

# Based on Stanislavsky - Comparison between American method acting and Chinese acting system

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## Abstract

The article studies how the Stanislavsky system has influenced the performing arts in China and the United States, as well as how it has changed in each nation. Method Acting originated in the US and was based on Stanislavsky's "experiential" approach. The performance style of American theater and film was significantly impacted by the performance system that Lee Strasberg and other American drama educators devised. This technique was based on emotional memory and role substitution. By emphasizing the actor's authentic emotional experience and role substitution, this technique has produced a number of internationally recognized actors, including Dustin Hoffman and Marlon Brando.

The Stanislavsky system was first used in China and quickly gained popularity, eventually forming the mainstay of Chinese performance education. China has developed a distinctive performance technique that incorporates the features of classical opera after decades of investigation and absorption. Performance is now understood in a variety of ways, particularly as a result of Mei Lanfang's methodology. This essay examines the development and distinctions between the Chinese and American performance systems, highlights the challenges of advancing the Method School in China, and suggests that, in light of globalization, collaboration and mutual learning between the Chinese and American performing arts are essential.



Full Text Article



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**Keywords:** Stanislavsky system , method acting, performing, Emotional Experience

## Introduction

Stanislavsky is a world-renowned actor, director, theater educator and theorist, a famous Soviet dramatist, who created a dramatic sensation for the Soviet Union against both China and the United States.

Stanislavsky (1863-1938) systematically summarized the "experience school" drama theory, emphasizing the principle of realism, and advocating that the actor should be immersed in the emotions of the characters. His whole set of drama teaching and performance system, known as the "Stanislavsky System", is one of the three major performance systems in the world, and has had a profound impact on the stage performances of drama, film and television in various countries.

The Stanislavsky system is a drama system that includes systematic expertise in acting, directing, drama teaching, and methods. It is a summary of Stanislavsky's lifelong creative and teaching experience, as well as his pioneer in the field of drama art. Summarizing the experience of the world's outstanding masters at the same time is based on his "organic nature" theory. He believes that human nature has infinite possibilities for development, and it is the living environment that shapes human character. The basis of mutual understanding is also the premise of the actor's incarnation performance. Therefore, Si Shi requires the actor to "start from the self", put himself in the position of "reaching the subconscious through consciousness", and completely incarnate into a character. At the same time, Si Shi attaches great importance to acting skills, and for this reason A set of methods for actor's physique and generation training is proposed. The system does not completely exclude improvisation in performance, and even regards it as a form of expression of actor's creative personality. It is the first time to make dramatic performance art, from actor training. To the stage practice, there is a complete scientific system, which affects the world. (Krause,1996)

It requires actors not to appear on the stage, but to actually exist on the stage, not to perform, but to live. Actors should always be real people on stage. They must obey the logical and organic laws of life, feel, think and act sincerely in prescribed situations. (Sweeney R,2021)

***In general, the Stanislavsky "system" can be divided into three parts.***

The first part, aesthetic principles and theatrical propositions. This part is concentrated in the book "My Artistic Life". In fact, in this book, he concentrated on writing an "introduction" to the "system" to be written in the future.

The second part, "Actor Self-cultivation". This part is divided into two aspects - internal skills and external skills. In his internal skills he created several elements such as concentration, communication, emotional memory, imagination, belief and reality, action and purpose. Among the external skills, he proposed "the development of physical expression, modeling, voice and articulation, language and grammar, speed and rhythm, control and modification, as well as personality, stage charm, moral discipline, etc.". Stein believes that only by mastering these elements can an actor establish a correct internal and external self-feeling and create a vivid stage image, so he must undergo rigorous training. If the actors cannot obtain the same sense of self in real life in the fictional stage time and space, and do not think, act and feel according to the logic of real life, it is impossible to create a living character image.

