Rerouting *King Lear* in a *Jingju* Actor’s Reminiscence:

Wu Hsing-kuo’s *Lear Is Here*

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*Jingju* actor and director Wu Hsing-kuo’s (*吳興國*) *Lear Is Here* (2001) is a 90-minute solo performance adapted from Shakespeare’s *King Lear* and performed in *jingju* style. In this performance, he alternately performs 10 male and female characters including himself in *jingju* role types of *sheng* (male), *dan* (female), *jing* (painted face), *mo*, and *chou* (clown) in search of dual identities. This paper will investigate Wu’s performance in *Lear Is Here* from three directions: First, how Wu subtly combines Shakespearean dramatic tension and psychological complex, his versatile *jingju* performing styles, and Brechtian alienation effect in developing his unique artistic flair? What are at stake of such an eclectic performance? Second, in the rooting and re-routing of both Shakespearean plays and *jingju* acting style where Wu Hsing-kuo meets *King Lear*, how Wu articulates the meticulous details of both source culture and target culture while at once extracting them out of context to interweave and re-articulate them into an eclectic intercultural theater? Third, investigating the cultural exchange, birelours, audience reception, and production mode of the work, the author will try to do away with the “authenticity” or “representativeness” of either the East or the West, but explore the possibilities of the hybrid theater in search of alternative aesthetic and emerging performance genre.

Keywords: *King Lear*, Shakespeare, *jingju*, intercultural theatre, Contemporary Legend

Introduction

This article will focus on Taiwan’s *Jingju* actor and director Wu Hsing-kuo’s (*吳興國*) solo performance of *Lear Is Here* (2001), an adaptation from Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, to investigate his self-reflexive performance in search of dual identities. We will first discuss how Shakespearean plays have been politicized and depoliticized on Chinese stage and then contextualize Wu’s aesthetics and politics of *King Lear* in terms of intercultural theater as well as in the milieu of Taiwanese nationalism versus Chinese nationalism. Furthermore, we will explore how Wu utilizes his performance of *King Lear* as an reflection on his life-long innovation of *jingju*; how he develops his unique artistic flair in rooting and re-routing *King Lear* in the eclectic theater combining Brechtian alienation and his versatile *jingju* techniques; what are at stake in this kind of performance? Finally, we attempt to go beyond the dichotomy between the East and the West to explore the possibilities of the hybrid theater in search of alternative aesthetic and emerging performance genre.

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De/politicizing Shakespeare on Chinese Stage

Over the past century, the adaptations and studies of Shakespeare plays in China have been paradoxically intertwined with modernity and politics. Shakespeare plays were introduced into China in the late 19th century by the Western colonizers and missionaries in the form of English spoken drama sporadically performed in English schools founded by catholic or protestant churches. Turning to the early 20th century, up to the May Fourth Movement in 1919, some popular plays like *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, and *Hamlet* were adapted and staged by liberal students and scholars to promote the liberal thoughts in the wake of modernization, which was considered equivalent to Westernization in many Chinese intellectuals’ eyes. From time to time, the adapted plays were also performed to criticize the corruptive politicians and warlords. For instance, in 1916, as the warlord Yuan Shih-kai usurped the republic to declare himself as an “emperor”, The New Herbal Drama Club (*Yàofēng xīnjū shè*) organized by Zheng Zhengqiu (鄭正秋) staged *The Usurper* adapted from *Macbeth* to ridicule Yuan Shih-kai’s infamous usurpation. The Spring Willow Drama Club (*Chūnlǐ jù shè*) adapted *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* to criticize the oppressive Chinese family and feudalism. However, these Chinese adaptations only roughly sketched the stories of Shakespeare plays for their own improvisation with comments on current social and political situations (CHEN, 1983, p. 56). After the May Fourth Movement, Shakespeare plays were sporadically adapted by Chinese local opera troupes like *jingju* (Beiing opera), *yueju* (opera in the area of Shanghai City, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang provinces), *chuanju* (opera in Sichuan Province), *huaju* (contemporary spoken drama following China’s theater reform movement in 1919), which mostly sketched the stories for their own acting. Wang Shuhua indicates, from the 1911 Revolution to the May Fourth Movement in 1919, those spoken drama clubs formed by intellectuals and young students adapted Western canons including Shakespeare’s works to promote liberal thoughts and modernization in order to advocate for socio-political changes (WANG, 2000, pp. 321-36).

