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Intercultural theatre and Shakespeare productions in Asia

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This chapter examines intercultural theatre in Asia through the lens of Shakespearean productions in India, Japan, the Sinophere theatres of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, and Southeast Asia. As the quintessential western dramatist, Shakespeare has captured the imagination of Asian theatre artists from the beginning of modern Asian theatre, as localized adaptations, as foreignizing translations and productions, and as intercultural hybridization that is performed through the many traditional and folk forms of contemporary Asia.

I. India, by Shormishtha Panja

One of the first things one notes about intercultural theatre is the disappearance of the idea of universal principles and the rescuing of local cultures from the hegemonic homogeneity of globalization. Intercultural theatre cannot avoid discussion of plurality and difference, of socio-economic bases, of transformations brought about by globalization. Intercultural theatre challenges the idea that cultural traditions and artefacts are national property, state or nation specific, that cultures are 'secured by their origins' (Kennedy and Yong 2010: 10) or that borrowings and appropriations cannot but be rampant. Intercultural theatre is often a hybrid of theatre rooted in a specific geographical location with very specific cultural markers, for example *Kathakali*, and one transported from another different culture, such as Shakespeare. The resulting hybrid performance challenges givens of cultural dominance, that is, that the west is dominant and the Asian material feminized (ibid.: 11). Bodies and gestures, and not just words, are crucial here, exploding the myth that performing bodies are pure and authentic cultural essences; the demon of interculturalism is universalism (U. Chaudhuri 2002: 36).

Intercultural theatre also raises the important question of whether cultural identity is fixed or volatile. No one in the audience can completely own an intercultural performance; part of it usually remains unintelligible to all. Intercultural performance underlines the importance of location: disparate responses to the same production depending on one's location are a hallmark of intercultural performance (Phillips 2010: 243; Kennedy and Yong 2010: 12–14). Intercultural theatre reflects 'provisionality, partiality of belonging' that characterizes many spectators in Asia (Kennedy and Yong 2010: 16). It inevitably raises questions of identity.

Just as intercultural performance foregrounds the mobility and circulation of cultures, it also puts the spotlight on the spectator as global tourist. There is, necessarily, a fragmentation of audiences and genres, a fragmentation of univocal national theatre. However, in India, a country that never had a national theatre, this is not a concern.

Intercultural theatre raises questions of the commodification of cultures and of cultural piracy. There are dangers of irresponsible interculturalism. Daryl Chin observes that deploying 'elements from the symbol system of another culture is a very delicate enterprise' and one has to be on guard against 'cultural imperialism' (Chin 2003: 403). The borrowed material should be allowed to speak in its own language; rather than imposing a meaning on it, one should allow meaning to rise naturally from it. The perils are manifold: 'Colonial legacies frame it, economic imbalances complicate it, and orientalist accusations are barbs that Western artists who go this route will encounter' (Daugherty 2005: 67). Similarly, Asian artists face the criticism of pandering to the west. However, through all this disparateness, dangers and difference, the important issue in intercultural theatre remains the human encounter (Pavis 2010: 13).

A vital thing to be kept in mind while discussing intercultural theatre in India is that Shakespeare came to India through a different route from the one taken in Japan, China and Korea. Indians read Shakespeare in English and in translation. His texts are part of the curriculum. He has been used as an educational tool by colonial rulers, often as a means of intellectual manipulation as Jyotsna Singh argues. In India there is not much talk of Asian theatre. Debates in India revolve around caste, community, religion and gender and not about an imaginary Asian community, as Bharucha points out (Bharucha 2010: 255).

Pre-independence Shakespeare on the Indian stage

Indigenous theatrical performance could challenge, consciously or unconsciously and through adaptation, the status of Shakespeare as a marker of universal cultural value; on stage, Shakespeare is not an 'accommodating ideal' (Singh 1989: 458) erasing or eliding all traces of cultural difference. Phillips writes of the political economies of the new Asias challenging the 'bland universality of the Shakespeare institution' (Phillips 2010: 242), but this was happening more than a century ago in colonial India.

Since India is a collection of enormously diverse regional cultures, I shall discuss some of the major regional Shakespeare productions and translations. After a Christmas 1780 performance of *Othello* at the Calcutta Theatre, there were twenty-three productions of Shakespeare, mostly tragedies and romances, in Bengali between 1852 and 1899. Boishnob Choron Addy created quite a stir as the first Indian Othello in 1848 at the Sans Souci theatre. Two famed actor-directors staging Shakespeare in Calcutta in Bengali were Girish Chandra Ghosh (1844–1912) and Amarendrananth Dutta (1876–1916). While Ghosh preferred remaining true to the original and lost the audience's interest quite speedily, Amarendranath preferred adaptations. His *Horiraj* (c. 1896), an adaptation of *Hamlet*, proved quite popular, while Ghosh's expensive *Macbeth* (1893), 'in the European style', bombed.

Durlabh bandhu (Rare Friend, 1880), a translation of *The Merchant of Venice* by Bhartendu Harish Chandra, the father of modern Hindi theatre, was the earliest example of Shakespeare in Hindi. Harivanshrai Bachchan translated *Macbeth* (1956) and *Othello* (1958) into Hindi verse (Awasthi 1964: 51–62). In Urdu, the earliest translation was in 1884. Those of Syed Mehdi Hasan Ahsan Lucknowi were of better quality than others. There was a Shakespeare Theatre Company (1912–13) which staged the so-called 'Indian Shakespeare' Agha Hashr's melodramatic poetic-prose translation of *Hamlet* titled *Safed Khoon* (White Blood), which even had Hamlet singing (Hasan 1964: 132–9).

On the Marathi stage, between 1867 and 1915 there were sixty-five productions of Shakespeare, mostly free adaptations, but in the next thirty-nine years there were only two. The increasing decadence of the Marathi stage and its fondness for song and dance have been offered as partial explanation. There were musical versions of *The Winter's Tale* and *Measure for Measure*. *Zunzarrao* (1890) was the most successful *Othello* production, revived as late as 1950 (Rajadhyaksha 1964: 83–94).

In Parsi theatre, Shakespeare held a place second to none. The languages were Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, even English. The playwrights were Hindu and Muslim. At least a dozen Shakespeare plays were adapted and staged. It was popular, rambunctious fare, freely adapted, replete with songs and dances. New situations and characters were added. The motives and situations were changed to suit Indian mores. There were prose, verse and rhyming couplets. The famed Victoria Natak Mandali company had thirty-five plays as part of its repertoire. It toured throughout the Far East, Mandalay, Rangoon, Bangkok, Java and then London (Mehta 1964: 41–50). On the Gujarati stage between 1865 and 1915, many plays were staged in different locations: Surat, Ahmedabad, Saurashtra and Bombay. In the 1860s in Bombay there were twenty dramatic clubs, including the Shakespeare Natak Mandali. The bulk of the unprinted scripts are lost (Mehta 1964: 41–50).

There are four major south Indian languages, Tamil, Kannad, Telegu and Malayalam. In Tamil, there were thirty Shakespeare productions in English and Tamil by 1900, which were presented as entertainment, not for edification or as exemplars of literary value (Subramanyam 1964: 120–6). In Kannad, *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Romeo and Juliet* were translated in prose and in *Kanda Vritta* stanzas (traditional Puranic plays popular in Kannada), and enacted by the Palace Company around 1881 under the patronage of the Maharaja of Mysore (Rao 1964: 63–72). In Telegu, V. Vasudeva Shastri wrote a verse adaptation of *Julius Caesar* in 1876, with its metre akin to iambic pentameter. In the preface he said he had done his best to introduce 'Hindu customs and manners where I could'. This was followed in 1880 with a prose and verse adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* by Guruzada Shriramamurti. The names, locations and incidents were Indianized. Dukes of Ephesus became Princes of the Chola Kingdom and even Shakespeare became Sulapani (Rajamannar 1964: 127–31). In Malayalam, while prose translations of Shakespeare appeared as early as 1893 (*The Taming of the Shrew* by Kandathil Varghese Mapilai), performances were rare. Interestingly, the radio station All India Radio (AIR) Trivandrum-Kozhikode broadcast adaptations of all four major tragedies, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Merchant*, *Julius Caesar* and *The Tempest*, specially written for AIR (Pillai 1964: 73–82).

In the northeastern state of Assam, the first Shakespeare translation, *The Comedy of Errors*, was published in 1888. *The Merchant of Venice* or *Banij Kunwar* (Merchant Prince, 1946), by Atul Chandra Hazarika, was a popular production. P. Talukdar and Narayan Bezbarua were well-known playwrights who adapted and translated Shakespeare. Radio adaptations were also prevalent (Barua 1964: 12–15).