The third part, "Actors Create Characters". For example, an actor has three stages in creating a character—(1) how to correctly understand the script and the character; (2) how to experience the character on the basis of knowledge; (3) how to embody the character on the basis of experience. At the same time, when creating the characters, Stuart discovered the highest task and the importance of running through actions, inner monologues, subtexts, prescribed situations, physical action

methods, etc. These are the basic principles and methods that make up an actor to create a character. The actor's role creation has transformed from unconsciousness to self-consciousness, from hazy state to sobriety, and from superficial to profound. (PÄTrU C,2008)

When Konstantin Stanislavsky toured the United States with his famous Moscow Art Theater (MAT) in the early 1920s, he opened the doors to his now famous system that became the basis for American actor training(White, R,2011) , From Moscow to New York. New York Adopts Stanislavsky.The system spread slowly in the United States, and a new concept was derived: Methodology.

The "Method School" is a genre of drama film and television performance that emerged in the 1930s in the United States. They took the Russian "Stanislavsky System" as the starting point for exploration, and took the contemporary American society, American culture and American drama as the realistic foundation, and performed a large number of plays. , film and television practice, on this basis, a relatively systematic performance theory system and actor training methods have been formed, the "Stanislavsky System" has been revised and developed, and a unique American performance method and style have been created. From the 1930s to the present, "method school" performance not only fundamentally innovated the appearance of American drama film and television performance, but also had a profound impact on European and even the world's drama film and television performance.

In the 1940s and 1950s, "Methodists" introduced Tennessee? Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire," "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," Arthur? Miller's "All My Sons", "Death of a Salesman" and other landmark drama works in the history of American drama have made two contemporary American drama masters except O'Neill, and promoted the American national drama to become independent. and mature. "Methodist" performances became the mainstream of American theater performances. The "Method School" performance has also had a great impact in the field of film, and has cultivated a large number of outstanding film performance artists for the United States. As early as the 1930s and 1940s, the famous movie star John? Garfield became the "spokesperson" of the "Methodists" at Horama. In the early 1950s, the "Methodist" director Ilya? Kazan took Malone? Brando, Eva? Mary? "Methodist" actors such as Sente were pushed to Holamar, and the influence of "Methodist" in film performances was increasing day by day. In the 1960s and 1970s, the four talented actors Dustin? Hoffman, Al? Pacino, Robert? De Niro and Jack? Nicholsons are all "method" actors. They swept away the false and artificial traditional performance style of Holamar almost overnight, and presented a series of real images of ordinary people on the screen.In the 1970s and 1980s, "method school" performances reached their heyday. During this period, the most influential screen images on the American screen were almost all shaped by "method school" actors.( Hobgood,1967)

The Method School mainly digs out the complexity of human nature and human heart through the external limbs and expressions of actors.It requires actors to maintain the same mental state as the characters in front of the camera and behind the scenes.

*At the same time, China had a very different influence*

As early as the 1930s and 1940s, Zhang Min, Zheng Junli, Huang Zuolin and other old artists and scholars in the fields of drama, film and translation began to translate and introduce Stanislavsky's "system" according to different versions such as Russian, English and Japanese. " of various works. Except for "MY LIFE IN ART" translated by Qu Baiyin and "An Actor Prepares" (Part 1) translated by Zheng Junli, which are relatively complete, the rest are relatively scattered and not organized. In 1935, Mr. Mei Lanfang went to the Soviet Union to visit and perform. This was a historic meeting between the two great drama masters from China and the Soviet Union (Russia), and was warmly welcomed by the Soviet government and Stanislavsky himself. Mei Lanfang's performance was hailed by Stanislavsky as "regular free action", (TIAN, M, 2020) breaking free from naturalistic performance methods. Mr. Mei Lanfang has absorbed the rich nourishment from the experience school from the Stanislavsky "system". This is the first contact and academic exchange between Chinese opera artists and Stanislavsky , which is deeply engraved in the history of drama in China and the world.

