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concepts" (2). Stories told by these chapters dispute the orthodox narrative that the Maoist era was simply a time of hegemonic control of the arts. This research is possible due, in equal parts, to the diligence of the book's contributors and to "the obsessive record-keeping of lower-level bureaucrats" (20). Contending with and fine-tuning the prevailing ideology of one's time period not only became a performative part of theatre-making but also the artists' offstage life.

The book is designed to appeal to a broad readership beyond Chinese theatre specialists. Scholars and students alike will appreciate the book's companion website featuring 14 high-resolution images such as the Central Academy of Drama's 1950 production of *The White-Haired Girl*. These images can be sorted by the chapter in which they appear, their associated keywords such as *yangbanxi*, by sources such as *Renmin huabao* 人民畫報, and by year.

Alexa Alice Joubin
George Washington University

Performing the Socialist State: Modern Chinese Theater and Film Culture, by Xiaomei Chen. New York: Columbia University Press, 2023. Pp. xi + 384. $65.00 (hardcover); $64.99 (ebook).

The magnum opus of one of the leading scholars in the field in our times, *Performing the Socialist State* establishes the study of Chinese drama as an integral part of world theatre. Currently Distinguished Professor of Chinese Literature at the University of California, Davis, Xiaomei Chen has written extensively on modern Chinese theatre. The eight chronologically- and thematically-organized chapters in this book provide a much-needed critical survey of spoken drama (*huaju* 话剧) from its inception through the Republican and Maoist eras to the first decade of the twenty-first century. Spoken drama, as Chen's diachronic study shows, has evolved across an astonishing range of media in the forms of women's theatre, socialist theatre, "red classic" films, and even in the "sonic theatre" of the Internationale, the unofficial anthem of various communist and socialist movements.

The book stakes two important claims that are a consistent thread throughout Chen's career. First, the book demonstrates, as Chen's other monographs and anthologies do, that several key, shared political and aesthetic elements inform the development of modern theatre in various periods that have previously been regarded as siloed and distinct, including the Republican, socialist, and postsocialist eras. For instance, the legacy of such *huaju* founding figures as Tian Han 田汉, Hong Shen 洪深, and Ouyang Yuqian 欧阳予倩 is still felt well into the twenty-first century. Secondly, the book argues that, contrary to common wisdom, state regulation and censorship affect, but do not stifle, artistic imagination. In the spirit of arts always finding a way out and giving credit where credit is due, the book deftly charts unexpected histories

of how artists create politically viable but aesthetically innovative works in this type of environment.

The book itself is divided into two key parts. Part One focuses on the three theatre founding fathers, with Tian Han, Hong Shen, and Ouyang Yuqian each taking up a chapter. Part Two (containing Chapters 4-8) turns to "Chinese socialist theatre and its afterlife." Chen's writing is theoretically astute and interwoven with relevant and captivating personal accounts of a 2017 UC Davis production of Ouyang Yuqian's *After Returning Home* 回家以后 and how Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a foundational text in modern Chinese theatre, featured in Chen's 1973 college entrance exam in Beijing.

The three chapters in Part One trace the achievements and legacy of Tian and Ouyang, who discovered the likes of Shakespeare, Chekhov, Ibsen, and Wilde while residing in Japan, as well as Hong, who gained hands-on experience working in theatres in the US. The purpose of these chapters is to counteract the bias in Chinese-language scholarship that dismiss these founders as being too political or propagandistic to be worthy of serious study. As Chen states, her research treats Tian, Hong, and Ouyang as "partial creators of socialist culture rather than its mere victims" (8).

Part Two connects Tian's, Hong's, and Ouyang's early achievements in the early twentieth century to the development of post-1949 Chinese theatre. Most interestingly, among the three, Tian evolved from an oppositional artist in the early years into a bureaucrat participating in the canonization of socialist theatre. He became president of the China Theatre Association in 1952.

Compelling artworks often espouse a sense of openness, leaving audiences to draw their own conclusions. One intriguing case is Meng Bing's 孟冰 play, *This Is the Final Struggle* 这是最后的斗争 (China's National Theater, 2011), which gives double meaning to a famous line in the song the Internationale: "This is the final struggle, / Unite together towards tomorrow, / The 'Internationale' / shall certainly be realized." One wonders, in the end, whether the play's protagonist will forge ahead with his criminal plan in order to survive, or be reformed only to be destroyed by "a society that cannot protect honest citizens" (269). Comparing the successful and party-ordained play to Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, Chen highlights the power of performative ambiguity. On one hand, the play is endorsed by government officials for its message of anticorruption—a key theme of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). On the other hand, the play also uses satire to draw attention to the "hypocrisy of communist glory" (20). In fact, the Internationale itself has been appropriated and sung in key moments in theatrical and cinematic works beyond the satirical *This Is the Final Struggle*. The song has been used both to validate the legitimacy of the CCP's rule and to tacitly challenge "the CCP's betrayal of its original blueprints" (20). Stories such as this are what make *Performing the Socialist State* particularly compelling. Not only will readers gain a more nuanced understanding of Chinese cultural history but they will also appreciate how

Chen's account transcends the binary logic of demon or angel in studies of Chinese political life.

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The Membranes: A Novel, by Chi Ta-wei, translated by Ari Larissa Heinrich. New York: Columbia University Press, 2021. Pp. 168. $65.00 (hardcover); $17.00 (paperback); $16.99 (ebook).

It only took 25 years for English readers to have a chance to read the pathbreaking novel *Membranes* 膜 by queer author and scholar Chi Ta-wei 紀大偉. A quarter of a century after its publication, queer Sinophone scholar Ari Heinrich finally took to task the long-awaited and significant translation of Chi's iconic queer Taiwan speculative fiction for a global Anglophone audience. Ari Heinrich, the author of *Chinese Surplus: Biopolitical Aesthetics and the Medically Commodified Body* (Duke 2018), is a familiar name to those of us who study queer Sinophone literature from Taiwan. For the past decade or more, he has taken up the significant task of promoting queer Sinophone Taiwan by translating some of the pioneering works by queer Taiwanese writers. In addition to Chi's *The Membranes*, Heinrich has also translated the late lesbian writer Qiu Miaojin's 邱妙津 *Last Words from Montmartre* 蒙馬特遺書 (New York Review Books Classics, 2014). Heinrich's more than two-decade-long research and investment in advocating for queer voices from Taiwan has elevated these voices to a global stage, especially to a wider English-speaking world.

While many laud the timelessness of the novel–a novel that was ahead of its time and still is, Heinrich reminds us of its significance to the generation who read it when it first appeared in print. With the lifting of martial law in 1987, Taiwan was reborn as a new national body seeking to rewrite its past that had been repressed for decades. The new Taiwan identity was to a great extent defined by Taiwan's participation in the global economy and its eagerness to embrace democratic values and liberal ideas. Hence, a national identity geared toward democratically embracing an array of cultures and non-normative identities began to take shape in the 1990s as Taiwan reshaped itself into a nation of global vision. Taiwan not only looked to global powers such as the United States but also to nations with similar histories of liberation from authoritarianism such as Spain for inspiration. This was the environment that nurtured the production of Chi's *The Membranes* and later the coming of age of a queer Taiwan literary culture. It is not a surprise that films by filmmakers such as Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar and Italian director Luchino Visconti are intertextually referenced throughout the novel. This is because these European films had a popular cult following in Taiwan in the 1990s among Taiwan film festival goers and college students.

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