Marjorie Chan is a Toronto-based Chinese-Canadian actor and playwright. She closely collaborates with Cahoots Theatre Projects, a company that is dedicated to contemporary play development. Among Chan’s produced plays we find *China Doll, A Nanking Winter, The Madness of the Square*, and a libretto for the one-act-opera *Sanctuary Song*, composed by Abigail Richardson (Thestar.com, June 4, 2008 and Theatre direct). The three abovementioned plays all deal with aspects of modern Chinese history in the context of the impact of Western modernity, colonialism and globalization from a culturally and politically hybrid, Chinese-Canadian, observer’s perspective. *China Doll* deals with the impact of Western literary and theatrical naturalism/realism and Western Feminism on Chinese modern political and artistic movements. The concept of “Ibsenism” by Hu Shi (1891-1962) (Hu 155-68), which was informed by George Bernhard Shaw’s term (Shaw 1994) and the additional genuinely Chinese creation of “Noraism” fuelled not only the anti-colonialist and nationalist efforts on the part of Chinese—predominantly male—intellectuals and artists but also the early Chinese Women’s movement. In 1923, Lu Xun asked “What happens after Nora leaves home?” and was thus contextualizing the Nora character in a specific Chinese context as well as problematizing the fact, that when leaving home, confronted with a hostile patriarchal environment, the trouble only starts for economically dependent and traditionally unequal women (Lu 85-92). However, the Chinese women’s movement was, and still is, influenced by both domestic and foreign practices of women’s liberation and gender equality. This is also reflected in Chan’s play.
First published in 2004, the playwright, Marjorie Chan performed the main character Su Ling in the premiere production at the Tarragon Theatre Extra Space in Toronto, directed by Kelly Thornton. There are five characters played by four actors. Three of them establish a generational line between grandmother Poa-Poa, her daughter Ma-Ma and her granddaughter Su Ling. The actor of Ma-Ma also plays Ming, the female servant of Su Ling. This raises awareness for class issues among women. The only male character is Merchant Li, although Su Ling's father and other male persons are present through conversations. Li teaches Su Ling reading and writing skills, introduces her to Ibsen's *A Doll House* and is the first man to approach Su Ling in a sexually motivated way. Li is an educated urban man from the highly Westernized city of Shanghai where Su Ling and her grandmother moved. The grandmother follows rather traditional ways of raising a girl, while originally coming from a rural background. Central to the liberating process of Su Ling is the discourse about the Chinese tradition of the Lotus Feet, or bound feet. Su Ling does not walk out of a marriage with children, but leaves the prospect to be married according to traditional standards. She unbinds her feet and, using a cane, stumbles off the stage. What happens after that, we do not know.

*China Doll* consists of two acts subdivided into scenes which do not necessarily follow a chronological order. Act one deals with the time period from 1904-1918 while Act two describes the events over a few weeks in the fall of 1918. Chan provides a timeline which intertwines important historical events with biographical data of the play's characters beginning with 1867 until November 1918. Of particular interest on the timeline is the fact that Qiu Jin's (Chang 18, Dooling 39-42) date of birth (1875) and date of execution by beheading in 1907 is included. She is considered to be one of the earliest political woman activists who became a kind of domestic role model for Chinese “Noras” long before Ibsen's play was actually perceived by Chinese (male) intellectuals and even before the founding of the Chinese Republic in 1911. This signals that Ibsen’s work, the concept of Western realism as well as the concept of republican democracy became successful to a certain degree in China because the domestic conditions had already created a fertile soil for that. (Chan 2004).

**Talking Dolls with Marjorie Chan**

JT: In the course of your education, did you ever read any works by playwrights of colour?

MC: That’s an interesting question. When I think about it, in my secondary school education, the only play that I remember written by someone of colour would have been *A Raisin in the Sun* (by Lorraine Hansberry, the first black woman playwright...
to be performed on Broadway in 1959, AB) And, that’s the only one—in all the literature and drama courses that I took. It didn’t have a strong impact in being about American culture, but it did have an impact on me in the discussion around what happened when this play was introduced. I remembered being attached to that notion. This play affected change. This play got under people’s skin and agitated them to an extent. I’m thinking now back to theatre school and I honestly can’t recall a play from a different culture.

