The Influence of Martial Arts on the Acting of Traditional Chinese Theater

Yao Hai-Hsing

There are many performance elements which constitute the traditional Chinese theater, but the most striking and fascinating component of all is martial arts. Any layman, who for the first time, sees a production of traditional Chinese theater is impressed and in awe of the actor’s clear-cut and perfect controlled fighting movements. The performer’s superb acrobatics are always a powerful element that attracts spectators. Unfortunately, this wonderful performance element is only truly understood by performers within the Chinese theater circle. In addition, martial arts are often regarded as an unimportant or less spiritually venerated element by theater fans and scholars. As a result, this theatrical aspect is almost unknown to the public. We do not know, for example, how martial arts are used in performance or how they are associated with acting. Clearly, this remarkable element needs to no longer be ignored in our times, but thoughtfully considered and studied.

This article intends to explore the relationship between martial arts and the acting of traditional Chinese theater, especially the acting of Peking Opera. The purpose of this paper is to discover whether the acting of traditional Chinese theater is influenced by martial arts and what is the result of this influence. The major difficulty for this study is the lack of scholarly research. Little has been published regarding martial arts or the acting of traditional Chinese theater. It is unfortunate that these subjects are completely neglected by scholars. While information concerning those subjects is scattered everywhere in historical documents, it is difficult to collect specific sources for such a study.

This paper consists of three sections. The first part is a historical survey, providing an overview about the influence of martial arts in Chinese theater. The second part deals with the actual influence of martial arts on the acting of traditional Chinese theater. A survey of theatrical acting in the Yuan, the Ming and the Ch’ing Dynasties is given. The survey helps us to understand when martial arts began to appear in theatrical performance and how it was integrated with acting. The remarkable use of martial arts in performance subsequently became a special characteristic of Peking Opera. The third part is focused on an obvious result of the influence of martial arts—the using of fundamental movements of martial arts in Peking Opera. The use of these movements as the basic movements of acting training displays the heavy impact of fighting arts on the acting of Peking Opera. If combat had not been an essential element of Peking Opera acting, it would not have become a part of the basic acting training, as demonstrated in the third part of this article.

PART I HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
武術對傳統戲曲表演的影響

姚海星

武功在傳統戲曲中佔的份量不輕，但卻殊少受到重視。在傳統的觀念中，武戲滿足的是視覺效果，僅投外行人之喜好，而行家偏愛聲腔的藝術，講究的是「聽戲」。然而，這個觀念在九○年代的今天，應該予以修正了。

由於武功一向被忽視，有關武功或武術的資料極端缺乏，而專家學者亦甚少探討武功及其發展。因此，戲曲武功的藝術僅以口傳心授的方式流傳於梨園子弟之間，而國外人即使有心想了解，亦往往有不得其門而入之感。

但是，戲曲是否確實受到武術之影響？武術究竟與戲曲之關係如何？要針對此問題做完整的研究並不容易，主要是因爲文獻不足，而有限的資料又散落各處，收集不易。因此，本文僅就武術和戲曲表演之關係——特別是和京劇之關係——進行探討。全文分成三部份：

一、歷史背景　在中國歷史上，早至西漢時期即有關於武術之記載。經由歷史背景的探索可幫助吾人了解武術何時開始與劇場發生關係，以及何時開始融入演出之中。

二、武術與傳統戲曲之表演　此一部份以元、明、清三朝代之戲曲為主，進一步分析戲曲表演是否確實受到武術之影響，以及武術與表演是否在演出中融合為一體。

三、武術與京劇之基本功　由京劇之基本功最易看出武術對戲曲表演之影響。此一部份將武術的基本功與京劇的基本功做一比較，以證明二者極端相似之處。