

“ I remember it was in 1942 during the steaming hot days in Chongqing. I wrote *The Family* on a boat anchored in the Yangzi River. ... The crew members saw me hunched over a small table day and night, sweat rolling down on my bare back. A middle-aged man said to me: “Gosh! You really work hard writing your plays.” In my life, I’ve forgotten many things that I should have remembered, but this sentence, perhaps for the man’s sincerity, has lived in my mind ever since.

- Cao Yu,  
*The Wenhui Daily*, 1978



Cao Yu and Ba Jin in the 1980s

## *The Family* (1942)

Cao Yu’s four-act play *The Family* was adapted from the famous novel of that name by Ba Jin. In 1934, Ba Jin had been the first to recognize Cao Yu’s talent as a playwright when he published the young man’s *Thunderstorm* in the *Literary Quarterly*, and the two became soul mates for the rest of their lives.



The mothers fear the young couple’s love will lead to tragedy, 1984



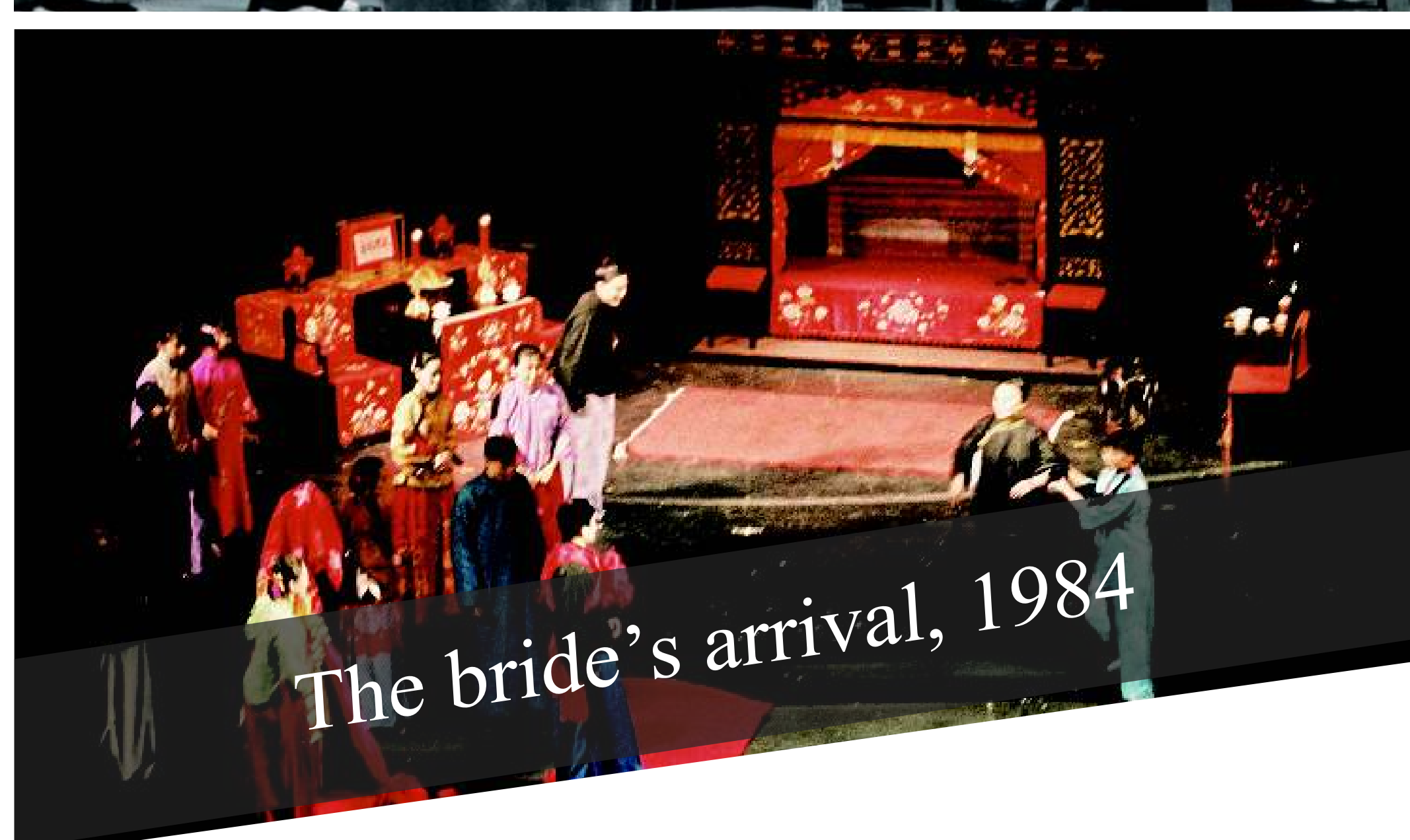
Shanghai’s premiere, 1948



The couple enjoy a nighttime reprieve, 2002



The pregnant woman is not allowed to give birth at home due to superstition, 1954



The bride’s arrival, 1984

Set in the socio-political turmoil of China in the 1920s, *The Family* explores the entire ambit of love, ranging from frustration to fulfilment, and from pretended affection to complete devotion. Love, treated with sympathy and warmth in beautiful poetic language, is contrasted against the all-pervading conflicts between generations, between tradition and modernity, and between the family and the individual. The tragedy of two young women and their innocent deaths demonstrate that the old “family” is a “prison” needing to be condemned and demolished.

Monologues from this play are regularly used in speech classes for drama students.