Respecting Tradition:

A Practical Exercise Using Theatrical Stage Lighting to Enhance a Work from Traditional Beijing Opera

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ABSTRACT

During the early 20th century, artists associated with Beijing Opera reformed various elements of the performance to reflect contemporary events. Attempts at reform were deemed unsuccessful since most traditional components of the Beijing Opera were obscured.

This thesis explores the use of theatrical stage lighting with specific emphasis on the use of stage lighting to support the aspects of time, space, and mood which are inherent in the performance. The ultimate objective is to do this without destroying the original performance style associated with Beijing Opera.

The practical component of this thesis is based on the McCandless method of stage lighting and the application of this method to the lighting design created for Murder of a Concubine, a traditional piece of repertory of the Beijing Opera. The culminating performance was presented on December 1st, 2013 on the Academic Hall stage in the Department of Theatre of the University of Ottawa.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Traditional Beijing Opera

Compared with other Chinese local operas, the Beijing Opera has a relatively short history, around 200 years. The Beijing Opera benefits from two unique conditions. First, it absorbs the advantages from other local operas, such as "operatic singing systems from qaoqiang (pitched singing), geyang (prevalent along the middle and lower reaches of Yangtze), bangzi (prevalent along the Yellow River valley) and liuzi (which originated in Shandong), and the historical stories or folk tales from Kunqu (popular opera in Suzhou)" (Xu,13). Second, the Beijing Opera has its incomparable location. From its beginning, it was closely connected with the culture of the national capital, and it was loved and supported by the royal family. The first condition provided the Beijing Opera with rich and colourful tunes as well as a wide range of interesting plays, and the second led it to become an official opera in the Qing Dynasty. Such conditions helped the Beijing Opera to gradually develop into the premier opera type in China, having no rival in terms of the number of plays and performing artists as well as its influence.

As an art form that synthesizes the artistic achievements from various Chinese local operas, the adoption of improvements to and reforms of the Beijing Opera followed along with its development from the beginning. Before the 1930s, the artists mainly focused on the improvement of singing and acting, adhering to the other traditional rules (storytelling method, facial make-up, costumes, and stage props) passed down by their masters. The traditional Beijing Opera derived its artistic meaning from the actor's performance; it relied on the actor's skill, accumulated by long years of training. As a result, the traditional Beijing
Opera emphasized the actor's performance and singing skills on the one hand and minimized the importance of the stage props, scenery, and lighting on the other hand. While China was isolated from Western influence, this tradition flourished. With the decline of Qing Dynasty, however, seclusion from the outside world was gradually broken down. War, accompanied by Western knowledge and influences, came into China.

**Modern Plays (shizhuang xinxi)**

Western drama, with its modern stage technologies greatly impacted Chinese artists and scholars, who realised that drama had played an important role in creating the enlightenment in Western society. This led to an important reform of the Beijing Opera, as artists attempted to use this art form to create stories that reflect events happening in contemporary society. However, the traditional Beijing Opera faced great challenges from the new requirements since the classical repertoires in traditional Beijing Opera were constituted by acting out events of past dynasties.

In addition, the new stage technologies, such as stage props, scenery, and the lighting system, also challenged the simple staging of the Beijing Opera. "The "shizhuang xinxi," which means "modern plays," appeared in the early twentieth century. These plays told stories that took place in the Qing and the Republic of China periods" (Xu,101). Costumes, stage props, and lighting were also different from the traditional Beijing Opera. Mei Lanfang (1894-1961), one of the greatest Dan (female) role performers of the Beijing Opera, attempted to direct a number of new plays at a young age.
Mei Lanfang and Modern Plays

In 1913, Mei Lanfang was invited to perform in the Shanghai New Stage (Shanghai Xin Wutai), "the first theatre in China with a proscenium arch, a revolving stage, and new lighting and scenery equipment" (Tian, 2). Deeply impressed by the functions of the New Stage, he recalled that "he was much delighted by the new stage compared with the old-fashioned square stage" (Mei, 132). He was also interested in the new direction of theatrical production when he watched some modern plays, produced either in Western style or in reformed Chinese traditional style. In the same year, he went back to Beijing with a new awareness of his performance: "compared with those plays based on histories and old stories, new plays based on contemporary events were more interesting and effective to the audiences" (Mei, 211). After a few months, Mei began his work on reforming the traditional Beijing opera. At the end of 1913, he directed his first modern play about the exploitation and oppression of prostitutes, "Nie hai bolan (Great waves on the sea of evil)". A number of modern plays were then created, such as "Yi lu ma (A thread of hemp)", telling the life story of a talented girl and her simpleton husband, "Deng Xiagu (Lady Deng Xia)", telling the story of Deng Xiagu helping her sister and sister-in-law escape persecution by their relatives, and the play that reflected the satire of superstition, "Tong nu zhan she (A maiden kills a snake)".

Mei directed the modern plays in three steps: first, he decided the main characters and plots based on the story; second, he reformed the costumes; third, he researched how the scenery could cooperate with the acting and the story (Mei, 213). The latter two steps were different from the traditional Beijing Opera.
In the creation of "Nie hai bolan (Great waves on the sea of evil)", Mei divided the experience of the main character into three stages: 1) when she is abducted; 2) when she is forced to be a prostitute; 3) when she is saved from the prostitution. Correspondingly, her costumes changed three times: 1) poor and worn-out; 2) silk and colourful; 3) simple and clean (Mei, 211). Compared with the conventional costumes in traditional Beijing Opera, "the costumes in modern plays were designed in accordance with the social status of the character with realistic and historical accuracy" (Tian, 5). Furthermore, Mei introduced realistic scenery and settings to reflect the realistic body movement and gestures that replaced stylization. For example, he put a real sewing-machine on the stage (Mei, 213).

