

Arthur Miller: Reception and Influence in China

Arthur Miller is one of the most influential contemporary American playwrights after Eugene O'Neill. In the 1940s and 1950s, he rose to fame with *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible* and other social problem plays. Since 1949, *Death of a Salesman* has been performed continually on Broadway and in many countries all over the world. Miller and his plays came to China when China reopened its door to the world after Mao's reign, especially with the conclusion of "The Great Cultural Revolution" ("GCR")^[1] and when China was no longer producing powerful social plays. Chinese drama had fallen into crisis in both playwriting and performance, for it seemed to grow rigid and stagnant after so many years of restriction. In fact, these restrictions had been proposed by Jiang Qing, Mao's wife, and only a few so-called model plays were allowed to be performed during the GCR. Thus, the translations and performances of Miller's dramas in China during the 1970s provided an enormous inspiration for and influence on Chinese playwrights, who later created many plays in a style that mixed realism and modernism.

When referring to literary reception and historical relationship, Hans-Georg Gadamer says, "The literal meaning of scripture, however, is not clearly available in every place and at every moment. ...all the details of a text were to be understood from the context and from the scopus, the unified sense at which the whole aims."^[2] Yue Daiyun, a well-known comparative literary critic at Beijing University, explains, "Literary influence is a sort of permeation, a sort of organic involvement presented in artistic works"^[3], and "The emergence of the influence is often associated with social changes as well as the internal requirement within literary development. ...Influence is usually a complex process of enlightenment, promotion or reinforcement, agreement, digestion, transformation, and artistic expression. This process tends to start when a certain writer is able to 'tease' another writer's heart."^[4] Arthur Miller's social problem plays are similar to those of Henrik Ibsen's. Miller emphasizes the moral force and social critical function through drama in order to reflect the modern human being's living conditions in a post-industrial and commercial society. Chinese spoken dramas, developed at the same time as social protest plays, bear a similar tradition with Miller's drama, in the aspects of social criticism and human concerns. When China reopened its door after Mao's era, Miller visited China, and his plays were soon introduced into China. Chinese audiences were attracted to Miller's social tragedies as well as his modern dramatic devices. Since then, many of Miller's plays have been translated into Chinese, performed, widely reviewed, and studied. In addition, influenced by Miller, many young Chinese playwrights and directors began to explore the modernist styles, powerful social criticism and keen insight into human life.

The First Journey to China

Arthur Miller's first visit to China was in the autumn of 1978, immediately before the establishment of Sino-US diplomatic relationship. He was the first contemporary American dramatist to visit China, thus beginning the face-to-face interactions of the dramatists between the two countries. During his visit, Miller visited many Chinese dramatists, directors, actors, and other theatrical figures, watched Chinese spoken dramas, Beijing operas and Kunqu operas and at the same time, he got involved in extensive talks with Chinese scholars. After returning to America, Miller published some of his travel notes in an article entitled "In China," published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, the 3rd issue of 1979. Later, he collected many beautiful pictures taken by his wife, Inge Morath, a photographer, and made them into a travelogue and published it with a new title: *Chinese Encounters*.

As the development of dramas in America and China was unbalanced and there left a big gap between the two different cultures after so many years of separation, this imbalance was reflected clearly in the direct conversations between contemporary young writer Su Shuyang and Miller, “Talking with such a great American playwright who should be referred to as a master, I am more mentally disturbed as a fledgling and ignorant youth....”^[5] This kind of nervousness preceded from his own ignorance of America and American drama as well as his shock from intercultural communication with foreign worlds and what’s more, it reflected Chinese literary men’s and artists’ uneasiness and disturbance for the incoming foreign culture. “People have lived under abnormal conditions so long that once life returns to normal, they are lost and stubborn, instead.”^[6] Qiao Yu, a poet, and Su Guang, an interpreter who accompanied Miller, were more anxious when talking about their knowledge of American writers. However, little did Miller know about Chinese writers either and he called this separation from each other as “being covered with clouds and fog, separated from the world.”^[7] Cultural differences were so great that collision and misunderstanding were inevitable. Miller was most surprised at Chinese writers’ working system that they were subordinate to government institutions and paid with monthly salaries. However, Su Shuyang was also perplexed that there was no Ministry of Culture in America. The consequences of these two different organizations were that Chinese writers “spare no efforts to maintain and establish a certain concept which our government exactly needs”^[8] while those American writers such as Miller had to live on writing as his occupation and therefore serious American writers “are always unwelcomed as they are criticizing the society and moral values all the time.”^[9] The difference between Chinese and American cultural concepts illustrates even more about thinking patterns since these two countries have undergone their own different historical progresses. For instance, China pays more attention to collectivism while America advocates individualism. When Su told Miller confidently that “we are optimistic and we believe that collectivistic spirit will make people warm forever,” Miller said with a smile, “I hope so.”^[10] Hence, there seemed a great discrepancy which has been separating the two peoples for several decades. It is impossible to bridge the gap and to integrate to the harmonious realm. Moreover, Miller was still a “left and progressive writer,” compatible with Chinese perceptions in some respects.