In the early 1940s, the "system" was identified as the basic textbook for the National Academy of Arts to study performance and directing methods, because it was the only advanced academic theory considered to be socialist in nature. Looking back at the present, the understanding of Stanislavsky's "system" at that time was still relatively superficial, and there were even mistakes in understanding. It was not until the Chinese government hired a large number of Soviet experts to teach in China that they truly understood, understood, and mastered the true meaning of the "system"—a model of realism, a thorough experience school! Stanislavsky's students and well-known director educators and so on, they successively gave lectures at the Shanghai Theater Academy and the Central Academy of Drama, and directly spread Stanislavsky's "system". Dramatists from Beijing, Shanghai, and even all over the country flocked to study devoutly, try to imitate them, and regarded Stanislavsky as the supreme "God" in the drama world, a sacred and inviolable idol. It was not until 1962 that Mr. Huang Zuolin published the article "On the "Drama View" at the Guangzhou Conference, and put forward the point of view that the phenomenon of the "system" of the only one should be broken, which caused a great shock. He said: "The expression method of this 'fourth wall', which attempts to create an illusion of life on the stage, is only one of the many expression methods of drama... But people who are engaged in drama in our country seem to think that this is the only way to create drama. In this way, we are completely constrained and severely limit our creativity." This sentence can clearly be seen as dissatisfaction with the phenomenon of Stanislavsky's "system" and "uniqueness". Because the climate of contention had not yet formed at that time, it did not cause greater repercussions. But in the early 1980s, the theater world paid more attention, and a heated debate between "freehand drama view" and "realistic view of drama" was launched. The details of the debate are not discussed here, and will be written on a separate topic. But in the debate, it is mentioned that there are "three major systems" in our country's theatrical performance methods. The three systems of Stanislavsky, Brecht and Mei Lanfang. In order to promote his experience school and achieve the effect of artistic fidelity, Stanislavsky advocated that the "fourth wall" between the performances must be constructed on the stage to make the actors "lonely in public"; while Brecht's expressionists believed that, This "fourth wall" should be torn down without hesitation, so that actors can enter and play freely; however, the

Mei Lanfang School believes that there is no "wall" in the art of opera, so there is no need to tear it down, because the characters live in freehand brushwork. virtual time and space.

## **Method Acting**

Method Acting is an innovative performance system that originated from the performance theory system of the Russian drama master Konstantin Stanislavski. It was introduced to the United States in the early 20th century and gradually evolved into a unique performance genre. Method acting was developed and innovated in the United States by acting teachers such as Lee Strasberg and Sanford Meisner. It emphasizes that actors can achieve a real and natural performance effect through deep emotional experience and in-depth understanding of the role.

It brought new performance concepts and techniques to Chinese actors. The following are some specific influences of American method performance on Chinese performing arts:

### ***1. Emphasis on role substitution and emotional experience***

While the method school stresses that actors understand the role and express inner emotions through personal emotional experience, the traditional Chinese performance system places greater emphasis on external performance skills and relies on external means like body and voice to shape the role. After the 1980s, this idea was progressively brought to China, giving Chinese actors additional ways to explore their inner feelings and giving their performances a more delicate and realistic feel. To achieve more authentic emotional expression in the performance, many Chinese actors started to feel the emotions of the character by meditating, thinking back on their own experiences, etc.

### ***2. Encouraged performance education reform***

Some art institutions started introducing pertinent courses to reform traditional performance education as a result of method performance's popularity in China. For instance, renowned performance schools like the Beijing Film Academy and the Central Academy of Drama progressively incorporated the theories and methods of the method school into their curricula. This allowed students to learn performance while mastering traditional techniques and comprehending the Western emotional experience school's performance methods. The next generation of performers may now train with both skills and emotions thanks to this pedagogical innovation, which enhances the performance's total depth and diversity.