Between 1919 and 1953 there was a lull in Shakespeare performances on the Indian stage. One of the reasons could be that the national movement against the British colonial rulers was gaining momentum. By 1942, Gandhi's Quit India movement was in full swing. In the light of this, performing an English playwright's works on the Indian stage would probably be considered unpatriotic.

Indian Shakespeare post-independence

Shakespeare performance post Indian independence in 1947 falls into two major categories: productions in English and adaptations of Shakespeare in the Indian languages. The latter may

be further subdivided into performances that follow Shakespeare's text faithfully with literary translations, as in Ebrahim Alkazi's production of *King Lear* (1964) in Hindi and *Othello* (1969) in Urdu, and productions that adapt the Shakespearean text radically. The latter may Indianize the characters and situations and perform the play in an indigenous theatre form such as *kathakali* (from Kerala), *nautanki* (a form from Uttar Pradesh with emphasis on music), *yakshagana* (from Karnataka) and *jatra* (from Bengal, with emphasis on dialogue). There may also be a combination of one or more of these forms within a single performance, for example Tanvir's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* fuses *Rabindranritya*, a form of dance used in Rabindranath Tagore's dance-dramas, with folk theatre. These adaptations, with the addition of music, dance, colourful costumes and makeup, can make the original play unrecognizable to an uninitiated viewer. Some outstanding productions are *Barnam Vana* (Birnam Forest, 1979) based on *Macbeth*, *Othello* (1996 onwards) and *King Lear* in kathakali (1989), and *Kamdeo ka Apna Basant Ritu ka Sapna* (The Love God's Own, a Spring Reverie, 1993) based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. *Barnam Vana* is an adaptation directed by B. V. Karanth for the National School of Drama Repertory in the yakshagana style. Yakshagana is a folk theatre form from Karnataka in south India that originated in the sixteenth century. The term literally means 'songs of the demi-gods'. A minimum of fifteen performers and as many musicians are needed for this lively, fast-paced form filled with songs, dances and improvised dialogue. Of particular note are the poetic songs or *prasangas* sung by the chief vocalist or *bhagvata*. Karanth says that the yakshagana form appealed to him because the characters in Shakespeare's play seem to have the same larger-than-life quality as the yakshagana characters, and the emotional tensions of the play can be captured through the rhythms of the actors' body movements. Also, *Macbeth* abounds in battle scenes, another hallmark of yakshagana. Karanth preferred the 'fluid rhythm and strong dramatic style' of yakshagana to kathakali, whose *mudra*s (movements), he felt, 'defy understanding'. In his Director's Note in the performance programme, Karanth says that yakshagana is especially developed in the 'presentation of characters' entries and exits, battle scenes and the expression of emotional tensions through the rhythm of body movements'. Karanth also seems to have in mind Bharata's *Natyasastra*. Karanth says that the *rasas* of valour (*vira rasa*), wrath (*krodha rasa*) and terror (*bhayanaka rasa*) abound in *Macbeth*, making it particularly suited to an Indian adaptation.

Kathakali, a highly stylized blend of dance, music and theatre originated in seventeenth-century Kerala, is performed outdoors in family compounds or near temples; lately proscenium stage productions have become common. There was a 1989 kathakali production of *Lear* by the Kerala State Arts Academy and the Paris-based theatre group Keli. Sadanam Balakrishnan's International Centre for Kathakali in New Delhi has produced *Othello* in the kathakali style since 1996. Only five scenes were enacted in the two-hour-plus performance. Not only is there no fresh interpretation of the play, but also there is a worrying erasure of the racial conflict: what Loomba terms Othello's difference in terms of colour or religion is unfortunately elided (Loomba 1998: 160). Apart from this, there is a *Julius Caesar* adaptation titled *Charudattam*, which was scripted, directed and sung by Sadanam Harikumar and presented by Satwikam of Kalasadanam (north Kerala). The play reduced the original to ten scenes. It was innovative in the portrayal of an ambivalent Cassius, who is neither *pacca* (green), the traditional heroic and upright character type, nor *karutta tati* (black beard), the conventional evil plotter. Instead, this Cassius has specially designed makeup, costume, choreography and songs. In addition to these complete plays, scenes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Macbeth* have also been staged in kathakali style. However, these productions were not without controversies. *Lear*, for example, satisfied neither uninitiated western audiences and critics, who were left perplexed, nor Malayalam critics, who felt that kathakali codes had been violated with a woman performing

Cordelia (the French actor–dancer Annette Leday; traditional kathakali is an all-male performance) and with Lear appearing without the customary headdress in the storm scene (Daugherty 2005: 56–72). What is crucial to understand is that both Shakespeare and kathakali are altered in this encounter, and purists must accept this. Something goes and something stays. The betrayal of the laws of intercultural performance is the condition of its existence (Phillips 2010: 249–50). As Zarrilli puts it, 'the arena of performance is a site of constant renegotiation of the experiences and meanings that constitute culture' (Zarrilli 1992: 16).

Kamdeo ka Apna Basant Ritu ka Sapna (The Love God's Own, a Spring Reverie, 1993) is an adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Habib Tanvir (1925?–2009), who was trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and the Old Vic and was the founder of the Naya Theatre. It deals only with the rude mechanicals, for which Tanvir enlisted tribal performers speaking in the Bastar dialect. Tanvir was a pioneer in the combination of folk theatre and politics. The language used is a hybrid of Hindi and the Bastar dialect of the tribals. Tanvir's art abolishes the hierarchies between folk and classic forms. At no point was his trained consciousness valorized over that of the unschooled tribal performers. Tanvir did not romanticize folk and neither was he an artist who produced authentic folk pieces. Influenced by Brecht, he was a thoughtful and highly sophisticated urban artist who made an ideological choice of choosing the folk improvisational techniques and music and combining it with his own socialist but humorous look at the socio-political situation. For example, the tribal performers, particularly the actor playing Bottom, were not discouraged from occupying centre stage each time they delivered their lines. The musicians were visible on stage and did not hide in the wings. A number of contemporary English words appeared in the script, and one of the rude mechanicals was told to 'xerox' his part, hinting at the omnipresence of globalization. As one critic put it, he was a 'Midas turned upside down' – whatever he touches 'loses its sheen: it becomes rough and turns to Chattisgarhi' (Deshpande 2003) – Chattisgarh was the tribal performers' home state.

In Bengal, Utpal Dutt's (1929–93) Calcutta-based Little Theatre Group produced a variety of Shakespeare's plays, including *The Merchant of Venice* (1953), *Macbeth* (1954), *Julius Caesar* (1957), *Romeo and Juliet* (1964) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (*Choitali Rater Shopno* in Bengali, 1964). However, in light of the violence that had gripped Bengal politics in the 1960s and 1970s, to 'stick to Shakespeare or Bernard Shaw was unbearable', writes Dutt (1977: 48–72). When he returned to Shakespeare, he did ninety-eight performances of *Macbeth* for Bengal's villagers in the jatra style, an overblown, melodramatic style with an emphasis on dialogue that is performed all night, out in the open, very different from his earlier restrained proscenium productions.

Royston Abel's *Othello: A Study in Black and White* (1999–2000) is a thought-provoking production of the United Players' Guild that embeds *Othello* in a contemporary English play about a group of Indian actors rehearsing Shakespeare's play and foregrounds tensions, other than racial, in contemporary Indian society: class, urban versus rural, metro versus small town, and the anglicized versus *desi* (indigenous). One of the most popular and dynamic recent Hindi adaptations of Shakespeare in the nautanki style is *Piya Behrupiya* (Chameleon Lover, *Twelfth Night*) by Atul Kumar and The Company Theatre, which was performed at the London Globe in April 2012 and then all across India to full houses. It is a riot of colour, music (folk and quawali), dance and hilarity in the nautanki style, with English words liberally thrown in for comic effect, and metatheatrical effects, as when Sebastian, who is also the translator of the play, bemoans the fact that the translator gets no credit and that he himself has been sidelined as an actor. Kumar has also staged *Nothing like Lear*, a one-man show, and *Hamlet the Clown Prince*. One could challenge his statement that Shakespeare 'is always a super hit' in India 'because Shakespeare's tales and human conditions are quite timeless, space-less and cultureless – they are simply human' (Vincent 2012), because there is so little Shakespeare staged in India today.

