

# Chinese Dramas of the 1990s In The 20th Century

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**Abstract:** This article contributes to the history of the debate and development of New Era drama and dramaturgy in China in the 1980s and 1990s. The formation of new era drama was influenced primarily by two factors: the experience of the "Seventeen Years" period of 话剧 (huà jù, spoken drama), and the concepts and practices of Western modernist drama. Five major dramatic systems from Europe and America—including Brecht's epic theatre, absurd drama theory, Grotowski's poor theatre, Peter Brook's intense drama, and others—had a significant impact on Chinese dramaturgy. The text highlights the discussions around dramaturgy concepts in the 1980s, focusing on the re-examination of realism, modernism, and classical dramatic models in China. Theories of Gao Xingjian and other dramatists, new dramatic forms, creative explorations, and perspectives on contemporary Western drama are analyzed. Furthermore, the text provides information about new dramaturgical tendencies influenced by social themes, modernist styles, symbolism, expressionism, and absurd drama. It also covers creative discussions among the public and specialists regarding dramaturgy, alongside its theoretical and practical aspects. Through examples of plays by Ma Zhongjun, Gao Xingjian, Yan Haiping, and others, the text outlines the stages of formation and development of new dramaturgy in China. During this period, dramaturgy sought a balance between realism and modernism while striving to express social, cultural, and philosophical issues through artistic means.

**Keywords:** New Drama, Chinese Drama, huaju (话剧), dhramatic Reform, modernism, western Drama, Bertolt Brecht, Absurd Drama, Grotowski, Peter Brook, realism and modernism, drama theory, Influence of Western drama, drama concepts, debates, crama innovations, Ma Zhongjun, Gao Xingjian, symbolism, expressionism, political and cultural content, new dramatic styles.

**Introduction:** The second half of the 20th century in the development of drama (话剧 huà jù) can be divided into the following stages:

➤ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, drama began to revive and recover from the ruins of the "Cultural Revolution," achieving great creative successes over the course of a decade. During this period, bold explorations and innovations were undertaken, drawing on Western modernist drama, and a number of dramatic studies were carried out.

➤ In the early 1990s, drama encountered a rather complex and difficult environment. While various experiments were ongoing, the movement of "small epic theater" became a noteworthy phenomenon.

In 1977, drama entered a new era of revival and renewal. Several excellent plays were re-staged, and criticism began of the notorious "Gang of Four (四人帮 sì rén bāng)" and "Conspiracy Drama (阴谋戏剧 yīn móu xì jù)," which had gained popularity in the drama world. The emergence of works such as "When the Maple Leaves Turn Red (枫叶红了的时候 fēng yè hóng le de shí hòu)" and "Dawn (曙光 shǔ guāng)" demonstrated a revival in dramatic creativity.

"When the Maple Leaves Turn Red" (by Jin Zhenjia and Wang Jingyu) was a political comedy and biting satire that exposed the political deceptions of the "Gang of Four." "Dawn" (by Bai Hua) attempted to explore the ideological roots and internal struggles within the early history of the Chinese Communist Party. After this,

numerous new plays were created.

Plays such as: "In Silence (于无声处 yú wú shēng chù)" (Zong Fuxian), "Testament of Loyalty (丹心谱 dān xīn pǔ)" (Su Shuyang), "There Is Such a Small Courtyard (有这样一个小院 yǒu zhè yàng yí gè xiǎo yuàn)" (Li Longyun), "Revolution in Shenzhou (神州风雷 shén zhōu fēng léi)" (Zhao Xuan, Jin Jingmai), "Neighbors Around (左邻右舍 zuǒ lín yòu shè)" (Su Shuyang), "The September 13 Incident (九一三事件 jiǔ yī sān shì jiàn)" (Ding Yisan)

—these and many other dramatic works depicted the people's resistance against the likes of "Dawn" and those under their control during a decade of devastation, forming the first wave of "exposing and criticizing (揭批 jiē pī)" dramas. A common characteristic of these plays is the revival and promotion of the revolutionary huà jù's militant traditions.