### ***3. Impact on the manner in which films are performed***

The performance style of Chinese cinema is especially influenced by method performance. Chinese films went through a period of experimentation and invention from the late 1980s to the 1990s, during which time many filmmakers and actors attempted to portray the characters' inner lives in a more organic and genuine manner. The actors' performances in the films of directors like

Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige are more realistic and less overdone, mostly due to the idea of method acting. The actors give the spectator a better connotative image of the character through more nuanced emotional expression, which improves the film's artistic expression.

#### ***4. Enhanced actors' creative approaches***

Chinese performers have started to focus on the performance process rather than merely the outcome since the advent of method performance. When preparing for a role, many actors invest a lot of time in character research, delving deeply into the role's life history and even attempting to live the lifestyle. In order to portray the everyday life of the countryside more authentically and naturally on television, actors who play farmers, for instance, will spend some time living in the rural. The performers' creative process is enhanced by this in-depth knowledge of the character's life, and the performance gains more legitimacy and appeal.

#### ***5. facilitated the expansion of performing genres***

China's performance style has expanded in diversity as a result of method performance. Traditional opera, which was more externalized and formulaic, had a significant influence on China's performance system in the past. More distinct performance styles have arisen as a result of method acting, which has caused many actors to focus on the characters' inner lives and unique expressions. In addition to being mirrored in films and television shows, this varied performance style is also frequently employed on the theatrical stage, bringing new life to China's performing arts.

The modernization of performing education, the creativity of Chinese actors in emotional experience and role creation, and the enhancement of performance style and meaning have all been facilitated by the effect of American method acting on Chinese performing arts. China's performing arts are facing both new chances and challenges as a result of the blending of Western and Chinese performance ideals in today's globalized society. Method acting offers a fresh approach to the growth of Chinese performing arts and expands the opportunities for producing Chinese performers. This performance approach will become more popular in Chinese performing arts as Chinese performers learn more about method acting.

### **Statement of Problems**

Under this topic, I need to solve the following problem

1. How did Stanislavsky's impact on China and the United States differ in history?
2. Is the American method school guided by the experience school still applicable to the present?
- 3 Does China still need the Stanislavsky system after Mei Lanfang's system is formed?
- 4 Both China and the United States have been influenced by Stanislavsky's system. Why is there such a big difference between the film and television drama industry and actors' acting skills in today's era?

### ***Further Objective for China***

- 1.Understanding Chinese and American performance systems is influenced by Stanislavsky's historical context.
- 2.The importance of the American method to the sublimation and development of the performance system, insisting on a scientific performance system to treat different styles
- 3.China should continue to adhere to Stanislavsky's system, add its own innovations, add national characteristics, and keep pace with the times in the inheritance and development of traditional opera.
- 4.Find the gap between China and the United States in performance, the gap between the film and television industry, strengthen mutual cooperation and exchanges, learn more experience, recognize shortcomings, learn with an open mind, and promote the innovative development of film and television drama performances.

### **Conclusion**

The Stanislavsky system plays an important role in Chinese performance and directing. The overall teaching of acting and directing in China is deeply influenced by the "Stanislavsky System", whether it is to follow the direction or just for basic training. In the syllabus, the arrangement of the "Stanislavsky system" is regarded as an important part. Under the influence of Stanislavsky's system, the director's teaching has established its own clear teaching structure. In the specific performance practice, the influence of Stanislavsky's system is also confirmed by the stage practice of many famous contemporary performance artists. (Jiang, H,2019)

The "method school" performance theory was developed on the basis of Stanislavsky's performance thought, and the "Stanislavian system" had a fundamental impact on the dramatic performance of the entire twentieth century. How could the "method school" be able to Turn this world-renowned Russian performance system into a unique American performance method, and it also has surpassed performance in film performance. Through comparison, we can understand the forefront of the innovation and development of the system, and can help us with the insufficient performance and acting skills. Providing better help can make cooperation and exchanges more convenient, make long-term progress in the performance industry, and have a significant impact on actors and performing arts careers.

### **Acknowledgment**

All contributions of the third parties can be acknowledged in this section.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14224217>

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