

Rethinking Theatricality

A Conversation on Postdramatic Theatre and Chinese *Juchang*

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TUCHMANN: The book *Postdramatisches Theater*² by Hans-Thies Lehmann was published in 1999 and translated into Chinese in 2010.³ Together with the translator of this seminal text, Prof. Li Yinan, and two outstanding theatre-makers working in China and the German-speaking theatre market, namely Wang Mengfan and Boris Nikitin, I want to discuss what kind of traces this text and the concept of postdramatic theatre have left in the European and Chinese theatre landscape. I am particularly interested in the controversial debates that have been and are still being conducted about it. A recapitulation of these controversies is especially relevant now, as the third edition of the Chinese translation is being prepared.

Perhaps we can first try to define the term. What is this “postdramatic theatre”? I will give you some keywords and invite you to add to this.

According to Hans-Thies Lehmann, postdramatic theatre is characterized by the fact that it favors the so-called theatrical axis over the inner-stage axis. The postdramatic theatre thus understands the act of communication between stage and auditorium as the central artistic material. This theatre is no longer primarily concerned with arranging a text invented by an author on stage. The focus on the process of communication is accompanied by a dramaturgical abandonment of the focus on drama/action/imitation that had previously existed in theatre. Instead of this triad, there is what one can describe an emphasis on the ceremonial. In terms of staging, this leads to a dehierarchization of the theatrical means: the performers' bodies, the light,

- 1 The conversation was held in German and Chinese. English translation by Pu Wenyan and Kai Tuchmann.
- 2 Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater* [Postdramatic Theatre] (Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag der Autoren, 1999). English translation by Karen Jürs-Munby: Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
- 3 Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Houxiju Juchang* [Postdramatic Theatre] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chuban she [Beijing University Press], 2010).

the sound, the atmosphere stand on an equal footing with the text. Historically, Lehmann locates the beginning of postdramatic theatre in the 1970s. He sees it as a reaction to the world as it was being changed by information technologies.

Yinan, as a theatre scholar, would you like to supplement this first attempt at a definition and tell us why and how you translated this text?

LI: You are right. The postdramatic theatre pays special attention to the audience's gaze. The mechanism of art is thus extended and becomes one of the social mechanisms. Literature/text descends from the top of the theatrical hierarchy to an equal position alongside other elements. This is partly a result of the development of aesthetics (in the sense of a "science of perception," which is the original meaning of the word) in the new media age. The postdramatic theatre becomes rather an art of performativity instead of an art of representation. Lehmann not only provides us with a way of describing and analyzing new theatre but also gives the possibility of rethinking theatricality.

In the Chinese context, dramatic theatre used to be exotic, an intruder. The performative aspects of traditional Chinese theatre, on the other hand, were overlooked or despised, which led to a historical record full of ruptures, self-deprecation, and contradictions. Chinese scholars have been using terminology imported from 19th century Europe to describe and analyze theatre, which is not only inaccurate and insufficient but also led to a decline in the quality of Chinese theatre, which was only copying the Western "masters." Today, when global theatre cultures are getting to know each other much more deeply and are interweaving with each other in a more complicated way, introducing Lehmann's terminology (which is the opposite to the 19th century European understanding of theatre) seems necessary, even urgent.

TUCHMANN: In his work, Lehmann makes a strict distinction between the terms "drama" and "theatre." You translate these terms with "*xiju*" and "*juchang*." What is the difference between the two concepts *xiju* (drama) and *juchang* (theatre) in the Chinese context? What is the relationship between them?

LI: Until now, Chinese scholars have had a very narrow understanding of theatre, namely as *huaju* (spoken drama), which was introduced into China from Europe via Japan at the beginning of the 20th century with the experiments of the Spring Willow Society. On the other hand, Chinese traditional theatre has been excluded from the theoretical theatre discourse. The focus of Chinese Theatre Studies has lain upon the dramatic text, which is closely related to China's particular way of modernizing by following the 19th century European model.

