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How To Improve Theatre Arts Education In Chinese Higher Educational Institutes

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HOW TO IMPROVE THEATRE ARTS EDUCATION IN CHINESE HIGHER
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES

by

J I D I N G

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS
IN
THEATRE ARTS

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO

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ABSTRACT

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This document is a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Master of Arts degree in theatre. Theatre Arts in China is in a state of decline. There are several possible ways to change this situation. This thesis will, through the comparison of Theatre Arts in higher education between China and the US, discuss what good lessons China may draw from the US in order to improve. The improved education of Theatre Arts in Chinese higher educational institutes may then be able to help the decline of Theatre Arts in China.

Theatre Arts was born in China around the 25th century B.C. E. (Buss 17-18). By the Yuan Dynasty, around 13th -14th century CE, the Chinese drama had reached the same mature and sophisticated level as the ancient Greek drama (Zhai 8-9). These theatrical forms that originated in China, before the introduction of western-style drama around 1912, are called traditional Chinese dramas (Brockett 622-623). The western-style drama, called “new drama” or “modern drama” (also most often labeled “spoken drama”) was very popular in the early to mid-20th century as well. It played a vital role in the modernization process of China (Liu 125-126). There were many great modern Chinese playwrights who were very active during this period, for example: Cao Yu, Lao She, and Ba Jin. Today, however, the Theatre Arts in China, both traditional ones and modern ones, are facing a very difficult situation. The Theatre Arts in China is in decline (Yu 5).

“Since Theatre Arts appeared, no matter it’s in China or in other places through the world, it has always been a major way of entertainment. This situation, however, obviously exist no more in China,” says Wei Minglun (1941-), a very famous contemporary Chinese playwright (Li 30). The description by Wei about the situation of Theatre Arts in today’s China is very accurate. For example, in Beijing, the capital and the cultural center of China, the average attendance for professional Theatre Arts performances is only about 20% to 30% of full capacity in recent years (Fu 37). In smaller cities, such as in the hometown of the author of this article, Leshan (a mid-sized

city in China with a population of over a million), there is only one professional theatre in the whole city and it has only produced 8 shows in the past 6 years. There is quite a dearth of audience attention and attendance.

Many Chinese scholars and researchers are trying to find out a way to revitalize Theatre Arts in China. They came up with plenty of interesting prospects. Sun Hongxia mentions in her article “Theatre Arts Has to Keep Pace With Times,” that the current theatre performances in China lack modern ideas and creative thoughts. The theatre performances divorce themselves from the masses and from reality, often acting in a blind way. Many times the theatre performances are more like official tasks, rather than emotional performances. This makes it difficult for theatre artists to have passion towards or interest in such tedious assignments. They would just work perfunctorily without any concern about the quality (23). Sun also discusses her idea about how to change this situation. She says theatre artists must find out what the common people, the common audiences like. Being creative about the interests of the audiences is the only way to make Theatre Arts advance with the times (24). Making theatre performances more commercial and market-orientated is another proposal from some scholars and economists. The marketing of the theatre performances is very important. For example: if an excellent show is very popular among theatre professionals, but unknown to outsiders, the show remains unsuccessful (Jin 17).

Movies and theatre are both storytelling and performing arts. There are many

similarities between them. The fact is, however, the situations of the two are totally different. In China, movies gradually become the main entertainment for the common people, but theatre went the opposite way (Duan 62). According to Duan Pei's research, sound commercialism is the principal reason of success in the movie industry.

There are many ideas about how to turn around the dying state of Theatre Arts in China. The problem is how to put these ideas into practical use. One of the most important things all these ideas have in common is that they all require high quality professionals. Higher education is a major source of high quality professional people. Compared with the United States, the higher education of Theatre Arts in China has a great need for improvement (Xu 11). The improvement of Theatre Arts in Chinese higher education may be able to provide better opportunities for Theatre Performance to the overall industry. In other words, it may be a significant way to provide help to the declining Theatre Arts in China.

Theatre Arts became an integral part of higher education in western countries around the beginning of the 20th century. In China, Theatre Arts became part of the higher educational system only about 50 years ago (Pan 52). Compared with the Theatre Arts education in the US, the number of theatre programs in China is very limited. There are only three institutes in China that have a complete school of Theatre Arts. They are: The Central Academy of Drama, The National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts and Shanghai Theatre Academy (Chen 79). The first two are in Beijing,

the other one is in Shanghai. In China one can find a Theatre Department only in the two biggest cities.

The Central Academy of Drama in Beijing is the oldest of the three. It was founded in 1950. It has most often been considered the best Theatre Arts institute in China. The philosophy of the school literary translated into English is: Make the Central Academy of Drama a world class art institute which keeps theatre education as the core and also has its own distinctive features; persevere in the aesthetic principles of realism, carry on the traditional Chinese aesthetics, learn widely from others' strong points; establish basic skills, focus on practice, "seek for truth, creativity, and real beauty," nurture elite theatre and media professionals for the country and the world. Here are the specific meanings of the motto: to seek for truth means to seek for reality and the true essence of Theatre Arts; Creativity means continuous innovation, in order to transcend predecessors and also oneself. Real beauty means to achieve the goal of providing the best Theatre Arts education in China and to cultivate more elite theatre and media professionals (Official website of The Central Academy of Drama). The motto of The Central Academy of Drama looks very appealing. However, in order to get a better sense about this school, it's necessary to look at other aspects of the institute, such as the facilities and faculties.

There are nine departments in The Central Academy of Drama, they are the: Department of Acting, Department of Directing, Department of Stagecraft, Department

of Theatre Literature, Department of Musical, Department of Beijing Opera, Department of Theatre Management and Department of Media study. It seems these departments cover all the Theatre Arts related areas. The faculty team consists of high quality staff as well. The professors of each department are all very notable people in their professions in China. The Central Academy of Drama also has lots of exchange programs with many famous foreign universities, for example: the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in England, Institut dl Teatre Diputacio Barcelona in Spain, Saint Petersburg State Theatre Academy in Russia, etc. There are also lots of practical opportunities provided by the school or through internships from cooperating companies. It really represents the highest quality of Theatre Arts education in China.