Such reforms encountered a lot of difficulties in practice. First, there was the contradiction between modern costumes and old-style acting. For example, a female role wearing a daily skirt introduces herself on the stage in conventional Beijing Opera singing. The unreasonable combination made her performance belong to neither the Western drama nor the traditional Beijing Opera. Second, there was the contradiction between the music and acting. Mei noted that "every movement and gesture in the Beijing Opera needed to be in accord with the rhythm of the music" (Mei, 557). In order to create the realistic movements in the modern play, he had to reduce the singing with slow rhythm in favour of more lifelike speeches. Moreover, "during the long monologue, the percussion music had to stop" (Mei, 569). Third was the contradiction between realistic scenery and the acting. There were arguments about "how the actor slept on the bed without taking off his shoes. If the actor does not enter a room, why is there furniture on the stage?... In conventional acting, the actor walking around the stage means that he travels a long distance and goes into a different space. How does a single realistic scenery imply the changed space?" (Xu, 503). In summary,
the realistic style in modern plays challenges the abstract performance in traditional Beijing Opera.

Mei gave up performing in modern plays because he realised that such plays were artistically restrictive and destructive. Min Tian, a scholar focusing his research on Mei Lanfang, summarizes the reasons why Mei gave up modern plays in his book "Mei Lanfang and the Twentieth-Century International Stage":

(Mei) noted that there were inherent incompatibilities and contradictions in such hybrid blending of realism and conventionalism. First of all, it is the contradiction between content and form. Since shizhuang xinxi (modern play) was based on modern and contemporary subjects, the actor's movement should be rendered lifelike as much as possible. Thus those highly conventionalized dance movements and techniques an actor practiced and perfected over decades became useless and had to be replaced. Second, it is the incompatibility between lifelike movements and conventional music. In traditional Chinese theatre, patterned dance movements are integrated with conventionalized music consisting of prescribed singing, tunes, and melodies. In shizhuangxinxi, owing to the adoption of lifelike movements and gestures, conventional music had to be reduced in favour of more spoken speeches that are in tune with such movements and gestures. Mei acknowledged that he was not comfortable with such an approach, for it was clearly in contradiction with the principles of traditional Chinese theatre (Mei, 568-69). Third, according to Mei, since the performance art of traditional Chinese theatre came into being and developed without realistic scenery, with the help of the playgoer's imagination, the actor's movement and
gestures can not only embody the character's psychological emotions but also signify different theatrical spaces and dramatic situations. Thus in Mei's view, the use of realistic scenery would affect the actor's performance in a quite negative way, restricting his dance movements, and any new invention, such as the use of realistic scenery, must see to it that it does not contradict the system of traditional Chinese theatre. As regards the use of scenery in his performance of *shizhuang xinxi (modern play)*, Mei noted that in general the use of realistic scenery had negative effect on the actor's performance because it reduced acting space and consequently imposed restrictions on the actor's acting capability (Mei, 1962, 20). (Tian, 7).

**Stage lighting in Traditional Beijing Opera**

Although the *modern play* was considered not successful according to Mei, the attempt to modernize the Beijing Opera has not stopped. Artists today still try to find ways to present contemporary events using the old Beijing Opera's performance style. However, such attempts are always accompanied by arguments and debates. On the one hand, artists attempt to create a new Beijing Opera with a new singing style, modern costumes, magnificent stage props, and lighting designs. On the other hand, traditional pieces of the Beijing Opera are being preserved and presented in the original way, with the old school acting style, the simple stage, and basic illumination. The aim of my practical exercise, explores the latter style and asks the question, can a modern lighting design be employed in traditional Beijing Opera, not aiming to reform it, but aiming to make it easier to understand? In other words, can I use a theatrical lighting design to clarify meaning while respecting and preserving the traditional elements of Beijing Opera?
Unlike changes to the singing and performance style, lighting does not fundamentally change the essence of the Beijing Opera. Compared to the costumes and scenery, lighting is intangible and abstract; it does not physically interfere with actor's performance, which was Mei's concern about the negative effects of the realistic scenery. Furthermore, according to Mei, "the actor's movements and gestures not only embody the character's psychological emotions but also signify different theatrical spaces and dramatic situations" (Mei, 293). Stage lighting also can indicate space, changes in time, and mood: "the (lighting) designer or technician can consider creating a definite effect of time of day and locality...and creates that intangible dramatic essence called mood" (McCandless, 18-19). In this way, stage lighting does not impose itself on the actor's performance, but it can facilitate it.

My research is based on McCandless's lighting method, the first systematic theory of stage lighting design. It seemed to me to be appropriate to apply what is recognizably a "traditional" method of stage lighting to the "traditional" Beijing Opera performance. The Department of Theatre of the University of Ottawa invited William Lau (Montreal-based Beijing Opera actor) and Jingze Wang (from China) to present a traditional work of Beijing Opera, "Murder of a Concubine," in Academic Hall on December 1, 2013. This permitted me to do my research and to apply it in practice. In the following segment of my thesis, I present four sections: an analysis of the play; the lighting design for Murder of a Concubine based on McCandless's method; a project review; and a conclusion.
CHAPTER 2: THE ANALYSIS OF MURDER OF A CONCUBINE

Background of the play

The story of Murder of a Concubine comes from one of the greatest classical Chinese novels Water Margin written by Naian Shi in the Ming Dynasty around 1380 B.C. Murder of a Concubine is a famous play that exists in many different kinds of Chinese operas, such as Chuan Opera, Han Opera, Hui Opera, Shanxi Opera, and Xiang Opera. In 1954, Xinfang Zhou, a famous actor in Beijing Opera, collected the story from other Chinese operas and adapted it to a classical repertoire in Beijing Opera. His performance of Murder of a Concubine has been recorded in the color film "Xinfang Zhou and his Stage Art" (1961).

