an *active audience* guide to indigenous Chinese theatre
Known as Xiqu (pronounced like ‘she chew’) in Mandarin Chinese, it encompasses over 300 separate forms of theatre, each native to a particular part of the country and based in the language and music of its home region. Xiqu performers are among the most diversely and highly skilled performing artists on the planet, rigorously trained in song, speech, acting, dance, acrobatics, and martial arts, and able to perform these skills in combination with one another.

A very brief history of this diverse and complex performing art at UH Mānoa.

**XIQU: indigenous Chinese theatre**

**12th Century**
The oldest forms of Xiqu date from the 12th century or earlier, with roots going back at least to the time of Confucius.

**Late 18th Century**
Jingju originated in Beijing in the late 18th century and is often called Beijing or Peking “opera” in English.

**19th Century**
Since the middle of the 19th century, Jingju has been recognized as the most widespread form of Xiqu in China, and is therefore considered the national form of Xiqu.

**Hawaii**
The relatively young form Jingju is also one of the best-known forms of Xiqu in Hawaii.

**20th Century**
The most famous Chinese actor of the 20th century, Mei Lanfang, performed Jingju in Honolulu in 1930 to full houses and standing ovations.

**UH Mānoa**
UHM professor Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak was trained in Jingju by Madam Shen Xiaomei, a personal student of Mei Lanfang.

**35 Years Plus!**
For more than 35 years, renowned Jingju actor Madam Shen has been collaborating with UHM faculty to teach Jingju performance at UH Mānoa.

**Her Colleagues**
This year, under Madam Shen’s long-distance supervision, her colleagues Lu Gengzhang, Zhang Ling, and Zhang Xigui are training UHM students.

**UHM Training**
Madam Shen and her colleagues teach UHM students to perform Jingju using traditional training methods.

**A Living Art**
Jingju and other forms of Xiqu are living arts, still evolving and developing. They encompass an abundance of theatrical elements - story, acting, dance, song, pantomime, acrobatics, stylized movement and more.

**Famous Roots**
Renowned Chuanju actor Xu Mingchi has joined the Jingju artists at UHM and is teaching students to perform Chuanju.

**Ancient Traditions**
This year the form Chuanju from Sichuan is also being taught. It shares ancient origins with Jingju.
3 Chinese Comedies
Immerse Yourself in the World of Chinese Theatre

SEND IN THE CLOWNS
Traditional Chinese theatre comes to life in these comic gems!

1. TREASURE IN THE CHEST
   A mother, a sister, a brother and the mysterious man in a “treasure” chest.

2. ROLLING THE LAMP
   In a comic battle of wills, a peppery husband is met by his even spicier wife.

3. WHERE 3 ROADS MEET
   A virtuoso fight in the dark ensues at the inn where three roads meet.

IRREPRESSIBLE
The comic character can’t be contained. Wild wonder may ensue.

COMIC
In all things “FUNNY.” Despite life’s challenges, the clown laughs.

FORCE
These characters may be down but they are never out.
FIGHTS & DELIGHTS

Showcasing the vibrancy of traditional Chinese theatre, these delightfully contrasting plays celebrate the *chou* – or comic – character, an irrepressible force of comedy who continually reveals the laughter in life. Filled with convoluted acrobatic contortions, mistaken identities, adorable lovers, and exhilarating battles, this celebration of “the clown” will appeal to audiences of all ages.

Only in Hawaii…

The finest university-based center for the study and practice of Asian theatre.

Widely recognized as the finest university-based center for the study and practice of Asian performance in the world, the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa’s Asian Theatre program has an international reputation that attracts students from Europe, Asia, the Pacific region, and North America. The program’s centerpiece is a yearly training residency, in which UHM students have the exciting opportunity to undergo long-term, intensive training in a traditional Asian theatre form with renowned master artists of the genre, who provide rigorous training in semester-long movement, voice, and instrumental courses, as well as individualized instruction in the performance of specific roles and instruments.

This year…CHINA. Like never before. Come and explore the grand theatre tradition of *xiqu* – indigenous Chinese theatre. Come celebrate the universal language of laughter.

“A clown is like aspirin, only he works twice as fast.”
~Groucho Marx
In Jingju there are four main categories of roles: male (sheng), female (dan), painted face (jing) and clown (chou). Special voice and acting techniques are used for each role category.