Kumar's attitude to the Bard is, however, far from reverential: '[T]he comedy works very well when you disrespect it and shakes hands readily with the audience' (Gupta 2012).

The study of Shakespeare on the Indian stage has served to highlight the differences between the situation in India and other parts of Asia with regard to Shakespeare performance, the colonial heritage of the literary icon and the resulting familiarity and ease with which the Indians regard Shakespeare, and the ways in which intercultural performance brings to the forefront the dangers and hurdles of meshing the two cultures together, indeed the near-impossibility of intercultural theatre itself.

II. Japan, by Suematsu Michiko

When performing Shakespeare outside the English-speaking world, Shakespeare must undergo linguistic and 'cultural' translation within a local context. Through this process of cultural adaptation, the aesthetics and staging strategies of each culture distinguish the production. Eclectic use of Asian aesthetics in Shakespeare performances in the west has long been criticized as orientalist appropriation; however, borrowing and appropriating either foreign or domestic aesthetics is an intercultural strategy adopted also by Asian Shakespeare. In terms of authenticity, borrowing and appropriating aesthetics in any performance is problematic, but the choice in this process mirrors the intercultural subtext of the performance and defines its unique interaction with Shakespeare. For instance, in the case of Japanese Shakespeare, the complex negotiation of disciplinary boundaries among the local, traditional performance forms *noh*, *kabuki* and *bunraku* had been going on for centuries, and this intracultural interaction, or a 'meeting and exposure of differences of cultures within seemingly homogenized groups' (Bharucha 1996: 128), was replicated in their engagement with Shakespeare.

The discussion of the intercultural strategy of Japanese performances of Shakespeare should begin by identifying what these performances share with their counterparts in other Asian cultures. First, in Asian Shakespeare performances, realistic and formal modes – or representational and non-representational modes – of acting often coexist and they can be switched smoothly and flexibly within one production, or even within one scene. This duality is a great advantage in presenting the multiple layers of reality that make Shakespearean drama exceedingly rich in meaning. The second characteristic, the subordinate position of language within the performance, mainly concerns Asian Shakespeare performances that draw on traditional theatre forms. As Dennis Kennedy and Yong Li Lan (2010: 17) point out, these performances tend to foreground 'the embodied' or 'the corporeal' over verbal expression. Shakespeare's language, which prevails in English performances, loses its absolute dominance when translated, and other 'corporeal' elements such as sets, costumes, gestures, singing and dancing fill the gap. These scenographic and physical elements create a spectacle that leaves an exceedingly sensory impression and have helped some Asian Shakespeare productions travel beyond linguistic boundaries. This spectacle has often been recognized in the west as a fascinating addition to Shakespeare's language; however, it is far from a decorative addition, as it vitally concerns the cultural attitudes towards the text and the intercultural strategy of some Asian performances of Shakespeare.

What distinguishes Japanese performances of Shakespeare from those of other Asian cultures is their reception process through 'a kind of inverse colonialism' (Sasayama *et al.* 1998: 4). In the tide of westernization, 'reform' of premodern or traditional theatre practices was implemented through dedication to modern European realism. One of the earliest examples of Japanese performances of Shakespeare that tried to 'reform' kabuki with Shakespearean plots was soon followed by productions of full-text translations that strove to edify audiences with Shakespeare's dramatic ingenuity, among which was the 1911 Bungei Kyokai (the Literary

Society) production of *Hamlet*, translated and directed by Tsubouchi Shōyō. With his emphasis on language in a performance, Tsubouchi paved the way for the *shingeki* (new theatre) movement (see Chapter 18).

A naturalistic shingeki approach that was initially applied to the productions of European writers such as Ibsen and Chekhov soon became the standard for Japanese performances of Shakespeare, which sought an 'authentic' western mise-en-scène. For instance, the 1955 production of *Hamlet* by Bungaku-za (The Literary Theatre), one of the leading shingeki companies, was famously an almost exact copy of the Old Vic production of *Hamlet* (1954) with Richard Burton. The fact that this Bungaku-za production was hailed with enthusiasm because of its 'authenticity' and became legendary in the stage history of Shakespeare in Japan epitomizes shingeki's absolute deference to the west as a place of authority at that time. Following shingeki's submission to the cultural hegemony of the west, each subsequent Japanese performance of Shakespeare has had to determine its cultural position, either by challenging or accepting western cultural supremacy.

A vehement reaction against this shingeki orthodoxy was started in the 1960s by the underground *shogekijo* (Little Theatre) movement led by avant-garde stage directors such as Kara Juro, Suzuki Tadashi and Ninagawa Yukio. One of the examples of Shakespearean performance that challenged that of shingeki was the legendary *Ninagawa Macbeth* (1980). With its blatant departure from the shingeki dramaturgy that had dominated Shakespeare performances on the Japanese stage, the Japanese framework and aesthetics of this production surprised Japanese audiences as greatly as it did the British audiences who saw it later in Edinburgh (1985) and London (1987).

In *Ninagawa Macbeth*, Ninagawa relocated the setting to a feudalistic Japan of medieval warlords and incorporated characteristically Japanese visual rhetorical devices. The stage was framed by a huge structure similar to a *butsudan*, a Buddhist home altar that enshrines the spirits of ancestors. When the sliding doors of the butsudan frame opened and the world of *Macbeth* in sixteenth-century Japan unfolded onstage, audiences felt as if they were witnessing the hurly-burly of their distant ancestors (Ninagawa 2001: 212–13). This framework at once worked as a tunnel through time and as a bridge across cultures. Other Japanese stage pictures used lavishly in this production – cherry blossoms, kimonos and Buddhist statues – also visibly connected the play to the Japanese audience. Ninagawa's successive productions through the early 1990s, including *The Tempest* (1987) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1994), repeatedly employed similar Japanese aesthetics and established the definitive Ninagawa style: an emphasis on visuals and an entirely eclectic hybridization of eastern and western cultures. In short, Ninagawa's formula of cultural translation to local idiom in this period, which was to undergo a degree of transformation in subsequent years, remained rather straightforward: he would find non-verbal images ingrained in the text and visualize them with typical Japanese aesthetics and stage pictures. This characteristic use of stage pictures, which originally aimed to evoke 'the collective Japanese memory', reshaped the Japanese image of Shakespeare once and for all; however, it also subjected Ninagawa to criticism for directing orientalist Shakespeare – first because his choice was too arbitrary and eclectic, and second because the chosen stage pictures were stereotypical exotic commonplaces. And yet, his 'eclectic' choice was at least true to the intercultural subtext of Japanese culture, where antithetical aesthetics of the east and west and the premodern and modern coexisted in a mishmash.

In terms of an intercultural context, the 1990s were a watershed decade. For one thing, the Japanese had begun to find it increasingly difficult to share 'the collective Japanese memory' to which Ninagawa had resorted. For instance, directors from the younger generation, such as Noda Hideki and Kawamura Takeshi, sought a Japanese identity not in traditional Japanese

aesthetics but in modern subcultures and countercultures, such as the worlds of comics and sci-fi. Furthermore, the opening of the Tokyo Globe Theatre, which exclusively mounted Shakespeare plays from 1988 to 2002 until it was closed down after the collapse of the 'bubble economy' and reopened as a theatre for pop idols, spurred diversification and decanonization of Japanese Shakespeare, and consequently diminished the domineering influence of shingeki.

Regularly inviting companies around the world while offering Japanese companies of any genre an opportunity to experiment with Shakespeare, Tokyo Globe, through its privileged space, sanctioned an unprecedentedly wide range of cultural exchange through Shakespeare for theatre practitioners and audiences alike. A variety of Shakespeare productions from the UK and other European and Asian countries revealed each culture's sense of ownership of Shakespeare, avowing their freedom to find new ways to reflect the current intercultural reading of Shakespeare. This encouraged diverse genres of Japanese performing arts, including traditional theatre forms, dance, ballet and opera, to explore their theatrical identity through Shakespeare. The rediscovery of Shakespeare at this site also took the form of intercultural collaboration, such as the 1997 ITI (International Theatre Institute) production of *King Lear* directed by Kim Jeong-ok, the former president of ITI, with a cast from six countries: Japan, Korea, the United States, Germany, Bulgaria and Mexico. While the production's objective to enlighten audiences with onstage international collaboration evolved into nothing more than a multicultural theatre 'event' or 'showcase' of cultures, to the Japanese audiences who were only accustomed to the practice of inviting (mostly non-Asian) directors from overseas to direct Japanese performances, the collaboration of a multinational cast with Asian leadership at least offered a new experience. Intercultural collaborations in the 1990s include Ong Keng Sen's *Lear* (1997), the PETA (Philippine Educational Theater Association)/Kuro Tento production of *Comedy of Romeo and Juliet* (1997) and Nonon Padilla's *Romeo and Juliet* (1998), all of which had a mixed cast from different Asian regions and attempted, with varying degrees of success, to dramatize Asian traditions and realities from Asian perspectives. They proved that Shakespeare performance in Japan was ready to go beyond an east–west dichotomy and redefine its cultural situation in relationship to other Asian cultures.

