

“ I was not clearly aware that I wanted to rectify, satirize, or attack anything. Near the end of the writing, however, there seemed to be an emotional surge pushing me forward, and I was releasing and transforming my suppressed anger into bitter denunciation of the Chinese family and society. In the beginning when I began to form a vague image of *Thunderstorm*, what interested me were a couple of episodes, a few characters, as well as a complex and aboriginal sentiment.

To me, *Thunderstorm* was the lure. The sentiment that came along with *Thunderstorm* formed my imagination, which I found difficult to describe, about the mysteries in the universe. *Thunderstorm* can be regarded as the remains of the primitiveness in me.

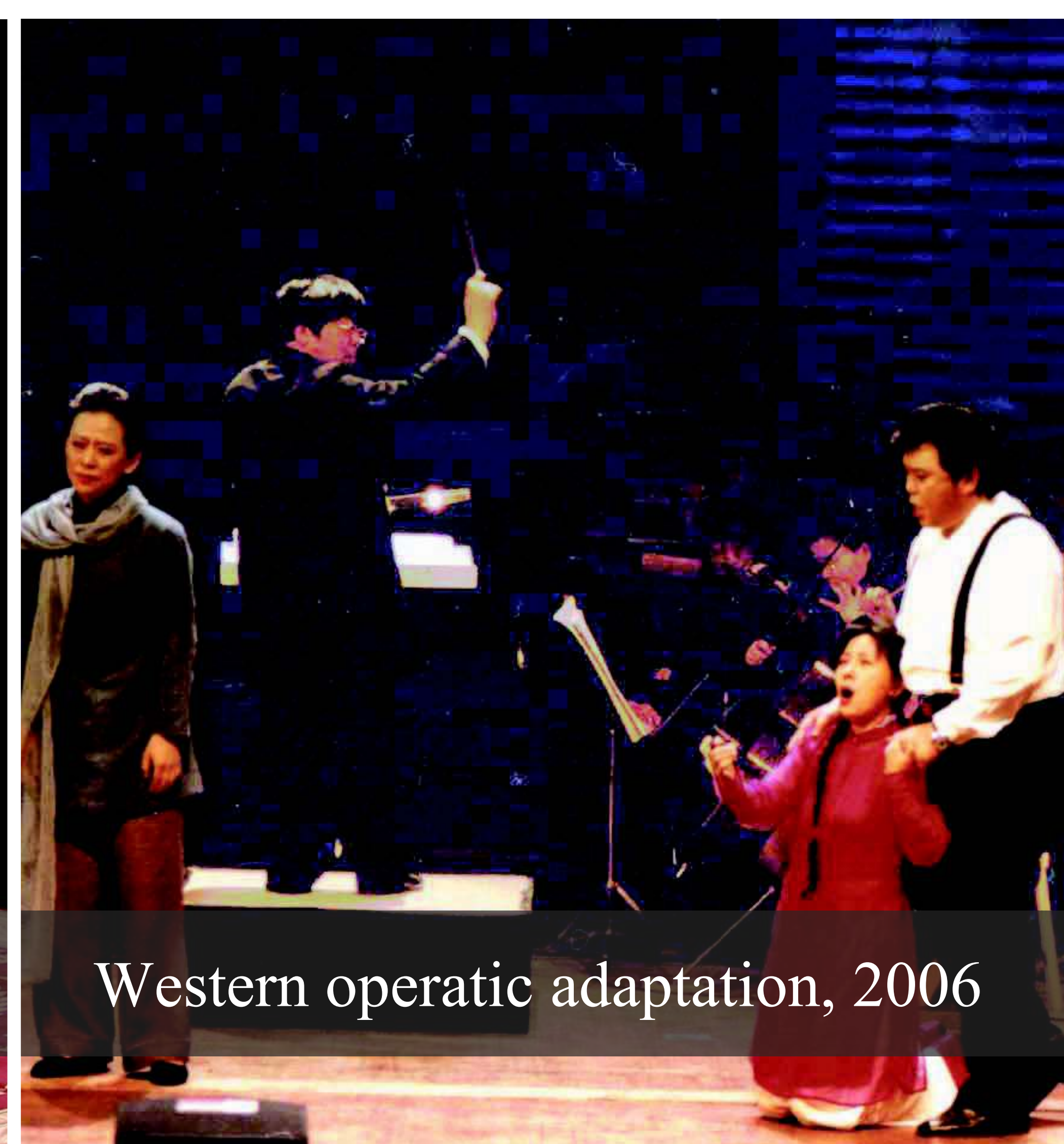
- Cao Yu,
Preface to *Thunderstorm*, 1936

Thunderstorm, a four-act play, looks to the three unities to provide the foundation for expounding a complex story involving family hierarchies, adultery, incest, threatened murder and labour unrest. The relationships between masters and servants, as well as between stepmother and stepson, not only reveal love and hatred but also embed an exploration of fate within a plot that exposes the oppressive realities of contemporary society. The themes reflect the spirit of iconoclasm in the 1920s and 1930s which advocated the liberation of the individual from the patriarchal family and the emancipation of workers from capitalist exploitation. The drama's tragic ending, inspired in part by Greek tragedy, is also a meditation upon fate.

Since its premiere on the Chinese professional stage in 1935, *Thunderstorm* has been revived constantly (except during the Cultural Revolution). Many celebrated actors have claimed they learned how to portray characters from acting in this play. *Thunderstorm* has also been adapted into regional musical theatres, Western opera, ballet and film.



Storytelling genre adaptation, 2010



Western operatic adaptation, 2006



Ballet adaptation, 1981