I went to George Brown Theatre School and they say quite clearly up front that what we teach is a Western form of theatre. We give you the skills to be able to become a theatre practitioner. If you want to become an artist, that’s your own journey.

AB: That does not include intercultural skills?

MC: No, not at all.

AB: One would assume living in Canada that they could be of use.

MC: An interesting tension came up in my year, in speech training and learning dialects. My class was the most culturally diverse class they have ever had as far as I can tell. People came from very different backgrounds and couldn’t always assimilate to this very Western form. There wasn’t anything in place, for instance, for a young woman, who came off the reserve to go to theatre school, she was very, very good, and yet they could not help her with that transition at all.

I wanted to note that in our speech classes the dialects we were taught were several types of British and several dialects of American—and in our class we asked: Can we learn other dialects that we may have a chance of using more in Canadian culture?

AB: Accents rather than dialects?

MC: Yes, accents. It came to pass that when we were learning dialects in our speech classes, the people in the class were: myself, another Chinese, a Filipino, south Asians, two Caribbean African Canadians. We were told, yes absolutely, they are totally open to that. The instructors said to us, “we don’t know those so you must go and find those tapes and bring them to us and we will teach them to you.” It was an interesting confrontation. You have to address the curriculum, if you are going to invite a diversity of students to the school. Your curriculum must account for this as well.

AB: Western theatre in itself is quite diverse. European theatre is very diverse, not to mention the tiny bit that isn’t even attached to Europe, called Great Britain.

MC: In fact, that’s probably what we are learning, the British style. We did touch on a few aspects of an Eastern European tradition, but again as modules and not as an over-arching philosophy

AB: Did you have classes of theatre history?

MC: Yes, British theatre history.

AB: Since our special issue is on Ibsen, who was not British and did not write in Britain, I wonder how you came into contact with his works?

MC: We only had one academic class of theatre history, lecture based, which was taught by one man who taught it over three years, and we worked through it historically in terms of modules. I can’t recall an in-depth study of Ibsen at all.
AB: Was it accidental then?
MC: Not at all. I was conducting research, working with a women’s collective at the time. I came upon the way feminism grew in China. Although that’s not the first time I heard of Ibsen, of course, but it was the beginning for me to see the fascinating relationship. What was this play from a Norwegian playwright doing in China? And the confluence of what was happening in China at that time that allowed A Doll House to add the sparks to the fire.

I believe to some extent that A Doll House and Ibsen had the most effect in China than anywhere else in the world just because of its cumulative effects. What was going on politically in China at that time had fed it just enough to be able to make a movement that grew.

JT: My research interest focuses on the intercultural, and because your education predominantly focuses on British and Western canonical texts and acting, how does this affect your work, as you are committed to interculturalism? How does your background limit you?

MC: I can’t be anything but intercultural. I was born to Chinese parents who came from Hong Kong and lived under British Colonialism. They have a particular understanding of what it is to be Chinese. To be here in Canada as immigrants and to grow up in East Toronto, where there were a lot of Chinese immigrants, hence a lot of Chinese influence in our daily lives, I was not even conscious of how big that difference was for the rest of the world until I went to theatre school because my education was such that there were enough people around that I felt that Chinese culture was always a part of me.

AB: In your high school there were many Asian students?
MC: I went to a math/science high school. Seventy percent were East Asian. Even though curriculum-wise, in drama and English, it really didn’t reflect this. But many of our teachers were Asian. I didn’t understand the minority perspective until I was in theatre school. I was in a high school that was predominantly Asian. It will always be a part of me in some combination. Though quite consciously, particularly with China Doll, that is a Chinese story told in a Western style. It is a two act play, a two act structure, with a climax. There is a way to understanding this play that can very much speak to Western audiences in a basic way. That’s often conscious for me. That’s also the form that I trained in. At the same time there are things that people point out to me as being Chinese, which I really don’t ever consciously think about doing.

