecht and China* 165-66). Shu-his Kao argues that the question of China in Brecht “depend obviously on the degree to which one wishes to

retain and stress the ‘strangeness’ of the Chinese fact in the work and thought of the man to whom we owe the concept of the *Verfremdungseffekt*” (qtd in Hayot 86). Despite Brecht’s effort to disassociate *Verfremdung* from *Befremdung*, Kao and Hayot emphasize that this “strangeness” that Brecht recognizes comes from his experience as a European audience member.

The connection between Brecht’s *Verfremdung* and Mei’s acting is further complicated by Brecht’s own remarks about Mei’s acting style, in which he seems to be more concerned with formal matters than with the historical implications and social connotations achieved in performance. Consider the following passage about Chinese acting:

The artist’s object is to appear strange and even surprising to the audience. He achieves this by looking strangely at himself and his work. Everyday things are raised above the level of the obvious and automatic. (BT 92)

With a de-emphasis on the theatre’s function as exposal of social conditions, Brecht’s remarks echo his earlier explanation of *Entfremdung* other than *Verfremdung*. Indeed, it would be simplification to claim that Brecht has ignored the social and political purpose of such an acting style in Chinese theatre, for the very fact that the Peking theatre has long lost the critical social and political momentum it once had and has primarily become an aesthetic experience for the viewers in Mei’s time. It is also tempting to simply conclude that Brecht is self-contradictory in his theoretical statements and that there are no any deep links between Brecht’s *Verfremdung* and Mei’s acting style. However, these explanations would not help much to understand Brecht’s theoretical development or to explain why Brecht and Mei—with their vastly different cultural backgrounds—would produce (at least to Brecht) comparable styles of acting.

Remembering that Brecht's interest in Chinese theatre is not a fever—he discussed Chinese acting on more than one occasion and his later theatre has abundantly adopted formal structures of Yuan *zaju*—a reconsideration of the designation of *Verfremdung* and its relation with Chinese acting is necessary for us to fully understand the implications of the V-effect in Brecht's theatre (although it is not my intention to argue that Chinese acting play a determining factor in Brecht's conception of *Verfremdung*). This will be done by means of a brief discussion of the basic principles in Mei's acting and the workings of traditional *xiqu* which effects joint participation and encourages critical attitudes on the part of the actor and audience, followed by a full consideration of how in his formulation and use of *Verfremdung*, Brecht shows his response to a dialectical understanding of paradoxical elements in Chinese theatre such as emotion and reason, illusion and reality.

Mei's Performance and Its Aesthetic Principles

Many critics' suspicions of Brecht's understanding of Chinese theatre are also grounded in the fact that Chinese traditional *xiqu* is a product of the long history of its culture, permeated with its religion and philosophy and with its aesthetic principles and social and political aims. The most widely accepted view among Brecht scholars is that “these effects of Chinese theatricality, though bearing some comparison with the Brechtian concepts of alienation effect and *Gestus*, have their own distinctive theatrical features and meanings” (Postlewait and Davis 36).

Based on the above assumption, despite Brecht's acknowledgement of the parallels between his theatrical innovation and the techniques used in Chinese theatre, scholars often come to the conclusion that Brecht misunderstood and misread traditional *xiqu*. As Haiping Yan demonstrates in “Theatricality in Classical Chinese Drama,” Brecht misperceived how emotions or feeling operated in Chinese theatrical

works and misunderstood the social and political aims of the theatrical representation. Tian pushes this idea further and even denies the connection by claiming that “it would be a mistake to conclude that Brecht found the A-effect in the Chinese theatre via Mei’s performance” (203). Tian shows how the parallels Brecht found in the Chinese theatre are only a misconception of the Chinese theatre.

Brecht’s appreciation of the Chinese theatre does nothing to diminish the fact that he is, concomitantly, differentiating his theatre from the Chinese theatre. However, Brecht’s agreement is not, as is often supposed, only with its morphological features. Brecht pointed out in “Alienation Effects” that only those who need Chinese acting’s V-effects “for quite definite social purposes” can profitably study it (BT 96). He also points out the unconnected development of the V-effects in the experiments conducted by the modern German theatre and Asiatic acting (BT 96). In “Short Organum”, he clarifies the differences between the V-effects in modern Germany, the old one in the classical and medieval theatre, and the Asiatic theatre:

The classical and medieval theatre alienated its characters by making them wear human or animal masks; the Asiatic theatre even today uses musical and pantomimic A-effects. Such devices were certainly a barrier to empathy, and yet this technique owed more, not less, to hypnotic suggestion than do those by which empathy is achieved. The social aims of these old devices were entirely different from our own. The old A-effects quite remove the object represented from the spectator’s grasp, turning it into something that cannot be altered; the new are not odd in themselves, though the unscientific eye stamps anything strange as odd. The new alienations are only designed to free socially-conditioned phenomena from that stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today. (BT 192)

By emphasizing his position concerning the new aesthetics for his theatre, Brecht identifies why even the old V-effects from the theatre of other periods and civilizations such as the classical and medieval theatre or the Asiatic theatre cannot contribute to representing the reality of life in the scientific era. This is not, it appears, a denial of those theatres as such but a view of them which places them within the contexts of their time. The theatre for a modern, scientific age must therefore be able to reveal social conditions in which the story functions and hence bring consideration to the historical circumstances. Consequently, the old V-effects only share the formal features with the Brechtian V-effect, but not the political dimension of theatrical representation.

While mapping the connection between Brecht's theoretical development and Chinese influence, it is first necessary to understand the aesthetic principles of Mei's performance and Mei's understanding of the Peking theatre by referring to his memoir *My Forty-year Stage Life*. In his memoir, Mei summarizes the two artistic principles of performance: the principle of *mei* (beauty) and the principle of *zhen* (truthfulness). Indeed, despite the variety and complexity in the tradition of Chinese performance arts, the two principles constitute the aesthetic goal that underlies a vast range of performances. Mei illustrates that it is imperative that dramatic performances evoke a sense of beauty from the audience by, coincidentally, giving as a specific example his performance in Moscow. Mei spoke of his performance of *The Drunken Beauty*, in which he played the part of a Concubine who, upset at spending the night alone, was getting drunk in the garden:

After the performance, one of the foreign specialists came to me and said, 'a drunkard usually appears to be vomiting and staggering, disgusting and ugly; yet when represented upon the stage it should not appear appalling, instead the elegant gestures and the perfect match of

dancing and singing, should evoke the feeling of beauty on the part of the audience.’ (Vol. 1 42-3) ⁴⁸

According to Mei’s description, the audiences in Moscow were less amazed by the Chinese actors’ stunning costumes or the spectacular nature of their performance than he expected. Mei recorded this story and further affirmed in his memoirs that this specialist’s observation was in accordance with the principle of beauty on the Chinese stage. Elsewhere Mei explained this emphasis on the aesthetic beauty evoked by the performer’s gestures and movements:

The beautiful dance movements created by past artists are all based on gestures in real life, synthesized and accentuated to become art. And so the performing artist has this twofold task: apart from acting his role according to the development of the story, he must also remember that his job is to express himself through beautiful dance movements. If he fails to do this, he cannot produce good art. Whether the character in the play is truly mad or is just feigning madness, the artist must see to it that all the movements on the stage are beautiful. (qtd in Tian “‘Alienation Effects’ for Whom?” 208-09)

It is clear that the stylized and beautified gestures and movements in no way present a naturalistic embodiment of the character’s action. Here Mei touches upon the complex relation between actor and role in Chinese theatre which we shall revisit later; suffice it to point out that Mei’s stress on the actor’s obligation to control his external actions in accordance with *chengshi* (conventions) is already a departure from Stanislavsky’s method of acting in which an actor’s identification with the role is considered to be fundamental to the highest level of acting.

Devoid of the social gesture that features in the Brechtian theatre, the principle of beauty gestures towards another important principle of Chinese acting; that is, its

commitment to “subjective likeness in emotion and spirit” rather than “objective verisimilitude in physical form” (Tian “‘Alienation Effects’ for Whom?” 205), a principle repeated in Mei’s memoirs. At the heart of the distinction between theatricality in the Peking theatre (the traditional style of acting that Mei mastered and performed in Moscow) and Brecht’s theatre, which Brecht is aware of but was unable to fully explore due to his limited exposure to Chinese performance arts, is a debate over the traits and purposes of representation in theatrical mimesis. The Peking theatre is based on a very different idea of representation. Huang Zuolin (a leading director of Chinese modern theatre), in his comparison of the theatrical aesthetics of Mei, Stanislavsky, and Brecht, gives a most vivid discussion of their different conceptions of theatrical representation:

Put simply, the most basic difference is that Stanislavsky believed in the ‘fourth wall,’ Brecht wanted to demolish it, while for Mei Lanfang such a wall did not exist and so there was never any need to pull it down, since the Chinese theatre has always been so highly conventionalized that it has never set out to create an illusion of real life for the audience. (156)

Indeed, the stage illusion of real life is never set up as an artistic principle in traditional *xiqu*. Nevertheless, Huang does not mean that the stage illusion is eliminated in Chinese theatre; rather, the illusion acquires a different level of meaning. In his instructions for acting, Mei reveals how the illusion (primarily of poetic and emotional atmosphere) is induced in an actor’s performance: “a performer should experience the personalities and social status of the character and bring them out from the innermost of his heart” (Vol 1 21). Mei does not emphasize that an actor should imitate actions and emotions, yet the actor’s inner technique of “introspection” is the prerequisite for the production of good art. While Stanislavsky also described how in

actor's training, introspection could be used to awaken an actor's creativity, the creation of illusion on the part of actor in traditional *xiqu* is concerned with the truth and reality of *xieyi* "what his mind knows" rather than *xieshi* "what his eyes sees."⁴⁹ In other words, by rejecting a naturalistic style of acting, a *xiqu* actor still aims to produce a poetic and emotional reality in the spectator.