According to the article written by scholar Xu Yang, "Comparison Between Theatre Arts in Higher Education in China and in the US" (《中美戏剧艺术高等教育比较》) and another by scholar Pan Wei, Theatre Education in higher educational settings in the US is much better than it is in China (52). To demonstrate this, it is useful to pick a few top Theatre Programs from the US based on the Hollywood Reporter's List of the 25 Top Drama Schools and compare them with the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing. The list by Hollywood Reporter is important because of its high reputation in criticizing and evaluating art organizations, especially the organizations of performing arts. After comparison, there are a few interesting issues to note, which may explain the reason why higher education Theatre Arts programs in the US are better.

Compared with The Central Academy of Drama in Beijing, the top Theatre Programs in the US all have playwriting majors and courses that emphasize creative writing. For example, the Juilliard School in New York, it was founded in 1905 and has often been considered the best art-focused institute in the US. The reputation of Juilliard in the US is very similar to that of The Central Academy of Drama in Beijing. Both of them are considered the best art-focus school in its nation. The theatre department of Juilliard thinks theatre is a calling, an art, a craft, a political act, a profession and a business. The statement of purpose of the theatre department is: “Dedicated to providing the 21st-century theatre artist with the necessary tools, artistic and personal, to meet the demands of aspects of our work in an ever evolving performing arts landscape.” The Theatre Department at Juilliard doesn’t have as many majors directly related to drama or media as The Central Academy of Drama, because, unlike The Central Academy of Drama, Juilliard is not a Theatre Arts specialized institution.

The Department of Theatre at Juilliard, however, provides a playwriting major which The Central Academy of Drama does not, which is very interesting. This shows Juilliard values playwriting in Theatre Arts, while The Central Academy of Drama doesn’t really pay much attention to it. This could be a significant advantage of the Theatre education at Juilliard compared with the Central Academy of Drama, because playwriting is very important in Theatre Arts. American theatre scholar Amanda Fisher says in her article “The Playwright in Residence, A Community’s Storyteller” that it is

the story that makes people feel our lives are worth living (135). If there is no story, there wouldn't be life on stage, that is, Theatre Arts may not even exist. Actually, some Chinese scholars also point out that there are three fundamental elements for the maturation and flourish of drama: remarkable, high quality scripts, distinguished performers and massive audiences (Jiang 53). Playwrights and the area of playwriting are a fundamental aspect of the art of theatre. There won't be any distinguished drama or theatre performances without an excellent script. The reason why Theatre Arts in China are facing such a difficult situation is that there aren't enough professional playwrights. In year 2001, the famous theatre critic Mao Shian from Shanghai says in his article "Will We Still Have Theatre Performances to Watch Tomorrow?" (《明天我们还有戏看吗?》) "The number of the high quality professional playwrights in China right now is less than 10!" Today, after more than 9 years, it seems the number of high quality professional playwrights did not increase but is gradually decreasing (Hu 5). The lack of playwright training and/or lack of professional guidance in the realm of theater writing in higher education may be the cause of this situation. If the theatre education in China wants to improve their quality, playwriting programs are perhaps, an important development that they really need to pay attention to.

The other interesting issue is Juilliard requires all of its students to complete a minimum of 24 credits in the Liberal Arts, which includes a Liberal Arts education in the humanistic, ethical, social, critical, and aesthetic backgrounds essential to personal

development and professional excellence. The Juilliard School thinks: “studies in literature, philosophy, history, social sciences, arts and languages, foster in students a deeper understanding of themselves and the complex world in which they live” (Official Website of the Juilliard). The Central Academy of Drama, however, based on the course information from the official website, doesn’t provide as many or various Liberal Arts classes outside of the theatre field. Most of the courses are very limited in the major area, which doesn’t include courses like philosophy, foreign language or history. Theatre, as an art form, is a combination of visual arts, music and literature (Munro 91). One can find all kinds of art forms in Theatre Arts, for example: dancing, literature, music, painting, sculpturing, etc. (Fu Sulian 260). According to this idea, perhaps it would be a little difficult to provide high quality Theatre Arts training without a sufficient liberal arts education. This could be another reason why even the best Theatre Arts institute in China is not as good as the top Theatre Arts institute in the US.

Shanghai Theatre Academy is another top Theatre Arts institute in China. It was established in 1956. The motto of the Shanghai Theatre Academy was created by Xiong Foxi¹, a very famous Chinese dramatist and educator, who was also the first president of the Shanghai Theatre Academy. It says:

The goal to train talented person, in my opinion, the first thing is to exert a favorable influence on one’s character, make every young theatre artist has a

¹ Xiong foxi (熊佛西): 1900-1965, Chinese Dramatist, educator. He is been considered to be one of the founders of the western-style Theatre Arts in China. His educational idea is: free the academic. Thoughts and the education of Theatre Arts shouldn’t limit in class, but learn through practice.

character of integrity, a dignified and imposing “person”—a person who loves his nation, who is clear about what is right and wrong, a person who has sentiment. Only then, will it be possible for one to become a great artist. The training system of our institute is not only teaching students the professional skills, but also training them how to be a real “person.” This is more important.

Compared with The Central Academy of Drama, the Shanghai Theatre Academy’s motto is more specific. The motto of The Central Academy of Drama focuses more on how to reach success in the area of Arts. It states that the primary goal to provide the best possible theatre education and to nurture elite theatre and media talents. The motto of Shanghai Theatre Academy’s goal is to cultivate the dignified and imposing “persons” before teaches its student to be artists.

The mottos of these two top theatre institutions in China shows their different educational philosophies, but the majors and the set-up of the departments of Shanghai Theatre Academy are almost the same as The Central Academy of Drama in Beijing. They both have lots of professional majors related to the Theatre Arts, but neither has a playwriting major. As mentioned before, playwriting is a vital part of Theatre Arts, so this could be a problem of Shanghai Theatre Academy as well.

