

Ruling the Stage

China Studies

PUBLISHED FOR THE INSTITUTE FOR CHINESE
STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Series Editor

Rana Mitter, *University of Oxford*

VOLUME 49

The titles published in this series are listed at *brill.com/chs*

Ruling the Stage

*Social and Cultural History of Opera in Sichuan from
the Qing to the People's Republic of China*

By

Igor Iwo Chabrowski



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Cover illustration: "An opera stage of the Longcanggong 龍藏宮 (Hidden Dragon Palace) in the Longxing 龍興 Town." Photo courtesy of the author.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Chabrowski, Igor Iwo, author.

Title: Ruling the stage : social and cultural history of opera in Sichuan from the Qing to the People's Republic of China / by Igor Iwo Chabrowski.

Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2022. | Series: China studies, 1570-1344 ; volume 49 | Includes bibliographical references and index. |

Identifiers: LCCN 2022018195 (print) | LCCN 2022018196 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004519381 (hardback) | ISBN 9789004519398 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Operas, Chinese--China--Sichuan Sheng--History and criticism. | Operas, Chinese--Social aspects--China--Sichuan Sheng--History. | China--Civilization--1644-1912. | China--Civilization--1912-1949.

Classification: LCC ML1751.C5 S534 2022 (print) | LCC ML1751.C5 (ebook) | DDC 782.10951/38--dc23/eng/20220415

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022018195>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022018196>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 1570-1344

ISBN 978-90-04-51938-1 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-51939-8 (e-book)

Copyright 2022 by Igor Iwo Chabrowski. Published by Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Nijhoff, Brill Hotei, Brill Schöningh, Brill Fink, Brill mentis, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Böhlau and V&R unipress.

Koninklijke Brill NV reserves the right to protect this publication against unauthorized use. Requests for re-use and/or translations must be addressed to Koninklijke Brill NV via brill.com or copyright.com.

This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

In loving memory of my father, Krzysztof Chabrowski (1939–2017)



Contents

Acknowledgments XI
List of Plates, Table and Maps XII

Introduction 1

PART 1

Opera in Qing-Era Sichuan

1 Development of Opera in Qing-Era Sichuan 13

- 1 The Role of Opera in Qing Society 13
- 2 Opera and Construction of the Community 18
- 3 The Nineteenth-Century Flourishing: The Role of Opera in Shaping Local Religious Practice 28
- 4 Opera and Shaping of the Material and Social Landscape 39
- 5 A Market Town: A Temple-centered Society, an Opera-centered Society 39
- 6 The Big City Perspective 45
- 7 Opera between the Elites and the Commoners 50
- 8 Opera, Officials, and the Social (Dis)Order 56
- 9 Concluding Remarks 65

PART 2

The New Institutionalization: Law, Market, Politics, and Culture of Commercialized Art, 1902–1937

2 A Transformed Relationship: Theater and Power after the Qing New Policies 69

- 1 The Three Forces of Change: Destruction of Temples, Commercialization, and the New Legal Order 69
- 2 New Policies and a Novel Way of Doing Business in Sichuan 72
- 3 The Protecting Power of Official Greed: Republican Commercial Theater 79
- 4 Taxing 81
- 5 Helping Hand 93
- 6 Women on the Show 98
- 7 Rectifying Opera 102

- 3 Commercial Opera: Shaping the City and Shaping the Actors 115**
- 1 Theaters and Urban Zoning: Researching the Social Background of the Audiences 115
 - 2 Early Transformation in the Social and Spatial Geography of Opera 116
 - 3 Republican Theaters and Urban Zoning: Crystallization of the Opera's Public 117
 - 4 Commercial Theater and Actors' Careers 127
 - 5 Concluding Remarks 144
- 4 The Culture of the Commercial Opera 147**
- 1 The Methods of Studying Opera: Troupes, Talent, and Repertoires 147
 - 2 Watching the Commercial Show: How Was It Served? 154
 - 3 Favorite Plays and the Cultural Universe of Sichuan Audiences 162
 - 4 Gods, Emperors, Heroes... 166
 - 5 Time and Place 176
 - 6 Lessons 181
 - 7 Concluding Remarks 183
- Illustration Quire 185**

PART 3

Creating the New World

- 5 The Divide: Local Intellectuals and the Cultural Conflict 197**
- 1 *Commercial Daily's* Explorations and Experimentations with New Drama 198
 - 2 Dissatisfaction, Estrangement, Elitism, and a Turn to the Left 202
 - 3 Radicalization and Rejection 213
 - 4 Concluding Remarks 224
- 6 The Times of the Nationalists (1937–1949) and the War 225**
- 1 Performing Arts Culture 225
 - 2 Military Emergency and China's Migration to the Southwest 226
 - 3 Inventing the Wartime Theater 229
 - 4 Putting Words into Action 240
 - 5 Living through Frustration: Playwrights and the War 249