An emphasis on the principle of beauty (in techniques of representation) shall not go against the principle of "truthfulness" (for actors, the inner technique of introspection; for audiences, the emotional truth in heart), or, in other words, audiences are encouraged to be convinced by the on-stage happenings: "Such 'truth' in Chinese aesthetics is as much about what 'really happened' in the world as about what is 'truly felt'" (Yan 76). Consequently, the modes of representation in the Peking theatre require a different understanding of theatricality, one that deviate from the codes of Aristotelian mimesis. Unlike the Brechtian theatre, which aims to disrupt the audience's ideological thinking position by means of the V-effect, traditional *xiqu* is meant to effect audiences by the force of imagination and enable them to connect with the realm of "truth." Jiao Juying, a contemporary Chinese esthetician, explains that this "truthfulness" is different from that of realistic literature and art. It does not call for a "true-to-life portrayal and representation of the objective world" (Su et al. 37). It is an idea that "was deeply influenced by the Confucian aesthetic concept of 'communion with the external world,' which maintains that feelings are stirred up by the external world; the emphasis is on expressing inner feelings, however, not external images" (Su et al. 37). The different understanding of artistic principles, namely, observations of beauty and "truth," leads to different artistic practices in the Peking theatre. As a performer uses ritualistic and stylized gestures and bodily movements, he moves the audience to do their imaginative knowing and feeling in order to reach the stage of spiritual illusion. The emphasis on imagination is sought through a method

that instead heightens the importance of emotion. This highlighting of the emotional force of the acting is recognized by Tatlow as antirealistic in acting: “the intensity of an emotion is best conveyed when it is reduced to its essential features that are not represented, because they cannot be, but rather presented or symbolized” (*The Intercultural Sign* 54).

And while there exist vital differences between Brecht’s V-effect and the “illusionist” tradition of artistic practice and techniques in *xiqu*, Brecht and Mei share one fundamental recognition: they consistently frame their aesthetic theories in terms of the theatre as a joint creation between actor and audience, and moreover, it acts, although in quite difference ways, as a liberating agent for both the performer and the spectator to reflect upon the performance critically. In his observation of Chinese acting’s stress on external techniques, even while realizing that empathy is interrupted in the Asiatic theatre, Brecht also noticed that Chinese theatre does not set up a method for de-emphasizing emotions, a view that is usually taken as proof of Brecht’s misunderstanding of the nature of Chinese theatre. As we shall see, by problematizing the two fundamental elements of the classical theatre (empathy and mimesis), Brecht demonstrates an awareness of the dialectical combination of opposites in acting (illusion and reality, empathy and reason), which reminds us of the Taoist philosophy that lies at the core of Chinese acting.

Producing a New Actor and Audience

Brecht realized the difficulty of describing the epic style of acting, as attempts at achieving the V-effects are often misread as “suppressing the emotional, individual, dramatic, etc. element” (BT 225). In order to correct such a potential misreading of the V-effect, we must find out what kind of critical relationship Brecht sought to create between actors, texts and audiences. To this end, we shall examine how Brecht

views the Chinese theatre as a potential source of methods for engendering self-reflexive attitudes among the performer and the spectator, despite the fact that the aims of representation and the aesthetic principles are different in the two theatres.

Brecht sees that the V-effect has potential applications in other fields and in other theatres (other than epic theatre) on the level of performance. Brecht inscribes his criteria for acting within the framework of his Marxist outlook and Lao Zi's paradox and adopts concepts from the Peking theatre. While struggling with the representational apparatus of modern Western theatre, Brecht espoused a new style of acting. The acting itself contains or suggests its opposite position. The same attitude from the slogan, "contradiction is our hope," guides the Brechtian new style of acting: "if you act this way the following will happen, but if you act like that then the opposite will take place" (BT 67). He goes on to explain what this new method of acting is:

Of course those actors whom we employ have also to use a special method of representation. We need to get right away from the old naturalistic school of acting, the dramatic school with its large emotions...This isn't the kind of representation that can express our time; it isn't going to sway a purely modern audience. For that one has to apply the only form of acting that I find natural: the epic, story-telling kind. It's the kind the Chinese have been using thousands of years. (BT 68)

It appears that Brecht is primarily concerned with revolutionizing this traditional way of "carrying-power" in his actor, and he adopts specific techniques to achieve this purpose of bringing out contradiction. While such techniques have been applied by traditional *xiqu* performers, what remains to be determined is the degree to which their ideas coincide with Brecht's.

In “A Dialogue about Acting” (1920), Brecht had already thought about the effect of his new style of acting: “The actor would simply strike people as ‘jarring’”. But it wouldn’t be his way of acting that would jar them, but he himself” (BT 28). He further noted that “a jarring element is one of the hallmarks of this new way of acting” (BT 28). Two years later he wrote “The Question of Criteria for Judging Acting,” in which he elucidated the implications of “a jarring element” in acting. While rejecting the old style of acting in which “a certain capacity for coherent and unhurried development of a leading part” matters tremendously, Brecht requires that “the epic actor may possibly need an even greater range than the old stars did, for he has to be able to show his character’s coherence despite, or rather by means of, interruptions and jumps” (BT 55). Until then, his concerns about acting were still restricted to formal considerations. In 1952 Brecht gave a full explanation of how the entry of dialectics is embodied in his epic acting:

If you look soberly at what I have called epic acting, it is a type of acting that brings out the contradiction, which is there in the nature of things, between the actor and the character he is acting. The actor’s (social) criticism of the figure, to whom he must naturally give full expression, comes into play. The opinions, passions, experiences, interests of the character are not of course those of the actor, and the latter have to come out in the acting. (that always happened, in the natural course of events, but there was to my knowledge little consciousness of it.) (*Journals* 452)

Here Brecht stresses the combination of acting techniques, which are meant to distance actor from role (as he suggested earlier), and the actor’s active consciousness and criticism (more on the mental level) of the contradiction within the character in particular socio-historical relations. Even so, acting out “the opinions, passions,

experiences, interests” of the character is still important for Brecht’s notion of epic acting.

Now compare Brecht’s acting style with Mei’s by considering Mei’s metaphor: “when a performer is in costume walking onto the stage, he is no more an ordinary Man but a *yishupin* (a piece of art)” (Vol 3 38). Here Mei stresses the paramount importance of the actor’s skills in contributing to the audience’s aesthetic experience: the actor has to crystallize daily realities and use stylized movements to evoke the sense of “beauty” and “truthfulness” in viewers. Underneath the diverse purposes and concepts of their theatre lies the core of their acting: an act of separation between actor and role, although for Brecht, this separation is a precondition for the actor’s disruption of his own ideological position, whereas for Mei, this separation is necessary but not absolute for an actor to achieve his aesthetic aim.

In the Brechtian acting, by contrast to the conventions in the Chinese acting which Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak described as “specific practices to which fairly precise meanings have been ascribed by tradition” (133), Brecht does not prescribe a system of signs with ascribed meaning. The notion of the contradiction as embodied in the individual is central in his instruction on the epic acting and search for innovations in his actors. From the appearance of the performance, Brechtian actors adopt a more realistic portrayal in external action (in Stanislavsky’s sense) than a traditional *xiqu* actor, whose “every little gesture, every utterance, is guided by convention and timed to music and rhythm” (Sun 176). Brecht envisions a style of acting, as we noted, that is premised on social attitude that his actor adopts towards his role. In other words, through adding a socio-critical dimension to his roles, Brecht’s actors are distanced from their roles and thus break theatrical illusion.

Such a concept of acting embodies a paradox (especially for the actor): it tries to disrupt the actor’s subjectivity by requiring that the actor adopt a self-reflective

attitude (as a commentator of the role) and then move away from ideological position, but at the same time it stresses that the actor must act out his part fully. Interestingly, despite his unfavorable view of Stanislavsky's method of actor's training, Brecht, in his later life, listed nine positive points of Stanislavsky's theatre in "Some Things that can be learned from Stanislavsky." In fact, the paradox of acting—the actor's experience of the distinction between the role they are playing and themselves—has already been discussed by Diderot in his essay "The Paradox of Acting." Diderot's negation of the possibility for an actor to experience the role's dynamic process of deep feeling (such as from sorrow to anger, and from anger to sorrow) (46) might have well served as a counterargument to Stanislavsky's requirement that his actors "live the part" and get immersed in the role. (While noting the similarity in Brecht's and Diderot's argument concerning an actor's self-control in reproducing emotions, we must understand that Brecht's acting theory, with its social function, goes beyond Diderot's philosophical reflection on acting.) It is obvious that in theory the paradox of epic acting and that of Stanislavsky's method result from, albeit in diverse manifestations, a "mechanical" configuration of the relationship between actor and role (either of separation or of complete identification). In practice, both Brecht and Stanislavsky have to make compromises in implementing their acting theories—Brecht's essay on Stanislavsky's attests to his efforts in coping with such a paradox.

