

FOUR

In Search of a Habitable Globe

The unruly urban festivity discussed in chapter 3 took on a global dimension with the end of Qing imperial authority. En route to Shanghai, this urban festivity developed its own traditions of justice and morality, traditions that signified the dissolution of the Qing imperial world. In Shanghai, it established connections with overseas revolutionary cultural trends to such an extent that those trends formed a revolutionary "cultural nexus" (to borrow Prasenjit Duara's concept [1988]) that contested the old nexus that had kept late-imperial society together. This new cultural nexus gave the urban society of Shanghai an alternative globality, represented by Chinese and Korean assassins, African Americans in the United States, the tragic fate of Poland, and the suffering of the Filipinos and overseas Chinese. This sense of globality was asserted in 1905 in the movement to boycott U.S. manufactured goods. Led by members of the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce, the boycott was mobilized through newspapers, literature, public gatherings, organization and association announcements, public speeches, posters, and the efforts of student activists, who went shop by shop and street by street to persuade the urban masses. Here, the urban festivity that the Qing imperial order had tried so hard to control had grown into a political ideal of a festive world community characterized by an air of "everybody-ness," by the feeling that all were included, regardless of color, race, class, or nationality.

To elaborate on Duara's definition: The interactions between state and society in late-imperial China generated not a class culture or a

public sphere in fixed terms but a cultural nexus connecting cultural practices that on the surface seemed far apart (Duara 1988, 21). All cultural practices—elite and popular, national and local—were shifting within the same web of cultures that was the foundation of the stability of the Qing state and of its elite group. The urban festivity presented here was a similar nexus that knitted together different positions and different versions of festive culture. But that festivity was generated from fragile interconnections between the state and the literati, connections that were already fragmented at this point, when the imperialist world was imminent. Instead of working to establish a stable or closed system that reconciled differences, this urban festivity nexus was in constant transformation and expansion. Because of the concentration both of artists and writers and of audiences and readers, a piece of work would quickly take other forms in other fields. As elements of festive culture, such works were transformable to other genres and spaces, highly self-regenerating, fast-spreading, and free-associative in their meanings and contexts. In short, they were more free-floating and random than they could be in the cultural nexus that had maintained the imperial system. Thus, they gave rise to something that can be called "radical festivity."

Postimperial Heroes: From Assassins to Anarchists

The earliest "operas of the time," *Zhang Wenxiang Ci Ma* (Zhang Wenxiang's Assassination of Ma Xinyi; 1870, revised 1893) and *Tie gongji* (Iron Rooster; 1870s), which were based upon contemporary incidents, won the hearts of the Shanghai public in the 1870s. Even at that early moment, the chaotic era that Gong Zizhen had foreseen was already beginning to give way to a political and moral alternative. It was evident that the semi-illicit actors not only provided the external base for the urban milieu of Fourth Avenue but also gave rise to something best described as the spirit of an urban subculture that undercut the legitimacy of the imperial order of the Qing state. For the purposes of this book, I am talking about the plays not as individual literary works or art forms but as elements or motifs of a festive culture. They were organs of urbanism that were free-associative and were constantly transforming. As such, these plays brought to the surface of urban festivity the fear, anger, and trauma experienced by those who had lived through the Taiping Rebellion and the Opium War. They also gave voice to those principles of morality and justice that had been deeply violated by officialdom during this

time, thus contesting political authority's intrinsic forms of urban festivity. Long prior to the 1911 Revolution, the urban public of Shanghai had already been prepared for the radical challenge to Qing authority and the collapse of the Qing world.

Assassination of Ma Xinyi reflected popular reaction to a well-known lawsuit of 1870. Ma Xinyi, newly appointed governor of Jiangsu and Zhejiang as well as a state official honored for his achievements fighting the Nian rebels, was publicly assassinated in Nanjing. The assassin, Zhang Wenxiang, surrendered peacefully to the authorities, leaving both the court and high officials in shock. After interrogating him, Qing officials executed Zhang publicly as an ex-"Taiping rebel" and a "sea rover" who had taken revenge on the Qing governor for the treatment of his fellow bandits.¹ This assessment conflicted with stories leaked to the public during the interrogation, but it embodied the political rationale of the Qing state that the assassin was a "rebel" against the state.

The true reasons for Ma's assassination are still debated today. Although both his connection with Muslims and the envy of powerful members of the Xiang army have been suggested as possible reasons,² the most widely believed conclusion at the time focused on Ma's personal morality. Before he became governor, Ma had been a "buddy" of Zhang Wenxiang and Cao Erhu during the Nian fight, where they vowed to help each other as "brothers."³ After becoming a high-ranking official, Ma did not keep his vow. As the story has it, he instead seized Cao's wife, making her his courtesan, and coldheartedly had Cao arrested and killed for a crime he did not commit.⁴

Zhang, in this version of the story, had sought revenge for his friend and himself. Sentencing Zhang as a "rebel" concealed the governor's abuse of power and personal greed. Whether the story was true or not, Zhang's sentence resulted in a torrent of public criticism, and popular opera took the lead in expressing disapproval of the state's verdict. In 1871, even before the case was completely settled, the popular opera actors Meng Qi and Wang Hongshou had created a play that was, at least in Zeng Guofan's conception, "satirical toward governor Ma" (Zeng Guofan 1936).⁵ While the original script is no longer available, it was famous at the time for ostensibly providing the only unofficial version of the story (Zhang Xiangwen [1929] 1968, 7:43a-45a).⁶ Performance of the play was quickly forbidden, but it effectively turned the tone of public opinion toward sympathy for Zhang.⁷ Partially because of the opera, the public

tended to see and remember Zhang not as a "zei" (rebel), as he was called in the official sentence, but as a *xia* (hero), and he was lionized in popular culture for dying in order to achieve justice for his victimized friend (Zheng Zhicheng 1996, 454-66).⁸ Zhang defended those basic human principles that Ma had violated: loyalty, friendship, consistency, brotherhood, and affection. His brave action showed a readiness to make sure justice was served without considering his own loss. Here, the morality and justice of the human heart were separated from the state order and aligned with the rebellious and the weak instead of with the powerful interests of those associated with the state.

Iron Rooster also illustrated the irreconcilability of this split between a popular sense of justice and morality on the one hand and state politics on the other. *Iron Rooster* was a crude remake of *Hong Yang zhuan* (Legend of Hong Xiuquan and Yang Xiuqing), a forty-six-episode opera series performed for the Taiping rebel army celebrating their victories over the Qing state (Li Hongchun 1982, 44-46). The play was revised dramatically to fit the tastes of the Empress Dowager by changing key Taiping figures from heroic protagonists into villains.⁹ Yet personal morality remained one of the basic themes of the play. The revised play borrowed from the record of an actual historical figure, Zhang Jiaxiang, a minor rebel leader who surrendered to a Qing general in exchange for official recognition at the outbreak of the Taiping Rebellion.¹⁰ He was then sent to fight the Nien rebels to demonstrate his loyalty to the emperor. His bravery impressed the general so much that he accepted Zhang as his stepson. The version of the opera available today plays with the meaning of "betrayal" and "loyalty," a binary opposition central to both the theatrical tradition and nineteenth-century political ideology.¹¹

The opera's plot is quite complicated but can be summarized as follows: The rebel Zhang was a spy sent by the Taiping leader to the camp of Governor Xiang Rong. Knowing that Zhang was an excellent fighter, Governor Xiang sent out his own soldiers, with one of them disguised as Zhang, to attack the Taipings in order to make the Taiping leader distrust Zhang. As expected, the Taiping leader was fooled and killed Zhang's wife and son in anger. Having no knowledge of Governor Xiang's trick, Zhang was deeply hurt and took revenge by killing a fellow spy who had been assigned to assassinate Governor Xiang. To express his gratitude, the governor offered his first daughter to Zhang to replace the wife he

had lost. The daughter, however, did not want to marry a former rebel and committed suicide on the night of the wedding. Though sad, the governor nevertheless married his second daughter to Zhang. This won Zhang's heart. From then on, Zhang became not only Xiang's son-in-law but also his bodyguard, even risking his own life to protect Xiang from his political enemies.