Beijing had been a glamorous place for Miller. As early as the 1930s, Miller was greatly concerned about Chinese Revolution (a communist revolution to overthrow Guomintang regime) and he knew some celebrated names like Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, etc. who “were like flares shot into sky out of a human sea.”^[11] He learnt these from Edgar Snow’s reportage on the Long March of Chinese Red Army (a great withdrawal of Chinese communist army from south to north) “*Red Star over China*,” and later the Anti-Japanese War. However, the forthcoming cold war between the two countries isolated one another by demonizing each other. He considered that “no one knows a country until he can easily separate its merely idiosyncratic absurdity from its real contradictions.”^[12] Therefore, when China exerted open policy and Sino-US relationship was normalized, he came to visit Beijing, Nanjing, Yanan, Xi’an, Shanghai, Guilin, and Hangzhou and many other places for trips and interviews. As to informal discussions with Chinese writers, he sighed, “the gap caused by our mutual ignorance of each other’s real rather than reported culture seemed limitless one morning when we sat down to talk with some ten writers, movie directors, novelists, and one actress in a Peking hotel. ...I felt a far more deeply depressing sense of hopelessness that such isolation could actually have been structured and maintained. ... we emerged from darkness to confront each other.”^[13] Long-term indifference as well as cultural barriers made both sides unacceptable and this sense of abrupt fainting at the sudden collision was exactly the cultural shock when two different cultures began to communicate again after long intervals.

Apart from his travel experiences in *Chinese Encounters*, Miller discusses mainly his impressions on

China after the catastrophes of the GCR: so many artists were persecuted that only eight model operas were left and economy was withered all over the country. Miller's keen interest in Chinese traditional opera was manifested in his reflections when watching Beijing Operas as *A Woman General of the Yang Family* (a famous legend of Song Dynasty about Mu Guiying, a heroine, leading an army fighting against the foreign invaders), *Wang Zhaojun* (a sad story about a beauty in Han Dynasty who was sent to marry a Mongolian king for peace) and Kunqu Operas as *The Tale of the White Snake* (a southern love story about a white snake loving a young scholar). His evaluations were pertinent when watching spoken dramas *Loyal Hearts* (a play by Su Shuyang about a devoted scientist fighting against the Gang of Four), *Cai Wenji* (a play by Guo Moruo about a Han Dynasty official's daughter being captured by Mongolian troops for 12 years and later coming back after paying a ransom), *The Other Shore* (an early absurdist play by Gao Xingjian, a Nobel Prize-winner, about contemporary Chinese people's spiritual pursuit), etc. And he talked with Cao Yu (author of famous Chinese play *The Thunderstorm*, an O'Neill-like tragedy of a woman loving her step-son who loves his half-sister blindly). He discussed with Huang Zuolin about the theory of "Freestyle Theater" (Zuolin's theatrical idea involving Chinese culture of space, in Chinese "Xieyi") and his recommendation of *The Crucible* to Zuolin.[\[14\]](#)

This visit allowed Miller to learn current situations of Chinese spoken drama. First, he thought Chinese and American people could undertake cultural communications through drama, "Chinese people's emotions in theater are the same. Although there are great differences between eastern and western cultures, the roots which produce the cultures are absolutely identical."[\[15\]](#) He praised the brilliant Chinese civilization and traditional operas. However, he had a deep impression on the political and conceptual tendency in problem plays, "Clearly, *Loyal Hearts* was fashioned as a blow and a weapon, and its force as a social document seems undeniable; ... The tone is that of *An Enemy of the People*; the impulsion being preeminently social and moral, there is little or no subjective life expressed and the people have characteristics rather than character. While the dialogue manages to ring in all the main current slogans—"Learning from the facts," "Don't forget that all reactionaries will come to a bad end," and so forth."[\[16\]](#) He pointed out the platitude and vapidness of *Cai Wenji* with classical American straightforwardness, "the story was told four and possibly five separate times in the first hour. The only difference is that new characters repeat it, but they add very little new each time."[\[17\]](#) He also hit the point of actors' overacting performance, "A remark that might call for smile causes its hearer to laugh; a mild chuckle becomes a guffaw accompanied by deep, appreciative nods. What should be a wave of recognition to an acquaintance turns into a bang of the palm on his back and plenty of ha-ha-ha thrown in."[\[18\]](#) His critique for contemporary Chinese playwrights, directors, and performers was pivotal. After Cao Yu exchanged views with Miller in this respect, he invited Miller to come and direct his dramas in China and this was the cause that Miller came to China again in 1983.

The Translation and Reviews of Arthur Miller's Plays in China

As early as in 1962, Miller's work was introduced into China by Mei Shaowu (son of Mei Lanfang, famous Beijing opera actor who visited America in the 1930s) whose article introduced six of Miller's plays but had limited reading circle for the restriction of western cultures in Mao's times, while the Chinese version of his plays didn't appear until the end of the GCR. In 1980, Chen Liangting translated Miller's *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* (published in *Foreign Drama Resources*, Issue 1, 1979, and later included in *Selected Plays of Arthur Miller*, Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 1992). Chen had a high view on Miller in the afterword, "He [Miller] pursues meaning of human life contiguously, does well in analyzing humanity and rationality, shows solicitude for the whole humanity