Alongside these "exposing and criticizing" dramas, new works emerged that reflected real-life struggles in the new era. These plays addressed major contradictions and problems in real social life, clearly expressing the need for ideological liberation and vividly reflecting the turn towards reality.

Works such as: "Navruz Flower (报春花 bào chūn huā)" (Cui Dezhi), "The Future Is Calling (未来在召唤 wèi lái zài zhào huàn)" (Zhao Zixiong), "Save Her (救救她 jiù jiù tā)" (Zhao Guoqing), "Power and Law (权与法 quán yǔ fǎ)" (Xing Yixun), "Dawn of the Grey Kingdom (灰色王国的黎明 huī sè wáng guó de lí míng)" (Zhong Jieying)

—raised key issues that needed to be addressed in society, such as family background, eliminating injustice and lies, juvenile delinquency, abuse of power over the law, feudal issues, and more. These plays created a significant public response and signaled the flourishing of realistic drama in the 1980s.

These plays, known as social problem dramas, maintained a sharply confrontational stance with mainstream ideology and played a unique role in gathering public consensus for social reform. Depicting the image of the elder generation of Communist Party revolutionaries also became a topical theme of creativity during this time. In plays such as: "Turning Point (转折 zhuǎn zhé)" (Zhou Lai, Wang Bing, Lin Kexuan, Zhao Yunsheng), "The Newspaper Boy (报童 bào tóng)" (Zhu Yi, Shao Chongfei, Wang Zheng, Lin Kehuan), —leaders were portrayed only occasionally. However, in: "Dawn (曙光 shǔ guāng)" (Bai Hua), "The

Xi'an Incident (西安事变 Xī'ān shì biàn)" (Cheng Shirong, Zheng Zhong, Yao Yunhuan, Xu Yaohua, Huang Jingyuan), "Chen Yi Emerges from the Mountains (陈毅出山 Chén Yì chū shān)" (Ding Yisan), "Mayor Chen Yi (陈毅市长 chén yì shì zhǎng)" (Sha Yexin), "The War Moved to Northern Shaanxi (转战陕北 zhuǎn zhàn shān běi)" (Ma Rong), "General Peng (彭大将军 Péng dà jiāng jūn)" (Wang Deying, Jin Hong)

—leaders such as He Long, Zhou Enlai, Chen Yi, Peng Dehuai, and Mao Zedong became central figures in drama. In plays like "Mayor Chen Yi", leaders gradually moved away from being idealized or deified and became increasingly humanized.

At a time when ideological views were being set aside and new works were emerging, "If I Were Real (假如我是真的 jiǎ rú wǒ shì zhēn de)" (a six-scene stage play by Sha Yexin, Li Shoucheng, and Yao Mingde) sparked nationwide debate across China. From January 23 to February 13, 1980, the China Playwrights Association and the China Film Association jointly held a symposium on scriptwriting in Beijing. During the symposium, several controversial works were discussed, including "If I Were Real (假如我是真的 jiǎ rú wǒ shì zhēn de)", the screenplay "In the Social Archives (在社会档案里 zài shè huì dǎng àn lǐ)", "The Female Thief (女贼 nǚ zéi)", the novel "Flying to the Sky (飞天 fēi tiān)", and the screenplay "Bitter Love (苦恋 kǔ liàn)", among others.

The symposium focused on evaluating literary and artistic creativity, understanding the spirit of the times, defining the responsibilities of literature and art, recognizing authenticity in creative works, and developing literary criticism.

Hu Yaobang, then head of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, delivered a lengthy speech at the meeting. He addressed topics such as: "How should we view our own Party, which is leading us?", "How should we relate correctly to our current society?", "How should we regard the majority of our population, who are engaged in both physical and intellectual labor?", "How should we view the People's Liberation Army?", "How should we correctly interpret Chairman Mao and his ideas?", and "How should we see the darker sides of our social life?" .