Similarly, the studies and adaptations of Shakespeare also correspond with Chinese cultural politics. Not until the first translation of Shakespeare’s work, *Hamlet*, by Tian Han (田漢) in 1921, and the following translations by Liang Shiqiu (梁實秋) and Zhu Shenghao (朱生豪) respectively in 1930s and 1940s had there been more in-depth adaptations and studies of Shakespeare plays. From 1950s to 1970s, the studies on Shakespeare plays conformed to the ideologies of Marxism driven by Ideological State Apparatuses in order to be politically correct. Regarding the staging of Shakespeare plays, Li Ruru and David Jiang indicate, from 1949 to 1962, there were only three “acceptable” Shakespeare plays—namely, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*, either romances or comedies—featured in seven Shakespeare performance in Beijing and Shanghai. Due to the external or internal strict censorship, the theater artists avoided performing any play that conveyed political messages or any ambiguous implication of political criticism (Li & Jiang, 1997, p. 101)

During the 1980s, following the end of Cultural Revolution in 1976 and China’s “open door” policy to the West together with Deng Xiaoping’s agenda of “Four Modernizations” proposed in 1984, the adaptations and performances of Shakespeare plays began drawing attention in heralding China’s economic and social reforms and promoting the image of “New China”. In this wave of enacting Shakespeare plays and the Western culture it represented, Shanghai became the center of the theatrical events. As a matter of fact, having long been the city of Western colonization from 1842 to 1945, Shanghai’s history of Shakespeare theater can be traced back to 1902
when *The Merchant in Venice* was staged by Foreign Language and Literature Department at St. John University. Turning to the 1980s, in the wake of globalization and China’s modernization, Shakespeare Festivals were held in Shanghai in 1986 and 1994. In these festivals, playwrights and actors were encouraged to adapt Shakespeare plays either in the form of spoken drama or Chinese local operatic genres (Wang, 2001, p. 130).

The two Shanghai Shakespeare Theater Festivals significantly change Chinese landscape of Shakespeare Theater with the experimental spirits and the emphasis of intercultural performance. Li and Jiang point out, not until the 1986 festival had the traditional Chinese operatic adaptations of Shakespeare plays attracted any attention. Not until the 1994 festival had the productions of Shakespeare in *Huaju* (spoken drama) form taken a bold step from the obsession with the “authenticity” of the Western genre to adapt or abridge the texts to satisfy their own requirements with the adapter’s name printed prominently on the cover of the program. To note Li and Jiang (1997):

> Before the 1994 festival, most productions of Shakespeare in Huaju (spoken drama) form had attempted to reproduce the Western genre by using Western settings, costumes, and makeup, including wigs and false nose. If there were not enough wigs, the performers sometimes had to dye their hair blonde. In order to reproduce Western style, all possible European productions of Shakespeare (productions mounted in the former USSR taking pride of place) were observed, examined, and painstakingly documented. Even the group could not get access to the productions it needed, its members would watch other Shakespeare plays. (p. 95)

**Glocalizing Shakespeare: Adaptation, Cultivation, or Rejuvenation?**

Whether in the form of *huaju* or Chinese local operatic theater, the Shakespeare theater in the two Shanghai festivals make palpable the increasing tendency of adopting elements of western theater traditions for their own productions, which corresponds with the trend of intercultural theater in the wake of globalization. Intercultural performance involves cultural and theatrical translation. Nevertheless, in reality, intercultural performance is often rendered in the asymmetrical power relations between different cultures, especially along the east-west axis of the globe, and hence cannot do away with the blame of cultural imperialism or self-orientation regardless of the director’s and actor’s intentions. Patrice Pavis indicates that the intercultural trend has been reinforced by Western directors of avant-garde theater as they adopt the forms of traditional Asian theater to subvert the realistic tendency of their own tradition, to create a distance and an effect of strangeness in opposition to the naturalistic perception; some borrow the highly codified form from an ancient tradition for an elevated artistic stylization. As Pavis notes, sometimes the result could be a formalism “that fashions theatrical materials for their intrinsic beauty, for a precision in gesture or voice which justifies reference to Eastern theater”1.