and takes it as his own mission to evoke audience and readers' social awareness as well as people's moral values and sense of responsibility." [19] Mei Shaowu's two articles introducing Miller and his eight plays were published *Foreign Drama Resources* (Issue 1, and 2, 1979). In 1981, Liao Kedui edited *American Drama Collection* (Chinese Drama Publishing House) including Yao Dengfo's article *On Arthur Miller's Plays*. The script of *The Crucible* (directed by Huang Zuolin in 1981) was interpreted by Mei Shaowu and published in *Foreign Literature Quarterly* (Issue 1, 1982) while Nie Zhengxiong translated it with the title of "Yanjundekaoyan" (*Severe Trials*, Chinese Drama Publishing House, 1982). Ying Ruocheng translated *Death of a Salesman* in 1983 and in 1999 it was reprinted by China Translation and Publication Corporation with a Chinese-English version. With the successful performance of his *Death of a Salesman* in China, other Miller's plays entered China in succession. In 1986, *The American Clock* was translated by Mei Shaowu and was printed in *Foreign Literature and Art* (Issue 5, 1986). His completed collection was *Selected Contemporary Foreign Dramas* (Chinese Drama Publishing House, 1992) which included *A View from the Bridge*, *A Memory of Two Mondays* and *After the Fall* besides the above-mentioned three plays. His *Death of a Salesman* is compulsory in university courses as "Selected Reading of Foreign Literature" and "Selected Reading of English and American Literature." There are two kinds of selected Chinese versions of essays written by Miller: *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller* (selected and translated by Chen Ruilan, et al, Shanghai Joint Publishing House, 1987) and *Arthur Miller on Theater* (translated by Guo Jide, et al, The Culture and Art Publishing House, 1988). In 1997, Ren Xiaomei translated Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and *All My Sons* (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press). According 2000 *China Reading Weekly* poll, Sun Weixin and Wu Wenzhi edited *Abstracts of a Hundred Famous Chinese and Foreign Literary Works Influencing China in 20th Century* (Lijiang Publishing House) in which *Death of a Salesman* is chosen. In 2000, *Death of a Salesman* entered New Chinese Text Book of High School (People's Education Press, Volume Six). The Ministry of Education wanted to "break through previous limitations on selection that merely emphasizes critical realistic works, and introduce some foreign literary works of great influence in different respects." [20] It can be perceived from the transmutation of above translation and introduction, Chinese passion for Miller and his works has been on the increase and his influence in China is also gradually far-reaching.

Soul-Hunting: *The Crucible* in China

The Crucible was recommended by Arthur Miller to Huang Zuolin, director of Shanghai People's Art Theater. This play, bearing many similarities with "the GCR," was staged in Shanghai People's Art Theater in 1981.

The story of *The Crucible* was derived from the historical "witch trials" as a result of which some 20 innocent people were hanged (Miller increased the number to seventy) and more people were put into jail. At the beginning of the play, a group of girls, who were obsessed by asceticism, danced nakedly in the forest under the leadership of Abigail. But they were found and scared. These girls were said to be bewitched and influenced by evil supernatural beings (devils). They were forced to accuse their villagers of being devil's spokesmen. This case gave rise to a chain of reactions and more and more people were accused. Abigail, the heroine, had been once a farmer John Proctor's assistant and in deep love with Proctor. Later their affair was discovered and dismissed by the Proctor's wife Elizabeth. She was always hateful and vengeful to Elizabeth. Therefore, Abigail accused Elizabeth of practicing witchcraft while Proctor admitted his improper relationship with Abigail in front of the public in order to save his wife. The court burst into an uproar and Elizabeth was immediately required to testify for her husband while

she denied the testimony to save his fame. Proctor was faced with a trial: either to retract his statements to ruin his own reputation or insist his statements (regarded as perjury by the court) to be executed. Finally, he went straightforward to execution gallows.

The Crucible was written during an era of white terror when McCarthyism was prevailing. Coincidentally, Miller himself was called in 1957 by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to force him name names of members of Communist Party. But he refused reasonably. Although the playwright always denied that *The Crucible* has direct connection with American McCarthyism in 1950s, we can infer their inner relationship clearly. First staged in America for 197 performances in 1953 and again for 633 performances in 1958, *The Crucible* has been always widely popular among audiences and has become part of the repertoire on Broadway.

The first performance of *The Crucible* in Shanghai on September 4, 1981 raised great concerns immediately and got a big hit. Miller once said confidently before the Shanghai performance, “It (*The Crucible*) will obviously acquire Chinese audiences’ understanding.”^[21] Cheng Yan said “it enormously shortens the distance brought by several decades’ gap as well as national difference”^[22] The attention on history, politics, humanity as well as morality in *The Crucible* appealed to Chinese audiences after the GCR because they saw the similar situations as false-accusation, crime-involvement (innocent people being punished for their relatives’ crimes), persecution, under which everyone felt insecure and frightened. These feelings and experiences enabled Chinese audiences to understand and sympathize with characters in the play. Miller wrote in his autobiography *Timebends: A Life*, “The writer Nien Cheng, who spent six and a half years in solitary confinement and whose daughter was murdered by the Red Guards, told me that after she saw the Shanghai production she could not believe that a non-Chinese had written the play. Some of the interrogations were precisely the same ones used on us in the GCR.”^[23] Chinese critics immediately expressed two different opinions on Abigail. Guo Jide said, “Abigail is the primitive evil power which causes the whole disaster, tells lies and creates a great deal of fraud. Proctor is the symbol of integrity and bravery as well as a heroic image which is standing erect and accepting ordeal in a fierce fire.”^[24] However, the opposite opinion states, “although she is false to be deliberately mystifying, her sentiments towards Proctor are as real as true love.”^[25]

Another great significance brought about by the performance of *The Crucible* is the theatrical concept of “Freestyle Theater.” As early as in 1962, Huang Zuolin began to reform the then dominant theatrical idea of Stanislavsky style so he proposed “Freestyle Theater” concept which blended Bertolt Brecht’s theory and staging concept, emphasizing on the unreal scenes and presupposition of stagecraft rather than the reality of “illusionism.” *The Crucible* was the first American play after the GCR performed in China and directed with the idea of “Freestyle Theater.” “There are merely several wooden poles on the stage with all gloomy background under which crucifixes exist everywhere. These crucifixes give a sense of divinity. Although doors, windows, court, jail, etc. vary, crucifixes stand there all the time.”^[26] Afterwards, other Chinese “Freestyle Theater” plays appeared on stage one after another such as *The Chinese Dream* (1985), *Moth* (1989), etc.

