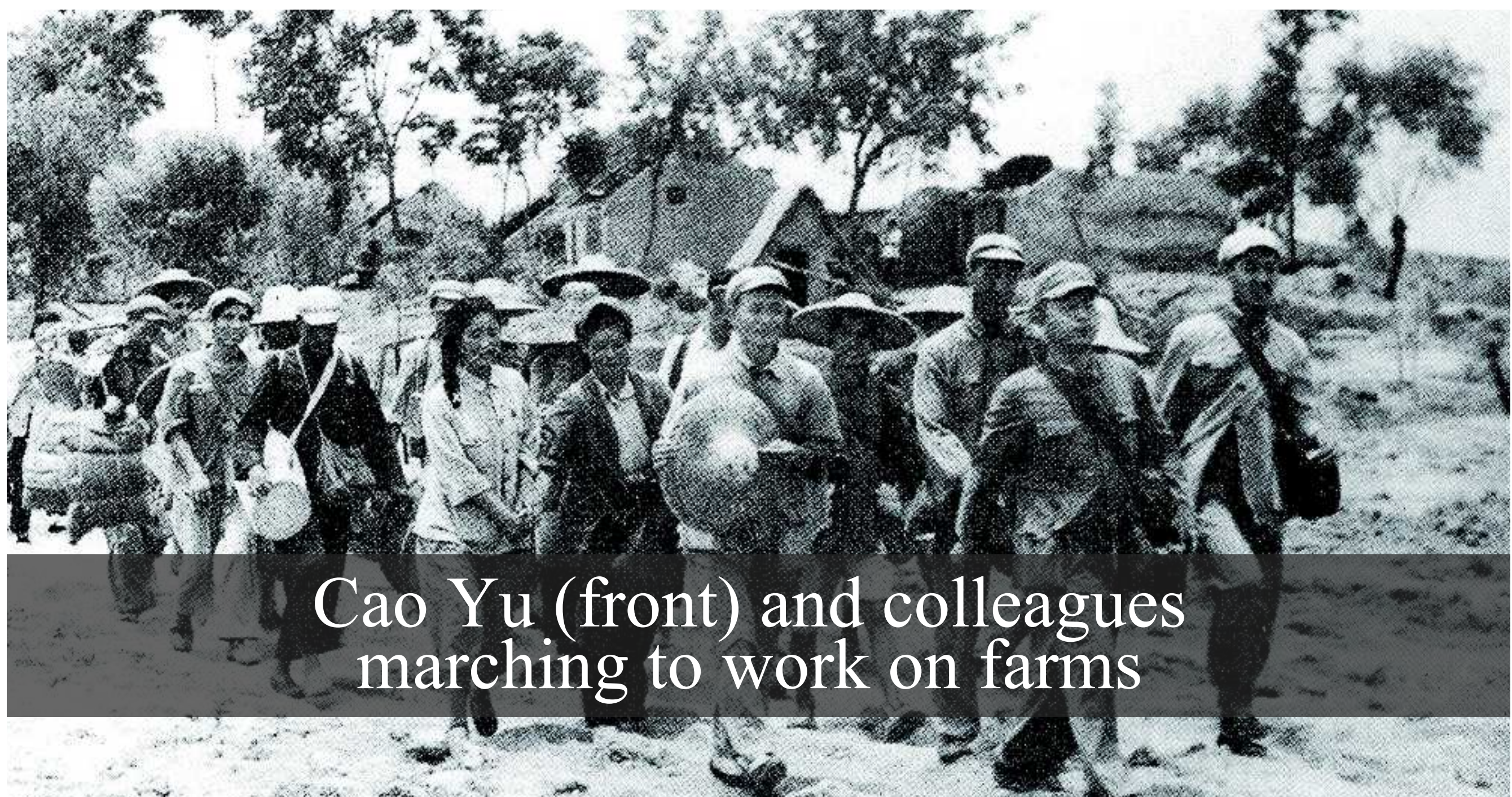


Cao Yu’s unhappiness with *Courage and the Sword* was reflected in an article he published one year later in the *Drama Bulletin*:

“ I feel that we will not be able to write until we really know the people and their surroundings. We should also have real feelings about them before we pick up our pens.