Another focus has existed almost from the very beginning of modern Chinese theatre but has not received widespread attention. In 1923, Song Chunfang first noticed the difference between the notions of "drama" and "theatre" when introducing Edward Gordon Craig's understanding of theatri-

cality in *The actor and the Über-Marionette*⁴ to China. During the 1930s and 1940s, Zhou Yibai and Dong Meikan also made efforts to differentiate two aspects in theatre studies—the dramatic and the theatrical – and laid particular stress upon theatricality as opposed to literature/textuality. They used various terms for the opposing pair of concepts – *wenxue* vs. *wutai* (literature vs. stage), *antou* vs. *changshang* (on the desk vs. *mise-en-scène*) as well as *wenxue* vs. *yanju* (literary text vs. performance). When translating *Postdramatisches Theater*, I preferred accuracy to interpretation (for example, interpretively translating “drama” as “literature” or “text” is, for me, inappropriate.) And I would rather use existing Chinese words, not create new ones. *Xiju* and *juchang* both have lived in the Chinese language for a long time. In “*Zhongguo juchang shi*”,⁵ Zhou Yibai uses *juchang* as a term that corresponds almost exactly with what Lehmann means by “das Theater.” In Hongkong and Taiwan, the term *juchang* is also used widely to translate “theatre.”

Since the publication of my translation of Lehmann’s book, it has encountered acclaim as well as denunciation. Criticism is concentrated on my choice of using the term *juchang* (rather than *xiju*) to translate “theatre.” At one conference, I was even scolded for “blindly copying the trendy jargon of the ignorant Hong Kong and Taiwan scholars.” This made me start my deeper studies of this particular term *juchang* more consciously. As I discovered, not only Zhou Yibai and the (for some Mainland scholars) “ignorant” Hongkong/Taiwan colleagues, but quite a few independent theatre-makers in Mainland China itself, such as Wen Hui, Wu Wenguang, Zhang Xian, and Tian Gebing have been using the term *juchang* to define what they do, while resolutely rejecting the more common term *xiju*, whose stress on text (which is closely related to ideology) means for them, oppression.

TUCHMANN: Mengfan, I would like to know from you, as a Chinese artist, whether and to what extent Lehmann’s concept of postdramatic theatre has influenced you?

WANG: I don’t think I understood the book at all. Later, I went to Germany to continue my studies in art history, and for some reason, I started making theatre. I began to understand the book after I did my first piece, *50/60-Old Ladies dance juchang* (50/60-Ayimen De Wudao Juchang) . So I cannot say that the book or this notion itself has influenced my creative work. But when I started creating, it gave me a standpoint to define my work. I began to understand where my work stands in the context of contemporary Western theatre and

4 Edward G. Craig, “The Actor and the Über-Marionette,” *The Mask*, Vol.1 Nr.2. (1908).

5 Zhou Yibai, *Zhongguo Juchang Shi* [A History of Chinese Theaters] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1933).

in history. I also started thinking about what theatre I'll make in contemporary Chinese theatre in the future.

TUCHMANN: Yinan, you say that this term "*juchang*" is, above all, a term used by Chinese artists who, as independent theatre-makers, stand outside the system to talk about their work. Can you explain to us: What is the official system, the Chinese theatre system, to which *juchang* is in opposition? And how exactly does it enter into this opposition? Who are these artists?

LI: As I said, the controversy the book aroused seemed to be about the translation of the term "theatre." However, as time went by, I realized it was not so. It was because of the notion of theatricality, in German "Theatralität". I translated it into *juchangxing* (theatricality), while the mainstream theatre study has always translated it as *xijuxing* (dramaticism). Tan Peisheng wrote a book in 1981, "*Taolun juxing*" (Discussing dramaticism), which is still part of the canon at The Central Academy of Drama. He translated theatricality into *xijuxing* (dramaticism). However, what independent theatre-makers like Mengfan do does not conform to the principle of dramaticism.

You might ask what this dramaticism is. I believe most of you here are active in theatre circles; you are probably not unfamiliar with the term. The book Tan wrote drew mainly on three Western theorists, all from the 18th and 19th centuries. One is Schlegel; one is Baker, the founder of the School of Drama at Yale University, from around the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The third is Archer, who wrote *Play-Making*.⁶ All three writers focus on drama, especially Baker, who talked about how to write the particular form of well-made plays. These theories are all about dramaticism, and they are identical to what Lehmann calls the dramatic theatre of Europe in the 19th century. Back then, the characteristics of drama were identical with the characteristics of theatre because the dramatic theatre was a very popular art form at that time. Later in the 20th century, though, some features of theatre became different from those of dramatic literature. The characteristics of theatre received greater emphasis. From this perspective, theatricality stands opposed to dramatic literature. With the growing emphasis on performance in new theatre works, the characteristics of theatre are changing. However, in what are considered "theatrical circles" in China, people are still making plays according to the principle of well-made plays in the 18th and 19th centuries. *Xiju* is an apt translation for this. Lehmann and I both think that it's a good equivalent for "drama." And at the center of dramaticism is actually what Kai mentioned: dramatic action. Dramatic action is emphasized to prevent the audience from being bored, to arouse their interest. This is still the principle of

6 William Archer, *Play-Making. A Manual of Craftsmanship* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1912).

making drama, but not of theatre works like Mengfan's at all. This is one reason this book is looked upon with skepticism in China.