The story operates on two levels, with an implicit disparity between them. On the surface level of the political order, Zhang found his way to becoming a "loyal" subject of the Qing state by changing his allegiance from the Taipings to the emperor. The initial impetus for this change was the governor's trickery and Zhang's misunderstanding of the Taiping leader's actions. Although this was enough to turn Zhang into an enemy of the rebels, it does not fully explain his support of the governor or why he became his son-in-law. The father-son bond between the former rebel and the Qing governor requires a special reciprocity. This leads us to the second level of the story: The changing relationship between Xiang and Zhang from enemies to relatives was the result of personal, rather than political, reciprocity—an exchange of faith, gratitude, and recognition. Xiang showed his faith in Zhang by offering his own daughters and putting his prestige on the line. Zhang accepted the recognition Xiang offered and, in return, was willing to give Xiang all his loyalty, even his life.

This second level of the story can be traced to the conventions of an ancient, if minor, tradition in the martial arts focusing on *en* and *yi* as ideal human bonds.¹² As one often sees in *yin* martial-arts writings, such as *Outlaws of the Marsh* and *Three Kingdoms* and their subsequent theatrical and storytelling versions, to receive such faith from another man was centrally important. An expression of faith of this kind demanded a return of devotion. The exchange of faith and mutual recognition embodied in the father-son relationship between Zhang and Xiang went beyond family ties to a higher level of moral reciprocity, becoming a form of *yi* (absolute mutual devotion).

At this second level of the story, the personal reciprocity that characterized the martial-arts intersubject relationship transformed the definition of what it meant to be a loyal subject of the Qing Empire: Xiang and Zhang built their intersubjective bond on personal moral reciprocity, and their loyalty to the empire was only an extension of this personal bond. This subaltern form of community is especially evident in

martial-arts works such as *Three Kingdoms*, *Outlaws of the Marsh*, and, more recently, *Lu mudan* (Green Peony), a martial-arts novel situated in Yangzhou in the eighteenth century. The decadent, rebellious *yin* elements in the latter two books are especially obvious, since both novels pit the principle of personal reciprocity against that of political reciprocity. Personal morality is central in these books, functioning as the glue that holds together politically powerless rebel groups and semi-illicit martial-arts communities. Personal reciprocity is represented in martial-arts literature and theaters as a principle of community action and cohesion existing outside state authority, thus mapping out an alternative to being a political subject of the empire.

It may be worth mentioning here that the lives of the operatic artists (that is, the semi-illicit actors) who brought these tales of personal loyalty to life were endowed with a rich source of festive culture that did not look to the Qing state as its immediate central authority. Wang Hongshou, one of the writers of and main actors in *Assassination of Ma Xinyi* and *Iron Rooster*, can be taken as an example of those traveling actors whose performances were banned by officials. The son of a navigation official in Nantong County in Jiangsu, he was the only survivor when his family was executed after his father offended an official of higher rank. Wang escaped by hiding in a big suitcase; then, concealing his true identity, he joined a traveling opera troupe. Already familiar with both the Kunqu and Hui opera arts practiced by the private troupes his father had patronized, he added to his skills as he learned from the different teachers he met on his travels. He joined the Tongchun troupe as a teenager. There he met Meng Qi, his coactor in the two plays, and, later, many others who were drifting around, half in exile, as a result of the ban on *yin* theaters (Li Hongchun 1982, 43–50).¹³ When he came to Shanghai, Wang became a student of the famous Beijing opera actor Mi Xizi, whose role as Guan'gong, the godlike hero from the martial-arts novel *Three Kingdoms*, was so vivid that officials had to ban its performance in Beijing (Li Hongchun 1982, 50–53).¹⁴

Wang was popular in Shanghai theaters after the 1860s, and throughout his wandering life, he learned, performed, and composed Guan'gong operas. Drawing on the martial-arts subcultures from Anhui, northern China, and the Lixia River region (Li Hongchun 1962, 418), he reinvented the theatrical convention of these operas by opening up a new repertoire of Guan'gong plays, new plays in which personal loyalty and friendship

often intervened in urgent political matters.¹⁵ He also developed a new role type for Beijing opera's male protagonists known as *hongsheng*, a "red-faced" persona who was younger, more active, and skilled in acrobatics with the sword and horse (Li Hongchun 1962, 405–6; Li Yuanlong 1960, 27–31).¹⁶ A personal reciprocity that had been deeply violated by political authority left obvious traces upon the dramatic structures of both of Wang's contemporary plays, *Assassination of Ma Xinyi* and *Iron Rooster*.

It is obvious that the personal reciprocity of the martial-arts tradition was not strong enough to result in the formation of any intellectually based alternative community, but as a form of festive culture, it disrupted the political justice and imperial authority by frequently reoccurring, transforming, and free-associating with other new meanings. *Iron Rooster* was so popular, even as a dramatic rewrite of the original play, that by the turn of the century it had expanded to twice its original length. *Assassination of Ma Xinyi* returned to Shanghai theaters in the 1890s after having been banned in 1871 and was performed by different opera troupes at different sites during the same period of time. The ban actually made the play even more famous. Upon its return, not only did it revitalize the martial-arts operas in Shanghai theaters, but it also took on the form of civic drama (1907), *tanci* ballad (1910–1920) and, later, spoken drama in the local dialect (1930s).

A Radical World

The beginning of the twentieth century, marked by the looting of Beijing by the army of the Eight-Nation Alliance during the suppression of the Boxers (1900), unmistakably indicated the imminence of a world of absolute power. Modernization or reform was no longer the key to China's survival in such a world, even though the state-led reform, the New Policy, was on the way. During 1902 and 1903, several Qing policies, particularly some of its international policies—such as allowing the Russian army to garrison the northeastern city of Fengtian as well as considering borrowing the French army to pacify internal rebellions—provided fuel to the state's political and cultural enemies. Nationalism, or anti-Manchu sentiment, spread rapidly among Chinese students in Japan and influenced the literati in Shanghai through the print media, various study societies, theater, and literature.¹⁷

In 1904, on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War, the well-known actor Wang Xiaonong brought to Chunxian Theater *Guazhong lanyin* (The Fall of Poland), his new-style Beijing opera based upon Poland's defeat by Turkey. According to Rebecca Karl's insightful analysis, this performance highlighted the Chinese intellectuals' reading of the relationship among Russia, Korea, and Japan, a relationship that was seen as a regional embodiment of the contemporary global situation (Karl 2002, 27–49). I believe, furthermore, that the performance also marked the ripening of a new urban nexus of something that might be called "radical festivity," a nexus formed by the connections among the members of the subcultural traditions of semi-illicit theater, student groups abroad, and intellectual journalism in Shanghai and Tokyo. The history of these groups came together to make Shanghai the central site of this radical festivity.

