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Résumé de l'article

Cet article explore les transformations récentes des conditions de production des pièces de théâtre en Chine en analysant, à l'aide des travaux de Bourdieu sur les champs de production culturelle, l'importance de la relation entre l'État et le marché qui encadre la pratique créatrice des troupes théâtrales de l'État. Les données utilisées ont été recueillies lors d'une recherche sur le terrain effectuée dans la province de Fujian entre 1993 et 1994 avec les troupes théâtrales de l'État qui étaient en tournée dans les campagnes. L'article porte attention à l'économie politique de l'organisation de ces troupes théâtrales et de la commercialisation de leurs performances dans les communautés rurales, ainsi qu'au répertoire et aux aspects rituels propres aux performances faites en zone rurale. L'article soutient que le pouvoir de l'État reste au centre des pratiques et productions théâtrales en Chine, mais qu'il opère par l'intermédiaire de relations de marché mises en place par la politique culturelle de l'État lui-même.

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Dramatic Conflict: Between State and Market in the Cultural Production of Theatre in Rural China [1]

Ellen R. Judd *

"Dramatic Conflict" explores contemporary changes in the conditions of production of Chinese drama by focusing on the relation between state and market orientations at the core of the creative practice of state drama troupes. The article does so through utilizing the work of Bourdieu on fields of cultural production. The data are derived from fieldwork with state drama troupes on tour in the countryside in Fujian province in 1993 and 1994. Attention is given to the political economy of the organization of state drama troupes and their commercialized conditions of performance for rural communities, and also to the repertoire and ritual aspects of rural performance. The article argues that grounded state power remains central to the practice of dramatic production in China, but operates through market relations inserted into the heart of cultural production by state cultural policy.

Cet article explore les transformations récentes des conditions de production des pièces de théâtre en Chine en analysant, à l'aide des travaux de Bourdieu sur les champs de production culturelle, l'importance de la relation entre l'État et le marché qui encadre la pratique créatrice des troupes théâtrales de l'État. Les données utilisées ont été recueillies lors d'une recherche sur le terrain effectuée dans la province de Fujian entre 1993 et 1994 avec les troupes théâtrales de l'État qui étaient en tournée dans les campagnes. L'article porte attention à l'économie politique de l'organisation de ces troupes théâtrales et de la commercialisation de leurs performances dans les communautés rurales, ainsi qu'au répertoire et aux aspects rituels propres aux performances faites en zone rurale. L'article soutient que le pouvoir de l'État reste au centre des pratiques et productions théâtrales en Chine, mais qu'il opère par l'intermédiaire de relations de marché mises en place par la politique culturelle de l'État lui-même.

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China's rapid turn toward the market since the end of the Cultural Revolution has been accompanied by a parallel reversal in the cultural world. In a manner reminiscent of heroic model operas heralding a wholesale rejection of the past, the prompt return of traditional opera to centre stage has marked a revival of the Chinese cultural heritage, both elite and folk, and its use in reformulating Chinese cultural content for Deng's "socialism with Chinese characteristics." Opera is important within the dynamics of this change because of its acknowledged role as a touchstone for engineered transformations in China's political culture. By the end of the 1980s, opera had also acquired new visibility in linking the disparate urban and rural realms, as urban-based troupes turned increasingly toward rural markets as the solution to a state-decreed funding crisis, and confronted the difficulty of reconciling the rural market's demands for traditional performance in ritual contexts with continuing state restrictions, and with the artistic values and aspirations of the artists themselves. The changes in the conditions of cultural production in the Chinese theatre have their own specificity, but are so closely connected with the wider transformations in Chinese society and culture that they may cast light upon the direction of China's contemporary political economy.

Related discussions in the China field regarding intellectual work and intellectuals in China's reform era have focused upon the possible emer-

gence of a separate civil society beyond the scope of the state.[2] Such discussions are heavily influenced by the histories of Eastern European societies, and by the importance of intellectuals in the expanding civil spheres of those societies toward the end of their state socialist periods. These discussions have not appeared wholly adequate to many China specialists, who have found limited explanatory value in models derived from a distinctively European reality and minimally adjusted to the politics of Chinese culture. There are also some limitations in the value of models that primarily address questions of a national intellectual elite, while China remains predominantly rural and regionally diverse. This paper attempts to address some of these larger issues through a concrete examination of the conditions of rural cultural production in contemporary state-market conditions, and to relate this study to theoretically significant work on cultural production within anthropology.[3] The central issue addressed is the relation between market and state forces in a culture permeated by a diffuse state power that has undertaken to incorporate market relations into the heart of its own practices.

The most powerful theoretical framework for addressing the multiple levels of practices and conflicts in contemporary Chinese cultural production can be adapted from the work of Pierre Bourdieu. The starting point is the concept of "field," and more precisely of the place of a "field of cultural production" as a dominated field within a larger field of power (Bourdieu 1990:144-145; also see Bourdieu 1993). Each field can be thought of metaphorically as resembling a "magnetic field, made up of a system of power lines. In other words, the constituting agents or systems of agents may be described as so many forces which, by their existence, opposition or combination, determine its specific structure at a given moment in time. In return, each of these is defined by its particular position within this field from which it derives *positional properties* which cannot be assimilated to intrinsic properties." (Bourdieu 1971:161, his emphasis) Each person engaged in cultural production is located within both a broader and dominating field of power and a specific and dominated field of cultural production, such as the field of drama.

In the contemporary Chinese case, the field of power is one complexly structured by two distinct but interpenetrating modes of power. One is centred on a diffuse state power, long predating state socialist China and now the object of intense efforts of state-building and relegitimation through indirect means embedded in market-oriented reform policies. The other is centred in market relations with deep roots in a similarly long commercialized cultural tradition, in which the business of the market and the business of the state have never been rigidly separated. Reform-era policies in China seek to utilize market mechanisms to achieve modernist goals of economic growth and political stability. However, neither state nor market have been stable, and the art of living in contemporary China has required the creation of innovative strategies for managing the shifting and often conflictual relation between them.

This paper will consist of an extended view of the micro-dynamics of these conflicts and strategies in the cultural production of drama in state drama troupes in southern Fujian province. During field trips in the summers of 1993 and 1994, I attended performances and interviewed members of five state troupes and two private (*minjian*) troupes in Fujian, and also attended performances and had more limited contact with several other private troupes. The focus of this paper is on the three state troupes with which I had the most extensive contact in both years. I travelled with two of these troupes, and visited the third, while they were performing in the countryside. Material from performances by and interviews with members of other troupes is occasionally drawn upon for comparison.[4]

Shifts in state-market relations within the encompassing field of power generate conflicts in the dominated field of rural dramatic production that are then addressed by diverse strategies on the part of troupes and their members. The following discussion will explore the impact of these shifts through a concrete explication of the effect of changes in that larger field on the *conditions* for cultural production at the edge of the state's reach. In the course of this discussion, I will endeavour to demonstrate the adaptability and utility of Bourdieu's concepts regarding fields for the analysis of cultural production in China and, by implication, in a wider range of contemporary situations than has been addressed in his own work. That work has focused primarily upon showing the relations between encompassing and specific cultural fields, within contexts treated as relatively stable and embedded in the habitus of participants. The context here is one of rapid destabiliz-

ing change within the encompassing field, in response to which innovative and conscious strategies are created.

THE SETTING

On the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month (7.15) in 1994, a state drama troupe performed *Baihua si* (*Hundred Flower Temple*) for thousands of rural people drawn from an area around a remote town in the mountains of southern Fujian. The seventh lunar month is now a low period for dramatic performance in Fujian–the government prohibits most performances during the month characterized by ritual appeasement of the wrongfully deceased on the Feast of Hungry Ghosts. Exceptions can be made, and in this case the performance was presented as honouring a local god's birthday, a now-acceptable and, indeed, conventional occasion for a local community to hire a drama troupe to perform. The local god in this case, however, was Dazhongye, a god closely associated with the Feast of Hungry Ghosts, and one locally believed to be especially powerful (*ling*).[5] His birthday was stated as being the fifteenth of the seventh lunar month, the day of the Feast of Hungry Ghosts,[6] and was celebrated with extensive drama performance–but conspicuously without the Daoist rituals that elsewhere constitute a prominent and simultaneous part of a god's birthday observations. The ritual appropriate to 7.15, *pudu*, or the Ritual of Universal Salvation, is prohibited and not conducted, and has not been replaced with other rituals.[7] Recipients of the god's favour had reciprocated with donations sufficient to fund a series of ten opera performances, five each by troupes performing the two most popular styles of local opera in the area.