TUCHMANN: Boris, could you describe the effect of the term and the text *Post-dramatisches Theater* on your work? And more generally, how would you describe the influence that this term has had on the German-speaking theatre scene?

NIKITIN: I was born and grew up in postdramatic theatre, so to speak, because I studied at the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies, which was more or less co-founded and decisively influenced by Hans-Thies Lehmann. In this context, it is very important to note that, in Giessen, the concept of postdramatic theatre is not only reflected in what happens on stage but is fundamentally part of the structure of the training and development of this institute. This is manifested above all in the fact that, in contrast to almost every other theatre school in Germany, if you study at Giessen, your training is not compartmentalized by specialization: Some study directing, others study acting, others study stage design, and others study lighting design; but rather: Everybody does everything. The theatre is understood there as a multimedia art discipline, where everyone should be informed about all the different means of artistic expression. One consequence of this, however, is that there are no real actors or no people who are trained for this purpose. That was a crucial premise in the founding of the institute: A theatre without the hegemony of the actor or of the canonical dramatic text.

In other words, one had to solve a problem first: Who do you now work with on stage and what should happen there? What is the alternative to the classically trained actors and actresses who have a trained speaking technique, who have learned to use different acting techniques to portray characters and not be themselves? The solution, of course, was not to let amateurs play Shakespeare, but rather to look for completely different forms of text and content that could be performed by people who are not amateurs. In other words, it was a question of a new constellation: of people on the stage, content, and the space in which this takes place. This led directly to the development of forms of documentary theatre or performative theatre. Here, people are on stage who no longer represent a character but who go on stage as themselves and negotiate themselves, their biography, their body.

TUCHMANN: There is this famous sentence by the theatre critic Gerhard Stadelmaier, who speaks of Giessen as a site of disaster for German theatre. Nowadays, the dramaturg Bernd Stegemann is strongly critical of postdramatic aesthetics, whose documentary variants he accuses of serving the ideology of capitalism by uncritically reproducing its surfaces. Both examples indicate that the idea of the postdramatic has always been—and probably still is—very controversial. From this perspective, would you like to talk again

about the influence of postdramatic theatre on the German-speaking theatre scene?

NIKITIN: I would say that Lehmann did not, of course, invent the postdramatic theatre with *Postdramatisches Theater*, but he described it and made certain phenomena understandable that had begun to be effective since the 1970s. It also has a great deal to do with emancipatory movements that have impacted the theatre and strengthened the independent scene. After the appearance of *Postdramatisches Theater*, which is part of this development, especially from the 2000s to the present day, there was an extreme expansion and strengthening of the independent scene in Germany. Even though there have been repeated attempts to neutralize them, I believe there are huge differences in production methods and aesthetics between theatre and dance productions in the independent scene and the municipal theatre.

TUCHMANN: That's quite exciting; it means that, for the German context, you would say that this publication is something like the grammar of the independent scene. A point that follows almost seamlessly from what Yinan said about the term *juchang* in China. Mengfan has brought along short video clips documenting her *juchang* work: Excerpts from her works *50/60-Old Ladies dance juchang* and *The Divine Sewing Machine* (Shensheng Fengrenji). Maybe you will now show us these excerpts and tell us a bit about these projects.



<https://tinyurl.com/Wang-50-60>



<https://tinyurl.com/Wang-Sewing-Machine>

WANG: As you can see, I've always chosen to work with unprofessional actors. Both pieces start from my focus on people's bodies, specifically Chinese people's bodies, how they are shaped under the socialist ideology and aesthetics, and how they speak. I think when they are presented as a group, as you see here, a group of square dance aunties or a group of kids—when they are presented as a group, something hidden will surface, something physical perhaps. Something else the two pieces have in common is a relationship with performativity. *50/60-Old Ladies dance juchang* is about square dancing, while *The Divine Sewing Machine* is about *speech intonation* (which is the preferred method of elementary education in China). The second piece may not seem to refer to speech intonation, but in the beginning, I started working out of interest in the way kids speak. So what we are trying to do in theatre is to create a