By contrast to Brecht's and Stanislavsky's acting, the dialectical combination of opposites in Chinese acting makes it a worthy topic. As discussed earlier, although both Brecht and Mei stress the separation of character and actor, they have a completely different understanding of the role and function of their actors: the disruption of the Brechtian actor's subjectivity is not analogous to Mei's actor's observation of conventions in displaying their skills. On more than one occasion,

however, Mei talked about the necessity of an actor's identification with his role. "When I'm performing, I'm not myself, even when I look at myself; For anyone who plays the part, he will be like the character". Mei quoted these words (of another famous *xiqu* actor) in his memoirs and considered this the best summary of the standard for Chinese acting (Vol 118). These lines demonstrate that although Chinese theatre does not aim to strike the audience with a resemblance to daily life (the external action in Chinese acting is relatively a "revision" of realistic life), the aesthetic aim for the actor is to become the character all the same. This aesthetic principle is usually used as proof of Brecht's misunderstanding of Chinese acting and thus of the irrelevance between the *Verfremdungseffekt* and Chinese acting. Tian, for example, accuses Brecht of misreading the self-introductory moment in *xiqu* and asserts that it "does not affect his [the spectator's] identification with the stage illusion" and "the spectator is not expected to distinguish between the actor and the character portrayed" ("Alienation Effects' for Whom?" 205). Although Tian is familiar with the artistic principles of Chinese acting, we can see that there is room for dispute. Brecht did misunderstand the relationship between actor and role in Mei's acting, yet his observation of self-alienation in Mei's acting is not ill considered. Consider Sun's quotation of Gai Jiaotian's words, "An actor on stage should consciously observe the standard, or he would lose the audience if he moves his eyes whichever way he feels like" (177); these moments of "observing the standard" in displaying skills to externalize the thoughts of feelings of the characters echo Diderot's and Brecht's stress on an actor's rational capacity in conveying emotions. Thus an alignment of Mei's remarks of "becoming the character" with Stanislavsky's "living the part" is as equally mistaken as saying that empathy is completely done away in the Chinese theatre.

There is little discussion of what "being the character" means in traditional

xiqu acting. For Mei, “becoming the character” is a statement which epitomizes, firstly, lifelong training of external techniques, which, when demonstrated on stage, requires a close observation of conventions, and secondly, to borrow Phillip B. Zarrilli’s observation of Asian acting, “the immediate psychophysical process of engaging in performing (doing) the acts which constitute a performance on any given occasion” (131). Indeed, using the Chinese actor’s statement of “becoming the character” to argue for its commonality with Stanislavsky’s naturalistic acting is just as misleading as claiming that “self-alienation” in Mei’s acting means the same thing in Brecht’s theatre, for the very fact that observation of external techniques requires that, when the actor emotionally feels and acts as close as possible to their characters, the actor be able to discipline his body (movement and singing) and mind.

Two points suggested by Mei and Sun confirm Brecht’s observation about Chinese acting: i.e., the self-observation and the dual identity of actor (although we should note that the purpose of self-observation in the Chinese traditional theatre had long lost its function as social criticism). The observation in Mei’s and Gai’s performance is specifically an aesthetic consideration (i.e., for the aesthetic experience of the audience). Brecht expresses the same critical attitude towards the dualism of the performer: “the actors who refrained from going over wholly into their role, remaining detached from the character they were playing and clearly inviting criticism of him” (BT 71). Brecht’s concern with the spectator’s detachment is meant to disrupt the actor’s subjectivity, which is not the aim of Chinese theater or of Diderot’s acting. Whereas traditional *xiqu* actors’ adherence to a system of acting conventions requires setting the limits for his emotional involvement in the role, Brecht’s actors, from the beginning of the play, are required to be distanced from their role by infusing their performance with the function of being a commentator (although most of the time his actors do not avoid psychological investment). The

question then arises: without the externalization of the actors' commentary upon their roles (through different methods such as reporting their speech in the third person), how is it that actors' are able to make their critical view towards the roles' social behavior conveyable?

Brecht's instructions for epic acting—that his actors should be aware of their role's social behavior and act with an explanatory mode as if here were reporting a street scene to court of law—is more of an attitude rather than a method for acting. When he observed that the V-effect was achieved in the Chinese theatre in the way that “the Chinese artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him” (BT 91), Brecht must have realized that the *Verfremdungseffekt* in acting depends on specific techniques that he could learn from the Chinese theatre. He noticed that the Chinese theatre used a lot of symbols and of particular masks in distinguishing characters (the latter method is used most famously in *The Good Person*). He also lists the use of direct audience-address (introducing the character and his situation) as one of the examples of how the Chinese actor “limits himself from the start to simply quoting the character played” (BT 94). One could well argue that Brecht had already thought of and experimented such techniques in his theatre long before 1936, or that he was influenced by the *Noh* theatre (in which “the Noh actors often address their remarks to the audience directly; they have a chorus which interrupts and comments, and at times even speaks for them” [Willett, *Bertolt Brecht* 116]). Nevertheless, Brecht's identification of the V-effects in the Chinese theatre and his realization that acting techniques in the Chinese theatre “cannot very well be exported” (BT 91), do suggest that the Chinese theatre confirmed his earlier experiments in acting techniques and also stood as an important example for his later explorations of other techniques and, moreover, for the development of a dialectical relation between actor and role, reason and emotion, illusion and reality.

After 1936 there is a noticeable emphasis on specific techniques for actor training in Brecht's theoretical essays. In "Alienation Effects" Brecht comes to the conclusion that "cold" and unnaturalistic acting does not mean that representation of feelings are rejected in the Chinese theatre. Four years later in "Short Description," by referring to Chinese acting's connection with gesture, Brecht suggests a dialectical view of emotions and social criticism: "everything to do with the emotions has to be externalized...and be developed into a gesture" (BT 139). Brecht goes on to explain that the use of gesture in the Chinese theatre is achieved by the actor's observing his own movements. Brecht is noticeably aware of two facts: firstly, that the function of gesture in his theatre is to distance both actor and spectator and to invite the criticism of the portrayed characters from a socio-political point of view, and secondly, that specific techniques have to be developed in cooperation with the acting, the music and the setting (a view that he already noted in "Alienation Effects"). In such a case, he suggests three aids which can help to alienate the actions and remarks of the characters: 1) Transposition into the third person; 2) Transposition into the past; 3) Speaking the stage directions out loud (BT 138).

Here we shall take the first guiding principle as an example to investigate how Brecht's gesture ultimately points to an alienation of the actor's identity—a function that is irrelevant with the aesthetic principles of Chinese actors' self-observation. In the Brechtian theatre, the retelling of events as if they were from a third person narrative is an artistic technique which serves to "historicize" events and thus encourages (both among the actor and audience) a critical consciousness of the character's fate as a result of a preexisting social class. Brecht once used Helene Weigel as an example to demonstrate how this shifting of pronoun works upon the consciousness of the actor and audience:

In the first scene the actress stood in a particular characteristic attitude

in the centre of the stage, and spoke the sentences as if they were in the third person; and so she not only refrained from pretending in fact to be or to claim to be Vlassova (the Mother), and in fact to be speaking those sentences, but actually prevented the spectator from transferring himself to a particular room, as habit and indifference might demand, and imagining himself to be the invisible eye-witness and eavesdropper of a unique intimate occasion. Instead what she did was openly to introduce the spectator to the person whom he would be watching acting and being acted upon for some hours. (BT 58)

Jameson suggests that this possibility of living in the third-person engenders a new mode of knowledge of alienation at the heart of identity, a tension in philosophical debates “central to certain influential ‘postmodern’ ones” (58). Indeed, the estrangement effected by third-person acting leads quite naturally to a reinvestigation of the relations of subjectivity as attached to pronouns like “I”, “he”, “she” and of what is deprived of the mark of them through working with the fundamental categories of language, such as person, tense, and voice, which Barthes describes as placing us in the very existence of discourse (Barthes *The Rustle of Language* 20). Barthes draws attention to the grammatical category of the person and argues that every language organizes the person into two oppositions: a correlation of subjectivity, “which sets person (*I* or *you*) in opposition to the non person (*he* or *it*), sign of what is absent, of absence itself” (15). Although Barthes applied this linguistic explanation to literary discourse, we find that it is equally applicable in our analysis of Brecht’s disruption of the actor’s subjectivity.

Speaking of oneself in the third person, as Brecht encourages his actors to do, already produces an ambiguous consciousness which enables an interplay of what is excluded from the mark of *I* and *he*, two persons in opposition. In other words, this

mixed system of person and non-person periodically breaks off the speaker's participation in the performance, such that the subject of the speech-act is always in a state of flux. The *I* of the discourse can no longer be the site where the stability of subjectivity is situated and can only be restored by the actor and audience through identifying with the *I*. It is always decentered; thus the whole idea of a coherent subject attached to the mark of *I* is subverted. This simple switch of register works in a similar way to the problematizing of the subject by posing the question: who is speaking? Thus it draws attention to the constructedness of subjectivity.