Let us first take a look at what had become the semi-illicit theaters in Shanghai at the beginning of the twentieth century. At this point, the eighteenth-century flower operas had become southern-style Beijing opera (that is, operas developed in the south but combining Hui and other northern operatic styles), and in Shanghai the southern-style Beijing opera gave rise, in a theater-reform movement, to a more Westernized "civic drama" (Wenmingxi), or spoken drama (Yu Zhibin 1989; Chen Bohai and Yuan Jin 1993, 425–59). In addition to the "operas of the time," reform-minded artists brought to the Shanghai public operas intended to be politically educational, such as *Pan leishi touhai* (The Martyr Pan) and *Heiji yuanyun* (A Homeless Soul), to create a consciousness of resistance and an anti-opium-smoking sentiment. "Foreign-dress" operas adapted from translated works—such as *Napoleon* (1904) (Ah Ying 1957), *New "La dame aux camelias"* (an adaptation of the younger Alexandre Dumas's *La dame aux camelias*; 1909), *Mrs. Walter's Occupation* (an adaptation of a Bernard Shaw work; 1910) (Tarumoto 2002), *Guazhong lanyin* (The Fall of Poland; 1904), and *Heinu yutian lu* (Black Slaves Appeal to Heaven, based on Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) (Wang Lixing 1992)—were performed in 1905 and 1907 by various troupes (Figure 12).

It is worth noting that, in the artists' circles, the theater-reform movement was initiated by the sons and students of the first generation of semi-illicit actors. The most important promoters of theatrical reform, Xia Yueshan (1868–1924) and Xia Yuerun (1878–1931), were sons of Xia



Figure 12. *Xin Chahua* at *Xin Wutai* (New La dame aux camelias performed at the New Stage Theater). From *Huan qiu she, Tuhua ribao* [Pictorial daily news] (Repr., Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, [1909–1910] 1999), 1:151.

Kuizhang, an ex-member of the Tongchun troupe organized by the Tai-ping leaders. Before they founded the first modern-style theater, the New Stage in Shanghai in 1908, they had already invited their students and friends, as well as their colleagues Pan Yueqiao, Feng Zihé, Xiong Wentong, and Wang Xiaonong, to perform a new repertoire in inventive styles (Zhang Zegang 1988, 31–36). As the 1911 Revolution drew near, the Xia brothers and Pan Yueqiao became actively involved in the political events of the Revolution. Their passage from sons of semi-illicit actors to theater reformers and then revolutionaries indicated the trajectory of urban festivity itself.

Theater reform was closely related to radical journalism. By 1904, Shanghai had already become the cradle of radical anti-Qing journalism. The state's ban on *Subao* (The Paper of Jiangsu), which had published such well-known anti-Manchu essays as “Geming jun” (Revolutionary Army) by Zou Rong (1885–1905) and “Bo Kang Youwei zhengjian

shu” (Rebuttal to the Political Proposal of Kang Youwei) by Zhang Taiyan (1869–1936) in 1903, made radical anti-Qing journalism even more famous. *Zhejiang chao* (The Zhejiang Tide), *Jiangsu*, and *Hubei xueshengjue* (The Student Circle of Hubei), radical journals organized by students in Japan and printed in Shanghai, called upon the urban society, with their powerful words and youthful spirit, to express their urgent concerns regarding the political situation in China in the contemporary world.

Other radical journals circulated in Shanghai, such as *Jingzhong ribao* (Tocsin), *Anhui baihuabao* (Vernacular News of Anhui), and *Zhongguo baihuabao* (The Chinese Vernacular News), enlightened their readers about specific international political conflicts that the imperialist world brought to China after the suppression of the Boxer uprising, such as the Russian army's move toward northeast China, British ambitions concerning Tibet, and French encroachment in the southeast. The journalists of *Jingzhong ribao*, *Anhui baihuabao*, and *Zhongguo baihuabao* had all been personally involved in the practices of the new theaters during the first surge of anti-Qing, or “revolutionary,” spirit in Shanghai culture. To this point I shall return shortly.

Translated works that introduced their readers to the radical changes in the world—the rising and falling of nations as well as the struggles and revolutions of the people—also contributed to the cosmopolitan cultural milieu of Shanghai. These works were serialized in the journals mentioned above or published in book form by student societies, intellectual societies, and presses in Shanghai or Tokyo before being reprinted in Shanghai. Of the 139 translated titles listed in *Xinhai Geming Shuzheng* (Books of the 1911 Revolution), 74 were narratives of radical change in other countries in the world, in the form of nonscholarly histories, biographies, novels, and *tanci*-ballad scripts (Zhang Yuying [1941] 1953, 140–83). The rest focused on philosophy, law, political theory, and historiography. A well-read Chinese adult in Shanghai or Tokyo could, in the short period from 1900 to 1908, find books about the U.S. War of Independence and Civil War; the independence of Switzerland; the struggle for freedom in Vietnam; at least one title about the fight for freedom in Ireland; two or more titles about the struggle for independence in Scotland; more than one story about the Russian Revolution against the tsar; at least two titles about the resistance to U.S. control of the Philippines and the search for independence in that nation; two

about the struggles in colonial India; two about the fate of Egypt; three titles about the fight for independence in Greece; four different narratives about the French Revolution, in a variety of forms, including translated history, *tanci* ballads, and biography; five titles about tragedy and struggle in Poland; two titles about anarchism in Europe; and two titles about the important and sweeping changes in nineteenth-century Europe (Ah Ying 1953, 184–203; Feng Ziyu 1954, 276–97; Zhang Yuying [1941] 1953, 140–83).

These journals and books brought to Shanghai's urban society two images of the world. One alerted readers to the imminent reality of the imperialist world, represented not only by the European and American encroachments already mentioned but also by the suffering of Koreans, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Indians, and Poles under the colonial and imperialist domination of Japan, the United States, France, Britain, and Russia, respectively. Nothing made it clearer that the Qing's state policies letting such things happen to China were no longer legitimate.

The other image, though, provided by scattered journalistic writings and rough narratives, was that of an alternative world, or a world in revolution. Such a radical world pointed no longer to modernization following European and American models but, rather, to a pursuit of freedom and independence following the examples of those in the non-West: the anti-tsarist movement in Russia; resistance movements in Egypt, Portugal, revolutionary France, independent Italy, Poland, Scotland, the Philippines, Switzerland, Greece, India, and Vietnam; and so on.¹⁸ At least in imagination, the contest between such a radical world and the imperialist world cut across national borders.

These two images of the world came into frequent juxtaposition to one another. There was the newspaper *Eshi jingwen* (Russia Watch, founded in 1903), and there were also legendary texts about Russian revolutionaries and Russian and eastern European anarchist heroes and heroines, as shown in the historical novels *Eluosi geming dafengchao* (The Great Tide of Revolution in Russia), *Xuwu dang* (Anarchists), and the story of a fictional Sophia in *Dongou nuhaojie* (East European Heroines).¹⁹ While the actual French state and army were pursuing colonial interests in Asia, the (re)constructed legendary figure of Madame Roland was upholding a revolutionary France—a France that to Chinese readers was a probable comember of an intellectual and international community. By the same token, although the Chinese audience perhaps

saw the U.S. achievement of independence from the British Empire as admirable, the Philippine resistance to U.S. power reflected in *Feilubin xiake zhuan* (Legend of Filipino Knights), serialized in *Xin xin xiaoshuo* (The New "New Fiction"; 1904), was even more appreciated.