Unlike the Central Academy of Drama, which mostly collaborates with European universities, Shanghai Theatre Academy has more exchange programs with universities

in the US such as New York University, Yale University and Brown University. The students from Shanghai Theatre Academy may have more opportunities to experience Theatre education in the US, where the schools will provide playwriting courses and more various liberal arts courses besides their major classes. The fact is, however, the number of students assigned for the exchange program is very limited and highly competitive. Most of the students are not able to have such a chance. Also, the students won't be able to learn adequate information or fully understand the education in the other nations just through the half to one year exchange program. It's impossible to fundamentally improve the higher education in China by just sending students to overseas exchange programs (Chen 58). Therefore the exchange program itself is not enough to fix the issue of the lack of Liberal Arts training for theatre students.

Other than Juilliard, the other top theatre programs in the US are mostly from the larger comprehensive universities that have at least 15,000 students, for example: New York University, Yale University and Florida State University (Hollywood Report). The theatre majors from these kinds of universities can take not only the theatre classes, but also plenty of other courses from different fields that they are interested in, because of the gigantic and diverse school resources. There are many courses that would be very difficult to take or even find in an art-focused institution. Theatre students in these larger, comprehensive universities have more advantages in finding diverse courses than the students from an art institution, (e.g., New York University). New York is the

biggest city and also the economic center of the US, which is similar to the city of Shanghai's status in China. The status of Tisch School of NYU is very similar to Shanghai Theatre Academy. The curriculum of the theatre program in New York University clearly shows that the theatre major students are taking a huge amount of courses besides just the art courses. This is perhaps why the Theatre Department of NYU is considered one of the best theatre educations in the US. Even if Shanghai Theatre Academy wanted to use the curriculum from NYU as a model, it would be very difficult, almost impossible to apply. This is because the Shang Theatre Academy is just an art-focused institution which doesn't have the various backgrounds in other educational areas like NYU. A possible fix is to try to establish some collaborating programs with other universities in Shanghai, since Shanghai Theatre Academy has very high reputation, other universities in Shanghai may be willing to have cooperative programs with them.

The National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts is the last one of the top three theatre institutes in China. Its motto is: "Excellent in both performing skills and moral integrity, carry forward the cause pioneered by one's predecessors and forge ahead into the future." The National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts is a little different from the other two institutes, since it focuses more on the traditional Chinese theatre. It has quite a few unique majors relating to traditional Chinese drama, such as the Beijing Opera Performance and Beijing Opera Instrumental performance. The formation and quality

of The National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts is very similar to the other two top Theatre Arts institutions in China and does not have a playwriting major either. Based on its curriculum, it also does not provide the various liberal arts courses that institutes in the US do. This could be an aspect for future improvement.

Based on the comparison of the top Theatre Arts institutes in China, as the last paragraph stated, the structure of departments and curriculums are almost the same. Even in different places and different schools, the teaching and training models are almost the same (Zhang 110). In the US, however, different universities or institutes always fully use their own advantages and adapt their teaching method and curriculums to local conditions (111). For example, one of the other top 25 theatre programs, The California Institute of Arts. Different from most universities, CalArts is founded by a company, Disney. It fully uses its connection with Disney as an advantage, so that the students have more internship and practical opportunities in film and television productions, while other schools mostly only have such practical opportunities in theatre companies. The National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts has more connections with the traditional theatre arts organizations, such as museums and government cultural departments. It should absolutely use this advantage and provide more unique opportunities for its students.

The admission requirements of the top three Theatre schools in China are almost identical. The admission process for Acting majors for instance, requires students to

audition. The audition process includes a preliminary test which is a three minute long performance of a poem of an applicant's own choice, followed by singing, movement or dance and a monologue. The grade of audition will be an integral part of the decision for the admission. Actually this process is very similar to the admissions process of the top Theatre programs in the US. The difference is, the admission of all three top Theatre programs in China requires the applicants to reach a certain grade on the College Entrance Examination², while the three top Theatre programs in the US mentioned earlier in this chapter, Julliard, NYU and CalArts, require none of their Acting candidates to reach a certain score in any test for admission.

The College Entrance Examination in China has two types of concentrations: Liberal Arts and Science. Both of these two types include Chinese Literature, English and Math. The Liberal Arts section has History, Politics and Geography. The Science section has Physics, Chemistry and Biology. High school students in China focus on different courses, depending on what kind of examination they want to take in the future. The complication is, because the College Entrance Examination is so important, the high school education in China became the education for exams. Students learn to get high scores in exams but not real knowledge (Zheng 14). Using the score from the College Entrance Examination to judge the talents of students is a mistake because it only reflects

² College Entrance Examination: it's the admission exam for all students who want to enroll in college education in China. The scores of the exam directly decide the level of the university the students are able to attend. Therefore, the College Entrance Examination influences a person's whole life.

the ability of students to get high scores, but not the real overall quality and capability of the students (Chen Li 136). Similarly, it's not appropriate to make the admission decisions for the Theatre Major applicants based on their College Entrance Examination. There may be many potentially talented theatre artists who are not very good in subjects such as physics, chemistry or politics. The admission process which considers the score from the College Entrance Examination a vital issue would eliminate the opportunities for such potential talents to get a good Theatre Arts education. If the Theatre Arts programs in higher education in China want to recruit more talented people, it would be best to relax the restrictions and requirements based on the College Entrance Examination.

Stated thus, the top three Theatre Arts institutes in China all have very high quality major courses and programs in almost every aspect of Theatre Arts, except playwriting, which could be the next step for their future development. Also, they may want to provide more liberal arts courses like philosophy, aesthetics, humanities, etc, in order to nurture more versatile and comprehensive theatre professionals or artists, inasmuch as Theatre Arts is a combination of not only arts, but also liberal arts and many other subjects. Cooperation with some other universities which are capable of providing more diverse classes may be a good way to address this issue. The top theatre programs may also really use their own special advantages to make their programs unique, which is very important to build a recognizable and remarkable program. The final thing that

requires attention is that theatre programs perhaps ought to decrease the importance of the College Entrance Examination in order to get more talented people who may not be good at taking exams.