At the beginning of the 1980s, the popularity of huaju (话剧 – spoken drama) began to decline, and huaju started facing significant challenges. The reasons behind this are complex. Among them are the changing

social environment in which huaju existed, the growing focus on economic life, the broad opening of exchanges between China and foreign countries in the fields of economy, science and technology, and culture, as well as the diversification of entertainment options.

Additionally, internal issues within huaju itself—such as problems in the creation and performance systems, and conceptual-to-formal challenges in dramatic art—were also important factors that could not be ignored. Despite these difficult circumstances, the tough situation further inspired playwrights' passion to explore and develop the art of drama.

The study of drama progressed simultaneously from both theoretical and practical perspectives. The debates and reforms in the drama of the new era were not only influenced by the deep impact of social realities, but also shaped by two key dramatic traditions: First, the experiences—both positive and negative—of post-New Literature Movement drama, especially during the “Seventeen Years” period of huaju (话剧); Second, the concepts and practices of foreign modernist drama.

Among these, external influences played a particularly significant role, as reflected in the debates around drama that took place around 1982. These tensions arose as a result of the broad influence of Western modernist literature on Chinese literature.

In addition to reintroducing foreign modern drama authors first encountered during the May Fourth Movement—such as Maeterlinck, Hauptmann, John Galsworthy, Strindberg, Kaiser, Toller, O'Neill, and futurist playwrights like Marinetti and Kayden—the absurdist dramas of Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov, Jean Genet, Pinter, Albee, and others, which emerged in the 1950s–60s in France and spread across Europe and the United States, also entered China.

In 1979, the China Youth Art Theatre staged Brecht's “The Life of Galileo” (伽利略传 *gā lì luè chuán*), serving as an experimental attempt to integrate the two dominant systems of dramatic theory: Brecht's and Stanislavski's.

In 1981, the Shanghai Youth Drama Troupe presented Sartre's famous “Dirty Hands” (肮脏的手 *āng zāng de shǒu*) in Shanghai.

In May 1983, the Beijing People's Art Theatre hosted a performance of Arthur Miller's “Death of a Salesman” (推销员之死 *tuī xiāo yuán zhī sǐ*), directed by Miller himself.

On the theoretical side, Brecht's epic theater initially gained attention, followed by theories of absurdist drama, Grotowski's “poor theatre,” Peter Brook's

“rough theatre,” and others. These had a broad and profound impact on China's theatrical landscape and stage practices.

The modernist rebellion against realism in Western drama—through Maeterlinck's static drama and the pure theory of absurdist dramaturgy—had a significant influence on how Chinese drama circles reinterpreted traditional dramatic heritage and reassessed the legacy of traditional Chinese opera. These influences ultimately led to fierce debates on the concept of drama itself. In these debates, there was a call to reexamine traditional understandings of drama—especially the long-dominant model of Ibsen's social problem plays and Stanislavski's “fourth wall” technique, which aimed to create the illusion of real life.

The discussion also revisited the idea of a “free-form” drama, originally proposed in the 1960s by Huang Zuolin. According to Gao Xingjian, Ibsen's socially moralistic plays had existed as a distinct dramatic form for over a century, but global drama had not ceased evolving after him. He argued that foreign dramatic concepts should not be regarded—like in the Tongzhi or Guangxu eras—as an unbreakable dramatic code that shackles our creativity.

These debates helped gain public support for dramatic exploration in the realms of artistic creation and stage performance. During this time, the idea of drawing on Western modern drama, breaking the chains of realistic models, and pushing for innovation in Chinese dramaturgy gained significant traction within the drama world.

This debate in Shanghai first began in 1983 with a discussion published in *Art of Drama* regarding Huang Zuolin's theoretical conclusions on realism, hallucinatory drama, and non-hallucinatory drama. In Beijing, *Drama Newspaper* launched an extensive and in-depth discussion on issues related to drama debates. The discussion captured the attention of the theatrical community and had an influence across all of China.