The tension between the imperialist world and the radical world passed from the print media to the Shanghai theater, particularly to the reformed opera theater, and in this way illustrated the free-associative, fast-spreading nature of urban festivity. The imperialist expansion and its criticism presented by radical journalism, such as *Tocsin* and its predecessor, *Eshi jingwen*, became sources of the repertoire of the reformed Shanghai theaters. For instance, the Wenmingxi drama (a half-spoken, half-sung performance) actor Wang Youyou, who was then a student at the Minli High School of Shanghai, taking as his inspiration a letter published in the paper *Eshi jingwen*, wrote a play called *Zhang Tingbiao beinan* (The Death of Zhang Tingbiao), which was performed by the school's student troupe (Wang Lixing 1992, 283–88). The letter and the play narrated an incident in which Russian soldiers garrisoned in northeast China had forced more than 5,000 Chinese into a river (*Eshi jingwen*, December 2–3, 1903). After the script was published in the journal *Guomin xinwen* (Citizen News), another amateur student troupe at Nanxiang Junior High in Shanghai performed it (Wang Lixing 1992, 283–88).

The overlap between radical journalism and reformed theater was most evident in the founding of the *Great Theater of the Twentieth-Century*, organized by the editor of *Tocsin*, Chen Qibing (1874–1933), and the semi-illicit opera artists Wan Xiaonong and Xiong Wentong (Karl 2002; Zhang Zegang 1987, 78–81). Together with *Tocsin* and the *Vernacular News of Anhui*, where the leading activist Chen Duxiu was the chief editor, the radical journals published theater reviews, written by the intellectuals Chen Duxiu and Jiang Zhiyou, performing schedules (*Tocsin*, August 26, 1904), and play scripts such as Wang Xiaonong's *Guazhong lanyin*, an opera based on Poland's fall to Turkey (*Tocsin*, August 20–31, 1904). Just *Guazhong lanyin* alone embodied the free-associative nature of festive culture, arising from the interaction of news, journalistic circles, translated histories, and theatrical activities. The opera was probably based on books on Polish history, of which at least two translations were available in Shanghai by 1904 (Zhang Yuying [1941] 1953, 176).²⁰ The playwright was himself a semi-illicit actor as well as a radical cultural activist. The play circulated both in the print media and in the theaters.

The mutual reference among radical journalism, book culture, and the theater readily brought the “radical world” together with the already-existing semi-illicit theatrical tradition represented by *Assassination of Ma Xinyin* and *Iron Rooster*, the disruptive tradition that had long contested the authority of the Qing state. Assassins and assassination, both as actual events of the time and as dramatic actions in the theater, became the key to the affinity between the “radical world” and the “disrupted empire.” As word of the political assassinations by anarchists in France and by the nihilists in Russia spread to East Asia through the news media and translated literature, the symbolic goal of assassination in the theater began to be transformed, from enacting personal justice against corrupt authorities to carrying out a radical solution to a political dilemma.

From the 1890s to the 1900s, Shanghai theaters and public culture displayed an array of assassins, originating from different parts the world, acting for different purposes, and targeting political authorities of different sorts. *Assassination of Ma Xinyi* and *Iron Rooster* were joined by journalistic reports, play scripts, and theatrical performances as well as serialized pictorial stories of other assassins and stories of nationalists, of resistance to colonization, of French and Russian anarchists, and of radical anti-Qing organizations. An Chung-gun, the Korean hero who assassinated the Japanese prime minister Ito Bokubi, appeared first in the news, then in the classical verse of script (1901), then in the theater (1904), and finally in pictorial serializations (Huan qiu she [1909–1910] 1999, 1:15) (Figure 13). Around 1904, an unsuccessful attempt was made to assassinate the governor of Guangxi, Wang Zhichun, who was said to have sold local properties to the French. The event appeared first in the news, then as *The Jingu Xiang Teahouse*, a play performed at Chunxian Theater, and then in script form in the *Grand Twentieth-Century Theater* (1904).

Also appearing at the time were stories and play scripts about female Russian anarchists and early French revolutionaries who acted as assassins or heroines and helped the powerless to achieve freedom, represented by the fictional Sophia and historical Madame Roland mentioned above, as well as by the novels *Nü xiake* (Female Knight-Errant, 1907) and *Huang Xiuqiu* (Embroidering the Globe). Contemporary hero and heroine Qiu Qin and Xu Xilin, who attempted to assassinate Qing emperors, appeared not only in their legendary life stories but also in numerous

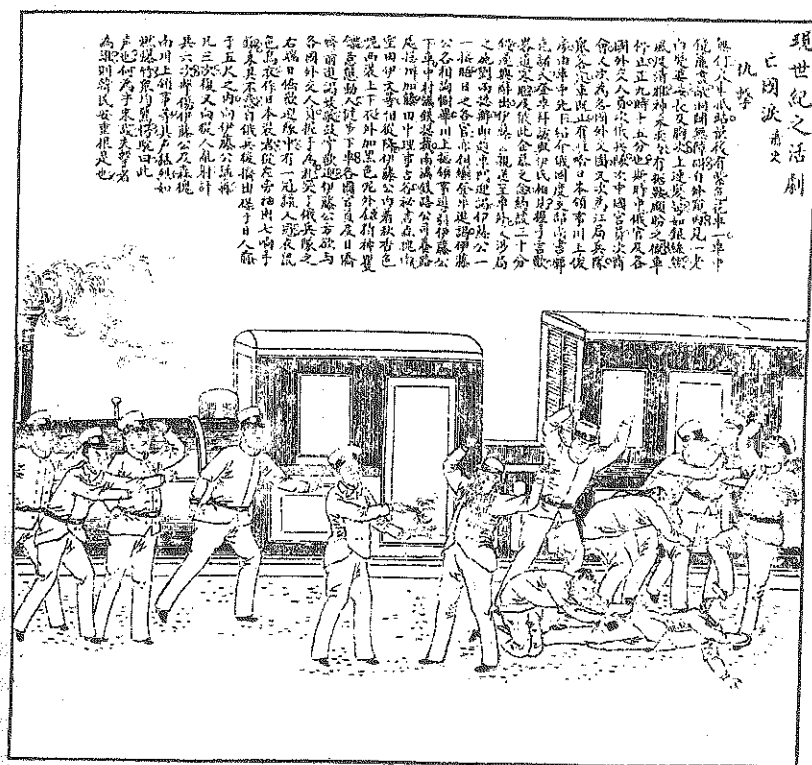


Figure 13. An Chonggen cisha Yiteng bowen (The Assassination of Ito Bokubi on Tuhua ribao). From Huan qiu she, *Tuhua ribao* [Pictorial daily news] (Repr., Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, [1909–1910] 1999), 3:453.

tanci ballads and poems. Through the operas about assassins and assassination, the subculture of semi-illicit theaters was internationalized and became a part of the “radical world.” This progression from presenting semi-illicit assassins on stage to presenting anarchist assassins not only projected the end of the Qing world but also indicated a total change in urban festive culture, from what had originally been simply *yin* or “disruptive” or “chaotic” to something radical and political.

At the Loss of the “Fair World”

In 1904–1905, a movement opposing U.S. discrimination against overseas Chinese, originating in San Francisco and Honolulu, joined existing cultural traffic between Shanghai, Tokyo, and diasporan Chinese. This movement drew both the imperialist world and the radical world closer to the cities of China. The result was a boycott of U.S. goods in

Shanghai and Guangzhou in 1905. The significance of this movement from a cultural and historical point of view was that it put into circulation the search, the longing, for a fair world community. The search for such a fair world was initiated by overseas Chinese and by political figures in exile abroad, who felt acutely what it meant to be people "without a state." Shanghai became an important terminal that turned that search for an imagined inhabitable world community into a call for such a world. Because of the city's environment of radical urban festivity, this cultural pursuit of a fair world peaked in Shanghai and passed its spirit on to other places in augmented form.