Background of the story

Jiang Song makes his living in the county of Yun as a humble officer. His wife dies, and he marries a concubine Xujiao Yan. Jiang Song has a handsome and romantic disciple Wenyuan Zhang. Attracted by Wenyuan Zhang’s charm, Xujiao Yan seduces him and commits adultery. Her scandal becomes the gossip of the neighbourhood. When Jiang Song hears rumours of the affair, he scolds his concubine. Xujiao Yan, however, blames Jiang Song for his small wages and unromantic personality. Though angry, Jiang Song cannot divorce Xujiao Yan because it will harm his reputation. Although Jiang Song fails to have a smooth relationship with his concubine, he is well regarded for his kind-hearted loyalty towards his friends. We learn that he once helped a chief of the outlaws and freed him from prison, the chief then sent a gold bar and a letter to thank Jiang Song. Jiang Song has hidden the gold bar and the letter in his bag in order to keep anyone from learning the secret relationship between him and the chief of the outlaws. Unfortunately, he loses the bag and
when Xujiao Yan finds it she uses its contents to blackmail Jiang Song, with tragic consequences.

**Story analysis**

After a brief argument with Xujiao Yan, in their house, Jiang Song sleeps then leaves at dawn. Not long after, he suddenly notices that he lost his bag. He is so scared of his concubine discovering the contents that he runs back home. He searches for the bag in the courtyard and finds nothing. He asks Xujiao Yan whether she has noticed his bag. The audience has already seen that she has found the bag and opened it and now knows the secret between Jiang Song and the chief bandit. She admits that she has found the bag but refuses to give it back. Jiang Song asks her again and promises to leave her the gold bar. She refuses again unless Jiang Song grants her a divorce and allows her to marry his disciple Wenyuan Zhang. In order to get back the letter and keep the secret, Jiang Song has to agree. But after he writes the divorce letter, Xujiao Yan takes back her promise and is going to send Jiang Song to prison. Song is so angry that he pulls out his knife and kills her. Finally, he takes the secret letter from the dead Xujiao Yan and runs out of the house in panic.

In the traditional Beijing Opera repertoire *Murder of a Concubine*, the stage is simple and uncluttered. There is only one desk and three chairs on the stage. One of the three chairs is employed only as a clothes rack where Jiang Song hangs his bag. Traditionally, the lighting never changes but only washes the stage, offering basic illumination. The space, time and mood of the play, however, change corresponding to the development of the story. The changes are not indicated by changes to the stage sets or theatrical lighting but depend
on a semiotic sign system which integrates the movements, gestures, facial expressions, and dialogue of the actors.

Time, space and mood are presented in the story in a variety of ways. The fictional time in the story changes from midnight to morning; the fictional space is revealed as a two-story house with a courtyard; the mood is reflected in the accumulated tension. *Murder of a Concubine* has a clear structure to present the fictional environment. In the first part of the play, before Jiang Song leaves the house, it emphasizes the change of time. In the middle of the play, when Jiang Song runs back to the house to look for his bag, it focuses on building up the fictional space. And in the rest of the play, it concentrates on increasing the tension between the two characters and leads the story to the climax when Jiang Song murders Xujiao Yan. Therefore, I analyze the fictional environment of the play from the space, time, mood as below:

**The fictional time**

The fictional time in this play is indicated by the singing:

- “Hearing the strike of the first watch” (9:00 P.M.)
- “Hearing the strike of the second watch” (11:00 P.M.)
- “Hearing the strike of the third watch” (1:00 A.M.)
- “Hearing the strike of the fourth watch” (3:00 A.M.)
- “He's gone, I didn’t sleep well the whole night” (Daytime)
All such changes in the fictional time happen in the first part of the play, and each time period exists within a few sentences. Although the fictional time changes quickly and leaves little room for theatrical lighting, the feature of each time period: midnight, dawn, and morning, still offers the possibility for the lighting design. For example, I can create the sky on the stage in the adaptation of the play and use the different positions of moon to suggest the changes of time.

The fictional space

The fictional space is built up by different movements or gestures executed by the actors. The rolling up and down gesture suggests the blind being raised and lowered on the window. A pushing outward gesture by the actor indicates the door, and stepping up and down movement implies the stairway. The simple gesture of leaning the head on the desk represents the bed and sleeping. Through these gestures we can construct a two-story house on the stage. I use two diagrams to show the fictional space.

Figure 1: Fictional space of the first floor in Murder of a Concubine

The door separates the fictional interior and exterior spaces. The stairway indicates the existence of the first floor and the upper floor.
The upper floor is established as a bedroom. There are beds in the middle and a blind, which suggests a window, is indicated on stage left.

Although the fictional space created by the actors’ movements and gestures is intangible and invisible, it rules the trajectory of the actors’ movements on the stage. For example, in order to leave the house from the bedroom, the actor of Jing Song needs to perform 6 kinds of movements or gestures. (1) Open the door of the bedroom. (2) Turn right and then turn around to the left stage in order to go to the fictional stairway. (3) Step down the stairway. (4) Turn around to the centre of the stage. (5) Open the main gate. (6) Lift his leg to step across the threshold of the gate.

The window blind is used repetitively by both actors, and when it is indicated by Song Jiang’s rolling up-and-down gesture, its fictional position is settled and never changes during the rest of the play. So too the positions of the other fictional items, such as the door of the bedroom, the stairway, and the main gate. In other words, the fictional positions of the space are not involuntary or psychological but are ruled on the stage. Accordingly, I determined that I could use theatrical lighting to define them and make them apparent by indicating a
feature which would suggest, such as moonlight or daylight coming from the raised window blind, or using a rectangular corridor of light to suggest the stairway.

The mood

The play starts with a scene showing the uneasy relationship between Jiang Song and Xujiiao Yan, a relationship which deteriorates in the development of the story. The tension between two characters accumulates and peaks when Song kills Yan. I determined that, at this moment, the fictional space becomes less important whereas the lighting needs to support the angry and nervous emotions which dominate the scene and set the mood.