In the Brechtian theatre, when the actor is speaking directly to the audience simultaneously as the narrator and the narrated, his identity as a social being and a scripted role intersects, and hence, the resulting engendered self-reflexivity provides possibilities for the actor to explore the subjectivity of the character while also reconsidering his own position. Brecht is in favor of such a technique of theatricality and uses it frequently in his own plays. In one example from *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, when Grusha hesitates over the choice of adopting the child, the scene occurs in the form of a mime, in which a singer intrudes, narrating her actions in the third-person. (A similar technique is widely used in the Chinese theatre.) The intrusion of the singer disrupts illusionist acting by reminding the actors of keeping their distance from the roles they are impersonating. The line between illusion and the real is fractured, and the actor is forced to recognize the artifice of stage. In other words, the action on the stage is historicized. The switch from impersonation to a reliance on narration and commentary suggests that a new relationship between actor and spectator, and actor and character is required.

Pushing this point further we find that Brecht's revolutionary theatre extends beyond the actor to the level of the audience, even while his concerns remain the same: the idea of the human subject and their role in life and art. What Brecht perceives as

extremely harmful in the naturalist theatre is that the spectator is “thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive [suffering] part of the total work of art” (BT 38).

For Brecht, the bourgeois theatre provides the mirror of “an image of the ideological consciousness,” while the represented world of morals, politics and religion seems to be no more than an illusion, a myth that imprisons the consciousness of the self (Althusser, *For Marx* 143). For these reasons, Brecht found it imperative to liberate the audience’s imagination, to transform audience members from victims at the mercies of what he called the “culinary” theatre into a productive part of a new type of theatre.

What is intended is depictions which depict the world not only for the contemplative human being but also for the active human being, ie the world is conceived of as alterable. A moral imperative ‘alter it’ need not be inherently active in it. It is just that the theatre gets a viewer who produces the world. It must not of course be a matter of handing out a patent solution to the riddle of the world to each member of the audience. Only as a member of society is he in a position to take practical action. (*Journals* 110)

The purpose of breaking with classical forms of identification is to make the spectator into an actor who, after realizing his own position in society, would seek to alter the world in real life. The first step towards accomplishing this involved (through doing away with two theatrical elements: illusion and empathy) arousing the spectator’s initiative to question the consciousness of self as “mesmerized” in the naturalistic theatre.

To fully understand how Brecht’s theatre and the Chinese theatre share a similar view concerning audiences, we shall first investigate audiences’ theatrical

experience in the Chinese theatre. Although in traditional *xiqu* the audience experiences moments of identification and moments of purification, his participation in the explicitly theatrical on stage is not denied: the audience's most profound feeling is aroused together with his active thinking capacity, although this active participation has nothing to do with decentering of the self-consciousness on the part of the Brechtian audience. The thinking ability in the spectatorship is crucial and imperative so far as the aesthetic aims of traditional *xiqu* are concerned. Mei recalled his own experience of watching Tan Xingpei perform (another famous Chinese *xiqu* performer), which demonstrates the state of mind expected to be experienced in Chinese *xiqu*. Mei recorded his feeling:

the emotions of regrets and resentment were all expressed most profoundly in his singing and facial expressions. The theatre was quiet. Some of the audience closed their eyes listening with all ears, some were fixing their eyes on his movements, all of them were purified spiritually. My virtuosity was only of a primary level, far from fully appreciating his art of such height. Yet from what I could understand, I already felt my heart was heightened and lightened. (Vol 1 45)

At first sight, this may appear to contradict my argument concerning the active participatory role for audiences in the Chinese theatre. Mei's statements make it clear that the unconscious and subconscious play an important part in the art of Chinese *xiqu*. But a closer look makes it clear that although Chinese spectators do have, as Tian suggests, an intense psychological and spiritual experience of the characters and of what is portrayed on stage ("Alienation-Effect for Whom" 211), their critical faculties are never fully mesmerized as are those in the Aristotelian theatre. Brecht observes:

We see entire rows of human beings transported into a peculiar doped

state, wholly passive, sunk without trace, seemingly in the grip of a severe poisoning attack. Their tense, congealed gaze shows that these people are the helpless and involuntary victims of the unchecked lurching of their emotions. (BT 89)

Indeed the element of empathy is never denied in the Chinese theatre, but it is also true that the spectator occupies a very important role as well. Mei says of the relationship between the spectator and audience in *xiqu*: ‘the performer is like a painter, and the spectator is like a connoisseur. A sculpture is like a painting and its artistic success is judged jointly by the sculptor and spectator’ (Vol 1 118). Mei’s statement emphasizes the significance of the existence of the audience as creator in the joint process of artistic creation and appreciation.

In “Alienation Effects,” Brecht explains that both efforts in the use of alienation effect in traditional Chinese acting and in Germany “were directed to playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters of the play” (BT 91). Mei describes how actors and audiences in the Chinese theatre are drawn into the productive process of the theatre in which opinions are formed, and criticisms, or judgments are made on the part of performer and spectator on an aesthetic level. Jiao claims that many artistic methods of *xiqu* derive from the aesthetic principle of “joint creation with the audience”, and notes that this principle is “the cornerstone of Chinese traditional aesthetics and a guiding principle for the interpretation and solution of other dramatic conflicts” (qtd in Su et al. 36). For Brecht, one of the aims of *Verfremdung* is to intrigue the thinking process on the part of audience and empower them to question the very social identity of themselves. (All the same, we still must remember that the acting-thinking process in the Chinese theatre is directed towards aesthetic appreciation rather than social criticisms as in Brecht’s theatre.)

By contrast to Chinese theatergoers (especially those enthusiastic ones) who are familiar with theatrical conventions (so that they will be able to judge a piece of performance) and thus more or less share a point of view in aesthetic experience, it is also true that in the case of the Brechtian theatre, Brecht does not intend to, as Althusser suggests, “produce a new, true and active consciousness in his spectators” (*For Marx* 143). This is also the paradox of the Brechtian theatre: in Carney’s words, “it tries to persuade us away from an ideological position, but cannot be said to persuade us towards a viewpoint” (10). Throughout the essay “Alienation Effects,” Brecht explains how the V-effect works by describing its alteration of the actor’s relation to his role, its relation to the audience and self-transformation of the audience. This new relationship is inevitably involved with a revisitation of the idea of the consciousness of the self. Reflecting on the means of how to actively involve the audience, Brecht says,

The speeches’ content was made up of contradictions, and the actor had not to make the spectator identify himself with individual sentences and so get caught up in contradictions, but to keep him out of them. Taken as a whole it had to be the most objective possible exposition of a contradictory internal process. ... By these means the sentences (sayings) were not brought home to the spectator but withdrawn from him; he was not led but left to make his own discoveries. (BT 54)

This passage indicates an active participatory role for audiences, for they are expected to engage their thinking capacity in discovering contradiction. This process of discovery requires critical thinking: “the spectator was no longer in any way allowed to submit to an experience uncritically [and without practical consequences] by means of simple empathy with the characters in a play” (BT 71). Brecht’s spectator has more

responsibilities than does the spectator of the bourgeois theatre. He is also expected to be stimulated to discover the determining factors of the fate of Man, “such as social background, special events, etc” (BT 60), as alterable and thus be able to change the world.

“Poetic Illusion”

As to notions of illusion and empathy, Brecht is often considered to refer to them inconsistently in his programmatic thinking on theatre: in Daphna Ben-Shaul’s words, he is “in disharmony with himself” (83). If we take Brecht’s claims of doing away with illusion (mimesis) and empathy (emotion) out of context, it is rather easy to see that Brecht’s practice fails his words; however, if we bear in mind the analogy of the paradoxical aesthetic of the Chinese theatre and his theatre, we shall understand how the dialectic relation between illusion and reality, empathy and reason in Chinese acting provides Brecht with another perspective from which to confront and produce his new audience.

The question, however, remains: does Brecht completely oppose illusion? In his famous example of “the most primitive type of epic theatre,” he describes a street scene and concludes that “it is most important that one of the main features of the ordinary theatre should be excluded from our street scene: the engendering of illusion” (BT 122). What Brecht opposes is the idea that illusion should be employed as a strategy or effect to cover the mechanics of society and deceive the audience into acceptance of the world-order as it manifests itself. In fact, he is determined to do away with “whatever is intended to produce hypnosis, is likely to induce sordid intoxication” (BT 38). It is obvious that he is more opposed to the hypnotic effect achieved by naturalistic acting (Ben-Shaul 97) rather than the mechanics of illusion. On more than one occasion in his essays, Brecht, instead, surprisingly suggests the

necessity of illusion. To answer the posed question, let's take a look at what the word illusion means to Brecht in his experience of watching traditional *xiqu*.

In the study of the connection between the V-effect and Chinese acting, our attention is easily drawn to Brecht's famous claim concerning the absence of the fourth wall in the Chinese theatre:

Above all, the Chinese artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him. He expresses his awareness of being watched. This immediately removes one of the European stage's characteristic illusions. The audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place. A whole elaborate European stage technique, which helps to conceal the fact that the scenes are so arranged that the audience can view them in the easiest way, is thereby made unnecessary. (BT 92)

What is either ignored or used as evidence of Brecht's self-contradictory position is another passage on illusion from the same essay.