JT: An example of which?
MC: In terms of motivations of characters which occasionally Chinese people will say, see that’s a motivation of a character that is particularly Chinese. It’s difficult for Westerners to understand. And I didn’t understand that until I got more experience as a playwright. People were saying I don’t understand this motivation that you’ve written as a playwright to take the indirect, for instance, or to choose not to necessarily address something in the moment and instead to address it three lines later. There is a different cultural basis of negotiation. I wasn’t fully conscious of that.
AB: This is something that you developed as a social practice but did not reflect on. It becomes so natural to you that you don’t realize there might be other people who socialize and interact differently.

MC: And I’ve learned that through the people who have read my plays as part of workshops and say, “Why does she take two scenes before she responds to what the other character says?” And to me it’s just because she does. For me that’s an instinctual thing from my culture. On the other hand, I do try to consciously work in a strongly Western way. I know my plays are not easy for people to hear.

AB: Which people do you mean?

MC: I am generalizing in terms of a Western theatre audience who goes to the theatre not wanting to be challenged or confronted. I don’t think my play necessarily reflects those needs. So, for me, I still have something to say and putting it into a Western form, I hope, helps bring people into the theatre.

AB: How would you learn about alternative dramaturgies or forms of performance that are not defined by the British or Western contexts? Would your parents or friends in the Asian Community be able to tell you what the Asian traditions are?

MC: One opinion they share is that the plays are not interesting enough. There is not enough dancing or music. There’s still a need for spectacle.

JT: This is interesting. If we look at Aristotle’s writings on theatre, he was very much against “Opsis”—spectacle, and we can then draw the line from that tradition to the conflict between the different wants out of the piece.

MC: My play to one population can be not Chinese enough and to another population too Chinese.

AB: Do you think on both sides there are certain expectations and stereotypes that play into this?

MC: I have no doubt in my mind. I resist that there are stereotypes in terms of what people expect my plays to be, what they want them to be, wish them to be for funding reasons, what they wish them to be because I came from Canada. I resisted writing for quite a bit because I wasn’t clear about my voice yet. People started to question me about what I was writing. There is an expectation of the immigrant story or the immigrant play coming out of Canada. I was not interested in that. The way my parents came to Canada was not that interesting. They were from a colonial posting and head-hunted by the Dominion of Canada. I had no pressing need to tell it, no desire or instinct.

AB: At the beginning of your play you make suggestions as to how people can approach directing or performing China Doll. They shouldn’t follow a naturalistic style but rather focus on essence, fluidity, and a sense of magic. I was wondering, where did you learn about these elements of a Chinese concept of theatricality, and why did you put it into a contradiction with naturalism?

MC: I work very much from imagery. Very often, before I have a full idea of a play, an image strikes me—a physical image from a magazine or from my imagination. I know when I write and feel like I’m going in the right place that the imagery is
important to me in terms of inspiration. That should be something that is recognized in the production. That doesn’t necessarily happen with historically based productions. There is a tendency in Canadian theatre where the story is practical, realistic and exactly how it happened. Then why am I in the theatre? I’ll turn on the TV and watch the news. It’s my resistance to that style.

AB: On the one hand, your play deals with the impact of Ibsen on Chinese feminism, on the other hand Ibsen and the concept of realism had a significant impact on modern Chinese theatre. Since you didn’t learn anything about Chinese theatre in your formal education, did you learn about it through family connections?

MC: I have no doubt that growing up in Toronto, I benefited of the culture in Toronto and of so many East Asian immigrants that surrounded my early life. This culture subliminally or subconsciously influenced my aesthetics today. I would not have had the courage or freedom to pursue the arts, had my parents been headhunted by Australia or England for that matter. I grew up surrounded by these communities that allowed my voice to push a little further. I don’t know that I can point to specifics in terms of a sense of how I gleaned what you determine to be a Chinese aesthetics but I think this is a situation where I didn’t consciously know was a Chinese aesthetic, but it was my aesthetic. I do think I’m lucky because of my upbringing.

AB: Do you write Chinese?

MC: No, not very well. Not very many characters at all.