For many years, journals such as *Drama Series*, *Play*, *Drama Studies*, *World of Drama*, and others published numerous articles discussing the nature and essence of drama, its laws and principles, stage imagination, the relationship between drama and audiences, dramatic thinking, and similar topics. These debates were examined thoroughly and broadly from an academic perspective. The discussion reached its peak in 1985 and continued intermittently into the 1990s, with articles still being published on the concept of drama.

During the course of the debate, Gao Xingjian, Chen Gongmin, and Tan Xusheng each proposed different theories about the nature of drama—namely, the

“Theory of Action,” the “Blurry Denotation Theory,” and the “Theory of Situation,” respectively. Tong Daoming conducted deep research into the hypothetical idea of drama, while Lin Kehuan and others gave high evaluations of the performative aspects of drama concepts. As for the relationship between realism and modernism, most critics took a broadly realistic stance.

Alongside the exploration of dramatic concepts, the study of creativity and stage practice within the world of dramatization also developed.

One of the earliest discovery dramas to attract public attention was the philosophical play “There Is Warmth Outside the House” (屋外有热流 wū wài yǒu rè liú)—a one-act play written by Ma Zhongjun, Jia Hongyuan, and Qu Xinhua, and staged in April 1980 (published in Play, Issue 6, 1980).

The theme of the play called on youth to break free from narrow personal concerns and engage with society, to embrace vitality, and to cast off the lingering shadows left by the Cultural Revolution. While the content of the play was traditional, it attracted significant attention. On one hand, it boldly incorporated the stylistic elements of symbolism, expressionism, and absurdist drama (such as a seamless blend of real scenes, memories, and dreams; fluid time and space on stage; the appearance of ghosts walking through walls and conversing on stage, etc.), which made the play refreshing. On the other hand, it aimed to reflect the spiritual world of its characters and imbue the theme with a certain philosophical depth.

The recognition of this play spurred the emergence of the “discovery drama” genre. By 1984–1985, this wave of dramatic experimentation had reached its peak. During this period, the development of discovery drama was largely influenced by the concepts and styles of Western modern drama.

Some of the most influential works from this wave include: “Blood, Always Boiling” (血, 总是热的 xuè, zǒng shì rè de) by Zong Fuxian, “Emperor Qin Shimin” (秦王李世民 qín wáng lǐ shì mín) by Yan Haiping, “The True Story of Ah Q” (阿Q正传 ā Q zhèng zhuàn) by Chen Baichen, “The Road” (路 lù) by Ma Zhongjun and Jia Hongyuan, “Absolute Signal” (绝对信号 jué duì xìn hào) by Gao Xingjian and Liu Huiyuan, “The Station” (车站 chē zhàn) by Gao Xingjian, “An Investigation and Analysis of Fifteen Divorce Cases” (十五桩离婚案的调查剖析 shí wǔ zhuāng lí hūn àn de diào chá pōu xī) by Liu Shugang, “Life · Love · Freedom” (生命·爱情·自由

shēng mìng · ài qíng · zì yóu) by Luo Guoxian, “Zhou Lang Bows to the Commander” (周郎拜帅 zhōu láng bài shuài) by Wang Gongpei, “Deep Alley” (小巷深深 xiǎo xiàng shēn shēn) by Wang Shuyuan, “Thursday, Page 4 of This Newspaper” (本报星期四第四版 běn bào xīng qī sì dì sì bǎn) by Wang Chenggang, “A Dead Man Visits the Living” (一个死者对生者的访问 yí gè sǐ zhě duì shēng zhě de fǎng wèn) by Liu Shugang, “Red Room · White Room · Black Room” (红房间·白房间·黑房间 hóng fáng jiān · bái fáng jiān · hēi fáng jiān) by Ma Zhongjun and Qin Peixun, “A Group of Men on the Horizon” (天边有群男子汉 tiān biān yǒu qún nán zǐ hàn) by Zhou Zhentian, “The Savage” (野人 yě rén) by Gao Xingjian, “Magic Cube” (魔方 mó fāng) by Tao Jun, “WM (We)” (我们 wǒ men) by Wang Peigong and others.