The appropriate performance for the occasion would be drawn from the core of Mulian opera, and would portray the ideal filial-son-and-*luohan*, Mulian, descending into hell in an attempt to rescue his mother from her torments there, and ultimately succeeding in bringing comfort to all lost souls through the creation of a ritual of salvation. As still enacted by Fujian emigrants to Singapore, the *pudu* and Mulian opera are fused together into a powerful event that is both ritual and opera. Central to such opera is the transcendently powerful figure of Mulian, transformed from god to human to god again, and possessing remarkable magical powers; the pure and redeeming figure of Guanyin, the goddess of mercy; and repeated portrayals of an unjust world, wrongful death, and betrayal in a cosmos permeated with terror and manageable only through ritual intervention (see Judd, 1994b, 1996).

Baihua si, the opera performed by one of the province's state troupes in honour of Dazhongye's birthday, presented figures instantly recognizable in the distinctive costumes of Mulian and Guanyin, but in a fundamentally different narrative. This play is an account of loyal subjects of the emperor being attacked and betrayed by characters in Buddhist costume, prominently including those perhaps best described as (not-)Mulian and (not-)Guanyin. Scenes of the terror of hell are replaced with scenes of secular evil and suffering, some performed with special effects to present the false use of the supernatural by wicked religious leaders to ensnare innocent people. The core of the plot concerns the wrongful accusation and execution of one loyal subject, while others are rescued from the betrayal of (not-)Mulian, (not-)Guanyin and their associates by the secular action of Judge Bao, an historical figure who has become an epitome of the honest official in Chinese popular culture.

The opera troupe seemed embarrassed by the supernatural elements of this play, and said that it was on its way out of their repertoire. The local temple association did not, for its part, appear to be overly pleased with this performance. However, while the local association cannot control the troupe's repertoire, it can choose from among the available items and determine their date of performance, and it can select a troupe with a repertoire that it prefers. *Baihua si* placed ambiguous representations of Mulian, Guanyin, the torments of hell and ultimate salvation on stage on the right date, but it did so while explicitly repudiating all that they represented.

On the surface, of course, there is nothing here except a conventional rural opera performance on a god's birthday, an event that is now exceedingly commonplace in Fujian (there are temples in every community and temples commonly have many gods).[8] Performances such as these do, however, shed light on the new terms in which cultural production is occurring in rural China. The state's reduction in support of its own drama troupes and insistence that they turn toward the market has opened the drama world to a new set of demands, ones generally unwelcome to the troupes and their

members, as will be indicated below. For their survival, such drama troupes must walk a razor's edge of often conflicting demands from state and from market, while somehow attending to the artistic aspirations central to their own professions–and necessary to their viability for both market and state patronage.

STATE DRAMA TROUPES

The specific field of cultural production examined here is that of Chinese drama as produced by performers and other dramatic artists located in state drama troupes. Chinese drama is primarily a mode of art in which performance and actors have priority over text and playwright; texts are not fixed and playwrights are rarely autonomous but are themselves members of performing troupes, which are then the key locus of creative activity. Playwrights attached to troupes revise items in the traditional repertoire,[9] and also create the new plays that may be performed for state-sponsored competitive drama festivals, but rarely on any other occasion. Drama as it is performed in the countryside and created for rural audiences is created by drama troupes as socially recognized organizations responsible for this mode of cultural production. Actors are the numerically predominant members of troupes and are highly specialized performers in a exceptionally demanding form of theatre combining music, dialogue, acrobatics, dance and mime.[10] Troupes are valued by audiences in terms of the qualities of their leading performers, but for the production of new plays, playwrights, composers and directors are essential, and these are also the professions from which troupe leadership is generally drawn.

The social character of state drama troupes in China is organizationally embedded within the larger society in the standard form of the "work unit" (*danwei*). Work units comprise the basic social unit for Chinese who hold non-agricultural household registration status, and all Chinese ideally are (and until the emergence in the 1980s of a substantial "floating population" of migrants, actually were) tied either to a rural locality or to a work unit. The work unit defines virtually all important aspects of a person's social status, apart from those of kinship. Individuals typically enter work units on the basis of state assignment following completion of their education, and until recently could rarely leave the assigned work unit unless transferred to another by higher administrative decision. The work unit is fundamentally a bounded community intended to provide for all aspects of a person's life, and members of larger work units may live their lives within the scope of employment, housing, childcare and education for their children, and social services and pensions for themselves, all provided through the vehicle of the work unit.

Drama troupes are organized in the same fashion as other work units in Chinese society and vertically articulated into the state structure, ultimately under the Ministry of Culture. The drama troupes examined in the course of this study each had several distinct cohorts of performers (actors and musicians) who had been through a secondary technical school training together. An entire class might be assigned to one troupe, with no major additions until a subsequent class was trained many years later, or a class might be split between several troupes upon graduation. Troupes may have little control over when graduates are assigned to the troupe or over who they are, and must therefore be flexible in accommodating both shortages (usually in specific types of lead role) or overstaffing (by those without the capacity to play leading roles).[11] Directors and playwrights are similarly assigned, but on an individual basis and from higher-level educational institutions; support staff are also assigned. Individual transfer from one troupe to another is unusual,[12] and an artist can expect to remain in one troupe for his or her entire professional life, unless he or she chooses to leave for the less secure but potentially profitable world of private troupes, an avenue now available to some of the more successful (male) actors.[13] The troupe is therefore the locus of a shared and long-term artistic practice embedded in comprehensively shared conditions of living and working.

State drama troupes have a particular responsibility to ensure the continued viability of the more than three hundred local opera forms in China. State opera troupes can in many cases trace a history back to the 1950s, when they were founded with a combination of local folk artists (primarily actors and musicians) and added elite artists (primarily playwrights, composers and directors, as well as political staff). For a period during the 1950s state and private troupes coexisted, but the private troupes later became politically unacceptable. Indeed, in the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976) of antipathy toward folk art, even the state troupes were disbanded with only a small

core of artists being retained to perform new Cultural Revolution works. Following the end of the Cultural Revolution, the state troupe structure was revived and private troupes have also been permitted to resume their activities, under state regulation, although the latter do so with much fewer resources and often precariously.[14] The relation between state and private troupes will be addressed more extensively later in this paper, but some of the distinguishing features of state troupes must be mentioned here. Apart from the integration of the state troupes into the state structure through employment and bureaucratic mechanisms, the most salient distinction can be found in the complex including partial state funding, drama festivals (*huiyan*), and the creation of a marked repertoire of new plays specifically for these festivals. Private troupes do not, of course, receive the funding, and they do not participate in the festivals. Private troupes do not have obligations to preserve traditional opera forms or to experiment with and create new repertoire along state-sanctioned lines. It is state troupes that, through the mechanisms provided by the funded festival system, preserve performative artistry and innovate in both performance and repertoire in each opera tradition, along modern and state-sanctioned lines. This complex provides an effective means of organizing and motivating state troupes to provide these dimensions of cultural production in the Chinese theatre. This is accomplished through administrative means in which funding plays a critical role, but at the same time, because only partial, leaves troupes open to competing demands that are also expressed in financial terms. Money becomes the common denominator through which state and market insert themselves into the creative process.

