

WANG Guojun. *Staging Personhood: Costuming in Early Qing Drama*.
New York: Columbia University Press, 2020, 312 pp.

王国军：《粉墨威仪：清初戏曲中的衣与人》，纽约：哥伦比亚大学出版社，2020年版，312页。*

In his excellent new book *Staging Personhood*, Wang Guojun explores theatrical costuming not just for what it can tell us about performance history, but as a way of examining attitudes toward changes in ethnic and gender relations in the Qing dynasty. As Wang himself puts it in his epilogue, “Since hairstyle and clothing were at the center of ethnic conflicts, theatrical costuming served as an effective—if not the only—avenue for theatrical producers to respond to changing ethnic and gender relations.” (208) As is well known, the Qing mandated that men shave their foreheads and braid the hair on the back of their heads in a queue; they also mandated that men stop wearing “Han” clothing, which was characterized by wide sleeves, a distinctive collar shape, and different headgear. (242) But the regulations about hair and clothing were largely restricted to men. (Attempts by the Qing government to stop the Han custom of binding women’s feet failed.) And the stipulations that men wear Qing dress were restricted to the living: Wang tells us that families were allowed to bury their dead in Han costume. (6) The increasing significance of costuming in the theatrical realm is demonstrated by the fact that late Ming and Qing drama texts have much more detail about costumes than did texts in the Yuan or early Ming. (21) Wang clearly demonstrates that theatrical costuming is “a volatile site reflecting and resisting historical changes.” (24) *Staging Personhood* shows the materiality of ethnic and gender distinctions, the ways that they are

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marked on the body and the ways that they are policed. Drama texts often (but not always) contain information about how characters should be costumed. Woodblock prints portray characters in enough detail to allow us to ascertain how they are costumed, and theatergoers wrote about plays. Wang uses all of these sources to good effect. His book will be of interest to scholars of theater and literature as well as historians.

In the early Qing dynasty Manchu costumes were prohibited in stage performances, except in those which took place in the Qing court. (The Qing emperors were enthusiastic fans of Chinese drama.) Wang explains the prohibition: “Perceiving performance to be a depraved practice of the Han Chinese tradition, the Manchu rulers prohibited Manchu people from theatergoing as well as the employment of Manchu clothing in popular drama performances. Meanwhile, they allowed theater to continue displaying Han-style costumes onstage, despite the ban on Han clothing in society.” (7) Manchus regarded Manchu costuming as part of Manchu identity that needed to be kept out of Chinese drama. (42) The disjuncture between costumes on stage and dress in society—no Manchu costumes were permitted on stage and only Manchu costumes were permitted in the social world—creates what Wang calls the “unstageable world.” (7) But by the mid-nineteenth century, Manchu costumes appearing on stage (202), and drama had become a key part of Manchu culture. (205). Wang cites a Qing official in a 1796 report asking “Who imagined that nowadays once the playhouses are open, half of those indulging in drinking are bannermen?” (44)

The world may have been unstageable but concerns with theater were not limited to the stage. The Qing government was concerned with actors in the offstage world as well. Not surprisingly, hair was a particular focus of Qing concern. Actors who played female roles argued that they needed to keep their hair; the shaved head mandated by the hair-cutting order inhibited their ability to be effective in female roles. But their protests were to no avail. (33) We see here a blurring of boundaries between the lived world of human society and theatrical roles played on stage. We see this again in a line from the play *Peach Blossom Fan* to the effect that the corrupting power of theatrical make-up can't be washed off. (164) And the political valence of costuming is shown by the fact that anti-Manchu rebels in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries wore theatrical costumes: they displayed their resistance through the clothes they wore.

Wang is not merely interested in the issues of ethnic cross-dressing; he is also interested in gendered cross-dressing and the intersections between ethnicity and gender showed by costuming. He links ethnic cross-dressing and gendered cross-dressing in his analysis of *Lovebirds Reversed* (*Duo yuanyang*). In that play, Hua Jing is unwilling to shave his head to adopt the Manchu hairstyle, so he disguises himself a woman, Shui Suyue. Shui assumes Hua's persona. Shui's mother recognizes her immediately, despite her disguise, but is troubled by the fact that her daughter is wearing her hair in the Manchu queue. She exclaims, “For what reason have you cut

your hair to be neither man nor woman?” As Wang explains, this suggests ways in which the Manchu hairstyle “fails to fall into any existing gendered category of hairstyles.” (89)

In the chapter “The Chaste Lady Immortal of Seamless Stitching,” Wang explores the ways in which a historical episode is dramatized and made into a performance where costuming is put front and center. In 1667, the Lady Hai stitched herself into her clothing to protect herself from sexual assault. Her inventiveness did not make for a happy ending, for she ended killing herself. The historical event happened in 1667, and Shen Shouheng began writing an opera commemorating it a mere four months after it occurred. Several years later, Hou Mi composed another opera based on the Lady Hai. The dramatic versions of the event somewhat mitigate the tragedy by allowing the Lady Hai to become an immortal. Wang explores in detail how costuming allows the lady to cross boundaries in different versions of the story, from folk tales to operas. By the late Qing, the Lady Hai had been transformed into a model Qing chaste woman.

The arguments that Wang makes are richly detailed and compelling. I strongly recommend it to people interested in gender and ethnicity in the Qing, as well as scholars of fiction and drama.

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