In summary, analyzing the script enabled me to understand the structure of the story, the nature of its characters, and the relationship between each character. In the absence of having the opportunity to see an adequate number of rehearsals of the piece, it was through the script that I determined how best to support the physical environment of the play through light with particular emphasis on time, space, and mood. Furthermore, analysing the script inspired me to have ideas about what parts should be emphasized by lighting. Thus I developed my lighting design based on such an analysis.
CHAPTER 3: LIGHTING DESIGN FOR MURDER OF A CONCUBINE

Project description

On December 1, 2013, one piece of the repertoire of the Beijing Opera, Murder of a Concubine, was presented in Academic Hall, University of Ottawa. Two actors, William Lau and Jingze Wang, were invited by the Department of Theatre of University of Ottawa to perform in this play.

William Lau was trained in both Chinese traditional dance and Western classical ballet. Specializing in Dan (young female role) in Beijing Opera, he developed the richness of Chinese dance and opera for a wide range of audiences nationally and internationally, and he trained and mentored a new generation of Chinese-Canadian dance artists. Mr. Lau performed Xujiao Yan in the University of Ottawa production.

Born in China, Jingze Wang began his professional Beijing Opera training at the age of eleven; he specialized in the Lao-sheng (elderly male roles). He works in the Shenn Xi Province Beijing Opera Company where he has performed many leading roles in traditional repertoires. Mr. Wang performed Jiang Song in this production.

The show was supported by the Department of Theatre, and I am privileged to have had the opportunity to explore my lighting research in this production. My lighting design was supervised by Margaret Coderre-Williams. During the project, Tina Goralski, Paul Auclair, and Jon Lockhart gave me great help in technical support, and Daniel Mroz offered help in facilitating a discussion both before and after the performance.
This production observed the traditional conventions of the Beijing Opera with its original music, song, dialogue, gestures, and movements. The different language and theatrical conventions may create barriers for the non-Chinese-speaking audience or people unfamiliar with Beijing Opera, therefore, my lighting design aimed to facilitate the audience's understanding of the play without changing or compromising its traditional performance style. The show was presented in Chinese with English subtitles.

**Lighting goals**

In order to understand a story, it is essential to comprehend when and where the story happens, what the personalities of characters are and how they are altered by the developments within the story.

Using lighting to support the plots and the personalities is a complex process. The unchanging white stage lighting, basic illumination, in traditional Beijing Opera does not contribute to an audience's understanding of character and plot development. It does not provide information about the time or the delineation of space on stage. It also does not contribute to other stage elements, such as music, dialogues, gestures, and movement. Therefore, my lighting design focuses on exploring the potential abilities of theatrical light to support the changes of the time and space in the story, and to use colours and intensity to interact with the actors' performance, and to enhance the aspect of mood as the play reaches its climax.

After setting up the main goals, I started my lighting plan with the reading of the script. There are six changes in the time, which are first, second, third, and fourth watches in the night time; dawn and later into day. Meanwhile, there are four spaces in the play, which are
the bedroom, stairway, courtyard, and exterior space. The tension grows throughout and peaks at the end of the play when Jiang Song murders his concubine, Xujiao Yan. To support the six changes in time, I decided to create a backdrop on which I showed different positions of the moon to suggest the changes of time in the night scenes, a sunrise to indicate the dawn, and a blue sky to illustrate the daytime. I created various light states to indicate the changes of the space, and I controlled the intensity and colour to support the tension between the characters.

**Lighting areas and Backdrop**

There are only two actors on the stage, and their movements will not occupy the entire stage. Therefore, I decided concentrate the lighting to the central stage for three reasons: First, the concentrated area can lead audiences to pay attention to the actors instead of being distracted by the bare stage. Second, the narrow, relatively small, space can suggest an intimate locale such as a bedroom. Third, it can indicate the transition between interior and exterior space. Therefore, I divided the stage with lighting areas as below:
The lighting areas A,B,C focus on the front of the center acting area while D,E,F focus on the rear part. Lighting areas G and H focus on the stage right.

The set-up for the original piece consisted of only two chairs and one desk on the centre stage. For my purposes, to create a sky, to project various positions of moon in the night and of the sun in daytime, I required a backdrop. The backdrop had to be neither too large, which would to distract the audience’s attention from the actors, nor too transparent, so that the projected colours could be seen well on its surface. After comparing various materials, I chose a three-meter-high and five-meter-wide plain white cloth as the backdrop.
Lighting layout based on McCandless's method

After these preparations, I began my lighting plan by following McCandless's lighting method: Lighting the acting area, Blending and toning, Lighting background surface, and Creating special effects.

Lighting the acting area

In his book, McCandless points out that the lighting for the acting area "is primarily to give adequate and yet variable visibility to the actor's face" (McCandless, 33). Such visibility is controlled by the Intensity, the Colour, and the Distribution of the lighting. In order to explain these terms, I refer to J. Michael Gillette, a more current lighting designer.

Gillette refers to intensity as one of the controllable functions of light. It offers basic illumination to the stage and the actor. According to Gillette, "Intensity is the actual amount, or level of brightness, of the light that strikes the stage or actor"(Gillette, 7).

Colour, another function, is "easily the most noticeable of the elements that a lighting designer can control and is arguably the most dominant"(Gillette, 122). According to the McCandless method, colour used in the acting area has two main functions. One function is to create the appropriate atmosphere, the second function is to ensure that the actor is seen in three-dimensions and is separated from the background.

There is a large range of colour available to designers, McCandless states: "The colour of the light is further determined by the attempt to be consistent with the motivating lighting, such as sunlight, moonlight, gaslight, etc" (McCandless, 50). Motivating lighting is the key light, which mimics a natural light source and must be dealt with in a way that convinces the
audience that the light comes from a reasonable position, has an appropriate colour, and is realistically textured. For example, a campfire as a motivating lighting may be more convincing if a yellow-orange colour is used and the light is diffuse, perhaps even with a flicking effect.

In order to support the desired three-dimensional appearance of the actors, a lighting designer can use two different colours, cool and warm tint, from opposite sides, to create contrast on an actor's face: According to McCandless, "if warm colour is used from one side, cool colour can be used from the other, just as the cool blue of daylight appears in the shadows caused by the warm rays from the sun" (McCandless, 51).

Distribution refers to four elements:

1) The direction from which the light approaches an area, actor, or object.