State troupes as they presently exist receive partial funding from the level of government to which they are hierarchically attached (national, provincial, municipal/prefectural or county). In return for this funding they are expected to preserve their local opera form,[15] to provide free performances on official occasions when asked to do so, and to participate in the competitive drama festivals (*huiyan*) that are held at national, provincial and (in some cases) municipal/prefectural levels at three-year intervals. Participation is not automatic. In order to participate in a festival, a troupe must first have a playwright capable of producing a first-class play, which may be either a new play along classical lines in a historical setting or a contemporary play in local opera style. The script must be sent to the government for political and artistic assessment. If it is approved (*ruwei*), it then becomes eligible for special funding. Even the least expensive production is estimated to cost RMB40,000, with the result that cost can be a major obstacle, especially if the government to which a troupe is attached is facing financial difficulties. Troupes rely on this funding, not only to participate in festivals, but also in order to renew and replace worn costumes and equipment. In effect, the professional capacity to be approved to enter a festival restricts which troupes will receive the funding essential to continue performing in the long-term, but it does not guarantee such funding.

All of the troupes examined in detail for this project have had conspicuous success in festivals in previous years, and continued to look to festivals as a major avenue for professional advancement. In addition to providing access to badly needed funding, awards earned at these festivals contribute to the success of both troupes and individual dramatic artists. At present festivals provide the only channel through which artists can gain significant recognition and reward for their work. However, these opportunities arise only once every three years, and recognition at the first level is required before a troupe can advance to the next level. Failure to obtain such an opportunity has a negative effect on a troupe for years. The troupe studied that was in the most serious crisis was one located in a municipality that did not hold its own festival; the troupe had been approved to perform at the most recent provincial festival but had not been granted the funds to enable it to do so.

Under such conditions and, indeed, most of the time even for troupes enjoying better conditions, almost the only performing opportunities are in the countryside. Performance in urban theatres is uneconomical because tickets cannot be sold at a price that will cover costs.[16] State troupes are occasionally required to give free performances (*jiedai yanchu*), but these are not numerous. For the one county-level state troupe studied, there had recently only been four or five such occasions in a year. Even the most prestigious of the troupes studied reported only forty to fifty such performances in a year. State troupes are officially required to perform in the countryside but, while they would previously also have done this for free, the state has now withdrawn much of its funding and uses the indirect financial means of under-

funding combined with commercial opportunity to compel the artists to perform for fee in the countryside.

Without exception, the artists object to such performances as incompatible with their professional development. The modern plays they prepare for festivals are not acceptable to rural audiences, and even the new creations in traditional style are rarely welcomed. Rural patrons hire drama troupes to perform traditional dramas, and are said to especially favour those with complicated plots. The artists view these plays as simple and vulgar, and further claim that rural audiences are not sophisticated and cannot tell a good play or performance from a poor one. The artists say that they cannot perform the best works or feel encouraged to give their best performances in the countryside. Stage and facilities are often rudimentary, rehearsal time inadequate, and living and working conditions arduous. Artists who perform intensively in the countryside fear that they are losing their artistry and the opportunity to develop professionally unless they also have opportunities to participate and succeed in festivals. The incompatibility of festival and rural performance demands, and the financial pressure to emphasize the latter, is generating crisis in even comparatively successful state troupes.

TOWARD THE MARKET

State troupes suffered a series of financial blows in the 1980s as the government reduced funding and demanded that troupes partially support themselves through income-generating performances. Many troupes, especially those at the lowest level in the network, the county, did not survive this transition toward the market, or survived as work unit shells that lacked the resources to mount any performances. The dates of the impact of these funding cuts varied with the particular government and level of government involved. One of the three troupes studied in detail in this project made the transition toward revenue-generating performance in the countryside in 1984-85, while the other two were not compelled to do so until 1987. There were additional stringencies during the political and economic crisis at the end of the decade. Although economic conditions were improving by 1993-94, and some increases in state funding were anticipated in the more affluent locations, there were no expectations of a return to comprehensive state funding.

The best-funded of the troupes reported here received an amount that its leadership described as sufficient to cover roughly 80% of the troupe's fixed salaries (that is, not including performing incentives or bonuses, which can be a large and essential portion of a performer's income) and 40% of the troupe's necessary expenses. Although this level of state funding was the object of some envy from members of other troupes, it only represented about 25% of the troupe's income. The remainder came from rural performances for fee, and this troupe was fortunate in being able to command a fee of RMB4,000-4,200 for each evening performance of four hours. This is a relatively high fee, possible only because of the reputation of the troupe and the relative affluence of the area in which it is located. A second troupe studied in detail received only slightly less state funding, approximately RMB300,000 yearly, and considered that this amount covered only salaries, with no funding remaining for performing expenses; but this troupe can only expect a fee of RMB1,700-2,500 for each five hour performance. The most difficult situation was that of the third troupe, which received only RMB210,000 yearly from the state, but was committed to using RMB130,000 of this amount for pensions alone, and RMB270,000 for pensions and salaries combined. This troupe also had the lowest fee of the three, at approximately RMB1,500-1,800 for each evening and an additional RMB600 for an afternoon performance, if this was also requested. State funding accounted for only slightly more than 40% of the troupe's total income in 1993, when it earned RMB300,000 from rural performances, but only by performing on a continuous and gruelling schedule–they gave 286 performances in the countryside during that year.

The situation of the troupe in the middle of the three troupes reported (in terms of fee, of overall financial situation, and of intensity of performance in the countryside) will serve to illustrate the situation. Its fee for the performance described at the beginning of this paper was RMB2,000 for each evening performance in a series of five. This was in about the middle of the range of fee it charges, depending upon distance from its base and affluence of the inviting community, that is, what the market will permit. The troupe negotiates contracts on the basis of its own standard printed contract form, which includes some other material provisions, among which the most important include provision of transportation one way (where the performance is too far from the home

base to permit daily commuting by bicycle; the troupe pays the cost of transport the other way), basic billeting in the host community, cooking facilities, 100 *jin* (1 *jin*=1/2 kg.) of rice, one kg. of tea and one kg. of peanut oil each day. Wealthier locations may also be asked for a pack of cigarettes for each person each day.[17] In the case of this performance, because it was in a remote location, transportation one way (one bus and two trucks) cost RMB1,500. Other costs were less variable: RMB150 each day to feed the 50 members of the troupe, RMB200 for extra pay for the workers loading and unloading the troupe's materials and setting up the stage, RMB100 each day for cosmetics and other materials, RMB4 for each person for food for each day of travel (one day each way), and RMB750 each day for bonuses for the performers. The remainder goes to the troupe to cover expenses[18] and year-end bonuses (recently RMB100-300 for each person). Rough calculations on this basis leave the troupe with RMB3,400 for these five days of performance, the only performance for fee that month.[19] The members of the performing troupe received modest meals for seven days and a total of RMB3,750 in bonuses for all fifty members.[20] The bonuses are provided only to those troupe members who go to the countryside, but all who go do receive some bonus, even on days when they have no role. The bonuses are calculated on a ten point scale reminiscent of collective era workpoints, with ten as the standard amount for a performer, ten points being valued at RMB28.40 at that time. The range was from four points for someone with no role at all on a given day to twelve for someone in a particularly heavy lead role, with the head of the performing team receiving eight. This compares with salaries of roughly RMB100 for new graduates through to a maximum of just over RMB300 for a level three performer, where most of the experienced performers were classed (the troupe had only two level two performers).[21] Even the hypothetical minimum bonus of RMB56.80 for someone who went to the countryside but did not perform at all over all five days, is a substantial addition to these salary levels. It is also apparent that sending part of a troupe to the countryside to perform allows the troupe as a whole to appropriate an amount that, in this unexceptional case, is an amount almost equal to the sum received by the performers themselves. Open inequities in the appropriation of the fruits of labour in the market context are one of the conspicuous features of reform era changes in even state-owned work units.

The financial pressures and difficulties faced by the troupes and that propel them toward such strategies arise from the particular fusion of state and market conditions that the troupes face. They are required to meet a number of state demands with heavy financial implications that devolve upon each troupe, but are hampered in the means they can use to address these problems. Each troupe is expected to accept whatever new graduates of drama schools are sent to it, in common with state labour allocation to state work units in general, even if this results, as it invariably does, in an oversupply of marginally useful staff. Fortunately for the troupes, this burden may be a temporary one, as such members often leave for more remunerative employment elsewhere, and troupes are now allowed to shed some of their young members, after first giving them some professional opportunities.