- Cao Yu, 1962

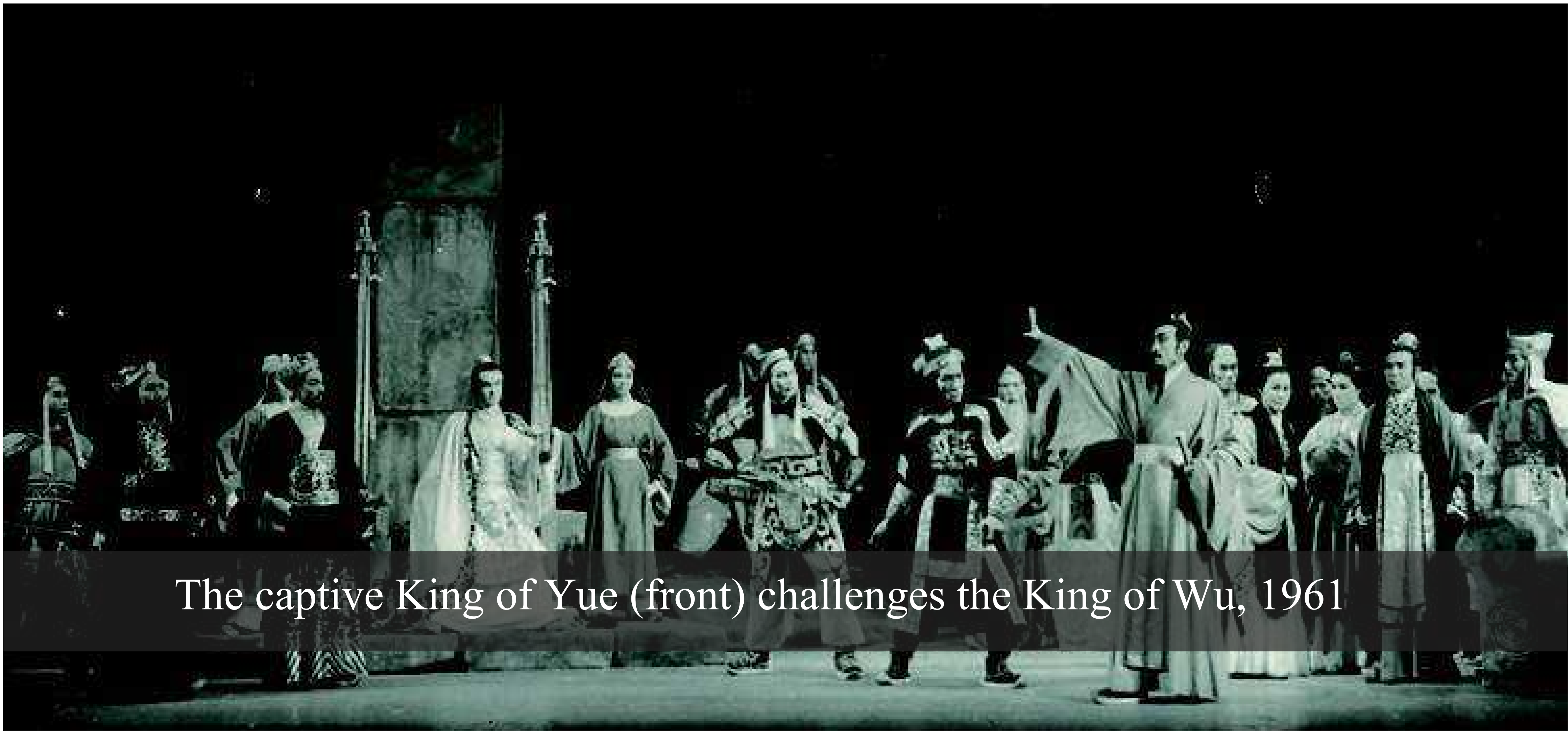


Cao Yu (front) and colleagues marching to work on farms

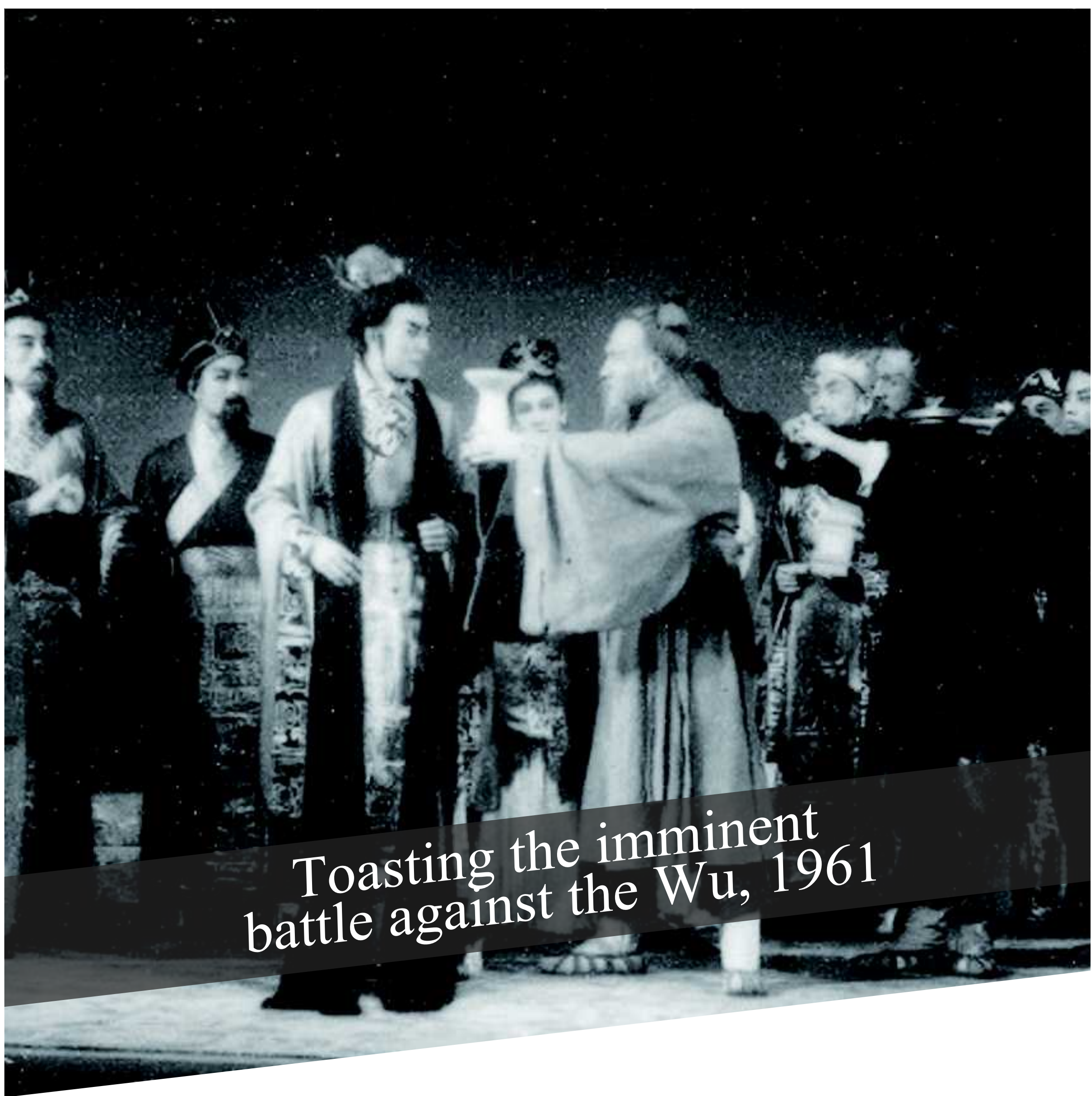
Courage and the Sword (1961)

By the late 1950s and early 1960s China was a nation of young people, detached from the past and ready to compete with the outside world. At the same time, the country had experienced the greatest difficulties with its economy and international relations. Following the disastrous Great Leap Forward campaign, China suffered unprecedented famine, and the Sino-Soviet split exacerbated China’s economic situation. “Self reliance and arduous struggle” was now the motto for the nation to follow; professionals in literature and arts were encouraged to produce works supporting the Party’s policy. *Courage and the Sword* was written and produced against this background.