When National Theater Company of China was established in May of 2000, it performed two foreign plays, one of which was *The Crucible*. Meanwhile, on the other shore it was also performed on Broadway. It more or less indicated both nations’ appealing to traditional dramatic culture of much historicalness and universal humanity. Many Chinese comment on the somber mise-en-scène atmosphere of this drama, “The director rendered the atmosphere of repression and distortion on the stage. Actually,

entering into the theater, one could feel the ominous aura that ‘something’ would happen. ... The ropes, dangling overhead from the ceiling of the theater, were virtually questioning each of us, when we face the same situation that those people in the play face, how shall we choose?”^[27]

Soul-hunting in Chinese Drama

After the GCR, searching for humanity became the main theme in plays as well as Chinese fiction and poetry. In the Chinese plays since 1980, honesty and trust were questioned and the persecuted victims experienced bloodier treatment than those in *The Crucible*. The representative among them is *Sangshuping Chronicle* (script by Zhu Xiaoping, born in 1952, who went to the border area as a student. The story is based on a titled novel by Chen Zidu and Zhu Xiaoping.), which was first performed in 1988, revealing northwestern Chinese peasants’ living conditions and feudal ideology precipitated from history and tradition in 1968.

People at Sangshuping are both persecutors and victims. Caifang, a widow falls in love with a wheat reaper (like a seasonal migrant worker) who helps to do the seasonal harvest work. They are caught in elopement, lynched and beaten by the villagers. Caifang drowns herself in a well. In order to carry on the family bloodline, the parents of Fulin (an idiot) marry his sister in exchange for Qingnu as Fulin’s wife. Some youngsters put Fulin up to pull off Qingnu’s clothes in front of the public, which drives Qingnu mad. Wang Zhike is marginalized and persecuted by villagers after the death of his wife and finally is falsely charged with murder. He is driven away for his non-native identity. Their only farm cattle is reluctantly butchered by farmers who have raised it when some inspection officials want to eat it and they have to kill it themselves.

Characters in this tragedy are all victims persecuted under feudal autocratic dominance. *The Crucible* expresses the destruction of human nature by rigid religious persecution and immorality while *Sangshuping Chronicle* shows the tragic life overburdened under traditional and feudal cultures and poverty. But people still show their brave pursuit for happiness. The vilification and persecution of virtuous human beings in *The Crucible* are fully embodied in *Sangshuping Chronicle* while the latter is more powerful than the former in many respects. And its exploitation of unenlightened humanity bears no difference from Miller’s calling for morality and justice. But both “hunting” scenes of Sangshuping and the Salem were rooted historically, relying on the similar events resulted from feudalism. Both of them criticize the human ignorance and backwardness, selfishness, narrow-mindedness and superstitious beliefs.

Both plays employ wizard rituals to add supernatural and mysterious atmospheres. Dancing in the forest and exorcism ceremonies in *The Crucible* are the discourses of the middle ages. *Sangshuping Chronicle* exploits praying for rain, sacrificing cattle, man-hunting and other ceremonies as well as bass drum, chorus and other skills full of national characteristics that make the whole drama permeated with poetic significance just as Gao Huibin said, “association with poetic techniques and illusionary skills in artistic conception.”^[28] Strong national characteristics, distinctive performance, and the mysterious mise-en-scène aura set up *Sangshuping Chronicle* as a banner of contemporary Chinese spoken drama. According to Xu Xiaozhong, its director, the staging of the play was a dramatic pattern of “combining Chinese and Western cultures. Reviewing the whole process, I clearly realize that no matter realism or romanticism, concrete or abstract, reproduction or expression, the artistic concepts and principles of drama may vary and the principal method of how to extract and abstract life may differ while all stage artistic creations

come from life directly or indirectly.”[29]

Selling Dreams in Beijing

From March to May in 1983, invited by Cao Yu and Ying Ruocheng, Miller came to Beijing People’s Art Theater to direct his masterpiece *Death of a Salesman*. It got such a great success that it enters the theater’s repertoires. After returning home, he published his directing notes *Salesman in Beijing* (New York: Viking Press, 1984) which recorded the cultural and dramatic concepts and the conflicts as well as communication during the process of his directing *Death of a Salesman*. It also included all sorts of interesting episodes, anecdotes even disputes when transplanting this play in China.