There are more difficult problems with older staff and the state's requirement that they receive 80% pensions or, in the case of the most senior generation, 100% pensions. Pensions must be paid from the work unit's (troupe's) budget, because the pensions are not funded but are a legal requirement. Furthermore, performers may retire, with pensions, at relatively early ages, 45 for women and 48 for men. The troupe facing the greatest difficulty has 123 members, of whom 43 are retired. One of the other troupes has 147 members of whom 42 are retired. This places an extraordinary burden upon the active performers, who must also support some non-performing members of the troupe (management, playwrights, support staff), and some remaining staff assigned to the troupe by the state, who either do not have the necessary artistic ability or are surplus to the troupe's needs. In each case there is a tension between protecting the privileges of state employees and the uneven burden this places on troupe members.

Each of the three troupes has been through continuous efforts at reorganization and staff adjustments. One is a streamlined troupe formed of a fusion of two previously existing troupes in 1988; some surplus staff were shed in that reorganization, and it now has only about fifteen retired members out of a total of over 100. Nevertheless, that troupe adopts a series of measures for reducing the salary and pension burden on its active performers, who form less than half of the membership of the troupe. Eight members of the troupe are in a reserve category (*taiping renwu*), where they are rarely called upon to work, are free to look for

other work, and receive only 60% salary. Nineteen members of the troupe are employed in two shops set up by the troupe to bring in some income apart from performance. These people receive full salary, but either are not suitable for performing or are women with young children who cannot easily travel with the troupe. Seven members of the troupe receive no salary and instead pay the troupe a RMB20 monthly fee for unpaid leave status (*tingxinliuzhi*).

The resolution of these financial difficulties pushes each troupe to maximize performance in the countryside in order to generate general revenue for the troupe, and to provide performance incentives and bonuses for those who go to the countryside to perform, that is, the effectively active members of the troupe. The leadership of each troupe endeavours to minimize the number of people who draw salaries but do not perform in the countryside, although each of the troupes is grappling with serious discontent and resistance on the part of performers, resulting in actions ranging from individual refusal to go the countryside, troupe-wide strike when asked to perform under especially bad conditions, and departures from the troupe. Each troupe is faced with grave retention difficulties, but each finds it necessary to take close to fifty people to the countryside in each touring troupe.[22] While it is not difficult to fill the minor roles, despite high rates of attrition among new graduates, it is often extraordinarily difficult to fill the lead roles–actors capable enough to bring contracts to a troupe, or simply capable enough to perform a key role, might refuse to go to the countryside. The departure of a lead actress in one troupe had forced it to abandon several items of its repertoire, because she could not be replaced, and to miss income-generating performances while rushing new plays through rehearsal. Another troupe was on the point of dissolving in 1994 because of the threat of departure of its leading actress.

Each troupe is concerned to devise means to retain its best performers in each role category, so that at least one touring troupe can remain viable. The means could be either inducements in terms of bonuses, recommendations for promotion to higher salary levels, and perhaps the opportunity to tour abroad in a successful troupe; or relentless personal pressure applied by a troupe's leadership to pressure key performers into performing in the countryside, and doing so on as frequent a basis as possible. Troupe leaderships can exercise negative sanctions, such as placing a performer in a "reserve," non-performing category, with consequent loss of income, but the use of such sanctions is presently limited by the opportunity performers have of leaving a troupe and making a living in some other way. Performers are, indeed, choosing to leave in large numbers. Every performer I interviewed was able to describe the attrition of at least half of his/her cohort, and in some cases was the only remaining performer. Troupe leaders complain that the good ones leave and the less able remain and that, while they can sometimes devise means of shedding unwanted performers, they have a much more difficult task in retaining good performers. At present, young men can and do readily leave the profession to engage in more remunerative work in commerce or elsewhere in the private sector. Some more experienced and able male actors are offered extraordinarily high salaries to become the marquee performers in private troupes, and some find the offer sufficiently attractive to give up the security and benefits of membership in a state troupe. Women commonly have less remunerative opportunities in the private sector and hesitate to tarnish their reputations through joining a private troupe, and consequently, although some do leave for other employment or to care for their children,[23] troupes find it easier to retain women than men. One troupe studied permitted women to play the young male role (*xiaosheng*) and made extensive use of the female warrior role (*wudan*), features that in combination give a particularly feminine flavour to the troupe's performances, a tendency recognized as artistically acceptable within its particular local opera tradition. One leading actress was promoting an exceptional solution to her primarily financial concerns by proposing to take over management of her own state troupe on contract (*chengbao*). She had acquired partners from within the troupe and was determined to go ahead despite the adamant refusal of the troupe's leadership. She was threatening to resign, raise the necessary funds privately, and start her own private troupe, presumably by recruiting members of the state troupe to which she then belonged. The impasse was approaching crisis and was pitting nearly all the active members of the troupe against its leadership and the non-active members in the summer of 1994.

IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

The resistance of the performers - and, to a lesser extent, the resistance of troupe leaders - to performing in the countryside is one of the critical

elements in this cultural field. The performers and the troupe leaders have assessed the conflicting forces of state and market and overwhelmingly prefer a state orientation. This may be partly attributed to the advantages of public subsidy and performance in more comfortable and better equipped indoor urban theatres. Equally or more important, those performers who are established or aspiring artists conceive of themselves as creative professionals, a conception that has been shaped by the post-1949 ideology and practice of providing improved working conditions, economic security, professional respect, and artistic opportunity through ties to the state for performers in China's traditional dramatic professions.[24]

These artists - and not only those troupe members who wish to leave the theatre - are actively resisting a move toward closer ties with rural society. Drama and rural society have a long and deep association in Chinese history, and the rupture of this relationship is one of the defining features of the present situation. The artists now see the opportunity for artistic creativity in terms of innovation and new scripts for urban, state-sponsored festivals. Rural people are able to impose their demands for a more traditional repertoire through the indirect pressure of the market, in the wake of the reduction in state sponsorship, but they are not able to convince the performers that this is their artistic future.

The relationship between artists and rural people is one in which the only shared feature seems to be the determination to remain separate. In none of the communities to which I accompanied the troupes did I observe spontaneous interaction between artists and local people. The only connections were those necessitated between troupe leadership and local leaders for practical arrangements and last-minute negotiations, and some contacts made in the course of accompanying me as I travelled with the troupes and visited and interviewed the local people. The degree of non-interaction extended far beyond an absence of interaction, into territory bordering on hostility. Local people, for their part, made no effort to welcome or provide for the artists beyond the bare minimum required to invite an opera troupe. Troupes invariably provide their own meals and bring a cook of their own with them to ensure quality of food, mealtimes, and hygiene, but accommodation or, more accurately, a place to sleep, must be provided locally. This may consist of no more than a place on the floor of an ancestral hall or in local homes, where artists can spread their own bedding and place their washbasins and other necessities. There may or may not be any organized attempt by the local people to arrange such a space - the troupe members expect that they will often arrive at a road near a village, walk into it carrying their personal gear, and locate a place in the village on their own. Often this will be a few scattered rooms where several troupe members will each share the floor of a room, often in the more affluent houses (this will likely include the home of the individual sponsor of a performance, where there is one). Performers spend little time in such accommodation and instead congregate on and around the stage, or at the location provided for cooking and meals (which may be adjacent to the stage). Where they do spend any time in the homes where they are staying, they are left to themselves nevertheless. For their part, the performers appear to have a contempt for rural conditions and make a point of rejecting them. This is made very clear by their efforts to clean their accommodation (implying that rural homes are not clean), and by wearing quite inappropriate, fashionable urban clothing that announces that they are not rural.

The general agreement, apparently shared by both sides, is that they have been forced together by the market. The artists say that they were welcomed in the past when they would go to the countryside to perform for free, but that now they are viewed as simply hired. The artists consider the rural people undiscriminating audiences that are incapable of recognizing the fine points of their artistry, and underline the recognized hierarchical difference in lifestyle and status between themselves as urban state employees and locals who are merely peasants.

