

English-Language *Jingju* (Beijing Opera) at the University of Hawaii

by Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak



The UH Asian Theatre Program

- Dates from 1923.
- Offers the MFA in Asian Performance (est. 1990), and the PhD in Asian Theatre (est. 1970).
- BA and MA degrees include Asian theatre study, and have focused Asian emphasis tracks.

Residencies:

The Core of the Asian Theatre Program

- Comprised of intensive training culminating in a fully-staged production.
- Held for 4-7 months each year, in a 4-year cultural rotation—China, Japan, Indonesia, and a “guest” Asian culture.
- Taught by leading professional artists from a particular Asian culture and theatre form.
- Produced by a permanent Asian theatre faculty member, who usually translates and directs the culminating, English-language production of a representative play from the form.

Benefits

For the University:

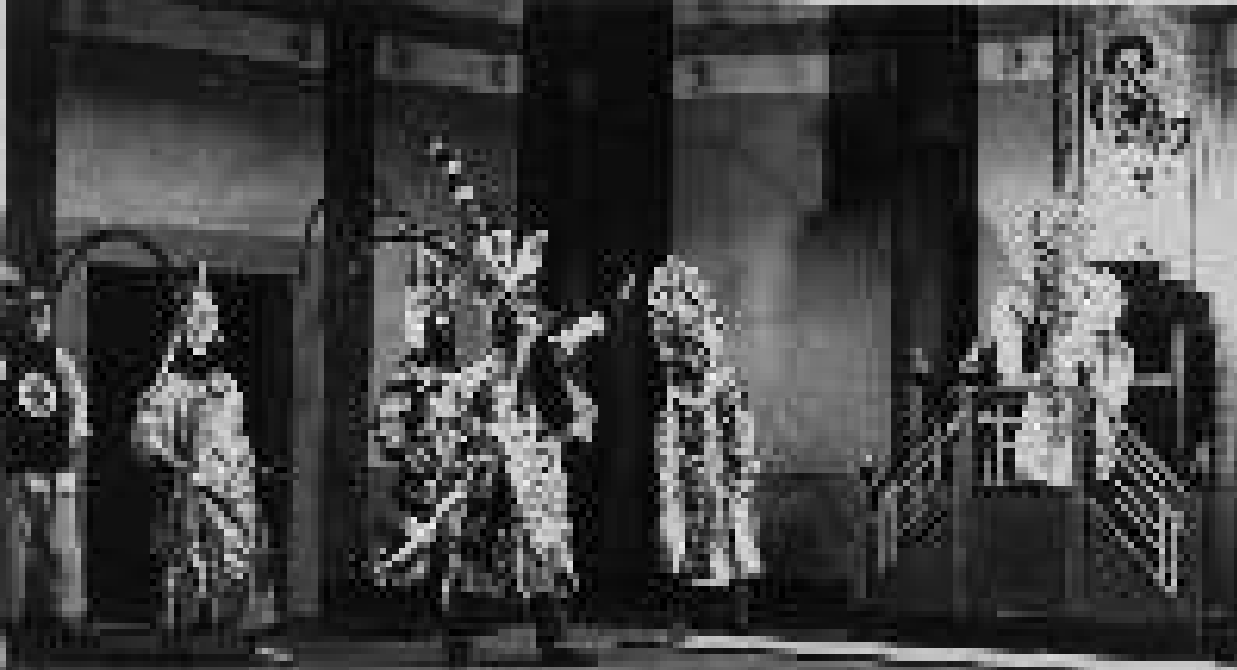
- Students receive in-depth training from international professionals on a yearly basis.
- Student and faculty scholars are provided with new opportunities each year for conducting practical, artistic, and theoretical research.

For the Community:

- The traditional cultures of Hawai'i's Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, and other Asian communities are showcased through their theatrical arts in fully-staged, English-language form.
- Hawai'i audiences of all ancestries may attend, understand, and appreciate these arts, and the cultures that have created them.

Chinese Theatre at the University of Hawai'i

- Featured in the 1920s-40s.
- Became the primary focus again with the early 1980s hire of a permanent Chinese theatre faculty member.



Chinese Theatre Curriculum

- Chinese theatre history, theory, and dramatic literature are taught every year.
- Currently 6 PhD candidates are working in Chinese Theatre.



Chinese Theatre Residencies



- Every 4 years, it is “China’s turn” in the cultural rotation of the Asian Theatre Program.
- Since 1984, there have been 7 Chinese Theatre Residencies—all in Jingju.

Chinese Theatre Residency Initiators



- Shen Xiaomei (沈小梅), personal disciple of Mei Lanfang (梅兰芳), has been artistic supervisor for all 7 residencies to date.
- Her student, Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak (魏莉莎), has produced, translated, and directed.



Participants and Audiences



- Training, outreach, and performance involve 60-80 participating students each residency.
- Outreach events and productions reach 5,000-8,000 Hawaii audience members each residency.
- 3 productions have toured China by special invitation.