**Sheng**

Younger sheng characters usually are quite dignified, and speak in a voice that goes back and forth between normal, fairly low pitch and very high pitch—like that of a teenager who’s voice is changing!

**Dan**

Young dan characters speak in a very high voice at all times, making them seem sweet and young and vulnerable. But older dan characters use strong, lower pitched voices that give them dignity and indicate wisdom.

**Jing**

Jing characters have elaborate painted faces that exaggerate their facial expressions, and booming voices to match. They look and sound very large, and have very large emotions as well!

**Chou**

Chou characters have the most natural voices, and regularly step right out of the play to talk directly with the audience. They are by far the least dignified characters, throwing themselves into whatever is happening, often with gleeful delight!

Want to dive deeper into xiqu role types? Check out this chapter: [Link]
The *jinghu* is a two-stringed fiddle (*huqin*), the most important one in Jingju. It has a horsehair bow that passes between the two strings, and presses against one or the other as it is bowed back and forth. The *jinghu* is made of bamboo and produces a piercing, high-pitch that is amplified by the snakeskin-covered cylindrical sound box. It is held upright on the musician's knee.

The *erhu* is another type of two-stringed fiddle (*huqin*). It is made of wood and has a hexagonal sound box. Like the *jinghu*, the sound box is covered in the front with snakeskin, and the long thin neck has a tuning peg for each of the two strings. The *erhu* supports the *jinghu*, providing a deeper, more mellow sound. Both of these fiddles are used in Chuanju as well as Jingju.

The *bangu* is a drum made from a solid piece of wood that is hollowed out in a funnel shape, with only a small hole at the top covered by a leather skin, and a wide-open bottom. The drum sits in a wooden stand and produces a sharp, piercing sound when hit in the center over the hole. The leader of the orchestra plays the drum and conducts the orchestra though sound and drumstick signals, while the other musicians follow these cues.

The *luo* are gongs made of brass that come in many different sizes. Larger *luo* (*daluo*) are held by a rope handle and struck with a stick that has a padded head. They produce loud, sonorous, intense sounds. Smaller *luo* (*xiaoluo*) are held by the upper edge of the outside rim and struck with the side of a fairly wide stick. They make clear, melodious, bounding sounds. The gongs are used to play percussion patterns that punctuate action and provide the rhythms and tempos for the character's thoughts and feelings.

The orchestra leader keeps the tempo for singing with the *ban*, a clapper made of two pieces of wood, one twice as thick as the other. The pieces are joined by a cord at the top and supported by the musician's thumb when played. The orchestra leader swings one piece out and up, and then catches it with the other when it falls back down, producing a sharp rhythmic sound that marks the accented beats of the songs.
THE PLAYS

1. TREASURE IN THE CHEST (Gui Zhong Yuan, a jingju play)
When Yulian’s older brother goes on a trip with their mother to arrange a marriage for her, a young man arrives and persuades Yulian to protect him by hiding him in the family clothes chest. But brother returns first and is scandalized to find his sister alone with a young man. He confronts their mother with this problem when she returns, but in the end, the family chest has actually produced a treasure, not a scandal.

2. ROLLING THE LAMP (Pi Jin Guen Deng, a chuanju play)
Pijin’s “hot and spicy” Sichuan wife has had enough of her husband’s idleness. With the help of her daughter, she determines to punish the errant Pijin, compelling him to perform increasingly humiliating tasks while balancing an oil lamp on his head. The wily husband turns these punishments into spectacular acrobatic feats, playfully sparring with his better half.

3. WHERE THREE ROADS MEET (San Cha Kou, a jingju play)
Two clowns escort a bravura military general to his death, stopping overnight at an inn before completing their deadly deed. A brave warrior follows in secret to protect the general. The innkeeper and his clever wife side with the general and aim to protect him too, but mistake the warrior for a villain out to kill the general. A virtuoso fight in the dark between the innkeeper and the warrior therefore ensues, and the bravura hero himself arrives to set things right.
What is Xiqu?

indigenous or traditional “theatre of song” that dates back at least 1,000 years

In present day China, there are two main types of theatre – Xiqu or traditional Chinese theatre (literally “theatre [of] song,” sometimes called Chinese “opera” in English), and Huaju or Western-style theatre (literally “speech-drama”). Huaju is relatively new, originating in the first decade of the 20th century, and serves an audience composed primarily of urban intellectuals. But Xiqu, which currently consists of over three hundred separate theatre forms, has a history dating back at least a thousand years and is the theatre of the general populace.