Indeed, the contrast may be intentionally overdrawn. Many of the performers are from rural backgrounds and acquired their urban residence permits and employment only through graduation from a secondary technical school specializing in training performers. It is standard for secondary technical schools to provide assignments in state work units and urban registration status to graduates, and some talented young people have been attracted to the profession by the availability of this avenue of exit from the countryside. They do not want to give up their hard-gained upward mobility to return to constant work in the countryside, under conditions where they will not be the object of respect.

The leadership of each troupe is compelled to ensure that at least one competent performing troupe does tour in the countryside in order to meet the troupe's financial needs. The leadership is not necessarily enthusiastic about this step and, indeed, only one performing troupe leader is required to take the troupe to the countryside. The rest of the leadership, including the head of the troupe (it is invariably a vice-head who takes the performing troupe to the countryside) can and does remain in the city. Some of the leadership staff have writing, directing and managerial tasks that are appropriately performed in the city. The troupe head will, with the support of this professional staff, seek attractive opportunities for his troupe outside of rural performance - in festivals and in performance abroad, principally Taiwan and Singapore. In fact, it is the opportunity to perform in these venues that keeps performers willing to remain on stage, even in the countryside. The lack of regular performing opportunities in the cities means that remaining active in the profession requires some rural performance. Those who aspire to the more attractive opportunities are consequently resigned to some rural performance, and primarily demand that it be in relatively good conditions, with good remuneration, and not excessively frequent. But it remains the case that they are in the countryside essentially in order to have the opportunity to perform elsewhere, and preferably abroad.

Where troupes are able to maintain more than one performing troupe at some point in time (typically when a sizeable class of new graduates has just arrived to swell the size of a troupe), the less skilled performers will have the heavier rural performance schedule, while the more experienced and skilled performers have the financial opportunity to reduce the intensity of their performing schedule, and to make full use of the opportunity for urban and foreign performance.

Troupe leadership must provide these opportunities as well as attend to the financial needs of a troupe. Part of the demand here consists of making decisions about repertoire and about what ritual activity the troupe is willing to undertake in the countryside. This is the result of complex weighing of many factors, including the capacity of the troupe, the demands of the rural marketplace, and the constraints of being a state troupe. The latter factor places these troupes under more strict limitations in terms of repertoire and ritual performance than apply to private troupes, but the state troupes must nevertheless compete with the private troupes for contracts.

The existence of private troupes as an alternative places state troupes under competitive pressure, both by providing alternative troupes that can be hired and by providing alternative employers for the performers. The private troupes are not a completely autonomous alternative, however, because they are also subject to a degree of state control and supervision,[25] and they are substantially dependent upon the state system for training performers. Training of performers is a lengthy and expensive process, and the least expensive way for private troupes to obtain trained performers is to recruit those that have been trained at public expense and have received their initial experience in state troupes. Private troupes routinely raid state troupes for top performers to whom they then pay high fees to compensate for the lack of security and benefits and the heavy performing schedule, and use a minimum of less skilled performers in minor roles. The total break in continuity of the autonomous folk opera tradition from the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, together with earlier losses in mid-century periods of war, economic hardship and the drama reforms of the 1950s, have meant that there are relatively few experienced performers available outside the state system, and even fewer who are young enough to staff private troupes. Although this could change in time, this history has made state troupes the primary source of top performers for private troupes. The capacity of private troupes to become wholly autonomous is restricted by their lack of state funding, the limited supply of high-quality performers, and the instability of the market. The number of private troupes is uneven and unstable - one municipality had recently experienced a decline from 50 or 60 private troupes to 20 over a one-year period, while another still had 100 although they were not all doing well. From the perspective of state troupes, the problem that made private troupes vulnerable was lack of artistic quality. However, there are certainly also problems with varying market conditions, which are not cushioned by state subsidy for the private troupes. Private troupes often have a short-term existence, but while they are active, apart from the viability of any particular troupe, their presence as an alternative provides the rural market with the choice of hiring troupes that are less expensive than the (larger) state troupes and more willing to perform in ritual contexts that the leadership of

state troupes would, under state pressure, prefer to avoid. State troupes are, in this context, the providers of the best and most ostentatiously expensive opera, but they must also accommodate themselves to some local demands if they wish to have a full schedule of engagements.

The local demand is for opera performance on two types of occasion, both of which are rooted in local society and organized by local associations, primarily temple associations. The predominant type of opera performance requested is opera for the gods on ritual occasions, overwhelmingly on gods "birthdays." There are also opera performances invited for individual purposes, such as the birthday of the mother of a wealthy member of the community who may be either a local businessman or (very commonly) an overseas relative. Such personal celebrations can readily be merged with a temple's celebration of a god's birthday, with the private sponsor providing the funds for a community ritual and thereby adding to his own prestige. Local people may or may not attend the opera. It is performed in the first instance for the gods, and in the second largely for personal prestige. One of the more evident paradoxes in the circumstances surrounding rural opera is that the communities most able to afford the best opera troupes - and that do actually invite them - have the least interest in actually watching the opera. Here performers may be performing to near-empty outdoor squares.

REPERTOIRE AND RITUAL

The demand for rural performance is embedded in rural social relations and long-standing patterns of belief and ritual in which drama has a prominent position. The majority of occasions for rural performance in Fujian are now described as being god's birthdays,[26] although these birthdays may happen to coincide with other significant ritual dates, such as the Festival of Hungry Ghosts or the Dragon Boat Festival (5.5 - the fifth day of the fifth lunar month). On these ritual occasions drama troupes are invited to perform elements of the traditional repertoire for the enjoyment of the gods, and for any mortals who choose to watch. Attendance at the opera is not always high, especially in the more affluent areas closer to the cities, and the more traditionally oriented attendants may choose to spend more or all of their time and attention in participating in the simultaneous ritual observations being conducted in the temple. Village drama performances are almost invariably on stages across from or at the side of a square in front of a temple. The only exceptions occur in the case of temples that have lost their former squares through recent construction or government edict. In that case, the god can be moved, in procession, to a temporary structure opposite the stage, wherever that may be. Gods may also leave the temple area to process in the village, or on a river bordering a village, as I observed during one opera performance on the Dragon Boat Festival.

Inviting a drama troupe to perform is a communal matter, and is conducted through either a temple association (*foweihui*) or an elders' association (*laorenhui*; in effect, associations of lineage elders). Both types of association reflect the patrilocal construction of local communities and their enduring patriarchal character by being primarily or exclusively male in composition. Women, especially older women, may play active roles in ritual observances, but have leadership roles open to them in only some of the associations. Women are excluded from some of the ritual roles involved in temple associations and festivals, but are present as unmarked participants and attend the opera without apparent restriction.[27]

Funds for opera performances may come from household levies, from voluntary contributions, and from wealthy individual sponsors. Records of donations, and sometimes also an accounting of expenditures, is prominently posted in each temple. In the less affluent communities, funding is likely to be more diffusely spread within the community than in the case of those communities that have had large numbers of emigrants, who are now visiting their home communities in large numbers and marking their return visits by funding opera performances. When individuals offer to sponsor an opera for the community, it will be done through a community association, even if the performance is in honour of a parent and even if it is provided by overseas Chinese. A performance is a gift to the community and a public claim to prestige which must be made in the appropriate manner.

When an association has reached its decisions regarding opera performances, it may, in some areas, engage a specialized intermediary (who collects a fee from both the association and the troupe), or may have representatives directly contact and negotiate with opera troupes. In either case, the community will be required to register

the performance with the local government office responsible for culture (*wenhuazhan*, or culture station) and pay a fee. State troupes performing within the area governed by the level of government to which they are attached do not pay a fee, but do pay if they perform outside that area. These mechanisms provide a channel through which local levels of the state can be informed of and can regulate local performances, although the most salient element of the arrangements appears normally to be the collection of fees.