different body from the body of our daily lives. Kai asked me earlier about making theatre in China and our relationship with the academies. After showing this piece, the question I most often get is: "What does this mean? Can you sum up in one sentence what you are trying to express?" I think this is a common question the ordinary Chinese audience has, and this is related to drama as it is taught at the academies. They need a work to have a plot so that they can understand it. Quite on the contrary, my work has no story or plot whatsoever. What the kids say on stage, as you might have heard a little in the video, has no meaning, and delivers no information. By presenting such a piece in the Chinese theatre, I mean to pose a question to the audience, that without anything to grasp, how do we read the bodies themselves, and why do we look at such bodies?

NIKITIN: I think it's very similar in Germany and Switzerland. A far greater diversity of people is visible on stage: people with diseases, people with disabilities, and migration backgrounds. Representation has been broken up as a result, and this is a very central concern of the developments that Lehmann describes as postdramatic. These developments have only been enabled by breaking up the drama, because the drama has been synonymous with the canon. The canon is a historical, literary canon that has only made available a certain repertoire of roles with an apparent division of race, gender, and gender hierarchies and an evident typecasting: Who plays Romeo, who plays Juliet? Who plays Lady Macbeth and who plays Macbeth? The guidelines were very clear as to who was represented on stage at all. So you first had to thwart the drama to make room for other forms.

Just one more short thing that is of concern to me: When you postulate things like "postdramatic theatre," it often has the character of: "This is the new theatre now and what was before it is bad!" I think it is crucial to point out that it is not about destroying dramatic theatre. It's about expanding the theatre as a space of possibility. It is not *per se* about completely displacing the old. That won't work because then you end up provoking reaction, and that's what Bernd Stegemann is. Many traditionalists feel very strongly threatened. Then I always say: Don't panic! It's not about destroying dramatic theatre but about expanding it.

TUCHMANN: Now Boris has just made the point that there is a decidedly political dimension in postdramatic theatre; for example, documentary procedures give people a stage who are otherwise not represented in the dominant public discourse; the aesthetics of postdramatic theatre thus quasi creates a new public sphere around these people. How would you see this point for China? Are there correspondences?

LI: I think that promoting theatre without dismissing drama is an important principle of postdramatic theatre. Boris said this well. Bringing up the postdra-

matic theatre is actually expanding theatrical art. Theatre is inclusive. In China, the concept of the theatre arts is more general. The kind of non-dramatic theatre that Mengfan does, makes up less than five percent of all performances in China. These works are more often shown in the relatively marginal, less grand theatre spaces. They won't be shown, for example, in the National Theatre. They are put on in the smaller theatres, even in specific sites, in the irregular spaces, and receive no governmental financial support. So really, these theatre theorists are saying that drama is now in crisis, that Chinese drama today is not good, not well-written, and young people like Mengfan are to blame, that their existence poses a threat to drama? I don't think such a threat exists. Mengfan's existence threatens no one. But allowing them to live is a great thing. And I think allowing young creators like Mengfan to exist is one very political aspect of postdramatic theatre. Not that what they do is political in the sense of propaganda slogans, but to allow their existence to supplement or co-exist with the dramatic canon, this is very political.

WANG: Professor Li introduced to us the political aspect in this sense. I'll talk about another layer – the political element of presenting unprofessional ordinary people in the theatre. When I was making the piece about square dance aunties, some say that they are affected by, as we know, stuff like *zhongzi wu* (the dance of loyalty) from the Cultural Revolution, which is undoubtedly seared on this generation. For me, however, the political meaning of this work is not so simple. These people, who have no claim to any space in the Chinese cities, can, for an instant, claim the public space of the theatre, where they present their actual bodies and express what they wish to say. This, for me, is a political expression. And the kids. I've realized that kids are deemed inferior animals in Chinese education, whose education consists of sermons and who are not supposed to think for themselves. I wanted to discuss this. In the process of working together with these children, I somehow found myself to be the student, learning from them. And I wanted to share this kind of experience with others. The groups of people with no voice, no freedom or space to express themselves gain the right to speak in such a public space as theatre. This, for me, is political.

TUCHMANN: Mengfan, what kind of audience does your theatre attract? And, more generally: Who is the *juchang* audience? Especially if this theatre has such a political dimension, what's the difference to the audience of the so-called official theatre?