Xiqu is a living form, still evolving and developing. It encompasses an abundance of theatrical elements – story, acting, dialogue and monologue, recitation, song, music, dance, pantomime, stylized movement and in some plays, acrobatics and martial arts as well. In Xiqu these elements and skills, rather than being present in sequence are synthesized – for instance, performers gesture and move gracefully while singing with the orchestra, and speeches and movements are punctuated and heightened orchestrally.

Two bumbling officers (both comic or chou characters) search for the son of a famous general in Treasure in the Chest. The officers are outside the young girl’s house, but the door and walls to her home are pantomimed, allowing the audience to see both inside and outside the house at the same time.
Jackie Chan’s Official Kid Site LINK

HOW TO BECOME JACKIE CHAN

1. Study Chinese Xiqu
   Jackie’s school was meant to prepare boys for life as a Jingju (Peking “opera”) actor. Chinese theatre is a very special kind of theatre. It includes singing, tumbling, and acrobatics as well as martial arts skills and acting.

2. Become a Movie Stuntman
   Each year many movies were made in Hong Kong and they were always looking for young, strong stuntmen. Jackie took these jobs and soon earned a reputation for being fearless.

3. Make Huge Movie Hits in Hong Kong
   Jackie brought humor to martial arts movies; his first success was Snake in Eagle’s Shadow. It was the first movie that Jackie had a part in making and it was a huge hit!

4. Make Huge Movie Hits in the USA
   Jackie’s first films in the USA flopped, causing him to return to Hong Kong two times, discouraged with his inability to “crack” the American market. However, in 1995 Jackie found success with Rumble in the Bronx. After that came Rush Hour, Shanghai Noon, and Rush Hour 2. Jackie Chan had achieved his dream of being a superstar in the USA.

5. Become a Global Superstar
There is a vast and varied group of performers that can be categorized as CLOWNS.

Silent film comedians like Stan Laurel of Laurel & Hardy fame.

Some African cultures allow for “masked fools” who playfully hurl insults at those in charge.

French mime clown Marcel Marceau was famous for his pantomime.

Bello Nock performs incredible acrobatic stunts in the circus.
Two of the clowns (chou) from *Fights & Delights* playfully entertain with their varied expressions. Click the image above to see this GIF file come to life with different backgrounds. More images and surprises like this can be found at [fightsanddelights.space](http://fightsanddelights.space)
Xigu makeup, with its designs and colors, is rich with meaning. Generally simple designs and dark colors are reserved for noble characters. Crooked makeup designs are for the wicked. Clowns have a patch of white makeup around the nose and eyes.
ROLE CATEGORIES
COLORING ACTIVITY

Can you name these characters?
In English you might recite, “male, female, comic, painted face.”
What about in Mandarin?
Match these drawings to the names in the center. “Lao” indicates “older” person and “xiao” indicates “younger.”

MARTIAL SHENG

YOUNG DAN

YOUNG SHENG

OLDER DAN

CHOU

JING
These drawings were created by Alvin Chan, UHM graduate and company actor with HTY (Honolulu Theatre for Youth). Alvin has also adapted aspects xiqu into his TYA stage writing, including *Five Chinese Brothers* and *Mu Lan*.
Color your dragon and the operators underneath. As in many types of Asian theatre, this dragon puppet allows the audience full visibility of the performers, even when they are ‘manipulating’ a puppet that is meant to appear alive. Typically, the puppeteers underneath the dragon are meant to be seen and often wear brightly colored costumes to match their beautiful beast.

Chinese dragons are often depicted chasing a celestial pearl. While the pearl is sometimes said to represent the moon with the dragons circling the moon, most agree that the pearl ultimately represents wisdom, showing the value placed upon this virtue in Chinese culture.
In Chinese, these words mean good wishes for New Year. Trace the characters. Then write them by yourself. Can you find the characters in this paper cutting?
### Fights & Delights

**TEACHER EVALUATION**

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**Teachers...**

*Please take the time to fill out and send in this evaluation. Your comments help us improve our programming.*

- What was the most valuable part of this experience for your students?
- Is there anything you would change about this experience? If so, what?
- What other kind of programming would you like your students to see at Kennedy Theatre?
- Any further comments? Feel free to email us!
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