

“ Wiping off the tears from her face, I would like to let Wang Zhaojun show her own sparkling colour. ”



- Cao Yu, 1979

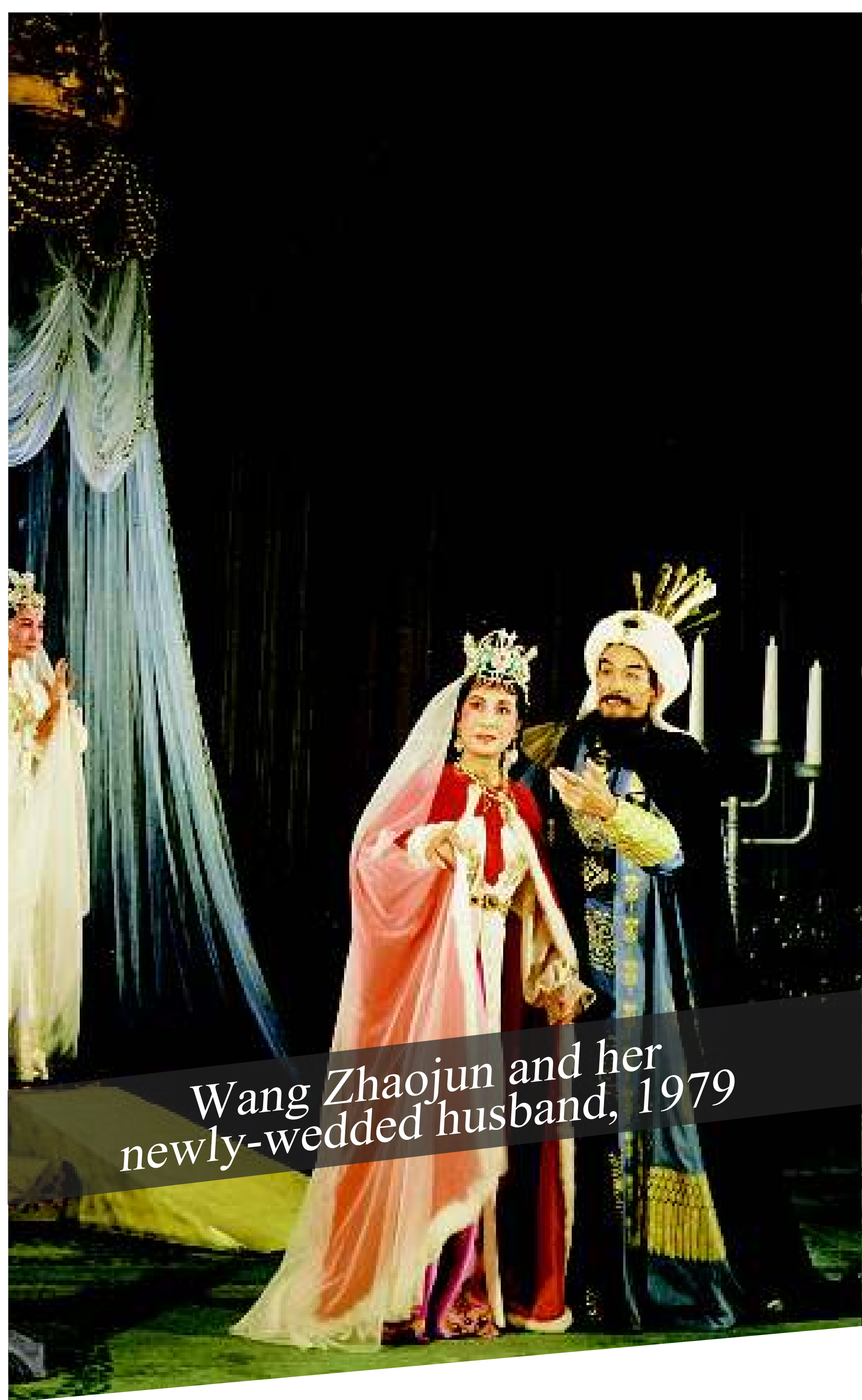
Consort of Peace (1978)

The decade-long upheaval of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) saw creativity pushed aside. Cao Yu was publicly denounced and forced to work as a cleaner, mopping the floors and toilets in the Beijing People's Art Theatre, an institution where he had been the founding president since 1952.