WANG: As for my expectation of the audience, who I want them to be? Well, I want them to be Chinese. This is the first thing. I think my plays are not made for foreigners. They are made for Chinese people. This is the general expectation. And this play, it's true, is very difficult to describe in the creative environment today. After all, even Lehmann used a whole book to describe the postdra-

matic theatre. So, I often encounter questions during promotion: what is this that I've made. Ultimately our audience is quite varied. Since I'm working with ordinary people, we first get a whole bunch of relatives. I think this is a great thing, though I didn't expect it, we can have more discussion with people who don't usually show up in theatres. How do they think of an art form that has nothing to do with their lives? They might not even know what dramatic theatre is. They probably never go to the theatre. I find this very interesting—and how do kids understand it? Apart from this, the audience is more like people who pay attention to independent theatres and marginal artists, who are long-time small-theatre-goers. But we can hardly reach the audience that routinely visits, say, Beijing People's Art Theatre. We can't even pass any message to them.

TUCHMANN: Then I would now ask the last question before we open the conversation to the auditorium. This last question has to do with the future. At the beginning of our discussion, I mentioned that Lehmann dates the beginning of postdramatic theatre to the 1970s and that he sees it as an answer to the challenges of an emerging information society. Well, the information society and the mechanization of our lives have not stopped. We live in a world where a handful of tech companies colonize everyday life, the public sphere, and politics. We are meeting here in a state where the so-called social credit system will soon be introduced, i.e., in a state that produces its inhabitants as digital subjects in an unprecedented system. What could be the potential of postdramatic theatre there? Precisely if one thinks of its origins as a form of, I don't want to say criticism, but as a form of behavior in the face of a profound change in the media.

LI: I think in the West, a trend is beginning to show at the start of the 21st century, as mainstream theatre is opening up to creators of the postdramatic theatre. Rimini Protokoll, for example, has staged works in some huge theatres. Hans-Werner Kroesinger, who graduated from Giessen, has received an invitation to the Berliner Theatertreffen. In China, the trend is similar. At first, the independent artists outside the system and "theatrical circles" within the system were totally incompatible. For example, *Caochangdi* was, in the beginning, a center of independent theatre arts. The hosts, or owners of the place, Wu Wenguang and Wen Hui, were very opposed to the drama establishment. So theatre and drama became two incompatible worlds. In the recent four or five years, however, as far as I've observed, many mainstream theatre festivals have started to welcome works by artists like Mengfan. For example, the *Divine Sewing Machine* was shown at the Beijing Fringe Festival. Festivals like the Wuzhen Drama Festival, and the Nanluoguxiang Drama Arts Festival—festivals with "drama" in their name—are opening doors to the new theatre. Another important reason is the gentrification of cities. As rents go up, theatre artists like Mengfan have to find opportunities to stage their works in ordin-

ary spaces. It is this process that brings drama and theatre together. The old generation welcomes the new, and the new reaches out to the old. So it's a gradually mixing world. This is an optimistic trend that I've seen.

NIKITIN: I would like to point out another aspect. I would say that the strength of the theatrical and perhaps postdramatic theatre is actually the theatre space. The theatre space has the special characteristic that it is a space in which we gather as individuals who at the same time form a community, without necessarily sharing the same views. It is a space in which—and this is very important for postdramatic theatre—dissent is possible. It has something to do with co-presence, that we are together in a space in which this dividing line between stage and audience is present and in which we have to negotiate this dividing line permanently. In contrast to digital space, which is a space simulation, the theatre space is physical and sensual. Therefore, it is a space of vulnerability, of possibility, a space of the alternatives, which fundamentally means: of disagreement. I can be in a space together with others who, at the same time, I can be in disagreement with. That's what makes this space political. That's what its modernity consists of today.

WANG: Although I've always shown my works in theatres, I've still been thinking about this question—how to think in a theatrical way? If we can be clear on this question, we don't have to restrict ourselves to the space of theatres or even the form of theatre. What I wish to share more with people is this way of thinking: how to think about all kinds of things theatrically, and not only artistically. This is my thought about the future.

TUCHMANN: Let us now direct our gaze into the auditorium and wait for questions, comments, or other reactions!⁷

AUDIENCE MEMBER A: Hello, I'm a beginner at theatre and have two questions. The first is for director Nikitin. I wonder about the role of identification in postdramatic theatre. Can I understand it this way—just like an audience of traditional drama, we watch a postdramatic play, and because we are moved, we start to think. First, we are passive, and then we become active. Is it a process like this?