On the March 20, 1983, Beijing People’s Art Theater welcomed Arthur Miller, the ambassador of Sino-US cultural exchanges.[30] Miller obviously felt the atmosphere of China’s rapid economic development and the signs of social transformation. He was still fluttering with fear of the experience when he watched plays acted by Chinese actors in 1978: “How appalling it was to see actors made up with chalk-white faces and heavily ‘rounded’ eyes, walking with heavy, almost loutish gait as they think Europeans and especially Russians do, and worst of all, wearing flaxen or very red-haired wigs that to us seemed to turn them into Halloween spooks.”[31] Therefore, he began to utilize cultural transplanting principle of “adapting foreign things for Chinese use”. The first moment meeting the actors, he proposed that it should bear resemblance in spirit rather than in appearance, telling them to express common humanity instead of “specious acting”. He suggested, “The way to make this play more like American is to make it more like Chinese. ... One of my main motives in coming here is to try to show that there is the same humanity. Our cultures and languages set up confusing sets of signals which prevent us from communicating and sharing one another’s thoughts and sensations, but that at the deeper levels where we are joined in a unity that is perhaps biological.”[32]

Miller highlighted the cultural exchanging function of the drama, carrying on the comparison between Chinese and American cultures from different aspects such as the plot, characters, performing techniques, etc. Placed in a manifesting areas such as comparing Chinese salesmen, insurance, refrigerator, cars, family life with those of America’s; comparing father’s earnest expectation for his sons with Chinese father-son relationship, “great ambitions for one’s child” (Wangzichenglong in Chinese idiom),[33] discussing with actors about the character Charley, and Willy Loman’s mistress, scenes of kissing as well as the different understanding and expression of sex, etc. Through bilateral negotiations, Miller compromised in many aspects, for instance, the representation of sex with the Chinese actors dealing implicitly with their accustomed and traditional ways.[34] During the performances, conflicts and problems raised contiguously. Some officials were afraid that the favorable material conditions (refrigerator, car, house of Loman’s family) displayed on the stage would bring about negative effects for the then poor Chinese conditions while social critical significance of the play would be weakened for this.

However, the fact that the performance of *Death of a Salesman* obtained a great hit proved that Miller’s practice of sinicizing his drama was the most successful interpretation of the original American work. It represented the essence of the Chinese culture, emphasized the resemblance in spirit more than in appearance, broke through the traditional realistic staging methods employed for decades in China and reflected the principles of integration of Chinese and Western cultures. The major newspapers published detailed reports on Miller’s direction of his own play in Beijing. *Foreign Drama* invited Miller to have a formal seminar, and published feature-length comments on the direction, acting and text analyses. All

these made it rise to a hot trend of Miller and *Death of a Salesman* in China and the year of 1983 determinedly witnessed the successful cooperation between Miller and Beijing People's Art Theater. Since then, cultural exchanges between China and America revived, breaking the ice of tight cultural relationship. From 30 tough years' hostility and exclusion to face-to-face conversation, peoples of both countries could eventually open their mind and exchange as they like. When everyone was cheering for the great success of the performance, Miller said to himself, "America will need this country as an enrichment to our culture one day just as China needs us now."^[35] This reflected Miller's modesty and wish for communication.

Chinese people accepted and acknowledged this classical American drama. They speculated on human's survival predicament brought about by modern society. Cultural misunderstanding was inevitable that there were many Chinese interpretations such as problems of the elderly, generation gap, problems of the rich and poor, success and failure and dream and reality. Many young people considered that Biff and Happy's cynical values and philosophies were inadvisable. Although they lost much time for working in the countryside during the GCR, they could not be irresponsible for society and their country. Zhong Yingjie, a dramatist, said, "Chinese audiences can understand easily and resonate with love as well as hatred between parents and their children as expressed in the conflicts between Loman and his sons."^[36] Chinese audiences felt angry for Loman's being dismissed and happy for China had no such unfortunate things then.^[37]

Afterwards, Miller recalled emotionally in his memoir *Timebends*, "Willy was representative everywhere, in every kind of system, of ourselves in this time. The Chinese might disapprove of this lies and his self-deluding exaggerations as well as his immorality with women, but they certainly saw themselves in him. And it was not simply as a type but because of what they wanted. Which was to excel, to win out over anonymity and meaninglessness, to love and be darling, and above all, perhaps to count."^[38] Many people thought the real purpose of China's reform and opening up was to lead people to success and wealth as aroused in the play, "a young Chinese student said to a CBS interviewer in the theater lobby, 'We are moved by it because we also want to be number one, and to be rich and successful.'"^[39] Miller published his directing notes in a book, *Salesman in Beijing*, in America in 1983. Later he wrote his directing experience in his autobiographical memoir. Miller's directing and the play's performance were made into a documentary series by CBS which was broadcast in America, introducing the performance spectacle of *Death of a Salesman* in China. All these promoted Sino-US cultural exchanges forcefully.^[40] Since 1983, the Chinese version of *Death of a Salesman* has been performed in Shanghai, Japan, Hongkong, Singapore and many other places, gaining a great popularity and an enormous success.

Ying Ruocheng not only translated the script himself, but also acted the role of Willy Loman. He pointed out in his articles, "As an actor, I do my best to obtain the value of the person which I act."^[41] In Ying's opinion, Loman remained in paradox of dilemma: affectionate but always breaking up in disagreement with his sons; alternately sober and absent-minded at whatever he does; his suicidal action was both passive and active, both terrified and conscious. In the end, the more delighted the deceased (Willy Loman) was, the more sorrowful the living people were. Zhu Lin, a renowned actress, starred a powerful and virtuous mother Linda. She represented Linda as a classical Chinese mother who was a obedient, hardworking, understanding wife and loving mother.^[42] Zhu Lin recalled the cooperation with Miller, "Mr. Miller helped us continually enrich the understanding of the script and characters. ... He is one of the greatest directors whom I encountered and are good at enlightening actors. ... He is absolutely in the standpoint of the actors, respecting actors' work and attaching great importance to the coordinating

relationship between the director and actors. ... We established profound friendship with each other during the pleasant rehearsals.”[43] Zhu Xu, actor of Charley, discussed his cooperation and rehearsal with Miller from the perspective of understanding of the character as well as its sinicization during the whole processes of rehearsals and performances in an article in *Theater Studies*. [44] Zhu Xu thought of Charley as a sophisticated character. In his opinion, Loman didn't understand the function of money but he believed such things like “popularity,” “personal loyalty,” “relationship” which showed his “innocence.” However, Charley lacked imagination and was pragmatic.