From the end of 1985 to the beginning of 1986, the nationwide enthusiasm for exploring drama began to fade. Since then, the world of dramatic research has gradually quieted down, leaving only the traces of the most determined and persistent individuals. During this stage, most of the most influential works emerged in a realist style that had absorbed and internalized the aesthetics of Western modernist drama. These included: “Black Steed” (黑骏马 hēi jùn mǎ) by Luo Jianchuan, “The Nirvana of Lord Gou’er” (狗儿爷涅槃 gǒu ér yé niè pán) by Jin Yun, “In Search of a Man” (寻找男子汉 xún zhǎo nán zǐ hàn) by Sha Yexin, “The Desert Bathed in Moonlight” (洒满月光的荒原 sǎ mǎn yuè guāng de huāng yuán) by Li Longyun, “The Chinese Dream” (中国梦 zhōng guó mèng) by Sun Huizhu and Fei Chunfang, “The Spring of a Twenty-Year-Old” (二十岁的春天 èr shí suì de chūn tiān) by Yu Yun and Tang Yin, “The Chronicle of Sangshuping” (桑树坪纪事 sāng shù píng jì shì), “Yunxiang” (芸香 yún xiāng) by Xu Pinli, “The Moth” (蛾 é) by Che Lianbin.

1986 — From the perspective of time, the trend of discovery drama can be divided into two phases: Up to 1985, discovery drama was more influenced by the dramatic concepts and methods of contemporary Western drama. From 1985 to 1989, the genre became increasingly characterized by the expansion and deepening of realism, along with the full absorption of modernist dramatic aesthetics. From the perspective of the relationship between the work and realism, discovery drama can also be classified into two categories: The first type works under the principle of realism while rationally incorporating modern dramatic



techniques. This enriches the expressive methods of realism and promotes realistic drama itself. Examples include: “There Is Warmth Outside the House” (屋外有热流 wū wài yǒu rè liú), “Absolute Signal” (绝对信号 jué duì xìn hào), “The Visit of a Dead Man to the Living” (一个死者对生者的访问 yí gè sǐ zhě duì shēng zhě de fǎng wèn), “The Nirvana of Lord Gou’er” (狗儿爷涅槃 gǒu ér yé niè pán), “The Chronicle of Sangshuping” (桑树坪纪事 sāng shù píng jì shì). The second type operates outside the traditional categories of drama and is fully based on the study of modernist drama. It includes features such as: Absence of a traditional stage, Polyphonic structure, Novelistic narrative, Free-form drama. Examples of this type include: “Red Room, White Room, Black Room”, “The Savage” (野人 yě rén), “Magic Cube” (魔方 mó fāng). These works belong to the second category and reflect a deeper engagement with modernist dramatic experimentation.

“The Nirvana of Lord Gou’er (狗儿爷涅槃)” is essentially a play centered on peasants and land. Chen Hesiang’s father, in a gamble over just 2 mu (approximately 14 sotok, or 0.14 hectares) of land, ate a puppy alive and died as a result. He left Chen Hesiang both the 14 sotok of land and the nickname Gou’er Ye (“Lord Dog”).

Gou’er Ye’s greatest dream was to become a small landowner: to buy large plots of land, build a tall gate, wear a traditional Chinese long robe and mandarin jacket (长袍马褂 cháng páo mǎ guà), dress in clean shoes and socks, and be so leisurely that he wouldn’t even bother to pick up a stick lying on the ground — someone who rides a donkey through town and eats pickled cucumbers soaked in sesame oil.

During the second civil war between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, while the entire village fled the conflict, Gou’er Ye sent away his wife and son for safety and, risking his life, harvested over 20 mu (about 140 sotok) of sesame, peanuts, and millet from Chi Yongnian’s land. By the time the war ended and the villagers returned, he had already become a wealthy man.