NIKITIN: The audience doesn't always have to be passive. I have not dealt with this in my practice, but in the varied approaches of the postdramatic theatre, some artists have already completely broken the principle of a passive audience. Some immersive plays, for example, totally wipe out the clear division between the stage and the audience. Some present their works in public

7 This is a selection of audience questions.

spaces. There are many experiments. Some, for example, give the audience a set of headphones through which you hear a performative text. Then you walk across the city and participate in composing a new text. There are a lot of possibilities.

Personally and artistically, I prefer to highlight and use that line between the stage and the audience and to play with the difference it creates. I very often play with the role of the spectators, their position, their expectations. It's crucial for me.

Anyway, in my eyes, the audience is never passive. The gaze or the seeing of the audience is a frame. And every kind of seeing is active, never passive. And clearly, the presence of the audience is active. It changes everything. A spectator who is sleeping is quite an active event in a performance.

AUDIENCE MEMBER A: The second question is for director Wang Mengfan. The director has the job of delivering a message. But what do you do if the audience fails to understand the message? It might be its problem if they don't understand. But, I want to ask, the work you do, when you are rehearsing, the actors, kids, aunties, do they understand what you want them to do? Or do you just ask them to play and perform according to your instructions?

WANG: We work collectively. I pose questions for them, or we accomplish missions together. In this process, I accumulate materials, some of which end up on stage. But what appears explicitly on stage is for me to decide.

AUDIENCE MEMBER A: Sorry, but I suddenly have an idea, as a beginner. If I, say, find two strangers, let them sit on stage and start drinking. With drinking, they get familiar. They start chatting. So, in the end, I think, perhaps it shows the strangeness among people and how they talk after letting down their guard, getting drunk even. This, of course, cannot compare with your work. But I want to know what the difference is.

WANG: Nikitin has talked a lot about the problem of whether we need professional actors at all. Your question is similar to this, right? What's the division between creation and non-creation?

AUDIENCE MEMBER A: I mean could I stage this kind of situation and call it art?

NIKITIN: A conversation? Sure, you just have to frame it well as an artistic work and somehow organize an audience to watch it, then it could work well as a theatre product. And I would always be careful about thinking of postdramatic theatre or performance as easy, that it's just about putting something authentic on stage without directing it, and then it automatically becomes postdramatic theatre. There's always the possibility that it just becomes a postdramatic something else. Of course, it still has a lot to do with staging, with

work, with forms, with dedication, and the investment of time and of one's own vulnerability.

AUDIENCE MEMBER B: I have a question for Professor Li. I'm reading *Houxiju juchang*⁸ (Postdramatic Theatre) and have read only a small part so far. In the translator's foreword, you wrote why traditional Chinese opera is not well known to the present Chinese audience. You say it's because the "*chang, nian, zuo, da*" (singing, dialogue, acting, and acrobatics) are theatrical, and the audience lacks the general cognition to understand this. I would like to know more about this subject.

Li: In fact, this is not only my opinion but Lehmann's as well. He thinks his book *Postdramatisches Theater* rightly describes the Chinese traditional theatre, which we call traditional opera. In the beginning, our Academy of Drama didn't think it was drama at all and only included it in recent years. This bias is related to wholesale Westernization during the May Fourth Movement. When drama was introduced from the West at the beginning of the 20th century, people thought it was a superior art form. This causes a massive gap in our own theatre culture. It's Lehmann's book, however, that tries to raise our attention to our own tradition. Of course, there are stories and characters in our traditional opera that are the same as in drama. But in the 20th century, we moved our emphasis almost entirely to storytelling and characterization. Even the famous Opera performer Mei Lanfang said that the emotions he expressed on stage were genuine. He became more and more loyal to the genuineness and building of real characters, which were ideas from drama.

AUDIENCE MEMBER C: My question is not so theoretical. I want to ask one of the theatre-makers here, do you know clearly from the beginning what you are doing, or not so clearly, but rather make decisions out of intuition? I think this is a question faced by artists in all art forms. Thank you.

NIKITIN: It depends. When I do a theatre project, I often have an idea; I have a hunch. I often have the idea of an effect. And then, of course, it's the process of artistic work, this remaining in a space, in a time, in which you influence the raw material, in which you try to bring it into a form, during which the understanding of what you're dealing with is then sharpened: and I think that's also what artistic work is. I refuse to say: "No, I never know the answer! It's just a question." Sometimes I have an answer, but I don't know how to formulate it, and that's the work.

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