Actions opposing U.S. discrimination against overseas Chinese originated in San Francisco, a city on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. Although the history of overseas Chinese in the Americas was relatively short compared to the history of Chinese in other regions, it began as early as the gold rush in the late 1840s. When U.S. officials solicited laborers from China in 1852, there were already Chinese living in California; and when the infamous Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882, Chinese overseas laborers had already constructed modern facilities in California and other states. The Exclusion Act was passed to restrict the economic and political rights of Chinese laborers and to expel them from the United States in order to reduce the impact of its ongoing economic crisis.²¹ The most important effect of the act was its enforcement both of unequal exchanges of labor and capital, in particular, and of racism against the Chinese, in general. Without revealing the discriminative content of the act, U.S. officials approached the Qing state in 1882 with an agreement stating that the United States would no longer solicit laborers.²² This agreement was renewed once in 1893, after which the restrictions and discrimination against Chinese in the United States became more violent and were extended to include Chinese students, travelers, and, particularly, Chinese merchants and entrepreneurs (Liang Qichao [1905] 1982, 387–426).²³ The next renewal of this agreement was dated June 1904.

Overseas Chinese in San Francisco reacted to this policy early, but it was not until the turn of the century that their actions became known among the political elites of the diaspora, who became the enemy, passively or actively, of the Qing state only after the Boxer uprising of 1900. Before June 1904, the date set for the renewal of the agreement, the community in San Francisco held several meetings and drafted a long

public letter, containing over 100,000 signatures, to seven U.S. governmental bureaus (Liang Qichao [1905] 1982), asking for an end to the discrimination. The community also pleaded with the Qing state to refuse to extend the agreement.

Negotiations between the United States and China on the agreement came to a dead end when Liang Cheng, the representative of the Qing government, refused to sign an agreement that made no substantial change (Liang Zheng 1905). In February 1905, the U.S. government sent William Woodville Rockhill (1854–1914) to China to meet with Qing officials about the stalemate. The Chinese community in the United States telegraphed relevant organizations in Shanghai, Guangdong, and other places to ask for their support in rejecting the renewal (*Zhongwai ribao*, April 13, 1905). Merchant organizations in Shanghai gathered several times to discuss possible strategies for ending the act (*Zhongwai ribao*, April 15, 1905). Although the U.S. cultural politics of endowing "people" with "national" or "racial" character was unfamiliar to early Chinese immigrants, it helped the Chinese abroad come up with a counter-strategy by granting "goods" a national brand.²⁴ Eventually, in May 1905, under the personal leadership of members of the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce, a boycott of U.S. goods (*dizhi meihuo yundong*) broke out in Shanghai.

The boycott as a social and cultural *movement* (to accept Karl Gerth's use of the term) made opposition to discrimination from afar an urban event in China.²⁵ Urban festivity was developing in this movement. Boycotting rapidly became a focal point of public urban life, a common theme of urban events. It generated numerous and frequent urban activities, ranging from organizational gatherings of different associations and unions, to public announcements by a variety of professional and other clubs and societies, to public lectures, street posters, shop displays of U.S. goods, and so on. Writers and artists volunteered to give public lectures at all sorts of meetings held in schools, at society gatherings, and in gardens. Student volunteers organized persuasive campaigns in which they spread throughout the city—going door to door, street by street, and neighborhood by neighborhood—persuading small shop owners not to buy or sell U.S. goods. Journalists made the boycott and related events the headlines of the daily news. Demonstrations and crowds marched through the main streets of the city calling for others to join the boycott.

As an urban movement, not only did the boycott give Shanghai an opportunity to express anger at and objection to the discrimination in more aggressive ways than could be expressed from afar, but it also generated echoes of objection to similar discrimination occurring locally. Riots against local discriminative policies took place even after the peak of the boycott.²⁶ In short, Shanghai became an urban nexus on the move.

Such a radical urban nexus, I shall add, was mobilized not merely because of economic need but because of a deeper urge for an ideally livable world. The intensified imperialist encroachment on China at the turn of the twentieth century had already made surviving in the increasingly unjust world an urgent issue. This nexus had much to do with generating radical groups who objected to the Qing foreign policy and even denied the legitimacy of the Qing state itself. The U.S. discrimination against Chinese laborers was the last straw for the already crisis-ridden Qing government. Since 1903, *Tocsin* and other papers in Shanghai had repeatedly warned their readers of encroachments by Russia and Japan in the Korean Peninsula, by France on the Yunnan borders, and by Britain in Tibet. At that point, newspapers beyond Shanghai, such as *Xin Zhongguo bao* (New China, founded in 1900 in Honolulu) and *Fujian ribao* (Fujian Daily), expressed concern about the new global power, the United States. The United States did not become a superpower until after World War II, but it had established itself as a global player when it launched policies aimed at securing economic control of overseas laborers through military means and when it seized the Philippines and Hawaii as its military bases. A keynote essay entitled "Ni dizhi jinli ce" (A Proposal to Resist U.S. Discrimination against the Chinese), published in *Xin Zhongguo bao* (New China) in 1903, noted:

In the past, Europeans had been fighting each other to dominate Africa. After possessing Africa, their object of competition pointed to China. The United States sought to join this world competition. That was why it remade its foreign policies, took over Honolulu by force, attacked Cuba, and occupied the Philippines. The rich in the United States desired to use their excessive power globally; therefore, they violated others' rights elsewhere. Honolulu was militarily crucial in the Pacific Ocean; therefore, the United States turned the island into its second naval base to forcefully guard its international trade. The Philippines were the doorway to southeast China; therefore, the United States occupied them to control the trade routes overseas. (Quoted in Ah Ying 1960, 282–83)

Xin Zhongguo bao was the first political Chinese newspaper to be founded overseas. It was established in Honolulu by Liang Qichao and was associated with the diasporan ex-reformist organization Zhongguo weixin hui (The Society to Reform China) (Shi He, Yao Fuzhong, and Ye Cuidi 1991, 341). The essay brought to the fore the global perspective behind the local issue of discrimination and asked the public to see the structural inequality in the world exchange of laborers, capital, and resources. The issue implied in the above passage was not merely the U.S. attempt to turn the Chinese economy into a market for American products, though that was worrisome; nor was it merely discrimination against the overseas Chinese. The implied question, rather, was related to the unjust world to come: Could any people live happily under the shadow of a global power that treated the Filipinos, the Cubans, the Hawaiians, and the overseas Chinese so unfairly?

Perhaps it was this question raised in Honolulu—that of the treatment of overseas Chinese—that so attracted readers, writers, theatrical artists, and journalists in Shanghai. From 1905 to 1907 Shanghai saw the publication of a couple of dozen poems and songs, five novels, several dramas, nine books of documentary and historical writings, and numerous journalistic pieces specifically dealing with the issue (Ah Ying 1960, 2–19). From April 21 to April 23, 1904—just a few months after the essay quoted above appeared in print—*Tocsin* in Shanghai published, among other reports on the theme, a keynote essay entitled "Lun Meiguo lingru huamin" (On U.S. Discrimination against Chinese People). This essay echoed and referred to the article quoted above and stressed the fact that "fairness" in the world had been violated by the anti-Chinese discrimination in the United States. Other Shanghai newspapers—such as *Shibao* (China Times), *Zhongwai ribao* (News of Home and Abroad), and *Nujie bao* (Women's World)—were also actively introducing readers to the issues and facts related to U.S. policy toward the overseas Chinese. According to these papers, a boycott was clearly a way of objecting to the unfairness that was being imposed upon the Chinese at home and abroad. The essay published on April 21 in *Fujian riri xinwen* (Fujian Daily News) voiced this feeling of unfairness simply and directly:

They (the people of United States) are human beings. So are we. They come to our country without being invited and are well-treated by our treaty. But when we want to go to their country, we are blocked. Their

workers came to our country and made a profit, yet still under our protection. When our workers wanted to go to their country and make a profit, they were prohibited. . . . I haven't experienced anything in the whole world as unfair as this. (Quoted from Ah Ying 1960, 604–5)

Not surprisingly, in an essay published in *Shibao* just a couple of weeks before the decision to implement a boycott was made, the journalist indicated that a boycott in Shanghai was one way to acquire a fair trade-off in this unequal and unfair cross-ocean exchange:

Since the United States placed restrictions upon Chinese people in order to protect the interests of American workers, we could therefore restrict U.S. goods to protect indigenous products. At least in this way, no one owes the other, and each country could act for its own survival in fair terms. (*Shibao*, April 20–21, 1905)

In a word, the aim of the boycott was to urge a fairer international exchange or to equalize an unequal exchange. Boycotting was a way of objecting to the unfair world that the United States, following the steps of older imperialists, was creating.