Concerning intercultural performance, the asymmetrical power relations and cultural imperialism are not only seen in the western directors’ works, but also reproduced in some Chinese directors’ attitude in discovering the advantages of their own cultural resources through the Westerners’ eyes. Commenting on the trend of the 1980s that many Chinese spoken dramatists eventually turned to non-realistic Western theater and Chinese operas for inspiration, William Sun and Faye Fei indicate that works of non-realistic Western theatre artists such as Brecht, Grotowski, and Dürrenmatt were introduced into China, and hence:

It was largely Brecht, Grotowski and western drama artists’ interest in Chinese and Asian theater that inspired many Chinese spoken drama artists to look back at their own legacies and explore the possibilities of integrating some more expressive styles of sung drama into spoken drama. (Sun & Fei, 1996, p. 189)

Sun and Fei’s comments not only bring up the issue that some Chinese theater artists await Western directors’ assessment to rediscover the advantages of their own tradition, but also explain the rising trend of staging Shakespeare plays in the form of Chinese local operas in the two Shanghai Shakespeare Festivals and other milieus since the 1980s.

Shakespearean adaptation in the context of intercultural theater is like a double-edged weapon, which, on the one hand, might risk conforming Asian theater artists to western directors’ assessment; on the other hand, might allow Asian theater artists to re-invent and re-explore their own cultural heritage from new perspectives. The adaptations of the western canon may provide some western-influenced adaptors, directors, and scholars a medium and platform to reflect their own cultural location and their relationship with Shakespearean plays. To note Lin Ying-nan,

For scholar of Shakespearean studies, once they do away with “the author’s intention” and “the ultimate meaning” of the “works” as emphasized in traditional approaches, how to rediscover “work”, “text”, and “author” in reading and interpretation opens up more possibilities and becomes a challenge. [...] The interpreters have to face the challenge to utilize appropriate interpreting strategies to interpret the “work”, “text” and “author” and related social and cultural phenomena. (LIN, 2004, p. 371)

In particular, in the rooting and routing of Shakespearean works, for some radical and self-aware Asian adaptors and directors, what matters is not the “authority” of the author or the “authenticity” or the works, but to rediscover and innovate their own traditions, to inspire their own creativity and novelty, and to remap their own cultural location through Shakespearean adaptations.

In terms of cultural exchange, Alexander C. Y. Huang points out the paradoxical relationship between Shakespearean adaptation and globalization: Shakespearean works are both the vehicle to disseminate a particular national literature and the beneficiary that has been “glocalized” into the popular culture in different locales in the world (HUANG, 2006, p. 112). Huang’s observation indicates that the “glocalization” of Shakespearean plays in different locales of the world diversifies the performing style of Shakespearean plays, hybridizes the elitist Western canon with local popular culture and hence enriches meanings of Shakespearean plays through cultural hybridization.

Contemporary Legend’s Hybridization of Shakespeare and Jingju

Speaking of the innovation of traditional opera through Shakespearean adaptations, the Contemporary Legend Theater in Taiwan, Republic of China (ROC), the other part of the divided China since the 1949 Civil War, is ahead of their counterparts in the Mainland of People’s Republic of China (PRC) due to their sustaining interests and constant experiments. The group’s experiment began with The Kingdom of Desire, an adaptation from Macbeth, as Wu Hsing-kuo and Lin Hsiu-wei (林秀偉) founded the theater troupe in 1986. Their primary concern of innovating jingju is to attract more young audience to jingju performance. Why are performing artists

