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978-0-521-03523-1 - Chinese Theatre and the Actor in Performance

Jo Riley

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This work gives an 'inside' view of Chinese theatre and the actor in performance for the first time. In doing so it also challenges western theatre artists such as Brecht, Grotowski, Barba and Schechner, who have extracted from Chinese theatre elements which might enrich their own theatres. Jo Riley writes from her personal observations of and dialogue with Chinese actors and her first-hand experiences of the theatre world of China in general, none of which were possible before 1980. She uses not only *jingju* (so misrepresented as Peking opera) but also exorcism, puppet theatre and ancient animation rites at the tomb to provide models for exploring the process of creating presence on the Chinese stage.

Each chapter takes one moment from a performance by the *jingju* master Mei Lanfang to show the articulation of the actor's body through metaphorical or actual dissection in training and initiation which releases the life-giving force of *qi* and movement as the manifestation of presence. Riley follows these discrete series of actors' movements and the overall action on stage and uses them to illustrate the essence of Chinese theatre. The book is well illustrated with photographs and diagrams and is accessible to anyone interested in theatre, even those with no knowledge of Chinese or Chinese theatre.

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\* Redrawn by Jane English