These problems are unknown to the Chinese performer, for he rejects complete conversion. He limits himself from the start to simply quoting the characters played. But with what art he does! He only needs a minimum of illusion. (BT 94)

Apparently for Brecht the element of illusion in Chinese acting does not depend on naturalistic mimetic elaboration, and thus evokes a sense of reality different than the one created upon the European stage. But since the effect is still described by Brecht as a minimum of illusion, and furthermore, is embraced by him, we must ask why he prefers such a minimum of illusion that does not jeopardize the V-effect. What then, in his view, is the difference between illusion stemming from the Aristotelian theatre and a minimum of illusion that does not intend to conceal the very mechanism of

theatricality?⁵⁰

Later in his essay “From the Mother Courage Model,” Brecht explains the elaboration of mimetic means from a perspective that naturalistic illusionism is a development of the stage machinery which “provided enough elements of illusion to improve the representation of some aspects of reality,” but this does not suggest that if the elaboration is poor and the mechanical resources are primitive, theatre will cease to function as theatre on the spectator’s part. What Brecht intends to do away with is the meaning of deception apparent in the noun “illusion”:

Restoring the theatre’s reality as theatre is not a precondition for any possibility of arriving at realistic images of human social life. Too much heightening of the illusion in the setting, together with a ‘magnetic’ way of acting that gives the spectator the illusion of being present at a fleeting, accidental, ‘real’ event, create such an impression of naturalness that one can no longer interpose one’s judgment, imagination or reactions, and must simply conform by sharing in the experience and becoming one of ‘nature’s’ objects. The illusion created by the theatre must be a partial one, in order that it may always be recognized as an illusion. Reality, however complete, has to be altered by being turned into art, so that it can be seen to be alterable and be treated as such. (BT 218-19)

While denouncing naturalistic illusion, Brecht argues for a partial one. The question is whether this partial illusion identical with the minimal illusion in the Chinese theatre.

The illusion which Brecht argues for both in his theatre and in the Chinese theatre could not, at any rate, be of the type known to the audience of realist theatre. The ultimate purpose of naturalistic acting is to convince the audience of being present and witnessing dramatic actions as if they were real. Brecht and Mei, on the

contrary, highlight the fact that theatre is first of all art (although Brecht puts more emphasis on the socio-political function of theatre than Mei does), and thus, that any techniques for ascribing reality to fiction on stage should observe this awareness of theatre *qua* theatre and hence illusion *qua* illusion. It is important to keep constantly in mind the fact that the Chinese audience simply has no experience of realistic scenery and naturalistic acting. It is misleading, however, to assume that the Chinese audience—while believing in the reality of the theatrical performance—does not also believe in the dramatic illusion (the unreal world of the drama). What this means is that even as Mei realizes that the spectator should participate in the aesthetic experience, and be moved, the illusion must be made possible with active participation of the audience: namely, the audience has to make use of their imagination in order to reach the very essence of life created by the symbolic performance. Brecht is also aware of the dual nature of theatre: theatrical reality on the performing stage and the illusion created as part of the audience's subjective experience. By contrast to a mechanical reflection of reality through stage design and performance, Brecht, like Mei, never intends to use the means of production of theatre to hide the bare reality of the stage, but aspires to invoke the audience's imagination and to create the theatrical experience.

This partial illusion is what Brecht hints at as “poetic illusion.” In the essay “From the Mother Courage Model,” we read:

No doubt the sight of the cyclorama behind a completely empty stage (in the Prologue and in the seventh and last scenes) creates the illusion of a flat landscape with a huge sky. There is no objection to this, for there must be some stirring poetry in the spectator's soul for such an illusion to come about. Thanks to the ease with which it is created the actors can suggest at the start that here is a wide horizon lying open to

the business enterprise of the small family with their canteen, then at the end that the exhausted seeker after happiness is faced by a measureless devastation. And we can always hope that this impression of substance will combine with a formal one: that the spectator will be able to share in the initial void from which everything arises, by seeing the bare empty stage, soon to be inhabited. (BT 219)

The use of the cyclorama in this production has an incomplete reality since the new stage design rejects and subverts the codes of representation in the naturalistic version. However, despite the fact that the objects are suggestive rather than real, the new design achieves the aura of the real. Whether the stage actually resembles “a flat landscape and a huge sky” is uninteresting and unimportant: the purpose of the scenery is to revive in the minds of the audience the experience of being in such a place. Emotion and scene are blended. The spirit of void is captured without using a single word, demonstrating that partial illusion created on the part of spectator is necessary in the Brechtian theatre. Similar treatments of stage design could be easily found in traditional *xiqu*, for example, “A night scene on the Chinese stage is as bright as any other scene. What the players try to produce is the impression of darkness, not the physical fact” (Hsu 147).

Here we see the surface parallels between Brecht’s “poetic illusion” and one of the aesthetic principles in Chinese *xiqu*, judgment upon a successful performance with reliance on evoking of emotion and scenery (needless to say the aim and effect of “illusion” in both theatres are entirely different). Moreover, there are methods which can be employed to achieve this purpose by other means than experimenting with stage design. The implications deduced from the actor’s performance, costumes, and props, together with the spectator’s imagination, all account for this course of illusion creation.

Brecht gives one example from Mei's performance to illustrate how the V-effect is achieved in the Chinese theatre:

A young woman, a fisherman's wife, is shown paddling a boat. She stands steering a non-existent boat with a paddle that barely reaches to her knees. Now the current is swifter, and she is finding it harder to keep her balance; now she is in a pool and paddling more easily. Right: that is how one manages a boat. (BT 92)

The above observation confirms the concept put forward by Jiao of "creating a poetic feeling to the stage based on a solid foundation in life" (Su et al. 39). Brecht's interpretation indicates his understanding of the reality of the fisherman's wife's action, and his realization of the illusion that is related to "a poetic world composed of a fusion of emotion and scene" (Su et al. 39), a key concept in Chinese aesthetic theories. Instead of eliminating the elements of illusion from his theatre, Brecht replaces "naturalistic illusion" with "poetic illusion," because the former one suffocates the autonomy of the audience and thus mesmerizes their thinking mechanism. By contrast, poetic illusion involves imaginative thinking and effects on the part of the audience in its participation in theatre. Brecht's theatre still depends on illusion, but one that entails joint creation between the audience and the artists. Brecht's use of the cyclorama behind a completely empty stage instead of historically accurate setting might be considered a pretty developed "illusion" that requires the efforts made by the audience's imagination. Consider the following passage from *The Messingkauf Dialogues*:

THE PHILOSOPHER: There is a vast difference between somebody's having a picture of something, which demands imagination, and an illusion, which demands gullibility. We need imagination for our purpose; we want not to create illusions but to see that the audience too

gets a picture of the matter in mind. (*The Messingkauf Dialogues* 48)

Imagination is an essential element in the process of creating such “poetic illusion” in the Brechtian theatre (and traditional *xiqu*). Brecht accuses “aids to naturalness” of sacrificing stimulation or provocation of any use of the imagination (BT 218). For him, the imagination encouraged amongst the audience serves the purpose of both aesthetic and artistic appreciation and social criticism.

“Emotional Criticism”

The effect of empathy among the audience in the Brechtian theatre is controversial. Brecht already realized that his objections to empathy in art would misleadingly be taken as objections to feeling in art (*The Messingkauf Dialogues* 78). He wrote via the mouth of the Philosopher that this misunderstanding went deeper than a misreading of his aesthetic theory:

...the bourgeoisie was always claiming that the rebellious masses were too emotionally confused to see how reasonable the existing order of society was, and accusing the masses’ leaders of relying only on cold reason instead of on that emotional life which the people had developed over thousands of years: its religious, moral and family feelings. (*The Messingkauf Dialogues* 78-9)

For Brecht, empathy is not equal to emotional elements, rather, the empathy that Brecht clearly opposes is the one pointing to the identification with the hypnotic effect on the stage-audience axis. Specifically, the passive acceptance of emotions and a satisfaction resulting from the overwhelming feelings.

We shall cite two more quotations to show that the accusation—that Brecht discards the possibility of passionate moments since he rejects empathy in his theatre—is a misjudgment:

THE ACTOR: Does getting rid of empathy mean getting rid of every emotional element?

THE PHILOSOPHER: No, no. Neither the public nor the actor must be stopped from taking part emotionally; the representation of emotions must not be hampered, nor must the actor's use of emotions be frustrated. Only one out of many possible sources of emotions needs to be left unused, or at least treated as a subsidiary source—empathy. (*The Messingkauf Dialogues* 50).

Elsewhere we read,

We need a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself. (BT 190)

Brecht's empathy is not conceived to be a definite opposite concept of empathy. It is equally misleading to assume that Brecht's announcing of doing away the concept of empathy as a feature of epic theatre/non-aristotelian theatre simultaneously suggests that Brecht has cut his links with the part of theatrical tradition in which emotional element is stressed. Indeed, from the earliest Greek theatre there is a recognition that good acting depends on the management of a precise system of presentation ("Acting and Emotion") (of which Aristotle especially noted the management of voice) and the actual emotional process of the actor: in Aristotle's words, "we mould ourselves with facility to the imitation of every form; by the other, transported out of ourselves, we become what we imagine" (II: 17). The emotional and the rational are always two important halves in acting. Elimination of each one is virtually impossible.