Apart from its special items for official drama festival competitions, each troupe maintains a repertoire designed for rural performance. In any one year, this will normally consist of about five items. One or two may be carried over from the previous year but, because troupes do seek to be invited back on a yearly basis to preferred sites (those that can afford higher fees and offer better facilities), and may be asked to perform for as many as five days in a row, the repertoire must always have at least a few new items. Troupes will not be invited to perform the same play two years in a row. Although I have seen state troupes perform items that were not designed for a rural audience - but always traditional in character - in the countryside, the demand is for conventional traditional repertoire. One of the three state troupes examined here performs a type of local opera that has a particularly large traditional repertoire upon which to draw. The other two have less extensive repertoires and have adapted elements from other local opera types, especially from the *yueju* of neighbouring Zhejiang province.

The state troupes report that they are under considerable competitive pressure to provide a repertoire that will be welcomed in the rural marketplace for opera. A full examination of the impact of these pressures upon troupes' choice of repertoire lies beyond the scope of this paper, but a few observations can be made. The performers themselves assert that the audiences are not receptive to contemporary innovations, and only want to see traditional operas with complicated plots. One of the standard negotiating points is length of performance and contracting associations will specify the duration of performance, and consequently, having items in the repertoire that can be flexibly extended by adding subplots is useful, and perhaps essential. The convoluted tales of intrigue, loyalty, betrayal and revenge in court settings that comprise most of the current rural repertoire for all these state troupes is well-adapted to such purposes. Such tales also have the merit of allowing walk-on parts for the newest members of the troupe, and the capacity to perform the pageantry of large-scale court dramas (*gongtingxi*) is one of the marks of state troupes in contrast with the smaller private troupes.

Court dramas also provide powerfully multivocal vehicles for rural cultural performance. In view of Xiong's (1936) powerful observation earlier in the century, the staging of dramas located in the imperial court is provocative: "According to our experience in Ding county, the knowledge of Chinese peasants, especially that about human behaviour, comes mostly from the stage. There is hardly a view of human affairs or recollection of history that does not derive strength from drama." The court is predominantly portrayed as characterized by unprincipled power struggles, acts of injustice and wrongful death, and struggles for succession. Values of loyalty to the emperor, the existing hierarchy, and patriarchal family values are also portrayed in what may then go beyond pageantry and entertainment to take on the qualities of a politicized morality play. The political dimensions do not receive open comment, but performers agree that death and violence play a major part in most of the plays,[28] and also that a disproportionate amount of the stage violence is inflicted upon women by men. Interestingly, one male actor/director argued that portrayals of especially violent and wicked men are popular with rural women because they have little outlet in their lives from unhappy marriages and enjoy having a wicked male character on stage to hate. In any event, all plays end with a brief and moral resolution, however lengthy and intense the portrayals of human suffering and betrayal may have been.

Some of the particularly interesting elements that appear marginally in the performances of the state troupes push the limits of officially acceptable drama somewhat further. Extensive scenes of ghosts and other figures from the underworld can no longer be directly presented, but they can appear as dream sequences, and I have seen this done by both state and private troupes. This is similar in effect to the presentation of (not-)Mulian and (not-)Guanyin described at the beginning of this paper. I have also seen performances that were sexually risqué, by modern Chinese standards, including scenes in which actresses have their outer costumes removed to reveal only undergarments. State drama troupes do not appear interested in such elements of performance

as artistically or professionally desirable, but they are pushed in these directions by the play of market forces, and the need to compete with private troupes, which are willing to push the limits much further.

Still more difficult pressures on the state troupes are posed by their involvement in ritual activities. One dimension of this is whether or not opera performance can be permitted in a ritual context. Essentially the official position since the 1980s has been to tolerate opera performance at temple rituals provided these are not highly charged occasions. The most difficult period continues to be the seventh lunar month, because of its connection with the Feast of Hungry Ghosts. This is presented as a delicate issue because of the element of superstition and the continuing widespread belief in ghosts. It is presumably also politically delicate because ghosts are the product of unjust deaths and concern with them could potentially have political overtones, especially after 1989 (see Judd, 1994b). The extent and efficacy of restrictions on performing in the seventh lunar month are variable, and in Quanzhou, for example, a somewhat flexible prohibition is accompanied by official sponsorship of approved performances in a central city location every evening throughout the seventh month.[29] Troupes can obtain official permission to perform during heightened ritual periods, and can negotiate the conflicting demands upon them, although the seventh lunar month is a period of relatively light public performance that is commonly used for rehearsal of new repertoire.

State troupes are under pressure to provide some performance of a ritual character, although no performers in state troupes are ritual specialists, as was formerly the case in some pre-1949 opera troupes. I have spent some time with one longstanding private troupe led by a man who inherited his professions as both actor and Daoist priest from his father and grandfather, but his relatively high profile private troupe no longer plays its former ritual role. Nevertheless, the willingness of private troupes to provide ritual services does place state troupes under competitive pressure. One troupe leader told me that it was simply impossible to perform in the countryside without providing some ritual elements, even if these were ones understood to be performed by actors who are not ritual specialists. Indeed, all three troupes studied do now provide some such items where requested, although all are uncomfortable with these demands from their rural patrons, and maintain limits on what they will perform. The most common acceptable element is a performance of the Eight Immortals presented on stage before the beginning of the opera. Such a performance may last from a few minutes to twenty minutes or more, and is essentially a matter of causing auspicious figures to appear and process on stage. The Eight Immortals can also be used in a performance of celebrating a mortal birthday and wishing an elder (male or female) a long life (*baishou*), and this seems also to have become relatively accepted during the course of the 1980s. Indeed, it was reported as having been used as a substitute for other rituals, which were not permitted.

Two slightly more problematic rituals are one of a masked figure getting rid of ghosts (*tiaojiaguan*) and one of bringing in a son or wealth (*song honghai'er*). These two are performed together. The sequence begins with a costumed and masked[30] actor sweeping away the ghosts. Then several costumed actors appear on stage with a crude doll in red cloth, representing the desired son or wealth. One male and one female actor, clothed in the auspicious and bridal colour of red, take this doll across the square to the temple, where it is received by a representative of a household, often an older woman. It is put in a basket together with some items prepared by the household (fruit, firecrackers, and a red packet of money), while the actors return to the stage. The household representative then takes the basket to the front of the stage and hands it up to the two actors. They receive it and take it backstage where the doll, the packet of money and some of the other items are removed; the actors return the basket to the household representative at the front of the stage, and the cycle is either concluded or started again. I have seen this performed once only, and I have also seen it done in steady procession for forty households over a period of several hours in the afternoon prior to an opera performance and major village ritual in the evening.

This ritual sequence may be performed for separate households, as was the case on the occasions I observed, or may be done for the community as a whole, for a larger fee. In the cases I observed the fee was RMB24 for each sequence, and I was told that the charge for the same ritual performance for the community as a whole would be RMB48. Compared with the other sources of funding, this ritual can provide attractive funding if it is performed a large number of times. Troupes have earlier refused to perform it, however, on the

grounds that it is superstitious, and have substituted less problematic rituals, such as a procession of the Eight Immortals. The troupe I saw perform *song honghai'er* in both 1993 and 1994 did so reluctantly. The troupe leadership refused to accept any of the funds generated from this ritual for the troupe, despite the troupe's financial needs, and only permitted junior actors to perform it. Those who participated divided the proceeds. This decision operated to the disadvantage of the leading performers, but the troupe did not want to appear to be endorsing the rituals by allowing its stars to participate. The only reason the troupe accommodated these rituals was that, if the troupe were to refuse, it would have many fewer rural engagements. The state troupes have generated new strategies for surviving in the contemporary state/market mix, but have not found a new space for autonomous cultural activity, as posited by emergent civil society models. Instead they have been confronted with more diverse demands that they must negotiate from a structurally and economically weak position.

