

“ In the natural world, there is a biological process. Many insects have to get rid of their old skin in order to develop their new life. This is what I meant by metamorphosis. We do not know what sense insects have of this process, but we can imagine that they may feel great anxiety before abrupt changes as the new life starts forming in them. ”

... This chapter of history, written in blood and sweat, and profuse in heroic and pathetic events, manifests the hardship that our national warriors have encountered on every frontier of their strife, as well as the despair of the degenerate class in the process of its elimination.

- Cao Yu,
Postscript to *Metamorphosis*, 1940



Metamorphosis (1940)

By December 1937, the adverse course of the Sino-Japanese war had forced the Nationalist government to retreat from its capital Nanjing. Cao Yu and the National Drama School withdrew to Jiang'an, a distant county in south-western China, where staff and students staged a series of new performances to entertain wartime audiences.

Written in 1940, *Metamorphosis* is an ode to the patriotism of the Chinese people. As in his earlier plays about social problems, Cao Yu takes a critical stance and attacks irresponsible administrators and corruption in a military hospital. This four-act drama focuses on two selfless heroes: a warm-hearted, caring doctor and an upright official. Through their struggle and ultimate success, the play presents an optimistic picture to worried audiences with the doctor's cry: "China, China, you will be strong!"

Both left-wing and Nationalist critics reacted severely to the play, as did those who sought purely artistic value. In spite of this, *Metamorphosis* proved extremely popular with audiences who saw the hope that they needed at the time.