When the Communist Party’s district secretary, Li Wanjiang, returned, he not only demanded sesame and other crops from Chi Yongnian, but also redistributed Chi’s land and house to Gou’er Ye. Gou’er Ye came to firmly believe: “If you have land, you have everything.”

Although his wife had been killed during the war, the land enabled him to quickly remarry — to a beautiful young widow named Feng Jinhua. He also bought 3 mu of good farmland from the barber Su Lianyu for three

bags of sesame. With land, chrysanthemums, a wife, and a son, Gou’er Ye’s lifelong dream had come true.

However, during the collectivization movement and the establishment of People’s Communes, everything was taken back in the name of public ownership. Gou’er Ye went mad, and his wife left him for another man. After the Reform and Opening-Up policy, land was returned to individuals, and Gou’er Ye regained his senses and began preparing to restart his family business.

But his son, Chen Daxu, wanted to build a factory, and to do so, he had to demolish the tall-gated house — a symbol of dignity and legacy in Gou’er Ye’s eyes. Seeing this as an unbearable disgrace, as if his very soul were being destroyed, Gou’er Ye, in a fit of pain, sorrow, and rage, set fire to the gatehouse.

Through the decades-long rise and fall of the peasant Gou’er Ye, the play prompts reflection on the changes in the rural world over recent decades, revealing the excessive damage caused by rigid leftist ideologies and showing how history can make a mockery of human affairs.

At the same time, by expressing Gou’er Ye’s peasant-style conformism, arrogance, narrow-mindedness, and vengeful psychology, the play criticizes the backward and conservative mentality of small producers. The symbolic relationship between Gou’er Ye and the gate tower deepens the critique of feudal ideology and culture, exposing the deep-rooted connection between the cultural consciousness of peasants and that of landlords like Chi Yongnian.

The play adopts the technique of first-person narration, borrowed from the novel form, which allows Gou’er Ye to serve as both the subject of the narrative and an active participant in it. At the same time, it transforms the protagonist’s inner world into an independent artistic image. The creative depiction of the ghost of Chi Yongnian helps to vividly and intuitively express the psychological complexity and internal contradictions of Gou’er Ye through their dialogue and confrontation.

Through these dramatic explorations, Chinese huaju (spoken drama) began to acquire new characteristics in terms of artistic concepts, creative thinking, and aesthetic pursuit. From an artistic standpoint, dramaturgy gradually freed itself from subordination to politics and ceased to function as a mere political tool. Writers no longer observed and portrayed life solely through a political lens, but instead through the broader lens of society and various aspects of culture, writing about life, its richness, and complexity. In terms of creative process, writers no longer saw themselves as passive reflectors of life, but instead emphasized the subjective initiative of the artist (including directors

and scriptwriters). This shift was primarily evident in the transformation of realistic time and space in many dramatic works. Secondly, it reflected a break from the outdated conventions that had been in place since the May Fourth Movement.

Artists boldly incorporated diverse artistic elements such as music, song, dance, pantomime, gymnastics, acrobatics, and technical innovations brought by modern technology — sound, lighting, and electricity — to construct a grand, comprehensive artistic system that served their own expressive needs. In many plays, creators often used narrators, storytelling characters, and even choruses to insert their own commentary into the narrative — another manifestation of the artist's subjective initiative.

Emphasis on spiritual expression, philosophical symbolism, and narrative structure became common aesthetic features in dramatic exploration. By the 1990s, however, the wave of exploratory drama had nearly come to a halt.

#### Development of Realistic Drama in China During the 1980s

In the 1980s, while exploratory dramaturgy was gaining momentum, realistic drama continued to yield positive results despite challenges. Some of the most notable works from this period include: *Bright Moon Shines on People* (明月初照人) by Bai Fengsi, *Who is the Strong One* (谁是强者) by Liang Bingkun, *The Sorghum Has Turned Red* (高粱红了) by Li Jie, *Lieutenant Song's Diary* (宋指导员的日记) by Mo Yan, *Old Friends in the Storm* (风雨故人来) by Bai Fengxi, *Red and White Celebrations* (红白喜事) by Wei Min, *Xiaojing Hutong* (小井胡同) by Li Longyun.