However, while the purpose is not in contradiction with emotional elements,

this does not suggest that reason and feelings occupy equal positions in Brecht's theatre. Consider Brecht's remarks,

The essential point of the epic theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason. Instead of sharing an experience the spectator must come to grips with things. At the same time it would be quite wrong to try and deny emotion to this kind of theatre. It would be much the same thing as trying to deny emotion to modern science. (BT 23)

Reason is given priority, since a thinking spectator is supposed to use his critical faculties to reveal the social and economic relations that generate the characters' worldview and motivate their actions. Brecht's theatre aims to produce a new audience, who is not only content in adopting a cognitive and critical attitude towards the performance, but one that, upon understanding the material conditions that create and perpetuate the character, will be challenged "to imagine a solution to the contradictions, usually the result of a capitalist society, that plague the characters" (Scheie 46).

Such a suggestion of a cool presentation of acting is not unique for Brechtian or Asiatic acting. Diderot has argued for the actor's controlling power in reproduction of emotions. Interestingly, Brecht once proposed to form a small "Diderot Society," which would act as an international pressure group and exchange theoretical ideas. But unfortunately it was never virtually formed (Willett *Brecht in Context* 25). In his essay, "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein", Barthes shows us that although Brecht hardly knew anything about Diderot, his idea for founding such a society was partly due to the fact that he saw in Diderot an overt investment in reason and rationality, and a commitment to dispensing pleasure and instruction in theatre (33-41). Whereas Diderot's argument for the control of emotion in acting is directed towards the

effective and positive reproduction of feelings, Brecht, with his belief that all cultural production is embedded in the material relations of a specific historical moment, claims that spectators should hold up their own involvement for critical assessment.

Furthermore, Diderot argues (from his observation of his contemporary great actors) that an absence of feeling is the prerequisite for an actor to imitate the role successfully and to effectively communicate the role's inner world to the audience (47-49). Brecht does not hold the same view as Diderot does, as in his journals, Brecht specifically corrected a possible error of equating the V-effect with performance without feeling:

On the one hand the *act of empathy* occurs in conjunction with rational elements, on the other hand the a-effect can be used in a purely emotional way. Stanislavsky uses long analyses to achieve empathy, and in the panorama pictures in fairgrounds ...the a-effect is pure feeling. In the Aristotelian theatre the empathy is also intellectual, and the non-aristotelian theatre employs emotional criticism. (110)

By contrast to Diderot's extreme exclusion of emotional experience in the actor, Brecht here sounds more like Lao Zi talking about the interplay of emotion and reason in acting. Viewed from such a perspective, both Brecht and Mei share a very similar (but not identical) concern with the combination of emotional involvement and rational element in acting. Whereas in Brecht, a social perspective guides an actor's performance, in Mei, it is an observation of the actor's external techniques that prevents the actor from losing his thinking ability in performance.

But then, how is the element of reason implemented and how does emotional criticism become effective in Brecht's theatre? There seems to be a paradoxical combination of experiencing the emotional moment in theatre (which requires an evocative power of the acting) with awareness of social criticism (engendered through

the distancing of the V-effect). To explain Brecht's dual view of emotion, I suggest that we look for links between Brecht's theatre and Mei's acting. In fact, Brecht himself refers to Chinese acting as his model in approaching emotion and reason as two halves of the dialectic:

The Chinese artist's performance often strikes the Western actor as cold. That does not mean that the Chinese theatre rejects all representation of feelings. The performer portrays incidents of utmost passion, but without his delivery becoming heated. (BT 93)

The "coldness" in presentation of emotion does not, however, as Hayot suggests, "negate emotion" (79). Brecht provides an example:

At those points where the character portrayed is deeply excited the performer takes a lock of hair between his lips and chews it. But this is like a ritual, there is nothing eruptive about it. It is quite clearly somebody else's repetition of the incident: a representation, even though an artistic one. (BT 93)

Moreover, the representation of a "ritual" sign—in this case, "taking a lock of hair between lips and chewing it"—highlights the fact that there is a correspondence between such signs of emotion and a prior understanding of these signs. In other words, this sign is already accepted and unanimously recognized among Chinese audiences as a representation of extreme negative feelings such as, grief, indignation or rage. Observing this "ritualistic representation of emotion," Hayot comes to the conclusion that "while it (the symbol or sign) represents genuine emotion it does not reproduce it" (79). Indeed, producing these signs of emotions requires first of all a conscious and cool brain for the exact and effective displaying of external skills. Brecht, though he could not understand the meaning of the signs as a Chinese would, surprisingly shows an awareness of how the actor's rational capacity occupies his

performance of the psychological truth of the characters in his consideration of which sign to use: “among all the possible signs certain particular ones are picked out, with careful and visible consideration” (BT 93). The spectator is little concerned with a “realistic” representation; the intensity of an emotion via signs appeals more to the spectator’s emotion and also his critical faculties (in his judging whether these signs are effectively demonstrated).

Especially notable to this discussion is how Mei’s analysis of how to represent facial expressions on the part of the actor justifies Brecht’s statement:

There are various ways to represent facial expressions. One is to demonstrate the four basic emotions of a character: happiness, anger, sorrow and joy. When you are in a cheerful situation, you are treading on air. If something sorrowful happens, you belabor in dismay. All these parts of performance are easily achieved. It is more difficult and complicated to demonstrate the struggling, complex and ineffable in the innermost heart of the character. I can only insinuate these kinds of moments in my performance. How to display this secret of sorrow in the facial expression depends on the performer’s own consideration.
(Vol 1 168)

Mei’s recognition of the difficulty of projecting himself into the inner psychology of the character is an indication of how the observation of acting techniques (in Mei’s case, a concern with appropriate facial expressions an actor chooses) prevents the actor from complete identification with the character. But this does not suggest that Chinese audiences are not emotionally agitated. They are emotionally involved in the performance by, as Mei said, an insinuation of feelings. As with Brecht’s epic theatre, such practice presumes an active participatory role for audiences.

In the Chinese theatre the emotion engendered is not one directed towards the

character, but one in the aesthetic (rather than social) dimension. Mei mentions often in his memoirs how his audiences evaluated his performance, pointed out his awkward gestures and actively discussed with him the issues concerning his performance. Mei's son gives one specific example,

while he [Mei] was performing a female general for the first time, they noticed his habit of lowering the head which diminished the attitude that a general should have. In order to help Mei to correct this limitation, they proposed to Mei that they would signal to him by slightly clapping their hands next time when the same mistake repeated. When Mei made the same mistake in the next performance, he heard the slight claps and immediately adjusted his head. After several performances he finally overcame this problem. (Vol 1 153)

Apparently the Chinese spectators actively supplement or modify the action onstage with their critical apparatus. Audiences are empowered, firstly, to do their own meaning-making with the aid of imagination; and secondly, to undertake their artistic evaluation of the performance. Su describes the relationship between the performer and spectator in the Chinese theatre: "during the process of the performance, the actors and audience not only have spiritual rapport but also direct exchange, which enable them to create a stage experience together" (36). In the tradition of *xiqu*, as recorded by Mei, audiences can, should, and are expected to punctuate the acting by expressing their commentaries or feelings with public shouting "*Hao*"! (bravo) to exceptionally good performance and "*Hao*"? (is it good?) to disappointing one in the midst of the performance (Vol 1 153). It is evident that a critical attitude is achieved at the moment of the heightening of emotions.

Tatlow suggests that Brecht was seeking, on the contrary, for "a method that heightened their [emotions'] importance, raising them to another dimension, allowing

them greater scope, and increasing their force as they are both distanced and strengthened, not weakened, by a reflective aesthetic” (*The Intercultural Sign* 54). Indeed, Brecht believes that the dialectical relation between empathy and reason could be achieved in his theatre via the V-effect.

The alienation effect intervenes, not in the form of absence of emotion, but in the form of emotion which need not correspond to those of the character portrayed. On seeing worry the spectator may feel a sensation of joy; on seeing anger, one of disgust. (BT 94)

Empathy does not suggest a loss of one’s judgment. However, in contrast to the Chinese audience’s theatrical experience of artistic appreciation and evaluation, the Brechtian theatre is intended to engender and practice the audience’s sobriety to reflect upon the social conditions of characters, accompanied by feelings for them. In the dialectical theatre, emotion contains a critical quality and a dialectical nature:

As for the effect: emotions will be contradictory, will merge into one another etc. In every respect the viewer becomes a dialectician. The jump is constantly being made from the particular to the general, from the individual to the typical, from not to yesterday and tomorrow, the unity of the incongruous, the discontinuity of the ongoing process. Here a-effect prove effective. (*Journals* 120-21)

In “Conversation about Empathy” (1953), Brecht tells a colleague an example of how to reconcile the tension between the two extremes—thinking and feeling:

A sister lamenting that her brother is off to the war; and it is the peasant war: he is a peasant, off to join the peasants. Are we to lose ourselves in her agony? Or not at all? We must be able to lose ourselves in her agony and at the same time not to. Our actual emotion will come from recognizing and feeling the double process. (BT 271)

By double processes, Brecht suggests that his audience must be able to emotionally share the sister's agonizing experience of separation from her and at the same time, when realizing the social condition (that he is going to fight for his own class, the peasant), be able to recognize the social causes of this specific condition of and have his sorrow displaced.

To sum up: we can reconfigure Brecht's *Verfremdung* in terms of the dialectical relation between empathy and reason. Brecht's theatre and traditional *xiqu* presume constitutively an active participatory role for audiences. While the link between intellectual engagement and emotional involvement in the performance does exist in both theatres, Chinese audiences are not trained, as Brecht hoped in his theatre, in the experience of dissecting representation and viewing the characters as alterable.