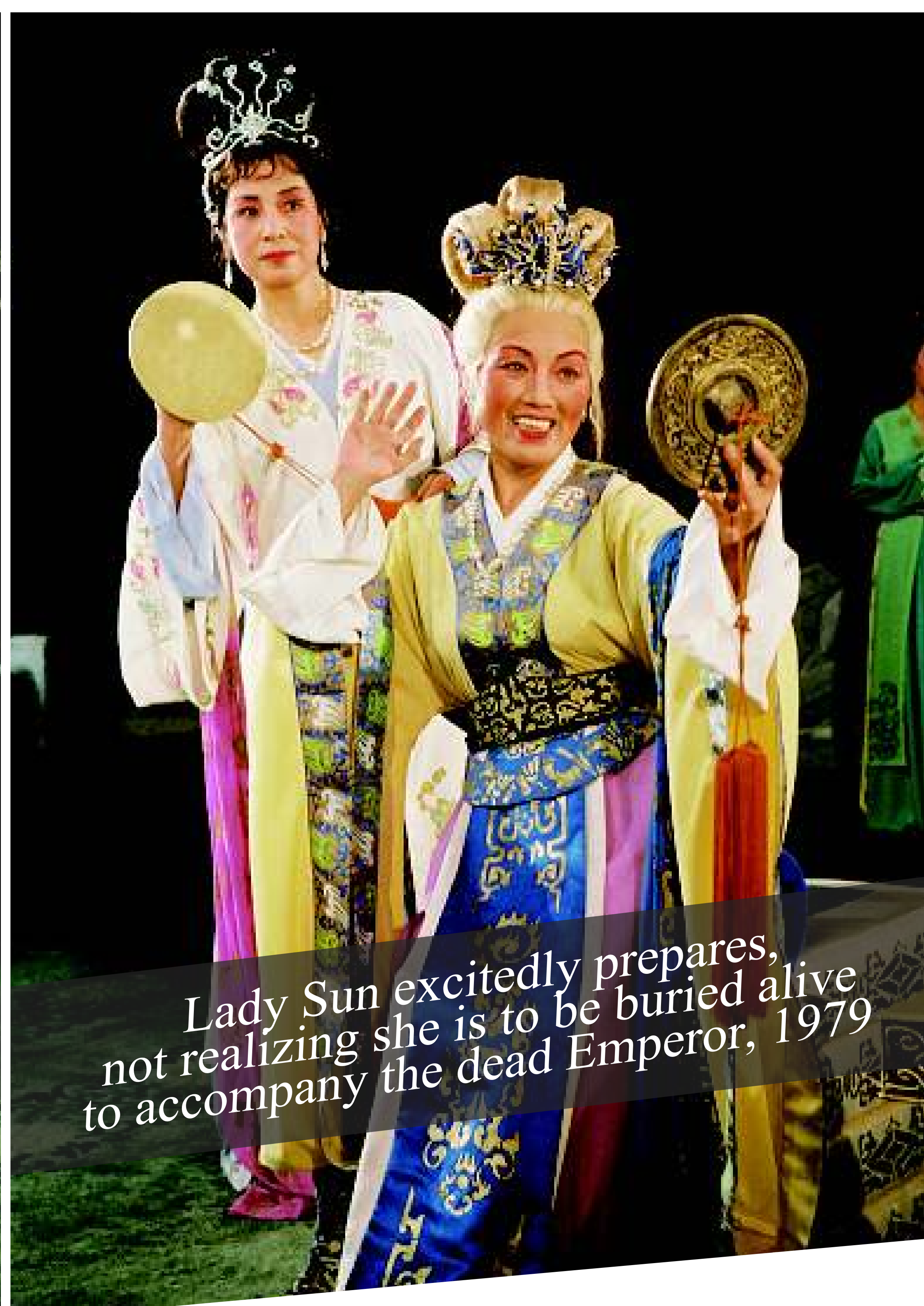
Consort of Peace, which originally had the eponymous title Wang Zhaojun, is the sole play written by Cao Yu after the Cultural Revolution. Wang Zhaojun was a lady-in-waiting in the Han court who was married off to a tribal prince to establish good relations between the Han and the Xiongnu tribe (circa 40 BC). Among the historical records, poetry, stories and plays about Wang Zhaojun, Cao Yu found her image in Han and Mongolian folk tales particularly fascinating. Her tomb, located in the Mongolian Autonomous Region, is called the “Green Tomb” because it is

said to be covered by evergreen grass and shrubs even in the snows of winter. Superstition has it that infertile women will become pregnant if they spend a night at this tomb.

Written in poetic language, Cao Yu's five-act play presents the tale from an unorthodox angle. No longer a weeping girl unwilling to leave her home, Cao Yu's Wang Zhaojun is an independently-minded woman who volunteers to go because she wishes to help bring harmony between the two peoples and also because she sees an opportunity to gain a life of her own. She is determined not to follow the narrow existence of ladies-in-waiting whose entire lives are confined within the palace walls without even a chance of meeting the emperor. Wang Zhaojun may be seen here as a new woman who celebrates the bright future after the dark years of the Cultural Revolution.



Wang Zhaojun and her newly-wedded husband, 1979



Lady Sun excitedly prepares, not realizing she is to be buried alive to accompany the dead Emperor, 1979