6	An All too Visible Context: Sichuan Opera and the War	259
7	Concluding Remarks	268
7	Revolution: Communist “People’s Art”	271
1	Communist Conquest of Sichuan: A New Political Context	271
2	Political and Ideological Basis of the Opera Reform	274
3	Breaking the “Superstitious” Opera	277
4	Adjusting to the New Party-State Policies	281
5	Seizing Control over the Opera Companies	284
6	Opera Becomes Useful to the Communist State	293
7	Policy in Action: Chongqing, 1951–1952	299
8	Concluding Remarks	306
8	Conclusion	308
	Bibliography	315
	Index	334

Acknowledgments

A decade in making, this book has been a pleasure, an adventure and, at times a burden. I would like to thank my family, especially my wife, Laura. Not only did she bear with me while I was incessantly rumbling about opera, but also read and discussed various versions of this work. Her help as always has been priceless. The very idea for the book started in a conversation with my most cherished mentor and a great friend, prof. Steve A. Smith who, in his immense generosity also read and commented on the first full draft of the book's manuscript. Thank you!

Throughout years I received very generous financial and personal support for conducting this research. I would like to thank prof. David Faure and prof. Jan Kiely for selecting me for postdoctoral grant at the Centre for China Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, during which I could realize much of the research necessary for this study. I have also built a debt of gratitude for supporting this study to the Centre for China Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, to the members of David Faure's project *China in the Twentieth Century, An Additional Focus to "The Historical Anthropology of Chinese Society"*, to the University Library of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University Service Centre for China Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. I have also received generous support from the Research Committee of the Faculty of History, University of Oxford and the Faculty of History, University of Warsaw.

It is impossible to mention all the people who helped me and contributed to the accomplishment of this work. Nevertheless, I would like to thank Liu Shilong from Sichuan University for his boundless hospitality and willing support. I have built debts of gratitude to Wu Peilin from West China Normal University for guiding me through the Nanbu Archives and Hu Tiancheng for discussing with me his experience of studying Chongqing's nuo opera. At various stages, I received invaluable help and suggestions for Vincent Goossaert, Kristin Stapleton, Maura Dykstra, Elisabeth Kaske, Rana Mitter, Richard Gudne, Micah Muscolino, Joshua Howard, Thomas DuBois, and Aurore Dumont. My special thanks go to Yan Yiqiao for his important help in finding sources and correcting translations as well as for the time spent enjoying all things Sichuanese; to Sara Ann Knutson for helping me with the maps; and to Debra Soled for her beautiful work of copyediting of the manuscript. I also received a lot of support from helpful staff of libraries and archives visited over the years, especially the Chongqing Municipal Library, Sichuan University Library, Chengdu Municipal Archives, Chongqing Municipal Archives, the National Library of China in Beijing and the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Finally, I would like to thank my anonymous reviewers for all their suggestions as well as Qin Higley at Brill for guiding me through the publishing process.

Plates, Table and Maps

Plates

- 1 Performance of Sichuan Opera in Yuelai 悅來 theater-teahouse, Chengdu 185
- 2 Traditional (as developed in the 1910s and 1920s) spatial arrangement of the audience and the stage in the Yuelai theater-cum-teahouse 185
- 3 Fengcheng 豐盛 town in vicinity of Chongqing 186
- 4 Baixiang Street 白象街 in central Chongqing 186
- 5 The main opera stage of the Huguang huiguan 湖廣會館 in Chongqing 187
- 6 The second theater stage of the Palace of the King Yu 禹王宮 in the Chongqing's Huguang huiguan 187
- 7 Bas-reliefs on the second theater stage of the Palace of the King Yu 禹王宮 188
- 8 An opera stage of the Qi'an gongsuo 齊安公所, Huguang huiguan, Chongqing 188
- 9 City of Langzhong 閬中 (also called Baoning fu 保寧府) on the Jialing River 嘉陵江 189
- 10 An opera stage of the Longcanggong 龍藏宮 (Hidden Dragon Palace) in the Longxing 龍興 Town 189
- 11 Longcanggong (Longxing Town) 190
- 12 An opera stage in the Longxingsi 龍興寺 (Longxing temple) 190
- 13 Opera stage in Dafudi 大夫第 (Longxing Town) 191
- 14 Theater stage of the Bao lineage temple 包氏祠堂 in Longxing Town 191
- 15 Theater in Anren 安仁 town in Dayi 大邑 county 192
- 16 Sichuan Opera used for entertaining guests at the food court in central Chengdu 192

Table

- 1 A monthly report on Sichuan provincial capital public security bureau opera tax receipts 四川省會公安局劇捐月報表 88

Maps

- 1 Map of Sichuan 193
- 2 Map of Theaters in Chongqing 193