Today in China, there are more than 1,700 standard institutions of higher education. Of those, 107 are the “Project 211” Universities. “Project 211” is a National Key Universities and Colleges project launched by the Ministry of Education in 1995, aiming at the development of greater research standards that match world-class level research while cultivating top talents in all areas. Since this project started, approximately \$3 billion US dollars have been distributed for the cause. These institutes represent the best in higher education in China. The interesting issue is that none of these institutes has a school of Theatre Arts or a complete Theatre department. Only some of them have a theatre major that is subsidiary to other departments (Shi 164). It is very useful to examine three “Project 211” Universities that have a theatre major and compare them with some comprehensive universities from the US that have complete Theatre majors, then to discuss the possibility for the improvement of Theatre Arts education in the top comprehensive institutes of China.

Nanjing University is one of the “Project 211” universities. It ranked No.6 in the National University Ranking of China 2013 by Cuaa.net. It is also one of the first institutes in China that offers a major in Theatre Arts. The theatre program offers a BA in Theatre and Film Literature, and an MA and PhD in Theatre and Chinese Drama

Research. There are eight professors and three associate professors in the department. Interestingly, none of these professors specializes in Directing, Acting or Playwriting. They are all academic theater scholars and the theatre department belongs to the school of literature (Official Website of Nanjing University).

In fact, many scholars in China have written articles concerning this odd issue. Currently the majority of Theatre Arts teachers in China are transferred from Chinese Literature Programs, they are good at lecturing in theory, history and analysis, but only a few of them are capable of teaching practical skills like acting, directing, stagecraft, playwriting etc., which is the knowledge the students need the most (Sun Huizhu 7). Shi Yi points out that the core problem that caused this difficult situation is that there aren't enough teachers who are real theatre professionals or people who have majored in Theatre Arts. Most of the teachers who teach Theatre Arts in China are pure scholars, especially scholars in literature. They don't have enough practical experience or knowledge on stage, which makes it very difficult for the students to gain and learn practical Theatre Arts.

This issue caused other problems in higher education Theatre Arts in China. The first problem is that the courses are not enough to fulfill the requirements of the students. The second problem is that Theatre Arts education in China is more like literature education, the students lack the practical training on stage. The last problem is that the teaching of Theatre Arts is mainly in lecture format, creating a lack of diverse teaching

methods (Shi 164-165).

Yale University is a top ten comprehensive university in the US and also one of the earliest institutes that offered the Theatre major in the US. Yale has its own School of Drama. It offers degrees from BAs to Ph.D.s and quite a few BFA and MFA degrees. Even though the background and the status of Yale and Nanjing University in both nations are similar, perhaps it's a little inappropriate to compare them, because the size of the School of Drama in Yale University much larger than the Theatre Department in Nanjing University. The point for this comparison is that, although there are more than 50 professors in The Yale School of Drama, the majority of them are experts in Theatre Arts. They have various professional experiences in practical theatre, or hold specialized degrees in different areas of Theatre Arts, for example acting, directing, playwriting, etc. This is very different from the professors at Nanjing University's theatre department, where most of the professors are pure scholars in theatre or literature and are not the practitioners or experts in the practical areas of Theatre Arts.

Xiamen University is another institute that offers a major in Theatre. Xiamen University ranked No.20 in the National University Rankings of China 2013 by Cuaa.net, and is also a "Project 211" University. The complete name of the undergraduate major in Theatre Arts in Xiamen University is "Theatre and Film Literature," which is offered by the department of Chinese Language & Literature. The department also offers MAs and PhDs in Theatre and Chinese Drama. The Theatre Arts program in Xiamen

University is facing the same situation as Nanjing University. All of the professors are scholars, and most of their degrees are in literature. The department lacks experts in practical areas of Theatre Arts. This reflects Shi Yi's point of view that the Theatre Programs in China lack theatre practitioner-teachers in general. This also leads to a situation that makes it very difficult for a university to offer MFA degrees in theatre. The lack of MFA programs may cause fewer highly trained theatre artists to be nurtured therefore, it might be more difficult to find such highly trained theatre artists to be teachers in theatre programs. Thus, this puts the theatre education in higher education in China into a vicious circle.

In fact, between the early 20th century and mid 20th century, higher education Theatre Arts in the US faced the same situation as in China, where a majority of the scholars considered Theatre Arts as a liberal art and part of the academic study of humanities (Berkeley 58- 62). The situation changed around the 1970s when the professionalization of academic theatre started. Highly trained scenic designers, directors, and technicians were hired to teach, and students were trained to perform in large venues for a paying audience. This change contributed to a lot of the success of theatre in higher education in the US (63). Anne Berkeley thinks that along with history, literature, and theory, such practical courses in design, acting or directing are integral parts of even a Bachelor's training too(66).

The BA in Theatre Studies at Yale includes plenty of practical courses, for example:

Dance on Film, Intermediate Acting, Musical Theatre Performance, Playwriting etc.

This could be a direction for the theatre departments of China to work towards. The primary mission is to hire more experts in the practical areas of theatre arts. Therefore, based on their knowledge, they may be able to provide more practical courses and opportunities for students. Hopefully, more and more highly trained theatre practitioners will be nurtured. A change from the vicious circle to a virtuous circle in higher education Theatre Arts in China may then occur.

Southwest University is located in Chongqing, one of the biggest cities in China. It ranked No.48 in the National University Ranking of China 2013 by [cuaa.net](http://www.cuaa.net). It is also a “Project 211” University. The author of this article attended Southwest University’s BA program in Theatre and Movie Literature from August 2007 until July 2009, then transferred to the University of Montana in the US. Unlike from the previous two theatre programs in Nanjing University and Xiamen University, some of the professors at Southwest have experience in the practical areas of film and theatre. One example is Professor Yu Ji, who is a practicing director and has actually directed many produced movies. However, one problem for the Theatre & Movie programs at Southwest University is the fact that the proportion of theatre courses in the program is negligible, making it more of a “movie major” than a “theatre and movie major.” There is only one series of courses directly related to Theatre Arts, and that is Western Theatre History I and II. The mission of this program shows its emphasis on movies and media

obviously: “This major aims of training professionals in the Film and Television area; with excellent skills and knowledge in screenwriting, analysis, and innovate activities in media industry; capable to engage in such works in Movie, Television, Theatre and other culture sectors” (Official Website of Southwest University). “Theatre” only appears at the end of the mission of this program. All the other parts of the mission statement tell that the goal of this program is to focus on training professionals in the movie industry. In fact, if one takes a careful look at the curriculums and the mission statements of universities or institutes in China that provide a major in Theatre and Movie Literature, it’s obvious that most of them are emphasizing the movie side of things. Perhaps it’s because most educators in China think that Theatre Arts are very similar to movies, so that students are able to learn enough theatre knowledge from the movie courses and training.