Literary works and theatrical performances, along with the journalism in Shanghai, formed an important cultural front for the movement. Literary and theatrical works expressed the shock, the pain, the confusion, and the anger felt at the loss of the “fair world” more effectively than could journalistic and historical texts. Whereas the discrimination against overseas Chinese was an issue of minority rights and taxes in San Francisco and an issue of international politics in the journals of Honolulu, in Shanghai's literature and theater it was a violent violation of the basic principles of individual humanity and human community. As early as 1847, Zhang Weilin, the author of the long poem *Jinshan pian* (The Mountain of Gold), had already found U.S. hostility toward Chinese gold-rushers to be in conflict with the principles of the cosmos of which humans were only a humble part. “Earth offers mankind gold and silver; Shall then humans decide whom not to share with?” (quoted in Ah Ying 1960, 8–9). The author obviously noted the absence in the United States of the belief that all human beings were one.

In 1882 Huang Zunxian (1848–1905), who was then governor of Guangdong Province and who wrote a lengthy poem entitled *Zhu ke pian* (Dismissing the Guests), found the Chinese Exclusion Act to be in direct “conflict with President George Washington's political ideal of liberty”

which assumed “everyone to be on an equal footing” ([1882] 1960, 3–4).²⁷ For Huang, this violation of “George Washington's political ideal of liberty” was at least rhetorically comparable to the loss of “the era of the great harmony” (*datong shi*), which ancient Chinese saints said had been lost. The disappearance of “the era of the great harmony” meant the loss of the internal quality of the human race represented by the oneness of all to all others, the principle of fairness, the peace and the compassion of the human heart. As a result of this loss, Huang saw the overseas Chinese as suddenly becoming homeless and stateless, drifting about on a strange globe, and thus vulnerable to victimization by all (*ibid.*, 3).

Indeed, this loss of an inhabitable world was a shared feeling and was expressed in different forms. A remote but more positive expression of this loss can be found in Kang Youwei's *Da tong shu* (The Book of Great Harmony), which was written around the same time period. “The great harmonious world”—based upon compassion, a basic human attribute that Kang Youwei assumed everyone held in his or her heart—was little more than a dream of a political utopia, which, ironically, indicated the lack of a habitable world on the real globe.

Perhaps it was the realization of the fatal loss of a fair, livable world that filled the relevant literary writings in Shanghai with anger, grief, and melancholy. The word and the sense of *ku*, “misery” or “suffering,” characterized both *Ku Shehui* (A Country of Misery) (1905), an important piece of fiction about the experience of the overseas Chinese, and its sequel, *Ku Xuesheng* (A Suffering Student Abroad) (1906). Melancholy and grief, like mourning, became the only internal traces of the world that had been lost. But as such, they were also an important means to regaining that world.

Jieyu hui (The Burned), a novel by an important late-Qing writer, Wu Jianren (1866–1910), is an allegorical view of this loss. The novel does not describe the life of the overseas Chinese directly but, rather, focuses on the emotional experiences of a wife whose husband was kidnapped and sold to the Americas by a remote “uncle” who profited from the transoceanic labor trade. The wife has lost not only the “world,” consisting of her husband and family, but also the hope of a peaceful life when she fell into the hands of the “uncle.”

Although she wants to end her own life several times, her soul, through mourning all that has been lost, searches for her missing husband

through dreams and prayers. Her grief for the missing family member not only saves her own life but also keeps her husband alive on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. Here, the wife's longing for her husband, an emotional and spiritual action, becomes the agent of reunion and redemption. Grief and melancholy, in this sense, were other forms of longing. It was in the longing for the survival of her husband as well as the other "stateless people" in the world that hope for the self also lay.

Uncle Tom's Cabin in China

Longing for a livable world made the grief of other people and other races one's own individual grief as well. This explains why the Chinese translation of the title of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the influential story of slaves in America by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896), was *Heinu yutian lu*, literally, "Black Slaves Appeal to Heaven." Nothing more accurately conveys the longing for a better world than the word "yutian," "appeal to heaven."

This also explains why, from the very beginning, the translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* circulated hand in hand with texts about the overseas Chinese. The book, translated by Lin Shu and Wei Yi, was published in woodblock in Hangzhou in 1901. By the end of 1905, its popularity had already warranted a couple of reprints in Shanghai, its inclusion in anthologies of fiction, reference to it in numerous works, and its adaptation by Wang Xiaonong into a Beijing opera performance. It was also transcribed into a spoken drama and was staged in Tokyo in 1907 by Chinese students who were then studying in Japan. In the same year, the spoken drama was performed in China by an amateur troupe that traveled from Shanghai to the northern cities of China.

The translators' prefaces to the 1901 edition established a clear connection between the experiences of African Americans and of Chinese in the United States. Both translators referred to the ongoing U.S. policy of expelling Chinese laborers. Wei Yi, in particular, called for readers to be aware of the possibility of being enslaved. Lin Shu, on the other hand, focused on the possible similarities between the slavery of African Americans and the experiences of overseas Chinese in the United States. Although Uncle Tom and the other characters were fictional, their fate

can mirror the actual situation of Chinese laborers (in the United States). It has been evident that the Chinese in Peru and other places have recently been abused. It is hard to anticipate the suffering of the

"yellow race" in the future. I can only hope that the readers do not think that what is recorded here is merely a ridiculous fiction! (Lin Shu [1901] 1960a, 661–62)

By borrowing the narrative of African American slaves to voice the situation of the overseas Chinese, Lin Shu set his view apart from the general view of African Americans and Chinese held by his contemporaries. Lin's contemporaries often made subtle distinctions between the Chinese and the African Americans based on the supposed cultural inferiority of the latter. Huang Zunxian, for example, while expressing the grievance caused by the unequal content of the Chinese Exclusion Act, wondered why the black people, though "less cultured," were allowed to stay where they were, but the Chinese were expelled so harshly ([1882] 1960, 3–4). Liang Qichao followed suit when writing about the issue (Liang Qichao [1905] 1982, 387–426). Lin Shu, on the other hand, urged his readers to focus on the interchangeable experiences of the African Americans and the overseas Chinese. In his preface, he warns the reader of a historical continuum between enslaving Africans on one end and discriminating against Chinese on the other:

After research, we know that the history of enslaving African black people in America's California started in 1619, when a Dutch warship took and sold twenty or so black slaves to Armstrong village. This was the beginning of white people's enslaving of black people. At this time there was not even a United States. Washington founded the United States for and according to the principle of public good. He did not seek after his own personal power. But the system of slavery was so hard to remove that he did not end slavery while he was alive. It was not until Lincoln's time that the system of slavery was formally abolished. But not long after that, the ways that had been used to treat African black people were extended to treat people with yellow skin. ([1901] 1960b, 658)

Within the limit of racial terminology, Lin Shu was able to show a parallel between enslaving Africans and abusing Chinese. Obviously, the way the overseas Chinese were being treated made Lin Shu question the true significance of the abolition of slavery in the United States. Like Huang Zunxian, Lin Shu too sees the discrimination against the Chinese as a betrayal of the political ideals of liberty of both George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

Lin Shu observed a difference between African slaves and overseas Chinese only in this continuum of slavery and racism. After giving a

brief history of the enslavement of Africans in the United States, Lin Shu went on to elaborate the history of Chinese laborers in California.