In this changing climate, Ninagawa has shifted his intercultural strategy, increasingly staging Shakespeare performances without apparent Japanese frameworks or visuals since the late 1990s. For instance, Japanese aesthetics are hardly recognizable in his 2001 production of *Macbeth* and his 2004 production of *Titus Andronicus*, which was restaged in 2006 as a part of the Complete Works Festival (RSC) in Stratford-upon-Avon. His All Male Shakespeare Series, which started in 2004 with *As You Like It*, is again devoid of an overt Japanese framework or visual cues. What distinguishes most of these all-male productions from his earlier attempts, for instance *Media* (1978), is his exploitation of a young male cast in an unabashedly populist manner. At a glance, period costumes and classical sets remind us of the traditional shingeki Shakespeare performances, which Ninagawa long rebelled against. However, beneath this seeming resemblance lies Ninagawa's characteristic drive to further liberate and popularize Shakespeare by introducing the theme of boys' love. The theme and conventions of boys' love are widespread in Japanese cultural forms, from kabuki to manga, and it seems that in this series – Ninagawa's version of manga Shakespeare, in a sense – he sought a new strategy to stage localized Shakespeare that resonates with a younger audience.

His search for a new intercultural strategy also resulted in *Shochiku Grand Kabuki Twelfth Night*, which was performed in Tokyo (2005, 2009) and in London (2009). This was Ninagawa's only attempt to stage Shakespeare within the single performative mode of traditional theatre, kabuki. Unlike Shakespearean performances in indigenous theatre forms since the 1980s, which had

straightforwardly applied their non-realistic dramaturgy, Ninagawa challenged the numerous and rigorous stage conventions of kabuki by adding naturalism in his customary mix-and-match style.

The most complex intraculturalism, or interactions of different cultures within Japanese culture, can be seen in the 2007 production of *Hamlet* directed by Kurita Yoshihiro, the fifth production of the Ryutopia Noh Theatre Shakespeare Series (Figure 23.1).[1] All productions in this series are staged in traditional noh theatres, although none of them have been staged in an authentic noh style with noh performers. Rather, by exploiting the possibilities of the noh stage and borrowing from various traditional Japanese theatre forms, Kurita tries to 'produce a new mixed breed of original Shakespeare' (Kurita and Tanaka 2006). The most striking feature of this production was Kurita's decision to let Hamlet remain seated and immobile during the entire performance. When stage lights revealed Hamlet sitting downstage centre of the noh stage, cross-legged in *zazen* (a posture for Zen meditation) style, the audience knew that he was meditating on his past and about to narrate his history. Kurita took advantage of the noh stage and its aesthetics in various ways, one of them being this use of the *Mugen* noh (the noh of dream vision) framework in which the dead or a visitor from another world appears before a stranger and narrates his or her past. Far from diminishing his stage presence, the immobility of Hamlet established his dominance on the stage. He was given a privileged stance from which he could control everything happening and exist in multiple levels of reality within the play. Hamlet, as a meditator on his past, acted as creator of his own story, and while he played a character in the play himself, he could also make everyone act at will. Following Zeami's notion that noh theatre is basically a space where audiences witness an 'epiphany', or an advent of the invisible, Kurita decided that everything on the bare noh stage should be seen through Hamlet's eyes.

To compensate for his lack of movement, Hamlet appointed three *tsukaima* (familiar spirits) and a *joruri* narrator (narrator with *shamisen*, a three-stringed musical instrument) as his surrogates. The contribution of the tsukaima was physical, while the joruri's was verbal, as he narrated the action on a different level of reality. The tsukaima and joruri served as more than dramatic

Figure 23.1 Hamlet, Ryutopia Noh Theatre Shakespeare Series (2007).
(Courtesy of Ryutopia Series)

necessities tasked with materializing Hamlet's vision on stage. This division of movement and speech between them best exemplifies the complex interaction of multiple indigenous theatrical forms in Kurita's production. First, the division is loosely based on noh, in which the audience is supposed to follow the narrative, irrespective of the non-realistic division of movement and speech between actors and chorus, by appreciating what is happening onstage as a whole. Furthermore, the movement of tsukaima to the accompaniment of the joruri's narration brings to mind another traditional theatre, bunraku, in which puppets act out a play to joruri accompaniment. The way the tsukaima figures were actually presented on the stage also complicated the use of indigenous theatrical forms here. To convey their inhuman identity, the three tsukaima figures always moved like dolls. This personification of dolls by actors is a kabuki practice called *ningyoburi* (acting that imitates the exaggerated motions of puppets). Thus, Kurita's exploitation of the non-realist environment of the noh stage resulted in an intricate combination, rather than a simple juxtaposition, of multiple theatrical forms in this production.

In a different mode of interculturalism, a shift in the representation of characters from the realistic to the formal not only outlined their emotional journey within the play but also critically reassessed the history of Shakespeare's assimilation in Japan, starting from shingeki monopoly. All characters, apart from Hamlet, the tsukaima and the joruri, gradually outgrew their realistic acting mode to adopt a more formal and ritualistic one before finally becoming completely motionless and speechless like Hamlet himself. By the beginning of the final duel scene, the realistic mode of speech and movement had been abandoned. The duel was performed symbolically by a row of characters who walked on the stage vertically to the joruri narration of a sword fight from the First Player's 'Pyrrhus speech'. Finally, the characters slowed their walking and knelt at the front of the stage, becoming completely motionless with their eyes closed.

The symbolic dimension to the final duel scene clearly makes visible the conflict between the two antithetical modes of acting: realism and formalism. The latter's victory in this performance was consummated in Hamlet's final line: 'The rest is silence.' In silence, everything disappears into Hamlet's consciousness and then into nothingness. The production thus ended with a celebration of the silence underlying traditional Japanese aesthetics. In Zen meditation, silence offers rich possibilities for comprehending what is beyond verbal expression and logical analysis. It is also the essence of formalism. The final silence that consumed everything promised triumph to the dying Hamlet, who would probably find the ultimate truth and peace of mind once he finished relating his story.

With an intricate mixture of traditional theatre forms and a shift from realistic to formal modes of acting, the Ryutopia *Hamlet* fully dramatizes the intracultural style of Japanese Shakespeare performance as well as the historical context that has shaped that style. The gradual disengagement with realistic modes of acting in this production of *Hamlet* epitomizes the history of Shakespearean performance in Japan, which can be largely understood as a struggle against the standard imposed by shingeki. What Kurita aimed to do in this complex performance was to provide a statement of Japan's current relationship to what Shakespeare and shingeki represent. In witnessing the onstage negotiation with the realist shingeki presentation of Shakespeare, a Japanese audience renews its awareness of Japan's cultural position.

III. Sinophone theatres: China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, by Alexa Alice Joubin

Along with a number of Japanese and Western canonical poets and writers, Shakespeare and his works have played a significant role in the development of Chinese and Sinophone theatres in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Hundreds of works have emerged in Mandarin and a wide

range of Chinese dialects, performing styles and genres. The encounters between 'Shakespeare' and genres and values represented by the icon of 'China' have enriched Chinese-language theatrical traditions as well as global Shakespearean performance history. In the following pages, I shall focus on the challenges and changes to Chinese-language theatres.

The transmission of Renaissance culture in China began with the arrival of the first Jesuit missionaries in 1582, followed by the Dominicans and Franciscans in the 1630s. Illustrated British travel narratives record British emissaries' experience of attending theatrical productions in Tianjin and Beijing during the reign of the Qianlong emperor (1736–1795), including the mission of Lord George Macartney. One of the emissaries' diary entries briefly comments on the similarity between an unnamed Chinese play and Shakespeare's *Richard III*. With the decline of the Qing empire in the nineteenth century, Chinese interests in Western modes of thinking and political systems intensified. Both Shakespeare and China were 'translated' – to use the word to mean transformed or metamorphosed, as Peter Quince does in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – in the late nineteenth century according to clashing ideologies of modernization, westernization and revalidation of traditional Chinese values. Along with John Milton and other 'national' poets, Shakespeare's name entered the discourse of nationalism. Shakespeare was first mentioned in passing in 1839 in a compendium of world cultures translated by Lin Zexu, a key figure in the first Opium War (1839–1842). By the time Chinese translations became available and substantive critical engagements with Shakespeare were initiated, there was already over half a century of reception history in which Shakespeare was frequently evoked to support or suppress specific agendas.

