CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE RE-CONSTRUCTION OF ‘CLASSICS’

1. The Experiment in the Creation of ‘Models’

The large-scale criticism and overthrowing of “classics” led to the appearance of a nearly “classic-less” literary period (the classically-styled poetry of Mao Zedong and the entire body of Lu Xun’s literary output were two of the few exceptions). This was connected to the cultural radicals’ creation of their own “classics” and their intense efforts to “initiate the most glorious and resplendent new literature and art of a new epoch in the history of humanity.” During this period, “models”—a term, in the Chinese, richly connotative of the “popular style”—was used to replace the terms such as “classics” or “paradigms”; this term seemed to embody the meaning of being more obviously available for copying and reproduction. In ‘The Summary of Minutes’, the requirement of the “leaders” of the government and military to organize their powers to “make good models” was held to be a strategic task. It was stated that “with these types of models, with successful experience in this area, will [we] then be convincing, will [we] then be able to firmly occupy the battlefront, will [we] then be able to knock away the rod of the reactionaries.”

The creation of “models” had already begun in the early 1960s. In 1963, making use of her special status as Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing had the Ministry of Culture, the China Beijing Opera Theater, and the Beijing Opera Troupe in Beijing rehearse in Beijing-style the Shanghai-style opera pieces ‘The Red Lantern’ (from the Shanghai Love China Shanghai-style Opera Troupe) and ‘Sparks Amid the Reeds’ (from the Shanghai-style Opera Theater of Shanghai). In June 1964, the all-China Beijing Opera Modern Opera Viewing and Emulation Festival was held in Beijing. Twenty-eight Beijing opera troupes from nine provinces, cities, and self-governing regions performed 38 “modern operas” (meaning that these were traditional-style opera pieces dealing with modern life). Aside from ‘The Red Lantern’ and ‘Sparks Amid the Reeds’ (the name of which was later changed to ‘Shajiabang’ at the suggestion of Mao Zedong), other opera pieces included ‘Raid on the White Tiger Regiment’ (performed by the Shandong Beijing Opera Troupe), ‘Taking
Tiger Mountain by Strategy› (the Shanghai Beijing Opera Troupe), ‘Azalea Mountain› (the Ningxia Beijing Opera Troupe), and ‘The Red Detachment of Women› (the Beijing Opera Troupe of Beijing), as well as ‘Thunderstorm over Miao Ridge›, ‘Morals Invigorate the Nation›, and ‘The Promise of Beauty›. About the time of this festival, except for the operas ‘The Red Lantern› and ‘Shajiabang›, to varying degrees Jiang Qing and her associates were involved in the creation, revisions, and rehearsals of the Beijing operas ‘Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy›, ‘On the Docks›, and ‘Raid on the White Tiger Regiment›, the ballets ‘The White-Haired Girl› and ‘The Red Detachment of Women›, and the symphony ‘Shajiabang›. Moreover, Zhang Chunqiao and his associates enthusiastically participated in the creation and rehearsals of ‘On the Docks› and other opera pieces. By 1967, the festival of modern Beijing opera three years previously was termed the “revolution in Beijing opera” and had been endowed with the added significance of being “the mighty beginning of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.” In the 1967 no. 6 edition of Red Flag, the speech Jiang Qing gave at the July 1964 conference for participants in the festival of the modern Beijing operas was given the title of ‘On a Revolution in Beijing Opera› and published together with a social commentary piece entitled ‘Hail the Great Victory of the Beijing Opera Revolution›. The social commentary referred to Jiang Qing’s speech as “an important document on the use of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought to resolve problems in the Beijing opera revolution.” This social commentary also featured the first official use of the term “model opera,” stating that model Beijing operas such as ‘Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy› “are not only excellent models of Beijing opera, but also excellent models of proletarian literature and art.” During activities commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of Mao’s ‘Talks› in Beijing and Shanghai, the then members of the “Central Cultural Revolution Group,” Chen Boda and Yao Wenyuan made a very high assessment of the significance of the “revolution in Beijing opera” and “model operas,” as well as the position and function of Jiang Qing in this revolution. They referred to Jiang Qing as “all along upholding and defending the revolutionary line of Chairman Mao in literature and the arts,” as “taking the lead in battle,” as “becoming the person who wears the thorns and nettles for revolution in literature and the arts,” and as “leading and initiating the Beijing opera revolution and the revolution in other performance arts, and in capturing the most obstinate fortresses of the reactionary literature and art of the capitalist and feudal classes, creating a brand new batch of revolutionary Beijing operas, revolutionary