2) The shape and size of the area the light is covering.

3) The quality of the light--its cohesiveness (clarity or diffusion).

4) The character of the light--its texture (smooth, uneven, patterned, hard- or soft-edged, and so forth) (Gillette, 6).

Distribution in the McCandless method serves three purposes.

First, to highlight a certain area or provide "dramatic visibility," as he called it. "Some areas are obviously more important than others and sometimes the best visibility from a dramatic point of view is that which does not allow too clear a delineation of form" (McCandless, 52). He suggests that such dramatic visibility can be supported by dividing the
acting area into a number of smaller sections, giving the lighting designer the flexibility to control the property of the light in each section.

Second, if the light comes from diagonal directions rather than straight on, it will make the actor more visible and sculptured. The ideal direction of the light is at forty-five-degrees from both sides and above (McCandless, 55). It will be reinforced if the cool/warm colour are used in conjunction with the lights on opposite sides.

Third, each lighting area should overlap the adjacent areas sufficiently so that there are no "dead pockets" through which the actor must walk (McCandless, 59).

In summary, McCandless's method in lighting the acting area focuses on the requirements of offering visibility to the actors, creating a convincing colour that co-ordinates with the motivating light, allowing for three-dimensionalities, dividing the lighting areas, and finally, linking the lighting areas together. Therefore, I used front light, forty-five-degree angled light, and side lights to fulfill such requirements.

**Front light and Forty-five-degree angled light**

In my first design plan, I considered that visibility was the most important part since I needed to preserve enough intensity for the costumes, make-up, and actors' gestures in order to present their every detail. Thus, I allocated ten Ellipsoidal lights (Short for ETC Source 4 Jr Zoom) as my front lighting and six Ellipsoidal in forty-five-degree angled position. Professor Coderre-Williams, however, pointed out that the ten Ellipsoidal as front lighting were excessive for the purpose and six cool/warm forty-five-degree angled lights were insufficient to provide the required intensity for the acting areas. Therefore, I adjusted the
amount of the lights to eight Ellipsoidal in the front light and twelve Ellipsoidal in the forty-five-degree angled position. The layout is as below:

Figure 4: Front light Layout. *Murder of a Concubine*

**Side light**

I used eight Ellipsoidal lights as my side lights, four with the colour filters Middle Lavender (R356) on the left and four with Medium Straw (R14) on the right. I opted to use a slight difference in colour between the side lights and the forty-five-degree angled light, R356 compared with R365, a cool tint in the angled lights, and R14 compared with R33, a warm tint on the opposite side of the angled lights, to enhance three-dimensionality. Besides,
the combination of those two light positions and the choice of colour contributed to the motivating light, as suggested by moonlight and sunlight. The layout for side light follows:

Figure 5: Side light Layout: *Murder of a Concubine*

**Blending and toning**

In McCandless's method, "the lighting is soft and general in distribution blending the whole visual aspect and toning in the atmospheric quality of the surrounding against which the important character or object is seen" (McCandless, 66). His idea is to fill the stage with light and tone the stage with colour in order to enhance the mood, to define shape and to support motivating sources.

**Back light**
McCandless considered that back light to be a key component of ensuing three-dimensionality and also a good position for toning. I found that the Fresnel light in back light position can serve the purpose (toning). Because Fresnels have the potential to cover large areas (on the stage of Academic Hall, one Fresnel hanging on the top can cover one-third of the front stage), toning light coming from back light positions can contribute to mood and atmosphere while not interfering with the light on the actor's face. I used six Fresnels as back light, four of them focusing on the centre stage and two focusing on the stage right area. I put three different colour in them: Zephyr blue (R84) for the night scene, Golden amber (R21) for the dawn scene, and Chocolate (R99) for the outdoor daytime. The layout of the back light follows:
Figure 6: Back light Layout: *Murder of a Concubine*

**Lighting background surface**

Backgrounds include "entrance and window backings, ground rows, and the main background in exterior settings" (McCandless, 86). In *Murder of a Concubine*, the background which needed to be considered was primarily the backdrop which I provided to complete the setting.

**Background light**
Lighting the backdrop was the most important part of my plan since my objective was to use it to indicated the time. By changing the light and colour on the backdrop, it was possible to present different lighting states from night to daytime without adding extra sets.

In order to create my sky, the backdrop needed to be given even illumination. The colour on the backdrop needed to be controlled separately so that it could be carefully blended. For the backdrop, I designed three lighting states to indicate midnight, dawn, and noon. I used Deep Blue gels (R85) for the night scene and Golden Amber (R21) for the dawn, and the Daylight Blue (R65) for the noon. The layout of background light follows:

Figure 7: Background light Layout: *Murder of a Concubine*

Creating "Special Effects"
"Special Effects" relates to different aspect of stage lighting which can be classified as Emphasis and acting area specials, Motivating light, and Effects (McCandless, 104).

Emphasis and acting area specials: The use of lighting "specials" to emphasis a dramatic moment, either by highlighting the action or on occasion- a particular stage element. Compared with basic lighting that is planned for general areas, additional lighting sources can be used to emphasize the object or the actor because "the eye can easily perceive a difference of intensity between different areas if the difference is greater than one-tenth of the existing illumination" (McCandless, 105). The aim is to focus the audience's attention to those things that lighting designer wishes to highlight.

Motivating light: McCandless uses the term "motivate" to describe light which mimics apparent sources, such as beams from the sun or the moon. In order for "motivating" light to be convincing, it is necessary to pay close attention to the direction, the colour and the textures of the light, among other things.

"Effects" is a term in McCandless's method which refers to "the patterns of light that do not, as a rule, serve to illuminate as much as to create recognizable forms such as clouds, lightening, and rain." (McCandless, 128). Such patterns add to the dramatic atmosphere on the stage, which inspires the imaginations of the audience to associate with a particular environment.