It is true there are many similarities between movies and theatre. They are inseparably interconnected (Duan Pei 62). However, there are also many differences. In his essay “Theatre, Movies-What’s the Difference?,” Christ Brandt points out some interesting differences between theatre and movies. He first talks about the difference of reality between theatre and movies; a movie is seamless, while in the theatre, the balance of illusion is fragile and requires concentration from the audiences. Movies are also different since they don’t include live acting. The performers don’t listen or interact to the audiences. Time is also a different issue between theatre and movies.

Movies control time, but theatre frees it, inasmuch as a movie will always take exactly the same amount of time to run, while the time it takes to run the same theatre performance may vary. From the audience's point of view, since nothing of what is shown on the screen is actually happening for real, movies take audiences out of time. In theatre however, it is always happening "right now." Space is another obvious distinction between movies and theatre, there is no limitation on screen, but there is on the stage. Also, movies direct the eyes of audience and the camera is capable of showing the images it wants the audience to see, while theatre leaves it up to the audience where they look, it's hard to truly see all that is happening on a stage. In addition to the issues Brandt mentioned, the acting technique between movies and theatre could be very different as well (Gong 23). Susan Sarandon says, "Movies are not as tough as theatre, you only have to get it right once or twice with a film." In a few words, movies are great, but Theatre Art is still indispensable (Brandt).

Since there are lots of variances between movies and theatre, perhaps it's a little difficult for students to learn enough Theatre Arts knowledge only from movie courses. If one institute wants to train distinguished theatre professionals, high-quality Theatre Arts courses are necessary. Separate Theatre Arts and Movie programs may be a good idea.

The University of Montana is the school the author attended after the Southwest. It is much smaller than Southwest University, but the University of Montana has

programs in both Theatre Arts and Movie/Media Arts. These two departments however, are not completely separate. There are lots of interactions between them. For example, the Bachelor of Arts with a major in Theatre requires its students to take 9 elective credits from Media Arts courses. The BFA students that majoring in Theatre has to take a class called Advanced Acting for Film in addition to the 9 credits electives from Media Arts. Similarly, Media Arts majors are encouraged to take some Theatre classes as well. This is a great example for the Theatre and Movie Literature departments in China to study. They could separate their majors into two; one that emphasizes movies while another one emphasizes Theatre. The two majors can still have lots of interactions and can share quite a few classes, since the essence of Theatre Arts and movies is the same.

The problem is, as Shi mentions in her article, there are not enough teachers who have real backgrounds in Theatre Arts trainings, thus, it may be very difficult for many universities or institutes in China to really provide a major emphasis in Theatre (164). However, there could be a way to change this situation. If one takes a look at the job postings of teaching positions including teaching Theatre Arts in the “Project 211” universities, a Ph.D. degree is always a requirement, which makes it very tough for the talented people who don’t have a Ph.D. to be a teacher at a university. There is much dispute on this topic (Timeshighereducation.co.uk).

In fact, in the US, there are many very high status Universities’ professors in theatre programs that don’t have a terminal degree in Theatre, a Ph.D. or MFA. For

example, at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities (this ranks No.68 based on US News Education, its graduate program in Theatre Arts also ranked in the top 25 in the US {graduate schools phd.org}), there are quite a few faculty members and instructional staff in the theatre departments who only have a Bachelor's degree. These instructors include one associate professor: Michael J Sommers; two teaching specialists: Barbra Ann Bevlovitz and Luverne G Seifert; and one coordinator in design/tech: William Healey. Tufts University, ranked no.28 based on US News Education, has a department of Theatre and Dance also ranked in the top 25 rankings of Theatre Arts programs (graduate schools phd.org). Professor Susan Kouguell and Professor Emily F. McMullen only hold a Bachelor's degree as well. Even in the No.1 Theatre Program estimated by graduateschoolsphd.org—the School of Drama at Yale University, there are many instructors who only hold a Bachelors degree, such as, Professor Jim Badrak, Professor Alexander Bagnell, Professor Deborah Berman and Professor Joan Macintosh. These are the ones that provide access to their educational background information. There are many other professors from such Theatre Programs above who don't have any education information accessible on the website; they may not even have a college degree. However, this doesn't become an obstacle for these programs to provide high quality Theatre Arts education. As that mentioned before, these programs are all among the top in the nation. This proves perhaps it's not necessary to hold a terminal degree to teach Theatre Arts in higher education. Some people who don't hold a Ph.D. or MFA

may be able to provide outstanding teaching programs in Theatre Arts for students too.

If the Theatre Arts programs from the “Project 211” Universities in China eliminated a terminal degree as requirement for a teaching position, there could be more talented people eligible to apply for such positions. Thus, the Theatre Programs may be able to have more teachers. There is one issue to remember, however, in the light of the background information of those professors in top Theatre programs in the US who don’t hold terminal degrees. All of them had exceptional great and massive amount of various practical experiences in theatre. Stated thus, it is a possible way for Theatre programs in China to hire people who don’t hold a terminal degree, but have extensive experiences or background in Theatre Arts or related areas, in order to have more capable Theatre Arts teachers,

Actually, the education of Theatre Arts is not only important in the institutions that have theatre programs, but also important in the general college education. In the article “On the Necessity of General Drama Education,” Dr. Yang Baochun points out that, it’s very necessary to have Theatre Arts in all higher educational systems (16). Theatre Arts is a combination of all kinds of arts, the training and education of Theatre Arts would help in developing and cultivating versatile and comprehensive talents. The shift between different times and spaces in Theatre Arts would also assist in improving students’ imagination, cognitive ability, perception ability and creativity. It also trains the practical abilities of the students. Also, entertainment is a very important part of

Theatre Arts, therefore, students are capable of learning a great amount through entertainment (19-20). The education of Theatre Arts can also polish people's aesthetic taste, relieve the stress and grow their minds (Yang Ge 54). Theatre Arts is the best connection and carrier of information among all subjects (Wu 45). According to the information above, Theatre Arts is very important in a higher education system, regardless of a student's major.