AB: But you have a sense of the involved visuality and musicality.

MC: Very rhythmic too.

JT: I think this comes through in the text with Merchant Li teaching Su Ling how to draw the character for horse and it’s a little unstable. He tells her it’s messy and she says, “No, it’s running.”

MC: And that is the horse! Each of the characters has four little what we call deems in Cantonese, but they were originally the legs of the horse. When they established that writing they drew a picture of a horse first and it evolved and evolved into the character we have today. And that is the imagination that Su Ling still has with it.

AB: The Chinese characters still carry the original realistic element but transform it into an abstract beauty. Chinese calligraphy and theatricality share the concept of visuality, musicality and fluidity. I think, these are elements that one can use in order to communicate with a diverse type of audience. However, music is almost completely missing from your play whereas in Ibsen’s play it has an interesting function.

MC: I wonder, when Ibsen’s play was then read in China, in addition to its political ramifications, how it was read, how it was interpreted. Would it have been interpreted as much more symbolic than what we would normally think of when we read Ibsen’s naturalistic style? Would it have been read more symbolically in China? One of the scenes that kind of got transmogrified from Ibsen to China Doll is the manic dance scene.

AB: Which you connect to the Cinderella myth.
MC: Playing with putting on a costume and how she ends up in a small fight with Merchant Li.
AB: This is the tarantella dance of *China Doll*.
MC: That scene to me represented for Nora just a kind of release and a break, but for a Chinese culture it would be deathly, deathly embarrassing to have that happen. To have Nora lose it would be an embarrassment for everyone involved. This loss of control. That was a connection I just started to realize. I was inferring an understanding of how the Chinese community over this time period would respond to Ibsen. Were they responding to the naturalism? Yes, dramatically there were influences after that.
AB: In the early days of Chinese Ibsen productions there were all male casts. Just imagine how naturalistic a male Nora is. That is probably the truest way, I think, of performing her because the play presents a male fantasy of female emancipation. In the discourse about Ibsen and specifically regarding Chinese feminism, you introduce the revolutionary Chinese heroine Qiu Jin.
MC: I was trying to find relevant things that Su Ling would have also read that might have incited her and emboldened her. Qiu Jin seemed an obvious choice in that way to have a woman that, prior to Ibsen's influence in China, had made a similar decision to Nora's to leave. She examined her life and recognized she had to go, leaves for Japan, studies bomb-making and sword play, and dresses like a man. She comes back to China and starts a journal about women's studies. She was beheaded for her work. She seemed pretty inspirational to me. People must have thought she was mad.
AB: You've introduced her as a point of reference. As a real existing person she provides a documentary aspect as Laura Kieler does in Ibsen's play.
MC: It was important to me to include Qiu Jin, because I got the sense in workshops with *China Doll* people drew the conclusion that when the Chinese got the Western play then the women became emancipated in China. This reaction was very simplistic. It was important to me to give a nod to what was already happening in China prior to Ibsen so the audience would know that when Ibsen arrived that, yes, it had an enormous effect, but it was fueling a fire that was already going. I also resist the notion that when both Su Ling and Nora leave that everything is okay on the other side of that door. All the signs point to the fact that it will not be okay. All of the economical, political, sociological signs in my play and in *A Doll House* point to the fact that, even though she has to make that choice, what is on the other side of the door is not going to be good news for her. The same goes for Qiu Jin as well.
AB: What is the meaning of the title *China Doll*? On the one hand it links to Ibsen's *A Doll House* and the Chinese perception of it. In Toronto, I’ve noticed that there is a pub called China Doll. I wonder if there were other connotations of the term.
MC: The China Doll is a sexually exploitive stereotype of a submissive Asian woman who will serve you hand and foot, who is sexually submissive, but will also be a dragon lady in the bedroom.
AB: It is used as a chauvinistic expression but you reverse this meaning and explore the potential of what a china doll is capable of achieving.
MC: The idea of the doll is to be able to put it in your lap and it conforms to your will. You control a doll’s every motion. You still see Asian women in popular culture represented as cute and doll-like in terms of how they are drawn, which translates into fashion and how people dress and how they act with Asian women with voices pitched way up here. I say that is not your real voice. An acceptable Asian woman is expected to be quite cute and this is “hip” in our modern culture. I resist that. Just because there is a tendency for East Asian women to perhaps be smaller, not all of them but a lot of them tend to be smaller, there is an infantilization that occurs.