Residencies Are Unique Opportunities



- Doctoral student Wei Ruhua (魏汝华Taipei, Taiwan): “Nowhere else in the world outside of professional Jingju performer training in China is it possible for college students to receive such long-term, intensive, in-depth training in the theory and performance of Jingju.”
- MFA graduate R. Kevin Doyle (窦课文Newtown, CT, U.S.A.): “Not even in China can university students outside a performance conservatory setting receive six to seven months of intensive, daily training from an artist of Madam Shen Xiaomei’s stature.”

Residency Structure: *Courses*

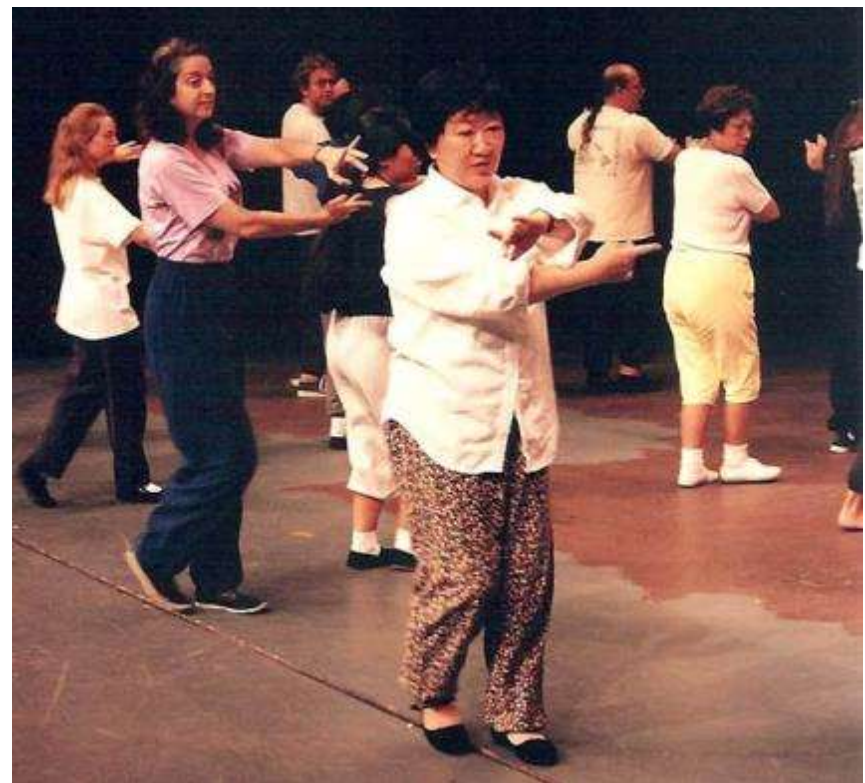
Each residency includes
3 semester-long,
practical courses:

- in the Department of
Theatre & Dance:
 - Jingju Movement,
and
 - Jingju Voice;
- in the Music
Department:
 - Jingju Instrumental
Technique





Lu Genzhang critiquing *pangtui*, 2009.



Shen Xiaomei teaching *yunshou*, 1997.

Residency Structure: *Individual & Group Classes*

- Students in courses are assigned acting roles and musical instruments in the 2nd week of class.
- Throughout the semester, individual training classes are held during the day, 1-5 times per week, for each specific role and instrument.
- Group classes are held from mid-Oct through mid-Dec, 5 nights per week, with all 3 teachers & all student performers involved in the specific scene being taught each night.





Residency Structure: *Rehearsals*



- Rehearsals of the culminating production are held from early January through mid-February,
- for a total of 6-7 weeks.
- Goal of rehearsals—add costumes & makeup, and
- move from imitation to performance & communication



Residency Structure: *Performances*

Performances run 2 to 3 weeks in the 2nd half of February, in UH's Kennedy Theatre, designed by I.M. Pei (贝聿铭), and generally have full or close-to-capacity (630) houses.



List of Culminating Productions to Date

- *The Phoenix Returns to Its Nest* 凤还巢 (1984-85, China tour 1986)
- *Yu Tangchun—the Jade Hall of Spring* 玉堂春 (1989-90, China tour 1991)
- *Shajiabang—Spark Amid the Reeds* 沙家浜 (1993-94)
- *Silang Tan Mu—Love and Loyalty* 四郎探母 (1997-98)
- *Judge Bao and the Case of Qin Xianglian* 秦香莲 (2001-02, China tour 2002)
- *Women Generals of the Yang Family* 杨门女将 (2005-06)
- *The White Snake* 白蛇传 (2009-10)

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Under Preparation

Lady Mu and the Yang Family Generals

穆桂英挂帅 (2013-14)

- Training Residency to begin August 15, 2013
- Culminating Production to open February 20, 2014