AFTERWORD

In this study, I have explored the influence of Chinese philosophy and traditional Chinese theatre on the work of Bertolt Brecht. More specifically, I have attempted to sort out the relationship between the Chinese dimensions of his work and his European influences with a focus on the significant position of Chinese theatre and Chinese systems of knowledge in Brecht's critical thinking about theatre and his conception of

“a new type of Man.” In Chapter One I situate Brecht’s engagement with China within a larger tradition of intercultural encounters between “East” and “West” (especially in Brecht’s time). This contextualization provides us with multiple perspectives (aesthetic as well as cultural-social-political) to think about what China means to Brecht. Chapter Two clarifies Brecht’s ideas about language and consciousness with reference to his understandings of Confucius’ teaching of “Rectification of Names” and to his commitment to Marxist ideas concerning ideology and consciousness. In Chapter Three I evaluate the impact of Daoism and Mao Zedong’s perception on contradiction on Brecht’s concept of dialectics, and demonstrate that other than differences, it is commonalities between Chinese system of knowledge and Western cultures concerning the notion of dialectics that provides the premise from which Brecht develops his concept of “dialectic theatre.” Chapter Four and Five discuss Brecht’s plays more directly—outlining the way in which Brecht’s understanding of human subjectivity developed over the course of his career. His earlier and middle-period plays demonstrate his concerns with the suspension of conventional causality and humanistic values, the tension between the self and the collective and, also, between individuality and class consciousness, while his later plays deal with a clear development in his configuration of subjectivity, individuality, and ethics. As we have seen, a number of elements within Brecht’s reflections on the very nature of ethical issues (such as “goodness”) and their constitutional function in one’s subjectivity bear a close parallel to humanistic ideas from Chinese philosophy (chiefly Confucianism and Taoism). Finally, in Chapter Six, I examine Brecht’s references to Chinese theatre, acting and philosophy in his theoretical writings focusing on the notion of *Verfremdungseffekt*, along with a number of key dichotomies in the Brechtian theatre (emotion and reason, reality and illusion, identification and alienation, performer and spectator).

The conclusion of this dissertation does not end the discussion of the subject of Brecht and China. In *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht* (1959), Willett made the claim that “There is a great deal still to be got from him [Brecht]. In this country at least he is not a monument yet” (225), with the belief that Brecht’s work could “act as a fertile source of new discoveries” (225). Willett’s prediction turned out to be true. Half a century has passed and we are still learning from his work. While some Brecht scholars (such as Elizabeth Wright, Astrid Oesmann, and Rainer Friedrich) have attempted to reassess Brecht’s theatre and his theatrical practice within the context of the post-modern age. Feminist critics have proposed an application of Brechtian techniques into the sources of feminist theatre,⁵¹ and have reread Brecht from a feminist point of view (in particular, the *Good Person* has been employed to question the accepted ideology’s social roles.) Since these efforts are made solely within the Western intellectual tradition, highlighting the affinities between Chinese thought and theatre (as this study has attempted) would not only bring more dimensions and perspectives for understanding contemporary cultural issues, but also provide possible multiple means for theatrical expression.

On the other hand, adaptations of Brecht’s plays and techniques are widespread in the Asian theatre. Tatlow has called this process “the dialectics of acculturation,” which “implies a longer lasting reciprocal process of discovery and adjustment between cultures. The second culture absorbs, transforms, and then retransmits. The first culture then encounters its own transformed transmissions, and...absorbs and retransforms them” (*The Intercultural Sign* 47-8). Indeed, the Asian theatre “profits” from Brecht’s aesthetics of theatre. Gao Xingjian, the first Nobel Prize-winning playwright (2000) to work primarily in Chinese, for example, stresses that reading Brecht make him realize that “theatrical rules could be re-established” and provides him a renewed perspective of traditional Chinese *xiqu* acting (53). His

rereading of the *xiqu* actor's acting with reference to Brecht's critical reflection of Mei's acting style helped him to rethink the relationship between an actor and his scripted role and to formulate a conception of "the third medium" to describe "the passage between the actor as a social being who is to act and the scripted role that she is to act" (qtd in Yan 82). Apparently reading Brecht's understanding of the Chinese theatre turns out to be not only beneficial for theatrical experiments outside China, but also for theatre practitioners with Chinese background who are either experimenting with traditional *xiqu* or are seeking for theatrical innovations in modern theatre.

NOTES

¹ The *zaju* form flourished in Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). Wenwei Du defines it as follows:

A *zaju* play usually consists of four acts with a *xiezi* (wedge)—something like a prologue when placed at the beginning of transitional scene when placed between two acts. The text is composed of sung lyrics interspersed with dramatic dialogue. Characters are cast into stylized role types; not only one leading role sings in one act or throughout the play; characters of the same role can be played by one actor whenever they do not meet onstage. ("The Chalk Circle Comes Full

It should be noted that the two sources (*The Chalk Circle* and *Orphan of Zhao Family*) that Brecht respectively referred to in composing his *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *The Good Person of Szechwan* are Yuan *zaju*.

² Though Chinese *xiqu* has a long history, the term was coined early in the twentieth century to designate the canon of the traditional Chinese theatre, “including various genres which matured in the twelfth century and have been developing, multiplying, transforming, and revolutionizing ever since” (Yan 66). The *jingju* and the *zaju* are part of the Chinese tradition of *xiqu*.

³ Concepts like “Eastern traditions” and “Western traditions” are reductive, yet for the convenience of writing the term “Eastern” shall be used to denote Asian throughout this study, while the term “Western traditions” refer to the cultural and intellectual traditions of Europe and North America which are far from unified.

⁴ Becky B. Prophet listed Brecht’s thirteen plays (out of his thirty-five full length plays) and six short plays, which have connection with China or Chinese sources. See Prophet pp. 3-8.

⁵ It is a regret that due to my very limited German I won’t be able to fully trace the steps of the German critics who have studied Brecht’s connection with Chinese culture and intellectual traditions.

⁶ In a radio speech introducing a broadcast of *Man Equals Man*, Brecht stated that it is of high necessity that “a *new human type* should now be evolving”, for the world he lived in was fundamentally new. See Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 18

⁷ Dialogue as a concept has been variously defined by different scholars in their own theories. Here I align myself with Hans-Georg Gadmer’s notion of dialogue in its broad sense. Gadmer notes that “Knowledge always means, precisely, considering opposites” (354) which happens in dialogue with others. He further describes the characteristics of a dialogue:

To conduct a dialogue requires first of all that the partners do not talk at cross-purposes ... [It] means to allow oneself to be guided by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are also oriented. This demands [in turn] that one does not try to argue the other down but that one genuinely weighs the other’s perspective. (360)

Knowledge or truth is acquired through dialogue which has to involve openness to others: in other

words, a discovery of knowledge is accompanied with a simultaneous process of acknowledging of the other's perspective and self-reflection and transformation.

⁸ *The Messingkauf Dialogues* were written between 1939-1942, a theoretical discussion of theatre between Actor, Actress, Dramaturg and the Brechtian Philosopher.

⁹ Throughout his life, Brecht adapted his plays for each production. In his later years at the Berliner Ensemble, he constantly rewrote texts during rehearsal. Esslin has cited the accounts of Feuchtwanger and Bernhard Reich to demonstrate how Brecht, as a writer, in Feuchtwanger's words, "rewrites his work countless times", and as a producer, his similar attitude is confirmed by Bernhard Reich, who once worked with him at the Munich Kammerspiele, he rewrote and changed the text once he found that, as Bernhard Reich remarked, "the author's intention could not in practice be realized on the stage." (*Evils* 17)

¹⁰ Esslin argues that Brecht's plays show influences from two German dramatists, Georg Buechner and Frank Wedekind. Esslin also listed other Brecht's influences in German literature and theatrical tradition, such as "the use of the chorus in Greek tragedy, the techniques of clowns and fair-ground entertainers, the Austrian and Bavarian folk-play, and many others" (*Evils* 111).

¹¹ Clarke notes how Said's orientalism, as a single narrative of world history, is criticized by historians such as Lisa Lowe and Rosanne Rocher. See Clarke p. 9.

¹² The judgment was made by Rhoads Murphey in his analysis of the development of the civilizations at the western and eastern ends of the Eurasian landmass long before Marco Polo's time, see Murphey p. 9.

¹³ Rossabi emphasized another aspect of this economic impetus. Specifically, the trade profits and the potential market for European products in Asia. See Rossabi pp. 58-60.

¹⁴ The text of *Orphan of China* is the first translated Chinese traditional drama. There have been five different versions adapted in France, Italy and England. For a discussion on the different adaptations, see Du "The Chalk Circle Comes Full Circle" pp. 307-25.

¹⁵ For a comparison of *Roar China* and *The Measures Taken*, and Brecht's response to the production of *Roar China*, see Tatlow *Mask* pp. 262-264.

¹⁶ In his effort to assess and explain the phenomenon of cultural identity in late-modernity, Stuart Hall has proposed a sort of historical progression by providing three conceptions of the

subject: the Enlightenment subject, the sociological subject and the postmodern subject, although he also adds that the three conceptions of the subject are, to some extent, simplifications.

