
In this book, Claire Conceison has reported detailed conversations with Chinese director-actor Ying Ruocheng about his family, life, and theatre experiences. Ying Ruocheng (1929–2003) was an extraordinary man for many reasons. He came from a distinguished family and was famous as a theatre director and stage and film actor. Nobody who saw him in films such as the English-language *The Last Emperor* (1987) directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, or on the Beijing stage as Willy Loman in his own translation of *Death of a Salesman* (1983) will dispute Ying’s remarkable acting and linguistic talents. He was also an academic, holding visiting professorships in several American universities between 1982 and 1993, and a political figure serving as vice minister of culture from 1986 to 1990. He was imprisoned for political reasons during the Cultural Revolution from 1968 to 1971. He was a Manchu and a Catholic. Although he lived the great majority of his life in China, he knew the West well and straddled the two civilizations. His English was hardly different from a native speaker’s. Because there is so much about his important family, his autobiography is in a very real sense the history of twentieth-century China.

The first chapter of the book is the introduction by Claire Conceison. She comments on Ying and how she approached eliciting his autobiography. After that, there are three parts. The first focuses on Ying’s life in prison during the Cultural Revolution and the surrounding circumstances. The second
part addresses his life before the CCP came to power and details his family, especially his grandfather and father. The third part focuses on Ying’s professional life and cultural diplomacy, especially his bringing Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* to Beijing. For readers of this journal, it is the last part on theatre that will likely be most interesting.

What came through this book for me was portrait of a passionate and deeply learned man. Though he never went out of his way to offend, he certainly had deep principles and did not mind expressing them in ways that sometimes annoyed people with the power to harm him deeply. Though primarily an artist, he became deeply involved in the politics of his time. His character comes through in what he says, especially concerning his loves. These include his love for his wife, Wu Shiliang, who looms very large in the book, for the theatre, and for China. But I was also impressed with the comments he makes about his Catholic religion and his Manchu ethnicity. His Catholicism did not impinge much on his life in the theatre, but was highly relevant to his career in other ways. His Manchu ethnicity was important for his career both inside and outside the theatre.

Claire Conceison’s character is of course subordinate to Ying’s in this, his autobiography. But it was very obvious to me how strongly she admired Ying Ruocheng and with what passion she completed her commitment to publish his autobiography. On the back cover is a touching picture of the old Ying Ruocheng and Claire Conceison hugging. The first words of the introduction introduce Ying as a human being “so unique and compelling” that she wished she could introduce him to everybody she knew (p. xv). One of her summations of Ying is “an uncommon everyman,” meaning that Ying never looked down on anybody and treated people as equals, even though himself remarkable in almost every way.

The fact that emotion and human interest are so important in this book does not detract from its scholarly value. In fact, both authors have gone to great trouble to get things right. There are numerous footnotes by Claire Conceison explicating issues of importance in the text. They are worth following up, because they add numerous points of interest and show her wide knowledge of China’s twentieth-century history and theatre.

One of Ying Ruocheng’s special contributions was to China’s cultural diplomacy: he introduced Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* to China and performed in several major Western films. The chapter on cultural diplomacy details the very special relationship between Arthur Miller and Ying, which was profound yet light enough to allow even serious controversies to be resolved through laughter. Disagreements included whether a Chinese (like Ying) should portray Anglo-Americans (like Willy Loman) on the stage with makeup that makes them look Caucasian. Miller was very clear that anything remotely resembling a false nose was unacceptable and overcame stiff opposition in the makeup department of the Beijing People’s Art Theatre that put on *Salesman*.

Overall, this is a truly excellent book. It is full of information and insight into the life of a wonderfully generous and learned human being, a
most unusual Chinese and man of the theatre. He understood the theatre of his own country and the West, and had valuable practical experience in both China and the United States. As for Conceison, whose job was to transmit to a readership her knowledge and feeling for her subject, her work is exemplary, as is her ability to convey in English his character and views sympathetically and truthfully. This is not only a lively read but also a convincing one.

For the readers of this journal I recommend it strongly. But I also recommend it strongly to those interested in Chinese history and society in the twentieth century, especially for insight on how religion and ethnicity interwove with politics.

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In this study of the history of Peking opera, Joshua Goldstein challenges a popular point of view that Peking opera (jingju) is a wholly traditional and purely Chinese art form. In contrast, he argues that Peking opera is a modern construction, and that its parameters, performances, and disseminations were greatly affected by the conditions of colonial modernity in late Qing and Republican China (p. 3). Approaching Peking opera as an object of knowledge production, Goldstein tries to trace various historical forces and changing discursive and social context that influenced the (re)framing of Peking opera as a genre. Furthermore, he illustrates how this knowledge construction changed the way jingju was perceived, produced, and performed. In sum, Goldstein argues that it was China’s shift from a troubled empire to a troubled republic that underpinned the reshaping of Peking opera, which finally became the “national drama” (guoju) of China (pp. 9–10).

Attempting to present a generally chronological narrative, Goldstein divides his complicated story into two parts, with four chapters in each section. Part 1 examines the development of Peking opera from the late Qing to the May Fourth era. The first chapter provides readers with a significant background for the subsequent analysis, describing the key institutions and operation systems of Peking opera in the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, particular attention is paid to laosheng actors (older male character performers), who dominated the Peking opera troupes in late Qing. Goldstein believes that relentless internal and external crises of the period resulted in the leadership of laosheng actors who symbolized masculinity, but when China shifted from an empire to a nation-state, their status was replaced by dan actors, who took the roles of young female characters and symbolized beauty (p. 50). Chapter 2, “From Teahouse to Playhouse,” focuses on the transformation of theaters in the early twentieth century in terms of architecture, operation, the perfor-