There are several recurrent themes in Chinese-language adaptations of Shakespeare. Universalization, as opposed to localization, has been a popular strategy among Chinese directors and translators. This strategy has produced plays performed 'straight', with visual and textual citations of what was perceived to be authoritative classical performances (such as Laurence Olivier's versions). Some early 1920s performances, especially those involving students or drama societies, in Shanghai followed this pattern. If the play seems foreign, according to advocates of this approach, that only guarantees its aesthetics have been preserved in a way that benefits the audience. Adaptations that localise the plays are another popular approach.

A second strategy is to localize the plot and setting of a play, and assimilate Shakespeare into the local worldviews. It folds Shakespeare into local performance genres. An example is Huang Zuolin's *Xieshou ji* (The Story of Bloody Hands, 1986), a *kunqu* opera adaptation of *Macbeth*. The complex idioms of Chinese theatrical forms were increasingly seen by the performers and their sponsors not as an obstacle but as an asset in creating an international demand for the traditional theatre form.

The third strategy involves pastiche, dramaturgical collage and extensive, deconstructive rewritings. It sometimes changes the genre of a play by accessing dormant themes that have been marginalized by centuries of Anglocentric criticism and performance traditions. The emergence of parody is a sign that Shakespeare's global afterlife has reached a new stage. The stories have become so familiar to the 'cross-border' audiences that the plays can be used as a platform for artistic exploration of new genres. For instance, in writing a *huaju* play called *Shamuleite*, or *Shamlet* (1992), Lee Kuo-hsiu, one of the most innovative Taiwanese playwrights and directors to emerge in the 1980s, turned high tragedy, or what was known to Renaissance readers as 'tragic history', into comic parody. He suggests in the programme that *Shamlet* is a revenge comedy that 'has nothing to do with *Hamlet* but something to do with Shakespeare'. This strategy has been used to counter stereotypical construction of local and foreign cultures. It has also been used as the artists' personal branding in international markets for intercultural theatre works, such as Wu Hsing-kuo and his solo Beijing opera *Li'er zaici* (Lear Is Here, 2000) in which the performer inserts his own life story. Playing ten characters from Shakespeare's

tragedy, Wu extrapolates the themes of domestic conflict, construction of selves and others, and notions of duty to family and duty to the state and mingles these themes with his autobiography.

These three themes coexist throughout the history of Chinese and Sinophone Shakespeares. As in almost all instances of transnational borrowing, a select, locally resonant group of 'privileged' plays has held continuous sway in the Chinese-speaking world. *The Merchant of Venice* is the first Shakespearean play known to be staged, and it continues to fascinate Chinese audiences today. The reception of the play exemplifies the complex processes of reading between, with, and against the genres of comedy and tragedy. Early modern printers and readers were uncertain about the play's genre. The 1623 folio placed it under 'comedies' as simply *The Merchant of Venice* (rendering the titular character ambiguous), but the entry in the Stationers' Register on 22 July 1598 – the first mention of the play – focuses attention on Shylock by calling it 'A Book of the Merchant of Venice, or Otherwise Called the Jew of Venice'. The later generic ambiguity carried over when the play came to China, where it has often been staged and received as a romantic comedy rather than a tragedy fuelled by religious tensions (as has mostly been the case since the twentieth century in the democratic West). The play has also been parodied on stage. A travesty by Francis Talfourd entitled *Shylock, or, The Merchant of Venice Preserved*, was staged in Hong Kong in 1867 for British expatriates. The Hong Kong Amateur Dramatic Club revived the production in 1871, as the mercantile-themed play proved relevant to the social milieu of a trade colony. The trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice* was performed in 1896 by the graduating class of St. John's University, a missionary college in Shanghai, followed by another student performance in 1902. In time, Mandarin-language performances began to dominate the stage, and today, the play remains a staple of high school and college curricula and is often chosen for the graduation *huaju* (spoken drama) productions of Chinese and Taiwanese universities.

In terms of performance style, Shakespeare has figured prominently in the shaping of contemporary Chinese theatre, where the genres of *xiqu* (stylized theatre with more than 360 regional variations) and huaju (post-1907 Western-influenced spoken drama theatre, including obsolete subgenres) coexist. The earliest-documented xiqu Shakespeare was based on *Hamlet* and titled *Shaxiong duosao* (Killing the Elder Brother and Snatching the Sister-in-Law) and performed in *chuanju* (Sichuan opera) style. Other artists followed suit. The Yisu She (Custom Renewal Society) staged *Yibang rou* (A Pound of Flesh) in the *qinqiang* opera style in 1925 in Shaanxi Province in northern China. Although stylized performances of Shakespeare in different genres of Chinese opera have existed since the early twentieth century, the 1980s were a turning point, when Shakespeare became more regularly performed in different forms of stylization in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and elsewhere, and entered the collective cultural memory of Chinese opera performers and audiences. The revived interest in Chinese-opera Shakespeare was encouraged by increased exchanges among performers based in mainland China and in the Chinese diaspora.

Beyond Chinese opera, performances of Shakespeare that involve China at their centre of imagination frequently highlight linguistic differences. Languages served as markers of ethnic differences in *Yumei and Tianlai*, a bilingual Taiwanese–Mandarin *Romeo and Juliet* at the Shakespeare in Taipei festival in 2003. The Montagues and the Capulets are each assigned a different language, complicating the experience of artists in the Chinese diaspora and the play's capacity as a national allegory. Key scenes from *Romeo and Juliet* were staged in two plays-within-a-play in Ning Caishen's *Romeo and Zhu Yingtai*, directed by He Nian and produced by the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center (May 2008), in which French, Japanese, English and Mandarin Chinese were spoken. In what Ning called 'a tragedy told in comic manners', the star-crossed

lovers traversed 1937 Shanghai and present-day New York in search of new personal and cultural identities.

The differing situations in other parts of the Chinese-speaking world led to varied histories of reception. Kawakami Otojirō's (1864–1911) *Othello* (a *shinpa* production in Japanese) in 1903 recast Taiwan as the outpost of the colonial Japanese empire, moving Venice to Japan and Cyprus to the Penghu Archipelago west of Taiwan. When Muro Washiro (the Othello figure), a dark-faced Japanese colonial general in Taiwan, commits suicide at the end of the play, he compares himself to an 'uncivilized' Taiwanese aboriginal inhabitant (*seiban* [raw savage]). An island off the southeast coast of mainland China, Taiwan has had complex relationships with the dominant 'fatherland' (*zuguo*) across the strait and with Japan to the north. While not directly responsible for the scarcity of western dramas from the early to the mid-twentieth century, the island's intense focus upon the essentialized aspects of Japan and China prevented the growth of translated dramas from European languages. In the first half of the twentieth century, tours of Japan's all-female Takarazuka performances to Taiwan occasionally included Shakespeare. The earliest-documented Chinese-language performance of Shakespeare in Taiwan was *Yi yun* (Clouds of Doubt) staged by the Shiyan Xiao Juchang (Experimental Theatre of Taipei) in February 1949 and based on *Othello*. A few other performances followed, but until martial law was lifted in 1987, Taiwan's theatre remained shaped by political censorship in significant ways, first by the Japanese colonial cultural policy and then by the anticommunist cultural policy of the KMT regime.

The presence of Shakespeare at theatre festivals in Taiwan in the 1980s and 1990s took a different form from mainland China's post-revolutionary Shakespeare boom, which was initiated by state-endorsed and government-sponsored Shakespeare festivals in 1986 and 1994. The month-long 'Shakespeare in Taipei' festival (May 2003), for instance, focused more on providing a platform for artistically innovative and commercially viable experimental works. As a multilingual society (Mandarin, Taiwanese, Hakka and aboriginal languages), Taiwan has produced a significant number of mainstream performances either entirely in a dialect or with a mixture of Mandarin and a local dialect or English. Some of these works reflect Taiwan's multiply determined history, while others question that history and the much-contested 'Chineseness' of the island's identity. These tendencies provide interesting contrasts to the ways in which mainland Chinese artists imagine China. By the same token, while mainland China is certainly multilingual, it is Taiwan and Hong Kong that have established strong traditions of Shakespeare performances in one or more dialects. The few mainland Chinese performances of Shakespeare in local dialects were commissioned and sponsored by the government for festivals or produced by ethnic minority students in actor training programmes. The linguistic diversity of Taiwan and Hong Kong theatres fosters distinctive views of 'Shakespeare' and what counts as 'Chinese'.