¹⁷ Brecht's favorite possessions he carried around the world with him are: "his manuscripts, his smoking things, and the scroll with the painting of a Chinese philosopher, probably Confucius" (*Evils* 57). Tatlow and Willett, in their books, identifies this philosopher as Confucius with certainty.

¹⁸ Hayot explains that "vorstädte" is translated into "slums" to avoid ambiguity for American readers, for that "vorstädte" means suburbs, which, in European context, refers to the outlying areas where the poor live.

¹⁹ Hayot admits, at the same time, that Brecht does not simply "reproduce the relatively banal mystical East/scientific West divide that one saw in Pound". (66)

²⁰ For its relation to *gestisch*, refer to Brecht's essay "On Unrhymed Verse with Irregular Rhythms".

²¹ Tatlow thinks that the *Tao De Ching* is an expression of "a peasant dialectic." To explain his ideas, he makes a comparison between Marx's and Mao's assessment of the potential role of the peasantry in any revolutionary process:

Marx saw the peasants as a conservative if not reactionary force, considering them little more than 'rural idiots.' Mao, on the other hand, would seem to have placed greater trust in their native intelligence and capabilities and consequently to have expected a certain spontaneity of response to the opportunities presented by the process of replaying rural feudalism with rural democracy. ("Peasant Dialectics" 278)

²² This passage is taken from an interview by Bernard Guillemin. The interview is not in Brecht's own words, but Guillemin, the interviewer prefaced it with a note saying that he had "deliberately translated into normal language all that Brecht told me in his own manner, in Brecht-style slang" (BT 35).

²³ For a full discussion of the origin and evolution of the term dialectic, see Carney p. 6.

²⁴ With no access to the English translation of most of these essays, I refer to Brooker's summary of them in his book *Bertolt Brecht: Dialectics, Poetry, Politics*. See Brooker 17-33.

²⁵ Willett identifies the three elements of Brecht's theatre: the highly flavoured, half-nostalgic artificial world of the early plays; the very clear didacticism of his thirties; and, arising out of this, the more complicated, less schematized moral-social arguments of the plays from about 1938 on. See Willett p. 86.

²⁶ During this period, he had already begun to practice the "estrangement" which would be developed into the cornerstone of his dramatic theory. According to Ewen, "The stage settings of the Munich production [of *Drums*] provided for screens that merely suggested rooms, behind which loomed, 'childish-like,' a sketched Berlin, with an illuminated moon that glowed now and then. In the auditorium, placards proclaimed to the public: 'Every Man Is Best in His Own Skin,' and 'Don't Stare So Romantically'" (108).

²⁷ When Wekwerth wrote that "the world gets changed by today's capitalism too, in some places more than socialism, though of course at a cost to humanity" (22), he was not specifically talking about Brecht's early plays. He thought that this was a basic understanding behind Brecht's words "changing the world."

²⁸ *The Lehrstücke*, as described by Brecht, serve as the Major Pedagogy, which represent "a new form of theatre, not intended for performance to non-participatory spectators, but as a means of learning for the actors" (qtd in Sacks and Thompson 284).

²⁹ According to Clifford, Said accused Marx's participation in Orientalism by subsuming "individual" and "existential human identities" under "artificial entities" such as "Oriental," "Asiatic," "Semitic," or within collectives such as "race," "mentality" and "nation."

³⁰ For a fuller discussion of the psychoanalytical theory of the subject, see Dawes pp.150-87.

³¹ For an elaboration of how Brecht works with this Noh play and Japanese theatrical practices, see Andrew T. Tsubaki pp. 161-179.

³² In their debate on the criteria for the choice of representation, the Philosopher suggests the Marxist doctrine, but he states his reservations concerning the issue of the incongruity between the behavior of individuals and individuals' social existence.

³³ According to Berg-Pan's prediction, Brecht must have watched the 1925 production of Klabund's adaptation; however, he read the original Chinese play in an English translation while in exile in Scandinavia ("Mixing Old and New Wisdom" 219).

³⁴ The play is about the political awakening of Tai Yang, a young factory worker, in the revolution in China.

³⁵ See Elizabeth Wright, *Postmodern Brecht: A Re-Presentation* (London: Routledge, 1989), Astrid Oesmann, "The Theatrical Destruction of Subjectivity and History," *The German Quarterly* 10.2 (1997), pp. 136-50, and Rainer Friedrich, "The Deconstructed Self in Artaud and Brecht," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* Xxvi 3 (1990), pp. 282-97.

³⁶ For a detailed discussion on Brecht's rejection of the traditional concept of the individual in his early plays, see Speidel, pp. 45-63.

³⁷ For example, Grossvogel wrote in his introductory chapter on Brecht, "*The Expedient* conveyed a political message that was easy to read—the need for self-effacement and commitment to an ideological discipline" (9).

³⁸ According to Berg-Pan, Brecht owned a copy of Mencius's work translated by Wilhelm, but the book contained no markings. Nevertheless, Berg-Pan suggests that Brecht most probably has read his works since he was somewhat familiar with Mencius' view of human nature.

³⁹ According to Hayot, "Brecht first referred to this anecdote in a newspaper title, 'The Polite Chinese' ('Die Höflichen Chinesen'), published in the 1920s" (71).

⁴⁰ For a full discussion of this claim concerning Marxism and ethics, see Kamenka p. 11.

⁴¹ While Freeman shares a similar observation with me, his argument is that this new relationship is directed towards the relationship between law and morality.

⁴² Nelson interprets the essential feature of the spirit of the *Tao* manifest in human society as ethical responsiveness.

⁴³ I am aware that using terms such as the Chinese theatre and Chinese acting (as Brecht did in his essays) is problematic. Mei's performance is exemplary but still cannot represent the tradition of *xiqu*, for *xiqu* comprises more than 360 types in contemporary China which differ from each other in dialect, music and repertoire. What Mei practiced in Moscow was the Peking theatre. Hence it would be reductive to speak of the aesthetic principles and "the aim" of Chinese performance while simply focusing on Brecht's reaction to the staging of Mei's performance (that Brecht saw in Moscow). However, for the convenience of writing, these terms will be used throughout this chapter.

⁴⁴ Willett writes in his editorial note of *Brecht on Theatre*:

This essay was published in Brecht's lifetime, and its exact date and purpose are unknown. Dr Unseld, editing it for *Schriften zum Theatre*, suggested that it was written "about 1936". Brecht's bibliographer Mr. Walter Nubel thinks that notes or drafts may have existed earlier. Unlike the items that follow, it bears no evidence of Brecht's visits to Moscow and New York during 1935, and it is tempting to think of it as having been prepared for one of these, for instance as a possible contribution to that conference of producers to which Piscator invited Brecht in Moscow: what he called (in a letter of 27 January 1935, in the Brecht-Archive) "collecting a few good people for a constructive discussion".

(76)

⁴⁵ According to Ding Yangzhong's, the Mei Lanfang drama Group staged six 'titles' in the Concert Hall of Moscow in March 1935: "*Jindian zhuangfeng*" (Feigning Madness at the Imperial Palace) which is scene from "*Yuzhou feng*" (Blade of Heaven and Earth or Beauty Defies Tyranny), "*Fenhe wan*" (By the Fen River Bend), "*Cihu*" (Killing the Tiger), "*Dayu shajia*" (The Fisherman's Revenge), "*Hongyi guan*" (Rainbow Pass), and "*Guifei zuijiu*" (The Drunken Beauty). He also performed six dances from "*Xishi*" (Beauty Xishi), "*Mulan congjun*" (Mulan Joins the Army), "*Sifan*" (Thinking of the Moral World), "*Maku xianshou*" (Ma Ku Wishing Wang Mu a Long wife), "*Bawang bieji*" (The king's Parting with His Favorite), and "*Hongxian daohe*" (Hongxian Stealing the Box).

⁴⁶ Willett also pointed out that the concept of making the familiar unfamiliar could be traced back to Shelley, Wordsworth, and Schopenhauer, at least a hundred years before the Russian Formalists (*Brecht in Context* 237-38)

⁴⁷ Hayot, however, argues for the inevitable failure of Brecht's effort at imagining the experience of the Chinese audience and thus dissociating the V-effect from the feeling of strangeness resulting from social or cultural difference (80-88).

⁴⁸ All quotations from Mei have been taken from the Chinese edition of his memoir. Having no English translations at hand, I translated them all anew.

⁴⁹ Huang Zuolin defines the essence of traditional Chinese art as *xieyi*. While resorting to

examples from painting, he explains that “the Chinese painter is preoccupied ‘with the essence rather than the appearance of things’.” For a detailed discussion of *xieyi* and *xieshi*, see Huang pp. 154-58.

⁵⁰ Ben-Shaul, while raising a similar question as I did, realized that the paradoxical implications contained in Brecht’s ideas: “Brecht indicates an alternative effect to the polar one, an effect that is still described as illusion but is formulated in dual terms, by which aesthetic-theatrical illusion includes a constant element of awareness of the theatrical frame” (89). However, his conclusion that “this oscillation between polarity and duality might be seen as inconsistency” (89-90) shares no commonalities with mine.

⁵¹ For a detailed discussion on how Brechtian theory is applied in feminist revision of theatrical realism, see Karen Laughlin’s “Brechtian Theory and the American feminist Theatre.”

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