There are more than 3,000 higher education institutions in the US. Half of them have majors in Theatre Arts (Sun Huizhu 6). Many institutions and universities that don't offer majors in Theatre Arts are provide very remarkable general/non-major Theatre Arts educations as well in the US (Yang Baochun16). This kind of shows the higher education in the US real applied the idea that Theatre Arts should be an integral part of higher education. If the higher educational institutions in China that are not offering Theatre Arts majors want to provide some supplemental theatre courses as they, there should be no harm for them to draw some references from American practice.

Peking University is the oldest university in China. It also has been considered the best University in China. It ranked No.1 in the National University Ranking of China 2013 by cuaa.net. There are 41 departments in Peking University, which offers 101 types of undergraduate degrees, 244 Masters degrees and 263 Doctoral degrees. Although Peking University doesn't offer a major in Theatre Arts, there are still plenty of courses related to Theatre Arts provided by the school, for example: Introduction to

Theatre Arts, Modern Chinese Drama, Script Writing, Musical Performance, The Glamour of Opera etc. Many professional theatre performances are also performed at Peking University every year, therefore, Peking University has always wanted to set up a department of Theatre Arts, but it has never worked out (Yin 29). In fact, Peking University could use how Princeton University treats Theatre Arts for inspiration, since Princeton doesn't offer majors in Theatre Arts either.

Princeton is ranked No.1 in the US News and World Report national universities ranking. Like Peking University, it doesn't offer any majors in Theatre Arts either, although it offers many courses about Theatre Arts. The difference is, although Princeton does not offer any degrees in Theatre Arts, it offers a certificate in Theatre Arts. Based on the information from the official website of Princeton university, their program in Theatre Arts allows students to work with professional artists and critics, as well as with scholars in the area of performance studies. This program has an excellent faculty and staff. The majority of the instructors have a very strong background in Theatre Arts and related areas like TV and Film. It offers various courses in almost all the areas in Theatre Arts and courses are open to students from all departments. It doesn't matter if they plan to get the certificate. Students who fulfill the requirements of the program will receive a certificate of proficiency in theatre upon graduation, which shows their ability and background in Theatre Arts. Thus, students who attend Princeton as other majors and who also love Theatre Arts can have distinguished Theatre training and a

certificate to prove their talent.

It is also very feasible for Peking University to establish such a program in Theatre Arts. Peking University is the best university in China. It should be appealing for artists to work there, which would make it possible for the Theatre program to have a very high-qualified teaching faculty. Therefore, the courses would be very distinguished. There are many talented students who love Theatre Arts at Peking University. They are very passionate, but they are also facing lots of difficulties since they don't have professional training (Liu Ping 2). The set up of their program should be able to provide sufficient Theatre Arts training for the students, and thus, the students in Peking University may become more versatile and develop themselves comprehensively.

Tsinghua University is equally as famous as Peking University. It is ranked No.2 in the National University Ranking of China 2013 by cuaa.net. Tsinghua University was once the leader of Theatre Arts in China (Ying). Many great Chinese dramatists graduated from Tsinghua University, for example Cao Yu, Hong Shen and Zhang Junxiang. Today however, Tsinghua University doesn't offer any majors in Theatre Arts and, the theatre courses are very limited too. It's very hard for students to have the opportunity to experience Theatre Arts.

Harvard University in the US has very similar historical issues in Theatre Arts to Tsinghua University. Harvard University was the first school that offered professional

Playwriting courses in the US. Currently, although Harvard doesn't offer any majors in Theatre Arts, it offers various Theatre Arts courses in its Dramatic Arts program as a Secondary Field. The curriculums include the study of theatre, dance, opera, and other multimedia or multisensory performance forms. Seemingly this program works very successfully. Lots of famous people have studied in it, such as Tommy Lee Jones and Christopher Reeve. Harvard University also fully uses their theatre houses on campus. The biggest theatre, Sanders Theatre, has professional performances all year round and even the smaller theatre, Agassiz Theatre, had four performances in just one month. Sometimes performances take place in Farkas Hall and Paine Hall too. These performances not only enable students to have a close-up experience of highly qualified Theatre Arts performances, but also provide practical opportunities for students to participate. In addition, these commercial performances also make a very good amount of money, which may contribute to the development of Theatre Arts in Harvard. The Theatre Arts model in Harvard University could be an exceptional example for Tsinghua University to learn from.

However, even if Peking University and Tsinghua University can use the Theatre programs at Princeton and Harvard as models to emulate, there is still an obstacle for the complete spread of general Theatre Arts education for their students. Most Chinese universities or institutes including Peking University and Tsinghua University are still

using the academic-year based system³. The universities in China are on their way to changing from an academic year based system to a credits based system. This is why there are many Academic Year Credit System⁴ universities in China now (Kong 59). In other words, the higher educational system still makes the universities in China choose the courses for students. The school decides what courses and when to take them for students based on their major. If such schools like Peking University and Tsinghua University opened Theatre programs similar to Princeton and Harvard, it would be true that some students may be able take it as a Secondary Field study or a certificate study, but other students who just want to learn some basic knowledge about Theatre may not be able to take it as a general introductory course since it's difficult to take courses outside of your major or minor in the Academic Year based system. In fact, there are elective courses in the Academic Year based system, they are the courses for students to choose freely among based on their interests, and most universities in China do provide some elective courses, but these elective courses are more like "chicken ribs"— things of little value or interest (Sun Jinghua 186). The elective course is worth only about 10% of a regular student's credits, and most students don't really take those courses seriously. It's true that there are still some students who consider the elective courses seriously and want to learn something out of their major field through them, but because most of the

³ Academic Year Based System (学年制): A rough translation: it means the school makes the study schedule and curriculum for students based on their majors. The school will check if the student finishes the program in a certain time and decides if the student is able to graduate.