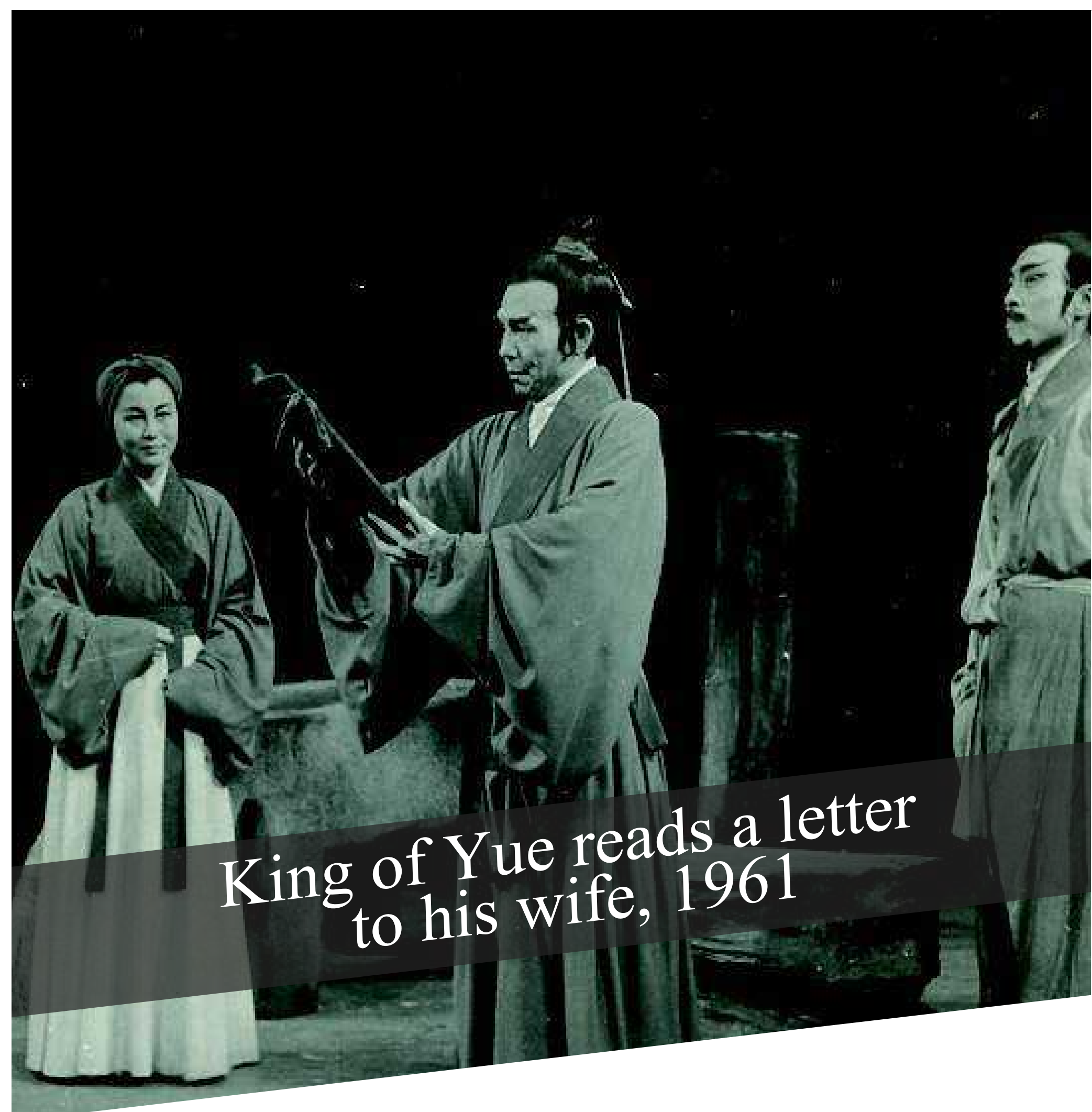
Based on the struggle between the kingdoms of Wu and Yue, around 500 BC, the five-act historical play focuses on the resolve and strategy evinced by the King of Yue. When held captive by the Wu, he sleeps on firewood and licks the bitter gall bladder to remind himself of his shame in losing his kingdom. (In Chinese belief the gall is directly associated with courage, and the Chinese title of the play is literally “*Gall and Sword*”.) Having gained his release, the King of Yue proceeds on a twenty-year crusade to unify his country and strengthen his army, eventually bringing victory to his land and restoring pride and independence to his people. The moral of this parable is clear: even a weak and conquered nation can stand up on its own through determined leadership, tireless effort and self-reliance.



The captive King of Yue (front) challenges the King of Wu, 1961



Toasting the imminent battle against the Wu, 1961



King of Yue reads a letter to his wife, 1961