With strong dual traditions of English and Cantonese Shakespearean performances in huaju and *yueju* (Cantonese opera), Hong Kong theatre reflects the tension between southern Chinese culture and the British legacy. After Hong Kong was ceded to Britain for 150 years in the 1842 Treaty of Nanjing, Englishness became an important element throughout the social structure. Under the British government, theatre was supported and encouraged as 'a wholesome diversion from the tedium of military life'. English literature was established as a subject of study in Hong Kong's school system and in 1882 students began studying Shakespeare for exams, initiating a form of 'domination by consent'. Shakespearean drama became part of the repertoire of the Hong Kong Amateur Dramatic Club that was active in the 1860s and 1870s. The so-called amateur theatre was in fact noncommercial theatre rather than nonprofessional. Such performances entertained British expatriates and brought 'a touch of the British culture' to Hong Kong residents. As in Japan, nineteenth-century China and Hong Kong saw sporadic performances of 'authentic' Shakespeare in English that exposed local residents to the contemporary

English culture. What was meant by authentic Shakespeare was a performance style that purported to present Shakespeare as he was conceived to have been played in his lifetime. Shakespeare festivals (23 April 1954; April 1964; 24–29 January 1984) and experimental Shakespearean performances emerged in the mid-twentieth century. Since the 1980s, a considerable amount of energy has been directed not toward the postcolonial question but toward Hong Kong's global status and its Chinese heritage, as evidenced by the productions of the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre (founded in 1977), the largest professional theatre in Hong Kong, and performances by students of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and other universities.

Despite the association of Shakespeare and Englishness, Shakespeare was not resisted as an image of colonization. Political changes have hardly affected him. Some contemporary Hong Kong scholars are surprised to find that 'local experimentations with Shakespeare in post-modernist and Chinese styles have continued to flourish [in Hong Kong]' (Tam *et al.* 2002: ix). This continued prominence, they argue, shows that 'Shakespeare has transcended his British heritage and become part of the Hong Kong Chinese tradition' (Tam *et al.*). While partly true, this view blurs the historical conditions surrounding early performances. One crucial reason why Shakespeare seems to transcend his British heritage is that Britain never colonized Hong Kong the way it did with India. This special historical condition – an indirect colonial structure that Mao Zedong later called semi-colonialism – informed Hong Kong's performance culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. If the practitioners of the new theatre were resisting anything, it was the Chinese past. The same is true of other treaty ports, such as Shanghai, that were home to a host of European concessions but had no overarching colonial institution.

The uses of Shakespeare's plays in spoken drama and Chinese opera are informed by a paradigm shift from seeking authenticity to foregrounding artistic subjectivity. Shakespearean themes and characterization have enriched, challenged and changed Chinese-language theatres and genres. Chinese and Sinophone Shakespeares have become strangers at home.

IV. Southeast Asia, by Yong Li Lan

Southeast Asia is a relatively new region, whose individual histories of Shakespeare performance in disparate languages, theatre cultures and socio-political contexts pre-date their collocation as 'Southeast Asian' by about fifty years. Prior to the Second World War, the region was generally referred to as the Indies, or by names denoting colonial governance, such as Nederlands-Oost-Indië (modern Indonesia) or the Straits Settlements (Penang, Dinding, Malacca and Singapore). Its coherence as a region originated in efforts by the world powers to exert influence over how these countries de-colonized (with the exception of Thailand, which has never been subject to external government). Conversely, people and likewise theatre practices in the region continue to identify themselves by country or by part of a country, not as 'Southeast Asian'. Southeast Asia was therefore from the first a region after colonialism. Its diverse contemporary theatre practices have in common a backdrop of contentions over a national culture made up of layers of historical alliances and hostilities between different points of cultural reference.

Given these conditions for intercultural practice, a binary opposition between colonial western culture and indigenous traditions is rarely seen, where we could say that Shakespeare, coming from the former, is re-created by the latter. Or if a binary formula seems to apply, it must be recognized as an effect designed to perform national culture for a specific agenda; for example, as the national entry in a festival of world Shakespeare, or to stake a claim to the 'national' within an *intra*cultural conflict. Rather, Shakespeare's work, perceived as classic in the sense of an enduring, high model of western realism, allows the engagement of the notion of the traditional

– although the tradition referenced is not always, or only, a tradition directly associated with his plays. Two common approaches can be distinguished: (a) a radical re-scripting of the play; and (b) an upholding of the received standard (western) Shakespeare performance, through the use of the original English text or an authoritative translation, but often differentiating the production's cultural character from that standard by several striking changes.

Traditional Macbeths

The style of Shakespeare performance thought of as 'traditional' in Southeast Asia is perhaps so regarded in many other places. Disseminated through Asia by English touring companies, early films and theatre practitioners and scholars who travelled and studied in the West in the early twentieth century, the style centres upon naturalist acting by star actors which, by twenty-first century norms, appears somewhat grandiloquent and mannered. Importantly for this essay, it is also a period costume style. In the British colonies of Malaya, Burma and Singapore, this style was imported into local theatre culture through amateur theatricals put on by British expatriates, servicemen and school-based groups (such as The Stage Club and Changi Theatre Club in Singapore). Examples in this tradition are now uncommon in English,[2] but it is still produced in translation in countries that were not British colonies. In translation, the traditional values with which this performance style is aligned are not only those represented by the original western classic (poetry, grand vision, dramatic characters), but also the literary values and cultural history embodied in the translated canon. In other words, performing Shakespeare in translation carries cultural pride in the unique qualities and character of one's own language, at a high point of its achievement that equals and rivals Shakespeare, by re-creating him.

The historical point to which the translated classic refers is the project of modernization through westernization, which occurred in different countries over slightly different periods of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Vietnam between 1917 and 1926, French-trained translators and intellectuals such as Nguyen Van Vinh (1882–1936) translated western (mostly French) plays and novels into the romanized Vietnamese alphabet, quoc ngu (literally 'national language', made compulsory by the French administration in 1910). Their project was to refine and promote quoc ngu, and at the same time introduce western genres and modern ideas into Vietnamese society (Nguyen 2011; Goscha 2003). In the postcolonial era, state-sponsored histories have foregrounded the western-style Vietnamese literature written in quoc ngu that emerged from this period of westernization.[3] However, the translated western classic is the counterpart of these original works, in that the translation itself becomes a classic of national literature, carrying the resonance of a seminal text of the modern nation's cultural identity as an *international* identity. Translations from a later period share this lineage. In Thailand, Shakespeare was first translated into Thai by King Vajiravudh (1881–1925), who is credited with stimulating the golden age of modern Siamese drama through his original plays as well as translations of classics from several languages, and who introduced major educational and administrative reforms along western lines. In Paradee Tungtang's account:

> The King's works are famous and widely read so that, to some extent, the King's name overshadows that of the original playwright; his translated works ostensibly become 'original' in their own right and are studied nowadays as classic pieces of Thai literature.
> (Tungtang 2011: xxiii)

The intercultural value of the translated text is thus in its duality: it presents at once as an extension of the authority of the world classic, and as national literary heritage.

As opposed to original plays dating from this founding period of nationalism, in the early twenty-first century Shakespeare in translation, produced in the conventional naturalist style, has the advantages of an indeterminate notion of the traditional, which can be flexibly purposed. Two recent productions of *Macbeth* provide examples.[4] The Vietnam Youth Theatre, one of the foremost theatre companies in Vietnam with fast-growing international engagements, has a flagship production first staged in Hanoi and Ho Chí Minh City in 2002. This *Macbeth* toured to China (Beijing, 2003 and Shanghai, 2005), was revived in 2008 as Vietnam's contribution to the global Shakespeare Schools Festival, and invited to the World Shakespeare Festival (Liverpool, 2012). The highly respected, scholarly translation by Bùi Phụng is matched by a very expensive production relative to the company's meagre funding, with elaborate western-styled costumes for a large cast and a set of marble columns; this grand staging was regarded as necessary in order to uphold the cultural status of Shakespeare.[5] While the scenography employs a local rendition of western traditional staging, it also includes prominent elements drawn from *tuong* (Vietnamese classical opera): three large drums placed at centre stage are beaten by the witches throughout the performance, and Lady Macbeth's death is depicted by an intense dance sequence where she is tied to a long swathe of red silk, representing blood, in which she is gradually wrapped by the witches. Its long international stage history and combination of Shakespearean and Vietnamese stage traditions have mutually reinforced the Vietnam Youth Theatre's creation of a classic national production in its *Macbeth*.