Death of a Salesman has been most popular among the audiences and has become one of the most significant foreign repertoires of Beijing People's Art Theater. As to the American culture reflected in *Death of a Salesman*, Miller thought Chinese cast's “95% of the comprehension of the drama is right because they know American People's lifestyles and customs.”[45] The audiences' comprehension and appreciation of the play was due to these American cultural media, Ying Ruocheng and other crew members as “retransmitters.” They made great efforts to have this famous western play deeply rooted in Chinese soil. As Wang Zuoliang, a famous literary critic, commented, “Chinese translators have the good taste, Chinese actors have the ability and Chinese audiences have the spiritual sensitivity and expansive art interests. All these enable them to understand and appreciate all the excellent dramas from all over the world.”[46]

Chinese Tragedy of "Stream of Consciousness" and "Success Dream"

Since it was presented on Chinese stage, *Death of a Salesman* has always been drawing attention from all over the country. Its influence is mainly manifested in three respects. First, more and more Chinese tragedies began to deal with disillusioned dreams of common people. Secondly, realistic play-writing began to absorb the expressionist method of “stream of consciousness,” digging into characters' inner worlds. Finally, all kinds of modernist techniques began to be widely used in performances rather than Stanislavsky method.

The Success of *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana* (written by Liu Jinyun, born in 1938, president of Beijing People's Art Theater, first staged at Beijing People's Art Theater) in 1986 was due to its realistic depiction of common people in the GCR. It was also a typical work of tragedy of success dream and realism integrated with modern expressionist techniques. The unsuccessful salesman in Miller's commercial competition became a common Chinese peasant cherishing a dream for success in *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana*.

Uncle Doggie, two of whose wives either died or departed, often dreams of working hard to buy land and become a landowner. When the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, he got some land for a few years in the land reform. But more political movements (Cooperative 1953-55, the Great Leap Forward 1958-1960 and the GCR 1966-76) to come, his land was deprived and his hopes for success became slimmer and slimmer. Uncle Doggie's dream of possessing land and becoming rich vanished and he was getting crazy. Meanwhile the landowner Qi Yongnian, his fellow villager, was charged as an exploiting landlord and was criticized, denounced, severely persecuted and eventually died in the GCR. When the play begins, those things in his earlier life constantly appear in his mind and they flash back continually on stage. He often talks with the ghost of the deceased landowner Qi Yongnian, even dispute. When China reopened its door in 1978, Uncle Doggie got his land again under the new reform policy. His joy lasts only a short time for he is no long young and needs his son Dahu's help. But Dahu and his wife

decide to set up a factory instead of plowing land. Uncle Doggie burns himself in the end.

Uncle Doggie's Nirvana and *Death of a Salesman* bear many similar characteristics in respect of themes and techniques. Both plays take social, familial and moral problems as their themes. The essence of tragedy is the disillusion of dream of obtaining success or of getting rich. The two protagonists are both common people with merits and demerits: Loman is industrious, loves his family and sons but he likes boasting and gets an affair with another woman, while Uncle Doggie is a dutiful and kind farmer who is hardworking and persistent but owns a small peasant's consciousness and is selfish. Two plays both end with the suicides of the protagonists. Their tragedies are spiritual and moral ones with the disillusion of dream as the main cause. They both employ symbolism and expressionism as artistic techniques: the high buildings and sowing vegetable seeds in *Death of a Salesman*, the "small box" (with seals in it) and the high gateway in *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana* are symbols of identity and power. The utilization of lighting is similar to that of *Death of a Salesman*. They both have a special time span: *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana* jumps from one period to another: the Cooperative Movement, the Great Leap Forward, the GCR, the Reform and Opening-up, and together with the protagonist's obsession with land as the clues, employing flashbacks to narrate the story, while *Death of a Salesman* narrates a story within two days during which many anecdotes are carried out through fantasies and recalls.

The playwright Liu Jinyun once said at a conference, "In recent years, modern Euramerican plays and performances have impressed me strongly. This feeling is just like opening the window and breathing fresh air, offering suggestions to me. I set sights on something 'new' ... Any methods can be employed for me. For example, I have never thought of such methods before like symbolism, expressionism, stream of consciousness, etc." [47] During a symposium on *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana*, Wang Yusheng said, "The appearance of Qi Yongnian, the landlord's ghost is similar to the emergence of Salesman's brother 'Ben.'" [48] In the chapter "Experiment Drama in Twentieth Century Chinese Literature and Modernism Trend" of a college textbook, Tang and Chen said, "The drama of *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana* is strongly influenced by western expressionistic drama which takes characters' stream of consciousness, emphasizing externalizing characters' deeper minds to visualized stage images. The ghost's appearance in *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana* is close to that of Karel Capek's *Mother* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*." [49] Ding Chunhua's "The Comparison Between *Death of a Salesman* and *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana*" (Zhejiang Business Technology Institute Journal, 2002, Issue 1) and Wu Ge's "Chinese Dream and American Dream: *Death of a Salesman* and *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana*" (Artistic Drama, 2002, Issue 4) have stated their opinions from their themes and artistic expressions.