"Special" light layout

This layout focuses on instrument which are specially used to highlight the actors and the setting; to create reasonable light sources; and to add patterns to suggest the exterior space. I used four Ellipsoidal lights, two from floor position on the left side and two on the
right from similar positions to emphasis the actors' bodies. The remaining equipment is for: the motivating lighting sources (moon and sun); the pattern of leaves; the lights which support the mood of murder scene and a two instruments which create the corridor of light to suggest the stairway. The layout of the "Special" light follows:

Figure 8: "Special" light Layout: *Murder of a Concubine*
Final lighting layout

By integrating all of the layouts above: Front light, Side light, Back light, Background light, and "Special" light, my Final lighting layout follows:

Figure 9: Final light Layout: *Murder of a Concubine*
Lighting plots for the Time, Space and Mood

The lighting layout, based on McCandless method, enables me to light the stage with enough intensity, divide the lighting areas, and highlight the actors and moments with various lighting positions. Therefore, I can further explore how stage lighting enhances different environments in regard to the time, spaces and mood.

Supporting the fictional time

I created three main states to suggest that the time changes from midnight to dawn and then to daytime. In determining each state, I followed three steps: 1) I decided the motivating light; 2) I chose the colour of sky on the backdrop; 3) I determined how to create the corresponding environments.

Midnight scene

There are four watches in the midnight scene. Thus I used motivating light to indicate four different positions of the moon on the backdrop. The different positions of the moon served to emphasize the changes in time. I coloured the backdrop with Deep Blue (R85) to suggest the sky at night, and I used Zephyr Blue (R84) in the back to tone the stage. The actors are lit by forty-five-degree angled cool light supplemented with forty-five-degree angled warm light in less intensity.

Dawn Scene

I created the image of a sun on the backdrop to suggest the sunrise. In order to make a contrast with the moon from the last scenes, the size of sun was bigger than the moon and the colour for the sun was orange, compared with cool blue for the moons. For the sky, I
blended two colours, deep blue on the top and golden amber on the bottom. I controlled the intensity of each of the colours in order to create a natural gradation from blue to amber. I created the effect that the amber seems to be emitted by the sun. For the general lighting, I used golden amber in the back light, middle lavender on the left side and medium straw on the right side to suggest the colour tone of dawn.

**Daytime Scene**

In my first plan, I tried to use another sun with different positions and a brighter colour to suggest the daytime. I found, however, three disadvantages for that plan. First, I had already created four images of moons and one image of a sun. Thus I felt it would be overuse if each scene had an obvious natural feature like the moon and the sun. Second, the colours I used for the sky in this scene were mixed with daylight blue and deep blue, and they were much brighter than the deep blue used in the midnight scene. Therefore, using a sun against this sky had less contrast and was less dramatic as a result. Third, the position of sun in the daytime should be much higher than at dawn, thus, even if I created another sun in a different position, it would have seemed less logical. In fact, when I watched the effect on the stage, the sun in this scene was more like a bigger moon rather than a sun in the midday. So I gave up the idea of creating another image of sun for the daytime scene. Instead, I tried to let the transition of the lighten sky to suggest the change in time in this scene.

**Supporting the fictional space**

I used the combination of different lighting areas to suggest the required fictional space, which are the bedroom, the stairway, the courtyard, and the exterior space. I divided the centre stage area into up-stage, mid-stage, and down stage. The up-stage are represented the
bedroom, the mid-stage was the stairway, and down stage was the courtyard. I used stage right as the exterior space. However, William Lau told me that the actors could not perform in the up-stage because it would be too far from the audience and the whole image of the play would be weakened since the actors would look small and the stage would seem empty. Therefore, I merged the down stage into the mid-stage, which meant that I could not keep both the courtyard space and the stairway. I chose to keep the stairway instead of the courtyard space because the stairway links not only the two fictional up and down space but also is a space for actors to present up/down stair movements.

In order to create an isolated bedroom space, I carefully limited the lighting into a relatively small area. For the stairway space, I used a corridor of light created by two Ellipsoidal to suggest the stairway and two floor mounted side lights, with different intensity, on each side to light the actors. For the exterior space on stage right, I used a pattern of leaves on the floor to reinforce the outdoor feeling and emphasize the differences from the other fictional spaces.
Enhancing the mood

Mood relates to "intangible dramatic essence" (McCandless, 19). Light which is used to enhance mood needs to be integrated with the actors' performance. Its aim is to reinforce the tension of the dramatic moment. The tension in this play gradually grows throughout and peaks in the murder scene. In the beginning, I had light coming from the front which provided the most illumination for the actors, primarily on their faces. As the play progressed, I slowly increased the intensity of the side light from left and right to illuminate the actors with emphasis on their bodies. I wanted to indicate the increased tensions by using the gradually dominant side light. Compared with the lighting coming from front, the side light can create a more dramatic effect because it does not light the entire actors' faces but only part of them. The slowly changed intensity between front light and side supported the increase tension between the characters.

When the tension peaks in the murder scene, I decided to use dramatic lighting to highlight the moment. I faded down most of the light, leaving a red line on the backdrop and a pool of red on the actor who lying on floor, lighting the standing actor only with side light. I felt that the red colour would suggest the blood, and the side light effect would reflect the fear, anger, and panic in the character's heart.

Lighting cues

After deciding the lighting layout and how the lighting would support the time, space, and mood, I finalized my lighting plot and each cue.