⁴ Academic Year and Credit system (学年学分制): The system between Academic Year system and Credit System.

elective courses have no connection with each other, it's very hard for students to gain enough knowledge and information in a certain area consistently (Xiao 248).

To change this situation and for the expansion in general of Theatre Arts education in higher education, the Chinese higher educational institutions could choose the credits system. The foundation of credits system is that students have the freedom to choose courses. This system is widely used and accepted in western countries, especially in the U.S. (Li Mengyang 169). Harvard University was the first one that put the Credit System into practical use. Interestingly China is also one of the first countries that tried to use the credit system, but, based on the current condition and factors of higher education in China now, it is very hard to really apply the Credit System (Jiang Fugang 97). Because of this difficulty, most of the universities or institutes in China are facing four major problems when they seek to embrace the credit system. First, the quality of the elective courses is not good. Second, students get little direction about how to choose the courses by themselves. Third, the teaching management is inefficient. Fourth, the supporting facilities and systems are not complete (98). To solve these problems, however, will take a very long time, only when the universities or institutes in China have enough self-decision-making power, advanced management tools, and a group of higher qualified teachers will the credit system be carried into practice (Kong 61).

According to this current situation, perhaps the best possible way for Chinese

universities or institutes to improve general Theatre Arts education is to more or less arrange some Theatre courses for all students. Also, providing some sort of Secondary Field Study or Certificate program in Theatre Arts for those students who want to study it seriously but don't really want a degree in Theatre is also a good idea.

One other very severe problem that cannot be ignored about Theatre Arts higher education in China is that there is not enough financial support. The scenes, costumes and technical equipment in most of the theatre departments are all very crude (Shi Yi 165). Without enough financial support, there is a chance that the quality of Theatre Arts programs will get worse in China. The level of performances and the quality of the students that been cultivated may all decrease, which in turn may lead to a decrease in the number of the teachers and students. This vicious cycle may cause the higher education system to pay even less attention to Theatre Arts, and even cut more of the budget for theatre departments.

It seems the Theatre programs in the U.S. have already found a way to solve the financial problems that plague China. Back in 1969, John Horton, an American scholar, had already pointed out that there is a trend of "re-professionalization" of Theatre in the context of the educational Theatre Arts establishments (371). Today, the Theatre programs in many universities or institutes in the US are using professionalized performances, or in other words, commercial productions, to make some financial profit, in order to support their various programs. Minnesota State University, Mankato is an

example. The author chose this program is not only because of his relation with it, but also because it's an "average sized" theatre program in an "average sized" community. It is a program has flourished in a "typical" location. An evaluation of the performance practices and audience responses in an average sized state university in an average sized city might shed some light on the potential role of ticket sales in other American educational theatre productions. There is a form at the end of this thesis which shows the box-office income from the performances of the department of Theatre and Dance, Minnesota State University, Mankato since 2004. See Appendix, page 37.

It reflects clearly what kinds of shows have better percentage of the audience attendance which makes the most revenue. Musicals definitely have better box-office income than straight plays. Some of the musicals like *Wizard of Oz*, *Rent* and *Phantom of The Opera* have revenue capacity all higher than 95%. If one compared the plays to each other, it's easily to see that plays with a fantastic subject (like the plays about fantasy stories or legends) and popular love themes make better income than the others. Some scholars and critics mentioned that today, fantasy stories like the "Lord of the Rings" series and "Harry Potter" series are the most popular subjects for theatres to screens, because of their power to attract audiences and their huge commercial value (Thompson 45-46). Also, the subjects of romantic love stories continue to be an eternal attraction to people (Gottschall 457-458). Musicals, fantasy stories and romantic comedy performances may be able to contribute more financial support to a university.

According to this, theatre productions may focus more on such subjects that attract audiences. Therefore they may be able to make a very good contribution to the financial supporting toward of the department. If the Theatre Programs get enough financial benefit by producing such performances, they would have more financial support for their productions in the future. With more financial support, there would be fewer limitations for the Theatre students to portray their stories on the stage. The quality of the performances may be better, the shows may be more entertaining, and as a result more and more audience members would be willing to come watch the show. Also, more students may join the department and more talented teachers may want to work in the Theatre Department. This not only benefits the department's finances, but it also benefits the students. With more attendance from the audience, the Theatre departments will make more money as well as be more willing to invest into shows. Additionally, they can purchase better equipment and costumes and also use the money as scholarships to assist the Theatre students. The students may be more enthusiastic and passionate and the audience will be entertained more and more audiences will come. More shows will be produced in order to fulfill the audiences' requirements, so more practical opportunities will be available for students to participate.

Publilius Syrus, an ancient Latin writer and philosopher had said, "Practice is the best of all instructors (Quotes.net)". With more practical chances, students may be able to learn more about Theatre Arts, the performances may be even better. The leaders of

the higher educational system may begin to pay more attention to Theatre Arts. It will be a virtuous circle for Theatre Arts in higher education.

In China now, however, only a few Theatre programs in universities or institutes have real product performances and most of them do not even make money through the performances. The best Theatre Arts school in China, the Central Academy of Drama, had only produced four performances in the year 2012. At the Shanghai Academy of Theatre, based on the performance information on its official website, it seems there are only five performances that were produced and made by the school itself during 2012. There isn't any information about the sale of tickets for the shows online either, so it seems they didn't use their performances to make money. Also, compared with the performances in Theatre programs in the US, the performances by the departments in China mostly focus on the classical plays, that is, the ancient plays and old time dramas. Only a few of the performances are modern ones or "popular" ones (Shi Yi 164). For instance, the four shows produced by The Central Academy of Drama include: *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare, *Duck Hunting* by Alexander Vampilov, *An Old Fashioned Comedy* by Aleksei Arbuzov and, a musical, *Crazy For You*, book by Ken Ludwig, Lyrics by Ira Gershwin, and music by George Gershwin. One of the four shows is a classical play. Two of them are not very-well known plays. There is only one that may be well-known, which is the musical *Crazy For You*. Thus, only one of them may really fits the taste of common audiences, and may mean that only one was

able to make a profit.