Before and after the performance of *Death of a Salesman* in China, many other playwrights undertook experimental techniques. For example, Ma Zhongjun (an avant-garde playwright born in 1957), and Jia Hongyuan's *Hot Currents Outside* (the 1980 best play about a brother and sister quarreling about their deceased elder brother's pension), employing transparent stage from which the dead could break through the wall with freedom. "This technique obviously stems from Arthur Miller's famous play *Death of a Salesman*." [50] Besides, there are many other plays using ghosts such as Gao Xingjian's *Alarm Signal* (1983, a play about train robbers involving many modern techniques as recalls, mental imaginations and symbolist method) and *Wild Men* (1985, a play about an archaeologist looking for wild men with modern skills of inner thoughts and multitrack), Liu Shugang's (a playwright born in 1940, president of the Central Experimental Theater) *A Deadman's Call On the Living* (1983, a play about a passenger killed on a bus and the ghost coming back to reality to pay visits to the living), Su Shuyang's *Taiping Lake* (1986, a play about the deceased famous writer Lao She returning to witness the world), as

well as Wang Zifu's (a play born in 1947 in Beijing) *Red River Valley* (1996, a play about a victim of the GCR coming back to invest a business to cut down trees but interrupted and haunted by a ghost), etc.

Conclusion

Miller's "tragedies of common man," offering criticism of society and exploring character's psychology, greatly broadened the horizon of Chinese dramatic circle immediately after his plays entered China. His two visits to China brought about brand-new concepts and atmospheres to Chinese stage. He draws more attention to society and family with conscience and responsibility, reevaluates the essence of humanity, combines modern techniques like "stream of consciousness" with realistic drama creation, explores characters' inner changes, and criticizes social inequality through the disillusion of dream. The consistency between Miller and Chinese dramatists' interest in social problem drama makes his plays much easier to be performed, understood, accepted and influential in China. Integrating with their own dramatic concepts, Chinese artists have created Chinese-style expressionist plays (such as *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana* and *Sangshuping Chronicle*).

However, influence is not unidirectional. "The communicativeness within literary receptive activities reflects mainly in the 'backflow' or feedback to writers of readers' aesthetic experience."^[51] Miller found a lot worth learning during his stay in China, for instance, supposition and stylization in classical Chinese operas. Zuolin helped Miller understand "Freestyle Theater." He even utilized these techniques of opera into his own plays as soon as he returned home. While directing *Death of a Salesman*, he employed the technique of "similarity in spirit" of Chinese opera. Through the repeated performances of *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible* in 21st century and more scholars reviewing Miller and his works, Arthur Miller's influence in China has become more and more extensive.^[52]

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[1]The Great Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) is a political movement led by Mao Zedong to mistakenly criticize bourgeois mentality and culture. Lin Biao (a general, and Mao's successor, later died in an air crash) and the Gang of Four (including Jiang Qing, Mao's wife, Yao Wenyuan, Zhang Chunqiao, and

Wang Hongwen) assisted Mao to put China into a disorder. During these ten years of upheaval, millions of students joined great parades and followed Mao's order to work in poor border areas and countryside. And millions of officials and intellectuals were persecuted and Chinese traditional culture was greatly damaged.

[2] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Garpett Barden and John Cumming (Beijing: China Social Sciences Publishing House, 1999. Reprinted from the English Edition by New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1975), 154.

[3] Yue Daiyun, *Comparative Literature and Chinese Modern Literature* (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1987), 44.

[4] *Ibid.*, 57.

[5] Su Shuyang, "People Will Reach a Great Harmony: A Talk with American Playwright Arthur Miller," *Reading 1* (1979): 119-22, esp. 119. (Su Shuyang, born in 1938, is a Chinese writer who published his famous plays as *Loyal Hearts* and *Taiping Lake* and a novel *Homeland*.)

[6] *Ibid.*, 120.

[7] Arthur Miller and Inge Morath, *Chinese Encounters* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1979), 13.

[8] Su Shuyang, 120.

[9] *Ibid.*, 120.

[10] *Ibid.*, 121.

[11] Miller and Morath, *Chinese Encounters*, 8.

[12] *Ibid.*, 7.

[13] *Ibid.*, 15.

[14] Soon after, Sun Huizhu and Gong Boan wrote an article ("On the Free-style Drama of Zuolin Huang," *The Art of Drama* 4 (1983), 8) to describe the different understanding and conflicts on the idea of "Xieyi (Free-style) Drama" between the two dramatists, "Huang Zuolin explained, 'The Chinese character of 'drama' is made up of two parts of 'vacant' and 'spear', being real and false should both be suitable. Being real is not drama and being not real is not art. Acquiring emotion and meaning is both drama and art.' On hearing this, Miller was at a loss. Huang continued, 'We must find the inner truth, the essence of the real world, their connections and feelings. Then take it out from the superficial matters.' To enable Miller to know the real meaning of Free-style Drama, Zuolin invited Miller to watch traditional Kunju opera *The Tale of the White Serpent*. Sure enough, Miller appreciated the play and said to Zuolin that the west realistic drama was much less colorful and exciting."