THE MARKET AND THE FIELD OF DRAMATIC PRODUCTION

Reforms within the state sector as a whole during the 1980s have remade the conditions of cultural production in local opera by remaking the conditions under which the key institutions of state drama troupes can continue to operate. The former relation of state troupes to the encompassing social field was one that incorporated troupes *administratively* into the state sector as work units, and, through the creative activities of these troupes, revised the repertoire and the terms of performance of local opera. In the process, a professional consciousness emerged on the part of post-1949 generations of performers that they were artists with a privileged relation to the state, based upon its patronage of their art. This consciousness may never have been as unconscious or stable as the *habitus* discussed in the literature of practice theory, because post-1949 China has not offered any prolonged period of stability, especially in the politically sensitive areas of cultural production; and also because competing ideas regarding the role of artists, and specifically actors, continued to be carried within the culture. Indeed, the question of the proper role of artists is one of the issues in open contention in the conflicts that have characterized recent Chinese cultural history. Even the brief period covered here demonstrates the competing power of official ideas of artists as serving the state's modernist cultural agenda, ideas of artists as serving the demands of rural communities, and the specific professional aspirations of the artists themselves.

Indications of the emergence of an independent sphere of activity for present-day opera are not perceivable within the field material. The artists involved may well wish that some form of civil society were present which could provide the context for such independence, but this is not evident. It is beyond the scope of this paper to address extensively the question of how civil society might be conceptualized in China, or where it might be found. It may, nevertheless, be possible to find some indications here of culturally appropriate lines of analysis for the market-oriented changes in Chinese culture which are sometimes addressed in terms of civil society.

The essential departure point here is not the emergence of a market-generated civil society beyond the reach of the state, but rather the processes of transition within both state structures (bureaucracies and work units) and organic rural communities that place market principles rather than administrative principles in the core of both, and articulate their relations with each other through the medium of *commercial exchange*.[31] Further, it is important to note that the catalyst in generating the changed conditions of cultural production that now obtain for local opera was not the market, but was a series of changes in state policy. The post-Cultural Revolution reform agenda has legitimated market principles and introduced them into official policy and, more important, into everyday conditions of living and working. The work units of state drama troupes, which are the decisive arenas of dramatic production, have been compelled by state directive to commercialize the larger portion of their artistic activities and to become dependent upon commercialized performance in order to persist as an artistic body capable of doing non-commercial artistic work. However, the troupes have not been cast free of relations to the state and privatized. Instead, they remain distinctively state troupes, with market principles incorporated into their conditions of existence. In this respect, the specific cultural field represented by these troupes is responding to and congruent with wider changes in the Chinese state and the range of work units associated with it, although they are less subject to direct administrative control than before the market reforms. The

ties with the state are more subtle, but no less effective (see Shue, 1988).

The rural communities for which the drama troupes perform are not separate from the state, but demonstrate a diffuseness of state power embedded within rural belief and ritual, as argued long ago for Taiwan by Arthur Wolf (1978), and still evidently present within the hierarchy of gods and the relations of both gods and temple associations to secular authority (Dean, 1993). Rural communities manifest a grounded state power that extends from gender and household based relations of power through to the readily recognized structures of formal government (Judd, 1994a). But rural communities are also highly commercialized. This is not a new phenomenon, although it has been revived and accentuated through the rural reform program that generated rural economic change through market-oriented state policies. The increased wealth generated within rural communities and brought into them, in the case of Fujian, by relatives living abroad is one factor permitting increased commercial access to the performing arts. However, rural communities use this access within the framework of established patterns of belief and ritual, patterns which are themselves internally commercialized. Gods are respected and given gifts of money when they demonstrate their power by giving supplicants what they request (often wealth). These gifts then provide the funding for ritual observances and opera performances. The role of money in rural ritual activity is prominent, and traditional, although in the reform era it is facilitating a distinctly contemporary set of relations.

At present the capacity of rural communities to hire state drama troupes to perform for their ritual occasions and to require the troupes to do so, at least in part, on the terms set by the local communities through their temple associations and elders' associations is a departure that dates from the mid-1980s. This situation is superficially similar to the traditional practice of hiring private troupes for such occasions, but in this case permits the village communities to access state-subsidized troupes based in the cities. State troupes did perform in the countryside from the time of their first formation, as did the propaganda teams attached to armies in the middle decades of the century, but then state troupes performed repertoire determined from outside the community, and for the purposes of external political leaders. They did not then perform on local ritual occasions and they could not be controlled in any manner by local communities. The underlying change that permitted this departure was *the state's policy decision to commercialize the conditions of creative activity of the state drama troupes*, in a manner consistent with the commercialization of the state sector in general.

The troupes, as indicated above, are concerned with the commercial viability of their performances as an necessary condition for the continuation of their troupes, for the creative activity centred within them, and for the livelihood of their members. Here the troupes are responding to policy decisions external to the troupes (and much higher in the state hierarchy), and market conditions that are also external. Indeed this is true of the entire specific cultural field of dramatic production. The state troupes and the other branches of the state involved in drama (such as local cultural stations, and researchers and critics located in work units within the state cultural apparatus) are somewhat closer to the state, and the private troupes are actually commoditized, but both have had their conditions of existence remade by the reform era marketization of Chinese state and society.

Troupes and individual artists must *consciously* formulate and negotiate strategies for survival, artistic creativity, and professional success under changed conditions that they did not produce and do not welcome. The terms of success within the specific cultural field of drama continue to be defined in terms of recognition and awards at festivals, but are now also partly defined in terms of commercial success. There is the new opportunity to exchange artistic prestige for commercial success on the part of the troupe or, more readily, on the part of individual performers, although it is difficult to make that exchange work in reverse. Nevertheless, the state-imposed conditions of under-funding make artists effectively dependent upon commercial success for the opportunity to seek non-commercial forms of success. At the same time, an effective strategy for artists and troupes must take account of shifting dynamics of state control and sponsorship and the demands of corporate rural communities. What appears new in the current situation is the pivotal role of commercial exchange in mediating the relations between the various interests and actors in the dramatic field. Commercial exchange, openly expressed in monetary form, is incorporated into the heart of dramatic production. Money - as gifts to the gods, in cash or transformed into dramatic performances

in temples - is a familiar part of rural popular culture, and it has now been inserted by the state into the core of the conditions of dramatic production and everyday life in the state's own drama troupes. *The shift toward the market has not been a shift into a sphere separate from that of the state,* and it has not offered autonomy for the artists in these troupes. Instead, it is indicative of a shift toward a more complex and subtle operation of state power - through the market - than had been possible before through purely administrative mechanisms. Whether this shift allows more autonomy for the artists, troupes, or the public, and in what sense and how that might be so, will depend upon both the strategies of those involved and the changing conditions in this dominated field of dramatic production. The encompassing field of the Chinese market state is characterized by similar internal conflicts. Once again, the field of drama offers a window on contemporary processes of change in China's political culture.

Notes

1. The research reported in this article was made possible by a SSHRCC Research Grant, 1992-95. The author also wishes to acknowledge the generous cooperation of members of the drama troupes described here and of scholars in the Fujian Academy of Art.

2. For articles that summarize the current themes in this large body of literature, see Perry (1994), Ma (1994), White (1993) and Huang (1993).

3. For a general review of the state of the literature on anthropology and theatre, see Beeman (1993). The absence of a discussion of China's rich theatre is conspicuous in this article, and indicates (and exaggerates) the extent to which Chinese theatre has been neglected by anthropologists. Apart from specialists in literature and the arts, the most sustained scholarly attention has come from historians. With respect to the issues in this paper, see especially Johnson (1989) and Dean (1988, 1993). Also see Weller (1985).

4. Although all the material presented here is public and not controversial in character, I consider it preferable not to name the troupes.

5. According to De Groot (1981[1886]:427), in late nineteenth century Xiamen, Dazhongye was the god also known as the "Master of the Ritual of Universal Salvation" (*puduqong*), and was viewed as an incarnation of Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy, who has the capacity to deliver souls from hell.

6. This was explicitly stated by one of the members of the temple committee, but omitted in translation into standard northern Chinese, with no objection made by the speaker.