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of jingju and other traditional operas losing their audience? How can Shakespearean adaptations help them innovate their own performance? Wang Anqi, a jingju playwright and Shakespearean adaptor, indicates that jingju is more lyrical than narrative, its story and structure are usually loose, and it is often imbued with out-of-date values; all these become barriers for young audience to appreciate jingju (WANG, 1996, pp. 185-198). To complement, the dramatic tension, psychological complexity, and vivid and multi-faceted characterization of Shakespearean plays provide an effective vehicle for innovating jingju. Moreover, for jingju actors, using the trademark of Shakespeare and framing their virtuosity within the stories familiar to western audience will help them promote their works on global stage and international theater festivals. Wu Hsing-kuo’s background equips him well to meet the challenge of innovating jingju through Shakespearean adaptations. In addition to Wu’s solid training of Martial sheng (male) role type of jingju since childhood, both Wu and Lin have been the leading dancers of Lin Huai-min’s Cloud Gate, a prominent modern dance troupe in Taiwan. In creating the large-scale Kingdom of Desire, Wu and Lin successfully combined the dramatic tension and psychological complexity of Macbeth, the performing skills of jingju, and the method of western total theater. The premiere of The Kingdom of Desire drew great attention from within the nation and abroad. For decades, it has been considered a paradigm of innovating jingju through Shakespearean adaptation. From 1990 to 2005, The Kingdom of Desire has made worldwide tours 13 times in important international theater festivals or national theaters.³ For every tour they were generously sponsored by the Republic of China government in Taiwan because like the Cloud Gate, the Contemporary Legend’s worldwide tours of The Kingdom of Desire have been considered a part of the national project in promoting the image of “cultural China” as well as rebuilding national pride after a series of diplomatic and political setbacks following Taiwan’s withdrawal from the United Nation in 1971, its breaking the diplomatic ties with the United States in 1978, and the U. S. recognition of Beijing in China in 1979. Encouraged by the success of The Kingdom of Desire, the Contemporary Legend produced three more Shakespearean adaptations in jingju style, including The Vengeance of the Prince (Hamlet) (1990), Lear Is Here (2001), and The Tempest (2004), among which only Lear Is Here has been comparable in acclaim to The Kingdom of Desire in terms of international popularity and reputation.

King Lear: Wu Hsing-kuo’s Self-reflexive Performance and Solitude at the Crossroad

Despite the prestige and popularity the Contemporary Legend had gained from The Kingdom of Desire, they unexpectedly announced plans to disband their troupe in December 1998, four months after their successful performance in the Avignon Theater Festival in France in August. Such a difficult decision mainly resulted from their financial difficulties and the lack of full-time actors. To produce The Kingdom of Desire, they had to borrow actors from the three army-owned jingju Troupes. However, since 1995, with the rise of Taiwanese nationalism, the three army-owned jingju troupes merged into Guoguang Jinju Troupe, which had to carry the mission of vernacularizing jingju by performing Taiwanese stories of Mazu (Taiwanese goddess), Zheng Chenggong (a Ming-dynasty general who developed Taiwan as a pioneer, also known as Koxinga), and Liao Tian-ting (廖添丁, an anti-Japanese hero). Guoguang Jinju Troupe’s frequent assignments to perform in temple squares, schools, and local communities made it difficult for the Contemporary Legend to borrow jingju actors. Wu’s frustration

³ From 1990 to 2005, the worldwide tour of The Kingdom of Desire includes UK, France, Germany, Spain, Netherland, China, Singapore, Japan, Hong Kong, and Korea. See Lu, 2006, p. 8.
increased as his proposal of a small-scale performance was turned down by Taipei City Government (LU, 2006, p. 202).

In 2000, Wu was invited by Arian Mounishkine to teach the workshop in the Theatre de Soleil. To let the participants understand jingju more easily, Wu utilized a familiar story Lear Is Here incorporating various role types and acting skills of jingju. He produced a 25-minute solo performance Lear Is Here. Praised and encouraged by Mounishkine, he expanded the performance to 90 minutes (LU, 2006, p. 207). Moreover, the participants’ positive response re-kindled his interest in innovating jingju and hence he re-opened Contemporary Legend after he returned Taiwan.