At the beginning, they went as laborers. After years, they sent savings from their salary back home. Some Americans thought the Chinese laborers would take away their silver and therefore abused the Chinese, prevented them from settling, and forbade them from coming. For this particular reason, yellow-skinned people might have been treated worse in the U.S. than the black-skinned. ([1901] 1960a, 658)

Whether the Chinese might have been treated worse was impossible to say, as Lin himself quickly admitted. But Lin's account pointed to a specific labor-capital relationship distinct from that of "master and slave." Chinese laborers were free laborers; therefore, they were seen as competitors for silver and were excluded and discriminated against in the United States. Lin laid bare here the crucial political problems that the United States would have to face for decades or centuries after the abolition of slavery: racism, global expansion, minority politics, and betrayal of the spirit of democracy in dealing with international affairs, as well as the politics in immigration, discrimination, and law-making. Not only the overseas Chinese but also other races, though not enslaved in the United States, might very well be mistreated to the same extent. "Some white people can only treat people of other races with discrimination, and the suffering of people of Poland, Egypt, and India might be even worse (than what was described in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*)" (Lin Shu [1901] 1960b, 662).

Not surprisingly, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* gave expression to sorrowful feelings and grieving for other people's suffering and for the loss of a livable world of fairness. As Lin Shu clearly indicated, the other people's loss of the inhabitable world was actually also the loss of the Chinese, since they shared that world. Here, in translating and reading about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, grief and sorrow became, or acted as, sympathy and compassion, which Kang Youwei had found to be the origin of Datong, the great harmonious world (1935, 2-14). In the preface to a historical work about the Chinese Exclusion Act in the United States, *Tongbao shounue ji* (The Suffering of Fellow Chinese), published in Guangzhou in 1905, the author described how the Chinese experience made even more heartbreaking the experiences of the African American slaves and the Poles he had read about in the translations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Fall of Poland*:

Years ago, when I read *Black Slaves Appeal to Heaven*, my heart became heavy and down-trodden with sorrow. Later, when I read *The Fall of Poland*, my heart again was downtrodden and full of sorrow. Now, I read *The Suffering of Fellow Chinese*, and my heart is once more filled with grief and sorrow, so heavy that I don't even know how to put them in words. (Anonymous [1905] 1960, 522)

To a heart capable of compassion, the misery of the overseas Chinese repeated twice, at least on an emotional level, the trauma of the experiences of the African American slaves and the Poles. A work that could connect these three experiences had to be, itself, one of compassion. In the preface to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, it was suggested that reading the book could be called a "compassionate association" or "compassionate reading" that expressed cultural and political concern about what the world had become.

Beside the Poles and the African Americans, compassionate associations were also made between the Chinese and the Cubans who were subjugated by the United States (Zheng Guanying [1905] 1982, 6-7). The same kind of compassionate associations were made between the overseas Chinese in the United States and those in Australia. In a similar way, the anonymous author of a new Yuefu lyric poem, *Tan xiang shan* (Honolulu), compared the misery of the overseas Chinese in Hawaii with the sad history of the Jews of the Diaspora who were adrift and discriminated against for centuries:

Honolulu used to be a thriving city of commerce
Now burned into dry dirt as the ruin of the palace of Ah-fang!
Nothing is left except your tears over the tons of losses
Taxes mount high, Chinese forbidden
(We) walked with tiptoes on earth but
Could not find even a place to stand, and
Abused in the south of Australia and the north of the United States!
.....
Can't you see the traces of tears that the Jewish Diaspora
Left on the roads behind their wandering footsteps?
My heart trembles in the chill, at such a thought of Jews!
(Anonymous [1905] 1982, 14)

The compassionate association between the Chinese in Hawaii and the Jews of the Diaspora represented here could not make a world of Datong, but it was enough to build an imagined community of which they were a part in the same way that the Poles and the African Americans were.

This global community came from the sense of simultaneity created by a vernacular print market (Anderson 1984), yet it reiterated the utopia that Kang Youwei had discussed in *Da tong shu*, a community that eliminated national boundaries, which compassionate thinking could not comprehend.

Compassionate associations involved not only sharing and understanding the experiences of others but acting on their behalf as well. A subject who feels for someone else may in turn act for this someone else. This explains why *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was revised in further adaptation. Whereas the boycott movement was short-lived because of conflict between those who were and were not involved in trade with the United States, the adaptation of the African American story continued. The translated *Uncle Tom's Cabin* traveled from Shanghai to Japan, where it was transformed into a spoken drama and performed by an amateur troupe of Chinese students, Chunliu (Spring Willows), in Tokyo in 1907.²⁸ The performance was well-received by Japanese journalists, writers, and theater critics (Chen Dingsha 1987, 20–57). More importantly, this performance may well have been the way that the story of American blacks first came to be known in Japan. Certainly, it was through this performance that the compassionate association between African Americans and Asians that had been nurtured in Shanghai was disseminated outside of China for the first time.

The synopsis of the performance gives us a hint to how the “compassionate subject” became the “acting for” subject, and how, through the “acting for,” grief and longing eventually paved the way to a better world. The performance consisted of five acts.

Synopsis of *Black Slaves Appeal to Heaven*
As Performed in Tokyo, 1907

Act 1. The House of Mr. Shelby

Begins with the introduction of the main characters: Eliza, George, their son, and Tom, and ends with Mr. Shelby agreeing to sell Tom and the son of Eliza and George to Haley, the slave trader to whom Shelby owes money.

Act 2. A Celebration at the Whitney Cotton Factory

Begins with a scene of celebration at the Whitney factory with singing and dancing and the introduction of guests who have been invited to attend the celebration. The factory owner bestows a medal on George

but is stopped by Harris, George's previous owner, who is jealous of his success and wants to take him back.

Act 3. Parting

Eliza overhears the slave trader's plan of taking away her son and Tom. She asks help from Shelby's wife but does not get any promise. George returns with the news that he cannot work at the factory anymore. He does not want to return with Harris and plans to escape.

Act 4. At Tom's Cabin

Eliza runs in with her young son and warns Tom of his danger.

Act 5. Fight at the Rock

George and his friends escape and meet Eliza on the way. Harris and his men chase after them. George and his friends fight for their liberty and escape successfully. (Ouyang 1984, 141)

There are two aspects of this adaptation that are worth special attention. First, the drama shifted the work's focus from Tom, a more inward-looking Christian, to George, a more outspoken and rebellious figure. Another interesting detail is the fact that Tom was listed as being in the last act, the big escape. As student actor Ouyang Yuqian recalled, the ending of the novel, in which Tom is beaten to death, was changed. According to the synopsis, Tom's appearance in “Fight at the Rock” suggests that he escaped with George and Eliza (Ouyang 1984, 142). Lin Shu and Wei Yi's translation had already reduced the Christian color of Tom's virtue, and here, in the spoken drama, Tom's passivity was further diminished. George and Eliza's choice determined Tom's future as well. The adaptation and the transformation of the original novel emphasized the agency on the slave side. This change in plot brightened up the story.