In this position, the production installs several familiar nationalist signifiers as traditional. First, while otherwise following Bùi's translation, the production inserts two scenes not in Shakespeare's play. The first opens the play, before the witches appear, with the triumphal return from civil war by Macbeth with his troops, flanked by Banquo and Macduff, and set to Bruckner's Eighth Symphony. This scene is treated with a grand ceremonial display of troops in formation and is clearly emblematic of national victory in war. So, too, the sentimental farewell between Macduff, his wife and his son while his men kneel in the background is a scene of the national hero's family in wartime: 'Son, come here and embrace your father, he might never return this time' (A|S|I|A, 1:40:46). These two scenes do not attempt to adapt Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as an analogy of Vietnam's national history; rather, they appear almost as a logical necessity for a production in Vietnam in the early twenty-first century whose subject is civil war, lifting out of Shakespeare's fiction in paradigmatic Vietnamese moments. A second major change is to the dramatis personae: Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff are here Mrs Macbeth and Mrs Macduff. In the publicity flyer, the reduction of Shakespeare's aristocratic characters to commoner status is placed alongside the elevation of the performers by their communist state titles. All press reviews specify that Mrs Macbeth is played by People's Artist Nguyen Lan Huong, Macbeth by Merited Artist Anh Tu and the play directed by People's Artist Le Hung. Through these scenes and titles, Shakespeare functions as a cipher for the traditional that extends its status of a world classic to the achievements of the communist nation-state, and conversely, becomes contemporary Vietnamese. Comparing this production to the thinly attended performances of *Macbeth* in English by the British company TNT on tour in Ho Chi Minh City (Anon. 2011), a blogger, Heo, felt that the emotional content of the play wasn't as stirring as the Vietnamese version. 'I was not as emotionally fulfilled as I was when I saw the Vietnamese hit, which tells the story of modern life', and is set in modern-day Hanoi (quoted in *Thanh Nien* 2011).

In a different context but with a performative similarity, a traditional production of Shakespeare in translation staged a tradition of international modernity in Thai theatre education. Chulalongkorn University's Drama Department produced *Macbeth* in 2011 in Bangkok to mark the department's 40th anniversary, and invited its alumni to participate in it. This sold-out production generated much excitement; roles were so over-subscribed that Macbeth and

Lady Macbeth were played by alternate pairs of actors, and additional non-speaking parts included thirteen witches among a cast of forty-eight. Reviews listed the cast and design team of prominent figures in television, media and industry, who all participated without fee (Soosip 2011; Musiket 2011). The production also inaugurated the university's new black box theatre, the Sodsai Pantoomkomol Centre for Dramatic Art, named after the theatre teacher who pioneered theatrical arts studies at university level in Thailand and is regarded by many to have been the driving force in the development of Thai modern theatre through her teaching of Stanislavskian naturalism (Tungtang 2011: 186–90). Chulalongkorn University's *Macbeth* thus brought together a new site, a living lineage of performance stars, and their mentor. The production gathered its community together in the celebratory creation of a local tradition of theatre education, and because this was the performative value of the occasion, the production values and style were exemplary. The translation by the director, Nopamat Veohong, employed a literary, old-fashioned idiom that, according to reviews, 'captures the emotion and the poetic beauty of the original. Once you adjust your ear to the stylisation, you can appreciate the same linguistic beauty for which Shakespeare is esteemed' (Nantapon 2011).[6] The acting, costumes and staging were modelled upon a high tradition of naturalist western productions, incorporating no elements of Thai traditional performance.

In contemporary Southeast Asian theatres, traditional productions of Shakespeare in translation perform a sign of the modernity of a national culture that shares a world heritage. Their enactment of the traditional, in both literary and theatrical respects, accommodates the treatment of local histories, performance elements and idioms as traditions to be equally taken for granted and uncontested as Shakespeare. Naturally, then, traditional-styled Shakespeare in translation is often produced as an educational enterprise, and thus an exercise in modelling. Instead of staging difference, these productions harmonize or even altogether avoid indigenous theatrical elements, to place the weight of the intercultural transaction on the performative production of national traditions.

Shakespeare and intracultural pasts

The alternative to traditional productions of Shakespeare in translation is an overtly intercultural practice of adaptation. Bold re-scriptings of Shakespeare's plays retain his plot outline as a reference point for a past world with which Shakespeare's story and its values are in some way compared. Frequently, this past is pre-national, and differentiating the adaptation from Shakespeare's play and from local performance alike functions as a means of resisting a hegemonic national narrative – not of claiming national identity, as is often assumed in intercultural theory. Instead, dissonances between languages, registers, theatrical vocabularies and dramatic modes, such as the realist and the symbolic, stage contending influences and narratives of the past.

Mak Yong Titis Sakti (Mak Yong Drops of Magic) by The Actors' Studio in Kuala Lumpur adapted *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to the ancient Malay form of mak yong in 2009 (Figure 23.2). This production co-opted Shakespeare's status as a world author to support mak yong in the religious controversy concerning its animist basis, particularly its invocation of spirits. Public performances of mak yong were banned in 1991 in its home state of Kelantan by the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) which rules Kelantan. *Mak Yong Titis Sakti* participated in the lobbying in the Malaysian capital to legitimate mak yong by re-situating it as an international performance form, and as national heritage, following its classification by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2005. Instead of myths of royal personages (the mak yong repertoire), Shakespeare's lovers provided broad comedy. The performance did not observe the prescribed arrangement of musical instruments, actors

and audience in alignment with compass directions (Sarwar 1976: 76–81). Here, a decorative and faintly mysterious air was created by set panels painted in pastels and glittering, intricate costumes, overlaid by coloured lighting and overhung with a lamp of red roses trailing garlands. The original Malay magic was transposed onto the *Dream*'s foreign, thus non-potent, magic, while its style preserved a kind of animism. The king's solution to the lovers' problems was to invoke a spirit: a beautiful girl with magical properties who does not speak, called Flower (*Bunga*). The mak yong formulae of fixed dramatic sequences, speech and songs were sufficiently followed, if abbreviated, for the director Norzizi Zulkifli to assert, 'the staging itself stays true to the style of mak yong which fuses together singing, dance, drama, romance and comedy' (Chua 2009).

The contention over mak yong's legitimacy in an Islamic society is understood to be driven by the political conflict between PAS and UMNO, the largest Malaysian party which dominates the coalition ruling party (Hardwick 2013), a conflict symbolically mapped between Kelantan and Kuala Lumpur respectively. This spatial figuration of the intracultural, however, occludes its temporality. Elder Peran and Younger Peran, the divine clowns of mak yong, respectively represented the older culture of Kelantan, which once ruled the Patani sultanate extending over south Thailand, and the newer cosmopolitan capital of Kuala Lumpur established by the British colonial government. Elder Peran spoke Kelantanese and Younger Peran mixed colloquial Malay and English. Their comic improvisation stole the show, with the Younger often puncturing the formality of the Elder by an incongruous register, word-play and topical references. Younger Peran introduced the performance by joking with the audience about their mobile phones and Facebook, before Elder Peran performed the rite to consecrate the stage with prayers followed

Figure 23.2 Mak Yong Titis Sakti (Mak Yong Drops of Magic), Kuala Lumpur, 2009.
(Courtesy of Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre)

by flinging of fistfuls of rice towards the four corners. Thus Kelantan and Kuala Lumpur are not only political loci but also time periods for differing visions of Malay culture. The humour generated by juxtaposing the two Perans' incongruous frames of cultural reference dramatized the disparities, but also the cooperation, between the slow, ceremonial world of mak yong and the urban wit of contemporary Malay life.