AB: The English translation of Ibsen’s play as A Doll’s House chauvinistically focuses on the female character. Yet, Ibsen had a reason to call his play A Doll House. He was thinking of everyone in the house as dolls including the male figures.

JT: It expands beyond the household.

MC: The entire society is structured that way.

AB: Religion produced an important structure in Ibsen’s society. You also talk about religion particularly with the Grandmother, Poa-Poa, who is a Buddhist. She has a close connection to Guan Yin, the goddess of mercy.

MC: I find that many contemporary Chinese who I know are Catholic, or Christian, or United and I go to their house and I find incense. Buddhist culture and Chinese culture have become so entrenched that people consider it Chinese culture and not Buddhism.

AB: Belief in religion seems to be generational in your play. The grandmother is religious. She does not ascribe to other religions like Confucianism, Daoism, even Christianity. She always goes to Guan Yin’s temple. In Ibsen’s play we find references to Protestantism. Unlike Catholicism which still maintains the Virgin Mary as a female symbol of identification, Protestantism eliminated the female reference. Ibsen talks about the patriarchal system found in families, society and religion. In your play you have the grandmother praying to the goddess, while the granddaughter is not religious as a sign of modernity, but worships a modern goddess in the figure of Nora.

MC: Something I’ve also resisted is the notion that women will always make the right choices for other women. In the character Poa-Poa I wanted to illustrate the need of people who are oppressed to oppress the next generation because that’s their understanding of the way the world works. Bringing in the female oppressiveness against another female was strongly pulled in with Poa-Poa that’s not really visible in A Doll House. What I gleaned from the cultural dynamic within the household is that power would lie in female hands to control the next generation and the generation after. Poa-Poa was not, in fact, able to control the next generation—her daughter—which prompted her to try really hard to control Su Ling without understanding why it’s not working.

JT: I think it is a really nuanced reading of power relations and negotiations that show complicity with the patriarchal system. The female figures in the play are not blameless and need to take responsibility for perpetuating the system.
MC: If you’ve known all your life that your worth was in the size of your feet, then that is something you are going to perpetuate and no one is going to take that away, not from you, and not from your descendants. When foot-binding was outlawed there were women who hung on to it as a matter of fashion, a matter of pride. If that’s the only power they had, that’s what they were going to hang on to it, no matter what. That’s the character of Poa-Poa who is the last of that generation who will fight to the death for it.

AB: How did you come up with the names for the characters?

MC: Poa-Poa is grandmother, literally, in Chinese. Su Ling’s original name was Xiao Ling and no one could say it. Su Ling came after that to anglicize that. My plays do not use very much Chinese language because I find the switch in the tongue too difficult for myself. I also find it jarring on the ear to hear a mandarin word in the context of an English sentence. In my next two plays, I actually prefer anglicized words and pronunciations because it’s an English language play. Poa-Poa, Su Ling, Ma Ma is understandable, Ming, Merchant Li are all easy enough to say. And there is also a tradition in the Chinese language that you identify yourself because there are so few names so it becomes Merchant Li. Like Smith in the English language, Blacksmith.

JT: I believe that everything we write speaks a lot about who we are. It is often autobiographical. How does this play speak to who you are as a Chinese-Canadian living in Toronto?

MC: The contemporary aspect of being a modern women and yet feeling the patriarchy strongly, although we’ve apparently achieved equality. I’m not sure if it’s in the play’s notes, but when I went to see the exhibit at the Bata Shoe Museum, *Every Shoe a Lotus*, I was looking at the shoes. I can’t believe these shoes. They’re incredible, so tiny and yet so beautiful and exquisite. I was staring at them as was the woman behind me. We were talking about the shoes and how some of them were worn, which meant that they were worn outside, there was mud on them. We talked a lot about what that meant for women to have their feet bound, what that meant for female culture in China at that time. It was quite extraordinary. We both agreed that it was oppressive to women. She left me there and went off to look at another case in the museum. I heard her walk away “tick tick.tick tick tick”. I turned and she was wearing six inch stiletto heels. I thought to myself that she did not necessarily see the parallel there.