It is true the classical plays are a very important part of Theatre Arts and also an integral area of Theatre Arts education. Also, some of the not very famous or popular plays could be fascinating too. In the light of the performance season by Minnesota State, Mankato, there are many classical plays and less well-known plays being produced, even though they didn't make as much profit as the musicals and the ones with popular themes. It is very critical to understand how to find a balance between the classical performances, which are less popular, and the popular plays. Using the season performance arrangement of Minnesota State, Mankato as an example, there are six main stage shows per year. The performances usually include two musicals and four straight plays. Among the straight plays, there is at least one classical play, for example *Volpone*, *Imaginary Invalid* and *the Mandrake*. There is always at least one better-known play, written by contemporary or modern playwrights as well. For example *Steel Magnolias* and *Wait Until Dark*. They seemingly make a very good balance for the types of performances, because the box-office income is doing well. Also students get chances to participate in various kinds of plays. This could be used as a very good inspiration for the Theatre Programs in China, where they want to produce performances.

All in all, if used properly, producing more shows and selling the tickets to the public is a feasible way to improve the Theatre programs in China. It may not only

solve the financial problems of the Theatre departments, but also provide more practical opportunities for Theatre students. The key point is that the Theatre departments have to find a balance, in other words, focus on both the shows that can make commercial profits and the shows that cover all genres of the theatre (which can enhance the students' ability and knowledge in the diverse Theatre Arts).

Will Theatre Arts in China regain vitality, or keep declining? Theatre Arts education in higher educational institutions plays a very important role in this critical situation. If the theatre programs in China can provide opportunities to study playwriting, emphasize the combination of both Theatre Arts courses and other liberal classes, provide more practical opportunities to the students and perhaps hire more theatre practitioner as instructors and try to capitalize the performances... These issues may all contribute to improving the Theatre Arts education, thus, helping the Theatre Arts in China to flourish.

MSU Department of Theatre and Dance Main Stage
Box Office Summary

APPENDIX

	2004 - 2005	2005 - 2006	2006 - 2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Season Tickets	2,113	1,957	2,098	1,810	1,969	1,569	1,415	1,463
Regular	1,986	1,766	1,769	1,627	1,864	1,335	1,335	1,282
Fall MSU Student	85	75	116	126	72	98	102	40/35
Spring MSU Student	70	73	164	114	85	75	55	106
Complimentary	38	43	39	54	30	30	40	39
Spring Half Season						31	5	
Season Revenue	\$154,530.00	\$146,767.00	\$142,755.00	\$143,450.00	\$161,320	\$125,137	\$117,555.00	\$136,634
Wizard of Oz		Man of La Mancha	Peter Pan	Cats	Miss Saigon	Into the Woods	Chicago	Rent
Performances	14	14	14	14	11	9	10	8
Revenue	\$77,977.00	\$34,459.00	\$61,267.00	\$53,120.00	\$41,652	\$23,312	\$49,040.00	\$56,270
Capacity %	97%	58%	82%	67%	79%	67%	87%	100%
Marvin's Room		Five Women Wearing ...	Arsenic & Old Lace	Enchanted April	Lysistrata	12 Angry Men	Virginia Woolf	Wait Until Dark
Performances	12	12	12	12	11	11	10	10
Revenue	\$5,230	\$9,883	\$8,650	\$7,432	\$6,147.00	\$9,337	\$4,896.50	\$11,185
Capacity %	88%	96%	93%	85%	96%	88%	81%	90%
Volpone		Gallo	The Lark	Bias Stop	Harvey	Christmas Carol	The Odyssey	Alvin Boyz
Performances	9	9	9	9	9	12	9	8
Revenue	\$6,687.00	\$6,998.00	\$5,477.00	\$8,198.00	\$3,580.00	\$37,329.00	\$9,835.00	\$32,381
Capacity %	59%	58%	53%	55%	60%	74%	55%	72%
Steel Magnolias		Urinetown	One Flew over	Dancing @ Lughlin	History Boys	Twelfth Night	Boon Yesterday	I Hate Hamlet
Performances	12	12	12	12	11	11	11	10
Revenue	\$8,633.00	\$16,111.50	10,513.00	\$4,765.50	\$4,429.00	\$6,999.50	\$4,931.00	\$6,027
Capacity %	100%	99%	98%	63%	85%	85%	74%	74%
The Cudde		Comedy of Errors	Angels in America	Hannet	Noises Off	On the Razzle	Dracula	Imaginary Invalid
Performances	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8
Revenue	\$10,117.00	\$7,819.00	\$4,957.00	\$10,138.00	\$9,972.50	\$7,527.00	\$12,089.00	\$12,421.00
Capacity %	68%	59%	51%	60%	59%	50%	61%	53%
Will Rogers Follies		Beauty and the Beast	Gypsy	Thoroughly Modern	Mame	42nd Street	The Producers	Phantom of the Opera
Performances	9	9	9	9	8	10	8	9
Revenue	\$24,149.00	\$24,012.50	\$24,322	\$30,500.00	\$24,106.00	\$25,544.00	\$28,732.00	68,130
Capacity %	79%	74%	72%	77%	78%	63%	79%	100%
Total All Shows	\$132,793.00	\$99,283.00	\$115,156.00	\$114,133.50	\$95,886.50	\$110,048.50	\$109,523.50	\$186,414
Grand Total	\$287,323.00	\$246,050.00	\$257,911.00	\$257,603.50	\$257,186.50	\$235,185.50	\$227,078.50	\$323,048
Average	82%	74%	75%	68%	77%	72%	73%	82%

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