[15] Dong Leshan. "Arthur Miller Reviewing *Loyal Hearts*, *Cai Wenji* and *The Other Shore*," *Reading 2*

(1979), 77.

[16] Miller and Morath, *Chinese Encounters*, 93.

[17] *Ibid.*, 94.

[18] *Ibid.*, 95.

[19] Chen Liangting, "Words after Translation," *Selected Plays by Arthur Miller* (Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Press, 1979), 249.

[20] Gu Zhichuan, "Replies on the New Senior High School Textbook of Chinese," http://www.360doc.com/content/11/0328/05/503199_105231591.shtml (accessed 19 October 2008).

[21] Cheng Yan, "The Appealing Art: On the Performance of *The Crucible*," *Shanghai Drama* 5 (1981), 18.

[22] *Ibid.*, 19.

[23] Arthur Miller, *Timebends: A Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1987), 348.

[24] Guo Jide, "Arthur Miller and His *The Crucible*," *American Literature Special Issue* (1981), 74.

[25] Wu Peiyuan and Hu Chengyuan, "On *The Crucible* Directed by Zuolin," *Foreign Drama* 2 (1982), 41.

[26] *Ibid.*, 42.

[27] Liu Xiaochun, "The News in Spring," *Drama* 2 (2002), 141.

[28] Gao Huibing, "The *Shangshuping* Chronicles and the Mystery of Imagery," in *A Study of Xu Xiaozhong's Directing Art*, ed. Lin Yinyu (Beijing: Chinese Drama Publishing House, 1991), 188.

[29] Xu Xiaozhong, "Changes in Combining and Connecting," (Part I and II) *Drama Journal* 5 (1988), 43.

[30] Ding Zhou, a journalist of *China Construction* reported on the visit of Miller, "The similar share of human feelings brought the aged American salesman from New York to Britain, Mosco, Rome, Oslo, Sydney, and Tokyo. And now, he comes to Beijing with heavy pace and same heavy case of commodity samples." (Ding Zhou, "Review on the Spoken Drama *Death of a Salesman*," *China Construction* 8 (1988), 25).

[31] *Ibid.*, 5.

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] The Chinese idea of Wangzichenglong (“high hopes for one’s child”) and the expectations for the sons in *Death of a Salesman* match each other. Miller often commented on this point, “What surprised me is that the parents’ expectations for the children are very Chinese way of thinking. They called it ‘high hopes for one’s child’, ie., hoping the children to succeed... Therefore, when Happy said life is a game, ie., to be No 1. Chinese audiences are the first to get the meaning of these words.”?See David Richards, “Arthur Miller, Survivor,” *Manchester Guardian Weekly* (Mar. 25, 1984), 17?

[34] Yuan Henian expressed his counterviews on the sex scenes being too strict. He pointed out that the two sex scenes in the restaurant and hotel are restrained and sex is always a taboo in Chinese literature and art. (See: Yuan Henian, “‘*Death of a Salesman*’ in Beijing,” *Chinese Literature* (Oct., 1983), 108-9)

[35] *Ibid.*, 252-53.

[36] “Stones Borrowed from Other’s Hills: A Forum on the Performance of *Death of a Salesman*,” *Drama Newspaper* 7 (1983), 42.

[37] See: Tan Aiqing, “‘*Death of a Salesman*’ in Beijing,” *China Reconstructs* (August, 1983), 26.

[38] Miller, *Timebends: A Life*, 184.

[39] *Ibid.*, 185.

[40] Miller’s directing his *Death of a Salesman* in China and his *Salesman in Beijing* (a diary of his directing experience published in the US) received warm responses in the US. *The Wall Street Journal* reported Miller’s play and Miller’s *Salesman in Beijing* on April 26, 1984. Meanwhile, Broadway staged *Death of a Salesman* again, starring Dustin Hoffman as Willy Loman. It was another big hit, bringing about more reviews and essays on the play. Next comes the 1998 performances of the play in Goodman Theater, Chicago, and the following year, it was moved to the Broadway.

[41] Ying Ruocheng, “The Stage Image Creation of Willy Loman and Others,” *Guangming Daily* (June 3, 1983), 3.

[42] Zhu Lin, “A Hard but Pleasant Performance: Experience of Acting Linda,” *Drama Studies* 1 (1984), 12-13.

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] See Zhu Xu, “I Act Charlie: Records of Rehearsing *Death of a Salesman*,” *Drama Studies* 1 (1984), 14-17.

[45] Rui Tao, “Notes on Rehearsing *Death of a Salesman*,” *The People’s Daily* (May 8, 1983), 7.

[46] Huang Zuoliang, “The Exciting Performance in May: After Seeing *Death of a Salesman*,” *Drama Journal* 6 (1983), 8.

[47] “Exploring the New and Thriving the Drama Creation,” *Literary Studies* 1 (1988), 44.

[48] "Five People on *The Nirvana of Gouerye*," *Drama Review* 1 (1987), 9.

[49] Tang Zhengxu and Chen Houcheng, *20th Century Chinese Literature and Western Modern Literature* (Beijing: The People Publishing House, 1992), 609.

[50] Wang Xinmin, *The History of Contemporary Chinese Drama* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang University Press, 2000), 216.

[51] Zhu Liyuan, *Aesthetics of Reception* (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1989), 175-76.

[52] Huizhu Sun and Bo'an Gong, "On the Free-style Drama of Zuolin Huang," *The Art of Drama* 4 (1983), 8.



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