AB: To watch the symbols of Chinese women’s oppression.

MC: And have a conversation about them.

AB: And still feel emancipated and fashionable in her stilettos, which are, in fact, inherently similar to the objects she saw.

MC: Those parallels continued as we were working on the play. One thing we started to work on was what it means to have the gait, the walk, of a woman with bound feet. How did they walk? We worked with a movement coach who said if your feet were bound, you had to balance on this. As we started to walk, we looked at the way we walked. Our asses were out, our chests were forward, and we looked as if we were walking on teetering, tottering high heels. So we were creating the same infantaliza-
tion of a helpless female tottering down the street. When we went into production for the show we needed to create the look of bound feet. We went to Peking Opera culture to do that, because they have men representing women with bound feet. They have very, very high heels. They hide the heels with the pant leg and just the point of the foot is exposed creating the impression of bound feet. As a part of this production, as actors with the costume designer we had to go to Yonge Street to buy shoes that were built for strippers and have those sent off to be built as lotus shoes. This contemporary link to the past is one reason why I have created this play.

AB: This play talks about socialized ways of oppression that are based on patriarchal mechanisms in society. We still have them, it’s not over, but the ways they play out in diverse cultural contexts are different. It can be a bound foot, a stiletto foot, mutilated genitals, a bulimic body or an otherwise hidden body. These women play with their health and other women’s health. Your play is about how female bodies are disciplined and controlled in a patriarchal society.

MC: I feel, five years on from the production of the play, that the point was missed by many people because they only saw it as happening in the past, in China. They thought, our lives are much better here in Canada. People missed my political reasons and a contemporary questioning, which, to me, is natural. I sit in the theatre and I ask how this is relevant to me. This is a problem in contemporary Canadian theatre culture where audiences don’t go to plays to arrive at a particular insight or critique. They’re not looking for that so they don’t see it. It’s frustrating. There were contemporary reasons for doing this play.

AB: For example?

MC: Nora’s forging of the signature, the relationship, for me, was the economic burden that the character felt which relates to Su Ling. In Su Ling’s head she knew that it rested upon her to make a marriage to ensure the fortunes of her family as small as it was. It rested upon her feet to ensure her family’s future. This is a relationship that I feel both characters, Su Ling and Nora, share. In their family, they both felt the need to shoulder their share of the economic burden.

JT: How is the issue of bound feet problematic in terms of audience and/or critical reception as it is a traumatic cultural memory?

MC: It was not problematic, politically, from a western media perspective because it was a known issue that is acknowledged and studied. In fact, the problem arises from the Chinese media side. Certainly, I was approached by someone from the Chinese community, after a reading of the script prior to its production, who told me that I shouldn’t talk about this and there was still a lot of shame in Chinese culture because it had been propagated for so many years. I didn’t feel that there was a resistance of the issue, but, more problematically, an exoticization of the issue.

JT: How do you deal with that? How do you write the story of someone who is removed from you in time, place, and culture without exoticizing? And how do you combat that perception that is laid upon it by the audience?

MC: I don’t know. The play itself exists in an insular dramatic form that stays in that
time period. In my next play, I knew I must have a contemporary resonance present on stage, or the audience may miss it. I couldn’t answer to that in China Doll. I certainly wasn’t conscious of it until afterwards. I don’t think the audience really understood the contemporary aspects. It’s difficult because you can never dictate how an audience is going to perceive the play. You can only give them clues and lead them to it. What was suggested earlier was that when doing the play if the audience could see the mechanism of the actors wearing high heels to be able to mimic the appearance of the lotus shoes, then there is a visual and clear way of drawing the contemporary links.