The brighter nature of the drama was also manifested in the way the actors dressed in the production. It is interesting to note that skin color was not at all the only way that the black people were represented. Rather, as Ouyang Yuqian recalled, the actors chose clothes and hairstyles that they thought would be “touching.” Even though Tom was depicted in the novel as having short hair, the actors who played both George and Tom seem to have chosen to wear their hair long, as is seen on the next page of the playbill. The slave girls, portrayed by Ouyang Yuqian himself and others, danced in long gowns (Ouyang [1959] 1990).

The clothing worn in this performance was a mixture of styles worn by people from different countries and from different historical periods; it is possible that they were chosen not only according to what the actors thought was touching but also on the basis of what was available to rent in Japanese theatrical costume shops (Li Chang 1987, 252–308).²⁹

For a variety of complex reasons, though, the bright appearance of the main figures enhanced the effect of the final act of the drama, “Fight at the Rock” (Figure 14). The effect of this act can be seen in the drawing provided in the playbill. In this drawing, the Western “scroll-effect” was made horizontal and, more importantly, it was annotated on the sides with titles and the synopsis done in Chinese calligraphy. Adapting both Western scroll-effect design and European figure drawing, this picture did not depict either the main characters, George and Tom, or the other slaves as being “black.” They appeared, instead, with long hair and in traditionally heroic poses. The Caucasian slave hunters, in fact, were drawn in dark and negative ways. This “dark” quality was only given to those who failed to treat others as fellow human beings.

The second aspect of the play I want to discuss is the way that George’s technological invention, a relatively unimportant detail occupying a mere two pages in the novel, was turned into an entire act of celebration in this production. This interesting transformation brought to life a “colored moment” of creation in human history (if not a colored temporality) that was easily effaced. From the synopsis printed on the playbill, one can see that many details that did not exist in the novel were added to Act 2: George’s winning a medal and giving a speech at a ceremony to which many guests have been invited and who end up enjoying a great dance party. According to Ouyang Yuqian’s reminiscences, these guests were played by friends of the Chunliu members, who came from different countries and could play these roles in whatever ways they liked (Ouyang 1984, 134–74). As a result, in the celebration scene, there were Chinese who sang Beijing opera, Indians who played “Indian aristocrats,” and Koreans, Japanese, and many others who danced on the stage in their own ethnic clothes (156). Ouyang Yuqian commented that although the celebration scene did not correspond to the novel in any way, he and his coactors had no reference for what it would have realistically looked like anyway. “We just did what we thought of, but the scene was very lively and the audiences loved it” (142). In this way, the act monumentalized

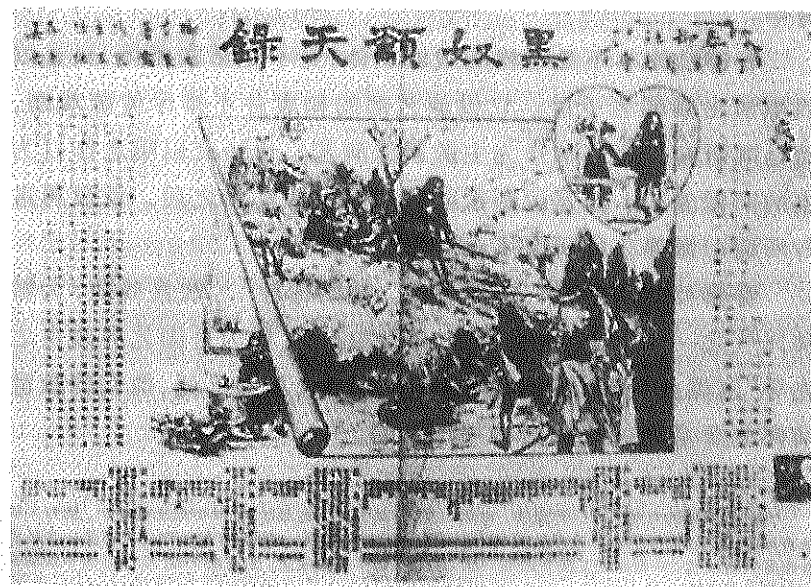


Figure 14. The playbill from the Chinese performance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. From Zhongguo yishu yanjiu yuan Huaju yanjiusuo [Institute of Spoken Drama, Research Institute of Chinese Academy of Art], comp., *Zhongguo huaju shiliaoji* [Compiled source materials of the history of spoken drama] (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1987), volume 1, n.p.

the slave’s technological invention by making it the reason for celebration, the cause for a cosmopolitan gathering, and the reason for the coming theatrical festivity.

The limited records of the Tokyo performance clearly showed the influence of the literary and cultural aspects of the boycott that had been nurtured in Shanghai. In the circulation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the grief and misery of those who were enslaved and those who were discriminated against were transformed into a compassionate act of liberation. The images of the overseas Chinese and the African American slaves, too, were transformed. They were not seen merely as cosufferers of racism and discrimination but as radical fellow human beings capable of fighting for freedom in a compassionate imagination. As the spoken drama and its performers traveled back to China from Tokyo, these transformations, in turn, enriched the meaning of the “radical urban festive culture” of Shanghai. The ideal of this radical festivity was not necessarily revolutionary in a political sense. It was, rather, a radical ideal

about mutual humanity, regardless of all differences—differences that had served as reasons for acts of discrimination in the United States, the country of “liberty and equality for all.”

Conclusion

In the short period of time from 1900 to 1907, Shanghai was characterized by a festive culture of semi-illicit actors, journalists, political diasporans, writers, members of chambers of commerce, and students traveling between Shanghai and Tokyo. During this time, the city saw a galaxy of books, journals, telegraphs, and translations providing images of Asian and European assassins; Polish, Filipino, and Vietnamese revolutionaries; and Russian and French anarchists. In addition, publications about the plight of the overseas Chinese and translated versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* mobilized a boycott movement in the city. This cultural nexus was the basis of Shanghai's urban festivity. And in the process, urban festivity itself became associated with a higher cause: It did not merely reflect a dreamlike state of togetherness in which everyone was having fun; more importantly, it expressed the anxiety, anger, and objection that was being felt about an imminent world in which unequal exchanges of resources and labor, discrimination, and racism were dominant. This anxiety, anger and objection to such a world order demonstrates how the urban festivity that emerged around the boycott movement was a radical festivity.

The 1905 boycott, I would like to note here, was the beginning of a series of similar but even larger movements, most typically the May Fourth movement of 1919 and the demonstrations against the May Thirtieth Massacre in 1925. These two movements involved ten to a hundred times as many demonstrators as the 1905 boycott. The leadership of these movements changed, too. The Shanghai General Workers Union and the Shanghai Student Associations played more active roles in these later movements than did the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce. Yet the rational or cultural logic remained the same: to object to the unjust world order that was about to determine the fate of the people and the land of China. The later movements continued to take the position and to use the methods that had mobilized the 1905 boycott. Journalism, literature, public speeches, posters, shop-by-shop and street-by-street canvasses, picketing, strikes, and exhortations not to buy or sell Japanese and British goods all became familiar aspects of urban life in Shanghai. Like the

1905 boycott, these later movements too had dual political and cultural targets. While the boycott of 1905 targeted both the Qing state and the foreign policy of the United States, the May Fourth movement denied the authority of both the post-Qing government and those powers at the Versailles Conference (April 28, 1919) who awarded the former German leasehold of Jiaozhou to Japan (instead of returning it to China). What I suggest here is that the radical urban festivity discussed in this chapter provided one crucial cultural condition for the birth of the unruly urban public of Shanghai.