Wu Hsing-kuo’s Lear Is Here is a self-reflexive solo performance in which he arbitrarily selects some vignettes from Shakespeare’s King Lear to display his versatile talents in jingju, to project his ambivalent relationship with his mentor Chou Cheng-rong (周正榮), and to allegorize his quest of a new identity as of a jingju innovator back and forth Chinese tradition and Western avant-garde theater. In the 90-minute solo-performance, he rapidly alternates in playing 10 characters: King Lear, the Fool, Kent, Lear’s three daughters (Goneril, Regan, Cordelia), Gloucester, Gloucester’s two sons (Edmund, Edgar) and the actor Wu Hsing-kuo himself through various jingju role types of sheng (male), dan (female), mo (old male), and chou (clown).

Wu’s Lear Is Here corresponds with what Alexander C. Y. Huang terms as “small-time Shakespeare”. Speaking of contemporary Shakespearean adaptations, Huang notes Bristol’s term to classify them into “big-time Shakespeare” and “small-time Shakespeare”; the former usually entangles with politics and ideologies that cannot do away with colonialism and imperialism, while the latter involves autobiographical performance as well as self-reflexivity of the playwright’s or actor’s identity politics (HUANG, 2006, pp. 114-15). For instance, in Asia, the “small-time Shakespeare” could be found in Zhào Zhìgāng’s (趙志剛) Yueju solo performance “Hamlet in Cemetery” in Shanghai, and Tián Mànshā’s (田曼莎) Chuanju solo performance “Who is knocking at the Door” and “Lady Macbeth” (p. 115).

Crossing the Boundary: Lear Is Here in a Jingju Actor’s Reminiscence

Lear Is Here consists of three acts. In Act I, Wu appears as mad King Lear with disheveled hair and messy beards, stumbling in storm. Wu’s enactment of the mad king is rendered in the role type of mo (old male) with masculine angular movements and deep voice. Howling and weeping, he laments his daughters’ betrayal and his loss of his kingdom and power. For a moment, in a Brechtian “silent scream”, he plucks his own hair and beard. Lear faints and later wakes up, insanely talking to a shoe as if it was his daughter Cordelia, and then he keeps asking a question, “Who am I?” He interrogates his own role:

Lear? Does any know me? This is not Lear.
Does Lear walk thus? Speak thus? Where are
Either his notion weakens, his discerning
Are lethargic... Ha! Waking! It’s not so-
Who is it that can tell me who I am? (Transcribed from King Lear, DVD)

Blaming himself, he falls down again. When he gets up, he removes his make-up and takes off his beard and costume, doing somersaults and revealing himself as the actor Wu Hsing-kuo. Folding his clothes, he bows to the
audience, “I am back to my nature, this breakthrough is more noble than leaving the world”.

Exposing the “constructed-ness” of his role of King Lear and speaking out of his role, Wu reflects his relationship with the role he plays, turning his own performance into a meta-theater interrogating the authenticity of mimesis and representation. Up to this point, Wu employs Brechtian-narration with the alienation effect that distances the actor from the role he plays and also prevents the audience from empathizing with King Lear, compelling them to reflect on an ontological question, “who am I?”.

Back and forth the roles of Lear Is Here and Wu Hsing-kuo, he dramatizes King Lear/Wu Hsing-kuo’s identity crisis. Then actor Wu keeps chanting, “Every inch of my skin is Lear! I have been Lear since childhood. I am destined to be Lear. I come back! The play is about to begin”. Wu recalls the names of his important partners in his jingju career, including Wei Hai-min (魏海敏), the jingju diva who collaborated with him in The Kingdom of Desire, Li Hsiao-ping (李小平) and Ma Bao-shan (馬寶山), who are directors of Guoguang Jingju Troupe and founders of CLT, and so on, which reminds the audience of Wu’s ups and downs from his founding Contemporary Legend to disbanding and then to restarting again. In other words, the double enactment of King Lear and Wu Hsing-kuo enables him to blur the boundary between the fictional world and the real world to foreground the bonding between him and jingju as the actor and art justify and sustain each other’s existence.