7. The previous and usual connection between temple and theatre had been broken by earlier government destruction of the site. The temple was now on the outskirts of the town, and the drama was performed on a rudimentary scaffolding in the centre of town. For the duration of the performances, the god was housed in a temporary temple opposite the stage, and local people of all ages paid their respects and burned incense at this site. I made several unannounced visits to the regular temple during this period and found retired members of the temple association to be present, but no ritual activities (in the absence of the god), prior to the god's return following the final opera performance. There were no Daoist priests visible at any point. On the late afternoon of 7.15, residents of the town made offerings of food, drink and incense, and burned paper money to hungry ghosts on the street outside each dwelling, but these were separately performed popular rituals with no apparent connection with either temple or opera.

8. For example, in one community I visited with a touring troupe, a small village with an active temple association celebrated god's birthdays in every month of the year and this involved more than one hundred performances of opera in a year.

9. The preponderance of the active repertoire consists of revisions of classical plays within a local opera style's traditional repertoire, or adapted from the traditional repertoire of other opera styles.

10. Actors commonly train for about five years in a secondary level drama school before joining a troupe; each specializes in one of the four major role categories (*sheng, dan, jing, chou*) of Chinese opera, and often in a particular sub-category. Performing well in any of these roles takes many years of training - leading performers are not easily replaced.

11. In some cases troupes recruit members on their own, and may train actors as apprentices, but this is a difficult choice because it will generally not allow the individuals in question access to the non-agricultural household registration essential for them to enjoy the full benefits of belonging to the troupe - such people will continue to hold their localized agricultural registration and not be eligible for the benefits accorded state employees. People in this category may, as a consequence, be very difficult to retain in a state troupe.

12. A troupe may occasionally raid another troupe for a desired performer, and troupes may also either divide or combine. Individual movement from one troupe to another within the state system is unusual. Note that there are also practical barriers, as each local opera style will have very few troupes within the state system, and it is difficult for a performer trained in one local opera style to perform in another.

13. This avenue is more problematic for women, because of questions about the "respectability" of women in private troupes, and women in state troupes will rarely choose this option.

14. Private troupes do not have the resources to offer long-term training for actors, without which they cannot undertake the performance of major roles. They may even have difficulty attracting performers at all, as they cannot offer the status of state employee, with its benefits and privileges, and provide only modest remuneration to most employees. For the key roles, such troupes often recruit experienced actors trained through the state system in return for high remuneration. The long period during which private troupes did not operate has meant that there is a very limited supply of experienced actors outside the state structure. Except for the few cases where private troupes are built around older and talented folk artists, they are either parasitic upon the state structure or of inferior performing quality.

15. Each of the troupes examined in this study is designated as the priority troupe for its particular local opera form. Such designation aids a troupe in receiving state support, and may be essential to the continued viability of some local opera styles on more than a rudimentary basis.

16. One of the most valued opportunities available to some state troupes is performance abroad. For Fujian troupes, this means performance in areas of previous migration from Fujian, primarily Singapore and, recently, Taiwan; such opportunities are highly valued by troupes and their members, for both professional and financial reasons. Foreign performance and foreign tourists within China are an important part of a market for drama that is now very weak in the cities.

17. The contract also provides for a deposit of RMB200 to be paid in advance. This amount is forfeited by the inviting community if it later replaces this troupe with another, but is returned if the performance is cancelled by government order because a community has failed to meet its birth limitation campaign target. If the troupe has to cancel because it is called upon to perform elsewhere by the government, the troupe will offer to find another troupe as substitute and, if the community is not wholly satisfied, may also have to pay a penalty.

18. This includes minor replacement of stage materials, costumes and properties, but not major expenses. For major expenses, the troupe seeks extra funding from the government through festival performance or other special requests.

19. Upon return to the city, the troupe immediately went into rehearsal and filming for a video being made by a Taiwanese team in connection with a possible visit by the troupe to Taiwan the following year. The troupe was also preparing for a festival. The vice-head of the troupe showed me the troupe's engagement schedule. It had only the one engagement during the seventh lunar month, a slow time for state troupes in Fujian, because of the government's disapproval of performance at that ritually charged time (this performance was described as possible because in a remote location). The schedule was much busier for the following few months, and the troupe currently estimated that it gave approximately 100 performances for fee in the countryside in a year.

20. On some occasions members of the troupe could be paid additional amounts in return for performing a costumed ritual (described below), but this was performed only once during these five days.

21. Performers in state troupes have classifications and associated salary levels as do all state employees, and this is another sense in which the state absorbs artistic activity into the larger field of state-defined work and remuneration. At the time of the 1994 fieldtrip salary level adjustments that would roughly double salaries had been announced by the state, but these had not yet taken effect in this troupe. The state had raised salaries, but left it to each work unit to fund the decreed increases. Members of the troupe were expecting salary increases and retroactive pay, but did not know when either would be forthcoming.

22. The detailed staffing for one such troupe was as follows: a vice-head of the troupe, twenty-nine actors, eleven musicians, two people for costumes, two for lights, one for props, one for curtains, one for projection, and one cook. This appeared to be the usual level of staffing for state troupes. Private troupes often perform plays requiring fewer actors, but state troupes are required to provide opportunities for newly assigned performers, and so select plays, such as court plays (gongtingxi), that call for numerous minor performers. A state troupe may consider reducing staffing slightly, on the part of either performers or musicians, if this will enable it to send a second troupe to the countryside. Each of the troupes studied has fluctuated between one and two performing troupes, as new classes of students arrive and as attrition depletes a troupe's resources.

23. Women in private troupes and occasionally even in state troupes have had to take small children with them when touring in the countryside, but this is a truly difficult situation they will avoid whenever possible.

24. This is not the place for an historical essay, and none of the active performers in these troupes had direct pre-1949 performing experience. All were surely aware of the previous categorization of performers as a type of "mean people" (*jianmin*), that is, a stigmatized hereditary under-caste, and of the desperate poverty and working conditions endured by most performers in the past. Indeed, some of the stigma of performing professionally survived uninterrupted after 1949 and appears to have experienced a resurgence with the return of performers to the rural marketplace.

25. The troupes that did not receive state funding were usually referred to as *minjian jutuan*, literally "folk troupes," a term I have rendered as private troupes in the main text, as the fundamental distinction between these and the state troupes is one of ownership. Finer distinctions are also possible. Those referred to as *minjian zhiye jutuan*, or folk professional troupes, in the narrower sense, are those that come under the direct

authority of county cultural stations (*wenhuazhan*), have leaders appointed by the state, and receive some government support. This intermediate situation has now almost disappeared. Where it remains a remembered or present possibility, completely private troupes are described by the term *yeyu jutuan*, which literally means "amateur troupe," but now refers to wholly private troupes. This appears to represent an adaptation to present market situations of a terminology that preceded the market reforms. It remains the case that every private troupe must have a license to perform (*yanchu xukezheng*), submit to yearly inspection by the Culture Bureau (*wenhuaju*), and pay a variety of fees to the state for permission to perform. Private troupes are under some supervision and control in terms of the political and ritual character of their performance, but the control is less tight than that over state troupes.

26. One troupe informed me that performances are allowed to celebrate god's birthdays, but must not take place on the actual birthday, although the day before or the day after is acceptable. This regulation appears not to be generally applied.

27 There may have been some change toward more gender-inclusive participation in recent decades. The performance of Mulian opera given by a Fujian folk opera troupe in Singapore in the summer of 1994 for the Festival of Hungry Ghosts at a Fujian migrants' temple continued the traditional practice of men playing women's roles, prohibited women from standing on the stage, and required some performers to abstain from sexual contact with women during the performance.

28. Communities may also insist that, for a more positive ritual event, a troupe perform a play with no deaths. This is an additional reason for a troupe to require a degree of range in its rural repertoire each year.

29. According to some troupe leaders in Fujian, this restriction does not hold for neighbouring Guangdong.

30. Masks are not ordinarily used in Chinese opera.

31. The market relations involved here are specifically commercial. The private troupes represent a situation in which culture has actually been commoditized, but the state troupes and the cultural field of drama in general is commercialized but not yet commoditized.

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