I started my cue with the open scene, lighting the chairs with the back light. It was a preset to gave the audience something to see while they were waiting for the beginning of
the show. After a black out, I slightly lit the backdrop with deep blue in order to offer
enough light for the actors to step onto the stage and prepare to start. Then I used eight cues
for the midnight scene, of which four were for the different watches and the rest for
blackouts, one between each watch. The 12th to 14th cues were for the dawn scene when
Jiang Song opens/closes fictional window blind. The next cue was for the stairway scene
when Jiang Song opens the door and steps down, with the same effect as the 19th cue when
Jiang Song goes back home and steps up from the stair. Cue 16 was when Jiang Song leaves
the home. I faded out the stairway light and crossed faded to the front light and back light for
the actor to suggest the change of space. Cue 17 was the dawn scene when Xujiao Yan
wakes up and finds Jiang Song's secret letter. Cue 18 was the exterior scene when Jiang
Song suddenly realizes that he lost the letter. Cue 20 to 22 were for the bedroom in the
daytime scene when Jiang Song asks Xujiao Yan to return his letter. I used a single front
light and decreased the other light's intensity in order to emphasis Xujiao Yan when she
gives her monologue in cue 23. The side light began to dominate in the quarrel scene (cue
24), and the whole lighting effect became dramatic in the murder scene (cue 25). Cue 26
aimed to highlight Jiang Song when he holds a pose at the end, and cue 27 was a blackout
for the ending. The cue list follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cue</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Mood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Open scene</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Black out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>First Watch</td>
<td>Midnight</td>
<td>Bedroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Black out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Second Watch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Black out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Third Watch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Black out</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Fourth Watch</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Black out</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Morning scene</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Open the curtain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased tension</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Close the curtain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Stairway</td>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>Stairway</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Leaving the home</td>
<td></td>
<td>Exterior</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Dawn scene</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bedroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Outdoor scene</td>
<td></td>
<td>Exterior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Stairway</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stairway</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Daytime</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Open the curtain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Close the curtain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Yan's Monologue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Quarrel scene</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Murder scene</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Angry/Fear/Panic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Ending posture</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bedroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Black out</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10: Cue list: *Murder of a Concubine*
Production photos

Figure 11: Production photo: First watch in the midnight
Figure 12: Production photo: Fourth watch in the midnight
Figure 13: Production photo: Dawn Scene
Figure 14: Production photo: Quarrel Scene in the daytime
Figure 15: Production photo: Murder Scene
CHAPTER 4: PROJECT REVIEW

This project review evaluates how theatrical stage lighting, using the McCandless method, facilitates or interferes with the actors’ performance in Murder of a Concubine, a traditional piece from the repertory of Beijing Opera. Furthermore, the review evaluates the degree to which the stage lighting can enhance meaning through supporting the aspects of time, space and mood. I evaluate the execution of my project based on the criteria of Visibility, Rhythm, the Theatrical Conventions associated with Beijing Opera, Time, Space, and Mood.

Visibility

In traditional Beijing Opera performance, the basic illumination of the stage lighting offers enough intensity for the actors, whose gestures, facial make-up, and costumes should be clearly seen. In my project it was my priority to ensure that basic visibility was achieved, but also to add three-dimensionality, one of the key components of the McCandless method. In his method, the layout of the lighting based on "lighting the acting area" fulfills the requirement of visibility. It guarantees that the stage and the actors are covered by lighting from various directions, and it leaves no black holes between the acting areas. Using McCandless's method of providing warm and cool lighting in forty-five-degree angled directions on opposite sides offers both adequate intensity and three-dimensionality. The use of complementary colours that are independently circuited also allowed me to alternate between emphasizing the cool tinted instruments for night scenes and the warm ones for daytime scenes.
Rhythm

The basic illumination in traditional Beijing Opera does not interplay with the actor's performance. In my project, I added the designed theatrical lighting to facilitate the acting. Therefore, I should consider whether or not the lighting interfered with actor's traditional perform style or the rhythm of the play.

First, I examined the blackout effects (refer to page 34). I created four blackouts to illustrate the changes of time in the show. Each blackout lasted about one second, and it followed a gesture which indicated that the character was falling asleep. Because the blackouts were very short, they did not interfere with the rhythm of the performance. Second, I examined the changes in the states of the lighting which I added and their effectiveness in following the logic of the story being told. For example, the moon in the first position corresponded to the first watch spoken of in the dialogue, and the second position corresponded to the second watch, etc. The other changes in lighting states also followed the logic of the storytelling. For example, the lighting shifted from the up-stage to down stage when the actor opened the door and stepped into the exterior space. The lighting state in which the white colour of the light changed to red was due to the change of mood. In my project, I considered that the changes in the light states corresponded to the changes in the story and were helpful to build the atmosphere, therefore, they did not interfere with the rhythm of the performance.

Theatrical Conventions

The term "theatrical conventions" refers to the certain meanings created by the actor's conventional gestures and movements in the traditional Beijing Opera. In this play, the
meanings created by the conventional acting can be listed as: sleeping, opening the door, stepping up/down the stairway, opening/closing the window blind, an indication of panic, and an indication of scheming. For example, the actor sitting on a chair and leaning the head upon the hand means that he/she is sleeping and shows that the time has passed. In my review, I examined whether or not the lighting can facilitate the understanding of such meanings.

Sleeping was hard to present through lighting. I used a blackout and the different night scenes to indicate sleeping and the passing of time.

When the actor is using a pushing forward gesture, it means that he/she is opening a door. I did not create the illusion of a door by lighting, but I used the different lighting areas to suggest the change of the space indicated when the actor opens a door and is going to move to another space.

Stepping up/down the stairway is indicated by the actors when they bend their bodies and move their legs in an exaggerated way. I created a corridor of lighting to suggest a narrow stairway space and used side light from both sides to highlight the actors' exaggerated movements.

For the fictional window blind, the actor uses a rolling up/down gesture. Therefore, I faded up and down a special light for the actor's face to follow the gesture. It aimed to indicate the light coming from outside when he/she opens or closes the blind.

The expression of panic is presented by the male character after killing his concubine. He quickly agitates his long sleeves and flicks his beard to show his panic. To support this, I increased the intensity of the side light and slowly faded down the front light in order create
a great contrast on both sides of his body and emphasize his gestures. In addition, I added red colour that dominated the stage to increase the tension.

Scheming is presented by the female character when she quickly shifts her eyes from left to right. It was hard for the lighting to convey such a meaning so I restricted myself to offering enough intensity for the audience to clearly see her eye's swift movement.

These last three points (Visibility, Rhythm, and Theatrical conventions) can be seen as the basic requirements necessary to guarantee that the changes in the lighting states respect the traditional performance in Beijing Opera.