In Act II, Wu displays his versatile talents as he alternately plays different characters in three sections: The Fool and the jester Kent’s accounts of King Lear’s tragic fall, the three daughters’ declaring their love to Lear, and Gloucester’s conflicts with his two sons. In Shakespearean plays, a man in power is often self-deceptive while the truth is often revealed by a mad man or a fool. Not until King Lear becomes a mad man has he realized the true nature of his three daughters and seen through those hypocrites and insinuators who cheated to profit from his power. Likewise, it is the fool or the jester who unveils King Lear’ delusion and blindness caused by his own arrogance and negligence. Act II begins with thunderbolt and lightening, and Wu appears as the Fool in clown role type, walking in jingju crouching step (a movement enacted by clown role type), and mumbling to the audience, “The Truth is like a dog hiding in its kennel”. For one moment, the Fool/Wu Hsing-kuo mocks that King Lear unwisely divided his kingdom and territory and gave them to his two evil daughters but expelled the filial Cordelia. For next moment, he addresses to the audience, commenting on Taiwan’s social problem caused by unfilial children’s ingratitude to their parents. He raps from the newspaper about the misery of a father who divided his properties into three shares, giving them to his children. However, the father was abandoned by his children. Being mad and disappointed, the father hired a crane to crack down all the buildings. Compared to Wu’s enactment of the Fool accentuated with Taiwanese accent, his enactment of King Lear’s jester Kent is performed in martial male role type with Sichuan accent.

When playing Lear’s daughters, Wu rapidly changed clothes on stage with his back toward the audience. He performs the evil Goneril and Regan in role type of vivacious dan (Huadan) while Cordelia in role type of virtuous dan (qingyi). When enacting Goneril and Regan’s competition for King Lear’s favor in order to gain more territory or Goneril’s forcing Regan to drink the poisonous wine in order for herself to possess Edmund, Wu rapidly alternated between the two roles by shifting his position or changing props besides differentiating the two daughters through trifle character traits.

Props also aid Wu to distinguish Gloucester and his two sons Edmund and Edgar. Wu uses a bamboo stick as a crutch as he plays the stumbling Gloucester whose eyes were blinded by his illegitimate son Edmund. Moments
later, Wu wields the bamboo stick aloft as a sword when he plays Edmund who schemes to kill his father and brother. Later the stick also aids Wu to render Edgar who pretends to be a beggar to escape Edmund’s search for him. Most amazingly, when simultaneously playing Edgar who escorts his father through various dangers, Wu swiftly shifts back and forth either end of the bamboo stick; for one moment he acts the father singing in low hoarse voice and for another moment he acts the son displaying martial acrobatics. Wu’s enactment of the conflicts and tension between father and sons, as a matter of fact, projects his own ambivalence and tension with his jingju mentor Chou Cheng-rong. Wu recalls his dream which later becomes the motif of father-son conflicts in Lear Is Here:

   I heard the calling of King Lear. Once I had a dream in which my master Chou Cheng-rong was wielding his sword towards me. The scene is reminiscent of that of Gloucester and Edgar, who love each other but pretend not knowing each other. In the play, they finally rely on each other. However, in my dream, I snapped my master’s sword and killed him. My master did not give me any chance to repent. No sooner than I came back to Taiwan had he died (Wu, 2009, p. 92).

As a matter of fact, Wu Hsing-kuo’s tension and conflict with his master Chou Cheng-rong are caused by their different perspectives and outlooks of jingju: Chou insists on preserving the authenticity and tradition of jingju while Wu endeavors to innovate jingju through various kinds of experiments in the hope to attract more young audience to jingju performance.

In Act III, Wu Hsing-kuo/King Lear addresses to his own solitude and confusion, echoing his question, “Who am I?” in Act I. He sang,

   Who am I? I am myself.  
   I am looking for myself! I am thinking of myself.  
   I am looking at myself. I know myself.  
   [..........]  
   I should not be myself; I dislike myself!  
   I am still myself! Am I myself?  
   I want to face myself, I want to find myself. (Transcribed from King Lear, DVD)

Finally, after a series of ontological questions and lamentation, the music fades. Wu Hsing-kuo/King Lear hangs himself. The tragic death of Wu Hsing-kuo/King Lear at the end of the play projects Wu Hsing-kuo’s anxiety aroused by his sense of individual and collective identity crisis. Wu manifests in the 2008 program of Lear Is Here:

   For such an orphan as me, King Lear is a symbol of father. The solo performance reflects my relationship with my masters and the inheritance and destruction of tradition. It symbolizes Taiwan’s political and cultural disintegration, which frustrates people, causing their identity crisis.4