The recuperation of heritage emphasized material culture in a play for children, *The Nonya Nightingale* by Paper Monkey Theatre in Singapore in 2010. This production combined the storylines of *King Lear* and *The Emperor's Nightingale* to teach children about Peranakan culture two generations ago. The Peranakans are a migrant Chinese community who arrived in the Malay archipelago from the sixteenth century onwards, becoming a wealthy merchant class with distinctive cultural practices. In British Malaya, Peranakans were educated in English schools (unlike Malays), and formed a bridge community between the British and the Malays; hence they were also called 'the King's Chinese'. Linking Peranakan heritage to Shakespeare therefore taps the root of the English language in the region as it branches into non-standard vernacular Englishes. In *The Nonya Nightingale*, the actors' speech patterns changed with the era in which a scene was set, from the 'Singlish' (Singaporean English) spoken today to the inflections and idioms of Malay-accented English that marked the Peranakan voice. The treatment of the story through object puppetry gave a voice and character to everyday Peranakan objects used as puppets: a miniature grandfather clock, a thermos flask, a china tiffin-carrier and an old-fashioned metal candle-holder respectively represented the matriarch Mrs Neo and her three daughters, Abigail, Barbara and Cordelia. Cordelia spoke standard international English, transcending time frames and cultures, whereas Mrs Neo used typical Peranakan expressions that are now seldom heard. 'Mouth got diamond cannot talk,' she muttered of her cousins, the Bibi twins, a pair of bright red Peranakan shoes who giggled and squealed when spoken to. Against nostalgia for a vanishing way of life were set the Peranakan culture's materialism and aspirations for a western-style affluence that caused Mrs Neo to disown Cordelia. Whereas Chulalongkorn University's *Macbeth* celebrated its tradition of international theatre education, *The Nonya Nightingale* staged its education in heritage with the ambivalent feelings of a family history.

Mak Yong Titis Sakti and *The Nonya Nightingale* were both productions in former British colonies, intended for local audiences, not international touring. They used Shakespeare to bring into view intracultural relationships to the past in cultural practices and speech idioms. International collaborations span the range from formal, theatrical interculturality to socio-cultural interactions dramatized without contrasting theatrical styles. An example of the latter type of performance was *Romeo at Julieta: Isang Komedi* (2008). This production resulted from a decade's collaboration between Black Tent Theatre in Japan and the Philippine Educational Theatre Association (PETA), and toured Japan and the Philippines. Its Filipino Juliet went to Japan to make a living as a karaoke bargirl and its Romeo was a Japanese farmer named Tamio. The production's social realism presented an ordinary nightclub, Verona Bar, and costumes by turns flashy and everyday. The social degradation of the characters' lives was satirized by implied comparison with the poetry and noble characters of Shakespeare's play. Nevertheless, the depiction of a problematic trade between the two countries in the 1990s to early 2000s (Parrenas 2011) accommodated the protagonists' aspiration to Romeo and Juliet's ideal romance through comic exchanges across the language barrier, and ensemble musical numbers delivered with infectious spiritedness. That fugitive idealism supported a dream-like moment at the heart of the production, when past and present momentarily recognized each other. Tamio's grandfather, who had been a soldier in the Japanese occupation of the Philippines during the Second World War, and was now suffering from senile dementia, mistook Julieta for the Filipino comfort girl Maria with whom he had fallen in love during the occupation and who was killed. Tamio's grandfather

and Julieta joined in singing an old Tagalog folk song, 'Babalik ka rin' (I believe you will return), which the grandfather had learnt from Maria, and Julieta had sung in her childhood. The multilingual script in Tagalog, Japanese and English by Rody Vera and Yamamoto Kiyokazu, as well as the rehearsal process documented by the companies, testify to the symbolic value of this collaboration across the antagonism of the two countries' historical and present economic relationships.[7]

At the opposite end of the spectrum of intercultural strategies from *Romeo at Julieta* is the work of the Singaporean director Ong Keng Sen, where each performer employed his or her own performance form and language. Ong's practice for Shakespeare brought performers together from the whole Asian region as well as Europe and the United States in four productions: *Lear* by the Japan Foundation (1997), *Desdemona* by TheatreWorks (2000), *Search: Hamlet* by TheatreWorks and Face to Face (2002) and *Lear Dreaming* by TheatreWorks (2012). These productions increasingly tested the premises of intercultural performance, a dominant and controversial strand of which has been the interaction of premodern Asian theatres with western canonical texts. *Lear* broke new ground by employing multiple Asian traditions, matched to the characters of *King Lear*: the Old Man was played by a *noh* actor, the Older Daughter by a *jingju* actor and the Younger Daughter by a Thai dancer. As a challenge to orientalist expectations of Asian traditions (Ong 2001), *Desdemona* juxtaposed contemporary practices such as video installation with ancient forms such as *kutiyattam*, and treated the plot of *Othello* as an occasion to explore the intercultural process, introducing the performers' thoughts and training into a many-layered performance. *Search: Hamlet* put greater pressure on notions of the intercultural as the theatrical presentation of two or more cultures, by individuating the traditional 'cultural performance'. Set at the originary site of Kronborg castle, the production brought together performers known for their individual styles of working in different genres, who devised their own music and dialogue in workshops. The result, which omitted the title character of Hamlet himself, was a refraction of the original play into the supporting characters and surrounding performance cultures around the canonical centrality of Hamlet and Shakespeare. Ong's productions increasingly foregrounded musical interculturality, combining *gamelan* with western strings, saxophone and the vocals of the Danish rock star Dicte in *Search: Hamlet*. *Lear Dreaming* was a piece of music theatre, with a series of soundscapes set against vivid colour washes that contrasted the principal characters' music: the Older Daughter Wu Man's pipa, the noh actor Umewaka Naohiko's sonorous delivery, the *jeongga* (Korean traditional song) of the Mother Kang Kwon Soon and the choric gamelan troupe.

Ong's productions draw upon artistic forms in diverse mediums from across the Asian region, and combine them in striking, unexpected contrasts that at once showcase the range and expressive power of Asian performances and problematize an audience's reaction to them by self-conscious framing. They depart from other Shakespeare productions in the Southeast Asian region by not engaging a local history. In general, in the early twenty-first century, traditionally styled productions of Shakespeare in translation employ Shakespeare to project or create national traditions, and adaptations of his plays use Shakespeare to bring into view the tensions adhering to the presence of pre-national pasts in contemporary society. At the same time, Ong's work enlarges an inter- and intracultural approach that is characteristic of Shakespeare adaptation in the region, where the plurality of artistic modes and sources, the fissures between different pasts, and the multiple languages or regional varieties of a language manifest the movement of political boundaries, and of peoples across them, in recent history. While atypical in their grand scope, their orientation towards international presentation and their lack of specific social context, Ong's productions nevertheless display an aesthetic of disjunctiveness between disparate elements that the stable tradition of Shakespeare enables in Southeast Asian adapatation. The choice of

adapting Shakespeare could be described as an occasion for the intersection between the place of cultures and their time.

Notes

1 The full production of the Ryutopia *Hamlet* can be seen online in the Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive (A|S|I|A) at http://a-s-i-a-web.org.
2 In Hong Kong, this tradition continued until its reunification with China in 1997. For more information, see Ingham (2002).
3 For instance, the plays of Vu Trong Phung and realist novels by Nhất Linh from the 1930s. See Pelley (2002) and; Tran Huy Lieu *et al.* (1971, 1985).
4 This chapter's research materials derive from two successive research projects supported by the Singapore Ministry of Education (Relocating Intercultural Theatre, MOE2008-T2–1-110; and Digital Archiving and Intercultural Performance, MOE2013-T2–1-011).
5 Personal interview with Truong Nhuan, deputy director of Vietnam Youth Theatre, translation by Nguyen Ha Nguyen, 20 June 2011, Hanoi. Nhuan stressed that the company rarely produces Shakespeare because 'Shakespeare is too expensive'.
6 Nopamat Veohong had previously translated and directed three other Shakespeare plays for the department; see Veohong.
7 A counterpart to *Romeo at Julieta* was the *Pikaresuku Iago* (Picaresque Iago) by Ryuzanji Jimusho in 1992, which adapted *Othello* to a post-apocalyptic setting in which Othello was the captain of a band of migrant workers collecting rubbish, and fell in love with a Filipino bar hostess named Desdemona.

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Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive (A|S|I|A), video-recordings and scripts, http://a-s-i-a-web.org: Vietnam Youth Theatre's *Macbeth*, Chulalongkorn University's *Macbeth*, The Actors Studio's *Mak Yong Titis Sakti*, Paper Monkey's *The Nonya Nightingale*, Black Tent Theatre and PETA's *Romeo at Julieta*, Japan Foundation's *Lear*, TheatreWorks' *Desdemona*, TheatreWorks and Face to Face's *Search: Hamlet*, and TheatreWorks' *Lear Dreaming*, accessed 22 June 2014.

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