The next three points, time, space, and mood, are the main aims for this project. They examine whether the theatrical stage lighting can help in the understanding of the story, in particular when and where the story happens and the growing tension throughout the piece.

**Time**

The suggestion of time was accomplished by the combination of the acting area lighting and the backdrop lighting. The former created the atmosphere to coordinate with the latter. For example, in the night scene, the acting area lighting was dominated by cool blue colour in order to coordinate with the deep blue backdrop with the image of the moon. There were three main states for the backdrop: deep blue colour with four different locations of the moon in the night scenes; orange colour with a yellow sun in the dawn scene; and sky blue in the daytime scene. The first two lighting states used shape and colour associated with the moon and the sun to suggest the features of a clear night and sunrise. The last states used a sky colour on the backdrop, suggesting the daytime. The continuity of these three lighting states offered a straightforward meaning that the time passed through night and dawn to the
daytime, therefore, theatrical stage lighting can suggest features of a certain time, though such effects mainly relied on the backdrop lighting.

Space

It was difficult to suggest a particular meaning of the space without the help of realistic stage props, such as a bed to indicate a bedroom space or trees for the exterior space, therefore, I used the different intensities and lighting areas to distinguish each space. For example, the lighting areas for the bedroom space were kept narrow in order to associate with a private space while the lighting areas and the intensity for the exterior space were made large and bright in order to imply an open space. In this play, lighting alone cannot offer enough information for a particular space without the help of the actor's performance. For example, in the stairway space, I created a corridor of light on the stage, which did not have a particular meaning unless the actor performed a stepping up/down gestures within the corridor of light. As another example, I used a pattern of leaves on the floor but it was the actor's movements through the shadows created by the pattern that made the pattern alive and suggested that he was walking through forest. Therefore, it is still the actors’ performances that play a key role in creating the meaning of each space while the lighting offers the suggestions. Compared with the lighting task for the aspect of time, lighting for the aspect of space works in an more abstract rather than a realistic way.

Mood

The tension gradually grows between the two characters and peaks in the final murder scene. Compared with the light coming from the front direction, the side light emphasizes the form of the body. Therefore, I gradually changed the contrast between the front light and
side light in order to suggest the increased tension. I made such changes scene by scene and
did not want the audience to be distracted by them. However, if we compare the first scene
to the scene before the murder, we would notice the obvious difference. In the first scene, the
actor's face is mainly lit from the front direction and the stage is dominated by an ordinary
atmosphere. In the scene before the murder, when the male character holds his concubine's
collar and threatens her, the two actors turn around and around in the lighting beam coming
from the side light position. Due to the different intensity and angle between the right and
left side light, their bodies and faces are picked up by the light when they turn around,
making a strong dramatic effect.

The murder scene has the strongest emotional impact of the whole play. Therefore, the
lighting for this scene was much different from previous scenes. I used red colour in the light
to suggest the blood and murder. I felt that the addition of a large area of red colour could
generate an aggressive emotion, magnifying the tension created by actors' performance.

In summary, the stage lighting can suggest the time, the space, and the mood for the
play. More specifically, the lighting generated straightforward meanings in terms of the time,
though it needed the backdrop to accomplish this. The lighting worked as an auxiliary source
with the actors' performances to indicate the space. Finally, lighting worked independently
and had the most freedom when being used to enhance the mood.

Limitation of the stage light in this project

Through this project, I found that stage light is good for creating an abstract atmosphere.
However, creating a more specific and concrete meaning is difficult to achieve through stage
lighting. For example, I found in this play that it was easy to enhanced the mood through
lighting. The aspect of suggesting certain times was harder. It was necessary to incorporate the backdrop to generate the suggestion of the moon, the sun, or the sky. The stairway, however, was nearly impossible to indicate by the lighting alone and providing a corridor of light was the least successful of my ideas. The "door" was also a special case, because my intention was not to create a specific door by lighting but to create the moment after the actor opens the door. I tried to do this by changing the lighting area to suggest that the actor opened and passed through a door, thereby helping the audience to associate with a similar experience.

The other limitations I faced in this project related to the degree to which the lighting needed to facilitate the traditional Beijing Opera's performance which specifically calls for non-changing basic illumination. In particular, the ideas that I originally had to suggest the aspect of space had to be changed in order to give priority to the actor's performance (refers to page 31). I had to merge the up-stage area into the mid-stage area in order to make the acting area shallower and keep the actor closer to the audience. As well, one of the actors asked me not to create too many changes in the lighting because there is a fixed movement trajectory in this traditional piece and if the lighting did not cover his position it would interfere with his rhythm and therefore negatively impact on his performance.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The pioneers of Beijing Opera's reform found that the realistic costumes and scenery hindered the traditional Beijing Opera's performance. My research and practice on stage lighting proved that the lighting can enhance the understanding of the time, space, and mood in the traditional Beijing Opera without negatively impacting on its original music, singing, costumes, and performance style. However, it can only do so if it interplays with the acting.

Moreover, in this play, the stage lighting takes as an auxiliary role in facilitating the actors’ performances, but should not dominate the performance. Only then will it help the audience understand and appreciate the traditional Beijing Opera.

Although the stage lighting has its limitations in suggesting the specific meaning, the designed theatrical stage lighting is worth trying on this traditional art form. Compared with the basic white illumination in the traditional Beijing Opera, the designed theatrical stage lighting has potential and should be further explored.

To this end, I thank the Department of Theatre of the University of Ottawa, Joël Beddows, the Chairman of the Department of Theatre; the two actors, William Lau and Jingze Wang; my supervisors, Margaret Coderre-Williams and David Staines; and Daniel Mroz, Tina Goralski, Paul Auclair, Jon Lockhart, Lyn Li, Mico Mazza, and all the people who helped me in this project. Without any one of them, this project could not have been completed.
Figure 16: Brochure 01: Murder of a Concubine
Figure 17: Brochure 02: Murder of a Concubine
BIBLIOGRAPHY