Paradoxically, death leads to crisis and also brings up opportunities for rebirth. At the crossroad where the East meets the West and where the tradition meets the avant-garde, Wu keeps asking “who am I?” and keeps deconstructing Shakespearean plays and jingju while innovating both in various forms of experiments. Breaking through the bottleneck of his performing career, Wu reached another pinnacle. Characteristic of low budget, small-scale, experimental form, and virtuosity, Lear Is Here became popular in international theater festivals and made eleven world tours from 2000 to 2007. His solo performance has won the praise and recognitions from

4 Wu Hsing-kuo, “Q & A about Lear Is Here”, 2008 TSMC Cultural and Arts Festival Program.
well-known directors. Eugenio Barba of Odin Theater remarks, “Opera. You also shook the understanding of Shakespeare” (LU, 2006, p. 13). Ariane Mnouchkine of Le Theatre de Soleil comments,

I am curious about what kind of extraordinary culture could cultivate an outstanding artist troupe such as Taiwan’s Contemporary Legend Theatre (CLT). All these years, Theatre du Soleil has been experimenting a theatre form that could encompass all art elements. What we have been pursuing I see that it has been achieved by the CLT. From the CLT, I see the dream of the theatre of the world. (p. 13)

From One-way Influence to Two-way Flow: Performing Shakespearean Plays in Jingju Style

Commenting on Wu’s Lear Is Here, Alexander C. Y. Huang indicates that it differs from the colonizers’ adaptation because Wu does not intend to assimilate the “cultural other” but to use it as an inducement, a medium, and a frame to explore oneself and to generate dialogue (HUANG, 2006, p. 121). For Shakespearean adaptations to go beyond superficial imitation or mish-mash, the intercultural performance should be rendered on the basis of equal cultural exchange and reciprocal interpretation rather than cultural assimilation. Patrice Pavis indicates that the adaptor should perceive the difference between his culture and the foreign, without setting up hierarchies or attempting to reduce one to the other. This perception of otherness is the condition of any cultural exchange: “Only the experience of one’s own culture and of a foreign culture as different entities and as systems that are perceived as correct within their own domain creates the basis of reciprocal interpretation” (Pavis 1992).

Without doubt, Pavis’ postulation of equal cultural exchange and reciprocal interpretation opens up two-way traffic in intercultural performance.

In the age of globalization, culture travels fast in the always already hybrid space, and the theater audience become more diversified with more cross-cultural experience. Theater and performance are one of the most effective means of exporting Chinese culture to the west, and Chinese adaptation of western canonical plays becomes a vehicle for promoting Chinese performance arts on global stage. Though not without utilitarianism, since 1990, many Chinese and Taiwanese theater artist have been lured by international theater festivals and global market to “innovate” Chinese traditional opera by adapting Shakespearean plays or other western works in order to attract western or multicultural audiences. Though some works are criticized by theater critics as “self-orientalization”, the performance artists have been faced with the unpredictability and challenge of the cross-cultural encounter, and hence become more aware of their own culture and different performance conventions as well. They have to negotiate their positions along the continuum between different source cultures, and the interstices of various cultures would open up more possibilities for them to develop their creative potential. To note Richard Schechner, misunderstanding, broken language, miscommunication, and failed transaction would inevitably occur in intercultural theater, but they should be considered “not as obstacles to be overcome but as fertile rifts or eruptions full of creative potential”. Investigating intercultural performance, we may go beyond the issues of authenticity or the reliability of the mimetic representation. We may generate

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5 From 2000 to 2007, the worldwide tour of Lear Is Here includes France, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, Denmark, Czech, UK, Germany, China, USA. See Lu, 2006, p. 8.
6 Pavis is quotaing Jurij Lotman, Knast als Sprache, Leipzig: Reclam, 1974.
dialogue with the “cultural others” or treat them as travelling companions in search of cross-fertilization. From one-way influence to two-way flow, the introduction, interpretation, adaptation, and transformation of Shakespearean plays not only involve bricolage of techniques, negotiation between different culture and performance conventions but also the choice of culture, the internal structure and the external structure.

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