These works represented a significant advancement over previous stages, delving deeper into the realities of life. They not only reflected the "Seventeen Years" period but also explored China's ancient cultural traditions. The characters became more complex and multifaceted. With the decline of exploratory dramaturgy, realistic drama experienced a resurgence. During this period, realism incorporated modern dramaturgical techniques, leading to distinctive transformations. Representative works include: *Black Stone* (黑色的石头) by Yang Limin, *The Field Again Under the Green Shazhang* (田野又是青纱帐) by Li Jie, *Elm Tree Style* (榆树屯风情) by Hao Guochen, *Guta Street* (古塔街) by Li Jie, *Don't Know Whose Home Thinks of Autumn* (不知秋思在谁家) by Bai Fengxi, *The First Building in the World* (天下第一楼) by He Jiping,

*Fire God and Autumn Girl* (火神与秋女) by Su Ley, *There Is a Cluster of Sacred Fire on the Horizon* (天边有一簇圣火) by Chen Zhenxuan. These works reflect the dynamic evolution of Chinese realistic drama during the 1980s, showcasing a blend of traditional themes with modern artistic expressions.

In the 1990s, the plays of Guo Chihong, Guo Shixing, and Yao Yuanjing were considered noteworthy dramas. Guo Chihong (born in 1940) is a renowned opera scriptwriter, known for works such as *The Legacy of the Southern Tang Dynasty* (南唐遗事), *Sima Qian* (司马迁), *The Farewell of Zhuo Wenjun* (卓文君别传), and *Cheng Zhaocai* (成兆才), written for Kunqu Opera and Pingju Opera. In the early 1990s, Guo Chihong transferred from the Northern Kunqu Opera Theatre to the Beijing People's Art Theatre and wrote the four-act historical drama "Li Bai." The central figure of the play is the great poet Li Bai, and it depicts the ups and downs of his life, particularly his inner turmoil following the An Lushan Rebellion. The overall tone emphasizes the poetic essence of human nature and the inexplicable circumstances of life.

After the An Lushan Rebellion, the Tang Empire awaited rejuvenation. Li Bai, a poet full of love and aspirations to contribute to the world, placed great hope in Emperor Yong and became one of his supporters. However, the Taoist priest Wu Yun warned him: if he wished to complete the tragic path of Qu Yuan by using the free-spirited wisdom of Zhuangzi, wouldn't he be moving in the opposite direction?

Initially, Li Bai believed he could demonstrate his talent and ambition, but he ended up a beggar at the gates of Emperor Yong. With Emperor Yong's defeat, Li Bai was imprisoned and faced death. He was later exiled to Yelang, and upon receiving news of his pardon, he once again felt a surge of ambition. One night, as the river flowed and the wind carried the scent of wine, he stood proudly at the bow of a boat, eyes blurred from drunkenness, mesmerized by the bright moon reflected in the water—and he stepped into the river.

Ultimately, the exiled Li Bai did not return to court or military life but instead returned to the realm of poetry, embracing his true self.

With the conscience of an intellectual dramatist, the play reflects on the centuries-old dream of Chinese literary scholars to help the world, and it conveys the true emotions, nature, and ideals of Li Bai. Throughout his life, Li Bai's spiritual journey was filled with pain and inner conflict. His sincerity and humanism made it difficult for him to adapt to the chaotic political struggles between the dynasties of Qin, Mu, and Chu.

His deep sense of responsibility for all people in the world never allowed him to rest in peace, even in old age. He was destined to live a life filled with disappointment and confusion. Yet his bravery in the face of death, his awe-inspiring character, and his heroic spirit as a warrior who sheds no tears—these qualities shine like treasures reflected in the mirror of art. Though intangible in the real world, they possess a unique poetic brilliance and spiritual aesthetic.

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