AB: I’d like to come back to the issue of shame in relation to colonialism. The practice of bound feet has to be seen within the context of the feudal Chinese society where it started out as a practice of the upper class, which then filtered down to lower strata of society. It was not a general Chinese custom, because non-Han Chinese ethnicities would not follow this tradition and physically working women could not afford immobility. They had to be the mobile servants of the immobile, but better off, women.

MC: But they often took the fashion of the wrapping of the feet, but not binding. They could take what they could to be fashionable.

AB: The introduction of Ibsen into Chinese culture is linked to western imperialism. Without imperialism, perhaps women would continue to bind their feet, master their pain, and take pride in their appearance. The play takes place in Shanghai, which is symbolic considering the city’s western roots. Opium addiction, as well as a specific Western discourse of women’s liberation, is linked to practices of colonialism. Christian missionaries, who are not exactly well-known for their interest in gender equality, arrive in China. Here the concept of shame comes into the picture, a shame that aims at oppression and not at liberation neither for women nor men. This is an aspect that very well translates to Canadian history and society. How does China Doll deal with this problem?

MC: I think shame is propagated through the collective. You don’t feel shame if you are an individual on your individual track if you know you are making your choices, or if you believe you are making your choices. The shame comes from when you are still connected to a collective that has a set of expectations.

JT: I tend to agree with you because if you are an individual you tend to eschew societal beliefs and pressures.

AB: That’s an illusion.

MC: There is a connection for me. Shame is a large part of Chinese culture. When in that collective, you are responsible. In Canada that translates to our responsibility of how the Chinese are perceived in Canada.

AB: I think the Catholic shame is based on a tradition of shame while bound feet are based on a tradition of pride. Both shame and pride, of course, are means of oppression. However, in China foot binding became a tradition of shame only under certain conditions which involve the practice of colonialism and the modern idea of
progress. Modernity creates the concepts of backwardness and barbarism in order to insist on its superiority. Western modernity linked the concept of shame to that of “backwardness”. And if you don’t want to be considered as “uncivilised” you better feel ashamed of certain parts of your culture.

MC: In particular, Canada with an immigrant population that is trying to establish itself there is a really strong need for the perception of the Chinese community to project itself as wealthy, successful, and progressive. I wonder if it’s particular for an immigrant culture their desire to establish themselves and affirm their position in Canada. Anything that would detract from advancement and image is seen as threatening and shameful.

It’s interesting that we come back to the immigrant culture in Canada. To me the play is Canadian, because it speaks from the cultures that are in me, I am Canadian. It also speaks to a particular Chinese culture and it speaks to a particular education in terms of the dramatic form it takes. I am a child of immigrants and it comes back to that.

**Works Cited**


Chang, Shuei-may. *Casting of the Shackles of Family: Ibsen’s Nora Figure in Modern Chinese Literature 1918-1942*. New York & Washington: Peter Lang, 2004.


Notes

1. “The word cahoot comes from the word for a small cabin, either the French cahute or the Dutch kajuit. Thus, to be in cahoots with someone means, literally, to live with someone in a confined space, implying close cooperation” (Cahoots Theatre Projects: 2009). The company is located in Toronto.

2. This production was part of the Luminato Festival in Toronto in 2008. “Sanctuary Song, an opera for all ages blending opera, dance and theatre together. Based on a true story it follows an elephant on her way to a sanctuary in the hills of Tennessee” (Thestar.com: June 4, 2008).

3. In 1918 Hu Shi wrote his famous essay “Ibsenism” which on the political and social level also influenced the Chinese May 4th Movement (1919). Hu Shi’s play The Greatest Event in Life, which is a sini-cised one-act comedy adaptation of A Doll’s House, is considered to mark the beginning of modern spoken drama play writing in China (Hu 1-9).

4. 1907 is in fact regarded as the year in which the modern Chinese spoken drama was first established by male Chinese students in Japan.

5. For information regarding the play and the production details see Chan 1-4, 11-12.

6. The conversation took place on December 30, 2008 between Marjorie Chan, Jacqueline Taucar and Antje Budde. Jacqueline Taucar transcribed our conversation for us.