Sinophone Adaptations of Shakespeare

An Anthology, 1987–2007

Edited by Alexa Alice Joubin

Sinophone Shakespeare: A Critical Introduction

Alexa Alice Joubin

Shakespeare's tragedies have inspired incredible work in the Sinophone theatre of China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Their creativity is changing how we understand Sinophone performance culture and Shakespeare's plays. The tragedies have been reimagined as political theatre, feminist operas, Buddhist meditations, and even comedies and parodies. In *Shamlet*, whose title playfully evokes the Mandarin transliterations of Shakespeare's name and "Hamlet," for example, the Danish prince froze when the ghost of his father was stranded onstage after the scene on the castle ramparts (act 1, scenes 4 and 5) due to a scripted mechanical failure of the wires. After the father-son conversation about the most "foul and … unnatural" murder of Old Hamlet, the Ghost—had everything gone according to plan—would exit by ascending by wire. A witty meta-theatrical comedy about a struggling theatre company, *Shamlet* depicts a group of bumbling Taiwanese actors' endearing efforts to put on *Hamlet* to rescue their company from financial ruin. Half way through the story, an actor-character made the astonishing discovery that their troupe got

A. A. Joubin (✉)
Department of English, George Washington University, Washington, DC, USA
e-mail: ajoubin@gwu.edu

the play's title wrong all along: it should have been *Hamlet* rather than *Shamlet*. The actor-characters' fate in the story mirrors the indeterminate state of being of the characters in *Hamlet*. In search of identities onstage and in their personal life, they explore such questions as "should the show go on?" and "to be or not to be" an actor? The show peels back the façade of stagecraft to reveal the contingency of theatre making. Its meta-theatrical structure also defamiliarizes the tropes of a brooding prince and his revenge mission in *Hamlet*. This 1992 masterpiece by Taiwanese playwright Lee Kuo-hsiu features dramaturgical parallels to Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be* (Romaine Film Corp, 1942) and Kenneth Branagh's *A Midwinter's Tale* (Castle Rock Entertainment, 1995), both of which revolve around fictional theatre companies' comical and, sometimes pitiable, efforts to stage *Hamlet*. With continuous revivals staged even after Lee's death in 2013, *Shamlet* remains one of the most popular plays in the Sinophone world today. Like several other plays in this anthology, such as Lü Po-shen's rewriting of *Macbeth* as *The Witches' Sonata*, *Shamlet* draws on audiences' awareness of previous, iconic performances of Shakespeare.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Shakespeare's motifs have been put to work in unexpected places, yielding a rich trove of modern classics with evolving relationships to the classics. Gender roles in the plays take on new meanings when they are embodied by actors whose new accents expand the characters' racial identities. Shakespeare's tragedies have been performed in the Sinophone world for over two centuries. In particular, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear* stand out as the most frequently and creatively adapted, a fact honored by the scope of this book. Sinophone Shakespeare's rich range of interpretive possibilities have much to teach us about non-Anglophone understanding of Shakespeare and Sinophone performance practices today.

This book showcases the directors' methodic transformations of three of Shakespeare's tragedies into various performance genres. Organized thematically to address the cultural exigencies between 1987 and 2007, this collection of translated plays showcases some gems of Sinophone cultures that stand at the intersection of East Asian and Anglophone dramas. Each section of this anthology focuses on a pair of striking adaptations of one of the tragedies: *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*, offering readers the opportunity to compare and contrast different approaches to

the same plays. We conclude with an experimental four-act play, entitled *To Be, or Not to Be*, that is inspired by Shakespeare's four tragedies, not only *Hamlet* but also *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*, thereby bringing us full circle. The adaptations are selected for their accessibility, artistic innovations, and curricular applicability. The criteria for pairing of the adaptations within each section include contrasts between geopolitical locations, between traditional and modern performance genres, and between thematic features such as Confucianism versus Buddhism. The pairings, when read as a unit, reveal connections between distinctive and often conflicting interpretations of Sinophone aesthetics and Shakespeare. English-subtitled videos of most of the plays in this anthology are available in the open-access digital performance archive *MIT Global Shakespeares*, co-edited by Alexa Alice Joubin and Peter S. Donaldson, located at http://globalshakespeares.org/.

Historical Context

Between 1987, when Chairman Deng Xiaoping reaffirmed "socialist market economy" as the guiding principle of China's development and when Taiwan's martial law was lifted by President Chiang Ching-kuo, and 2007, when the first competitive Chief Executive election changed Hong Kong's political culture (Donald Tsang was elected), these three tragedies were staged in multiple traditional and modern performance genres. They were informed by the anxieties and cultural dynamics in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan during this period. The year of 1987 was the beginning of the internationalization of Sinophone Shakespeare. The multinational technology company Huawei was founded in 1987, a landmark event in terms of China's rise internationally. With the 13th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party's adoption of capitalist market principles, China entered a phase of accelerated economic development, which is also known as "socialism with Chinese characteristics" in Deng Xiaoping's words. For artists and intellectuals, Deng's reforms initiated a new, enlightened era of openness.[1] Even though the openness was short lived, as the Tian'anmen Square massacre would crush the democratic reform by 1989, the year of 1987 did usher in a phase of internationally visible creativity in the forms of festivals and touring productions. The first Shakespeare

---

[1] Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 25.

festival was held in Shanghai and Beijing in April, 1986, to celebrate the 422nd anniversary of the Bard's birthday. Among the works commissioned for the festival was *The Story of Bloody Hands*, a *kunqu* opera adaptation of *Macbeth* by Huang Zuolin (see Chap. 4). The seven-act play became part of Shanghai Kunqu Theatre's repertoire. It was most recently revived in 2008 with an additional scene depicting Macbeth's murder of King Duncan. The play toured to several European cities, receiving critical acclaim at the Edinburgh Festival in 1987.

The year of 1987 was an equally pivotal year elsewhere in East Asia. South Korea had its first fair and direct presidential election in 1987, and hosted the Summer Olympics in Seoul in 1988. Taiwan lifted its 38-year-long martial law which accelerated the economic development of the island. As a large number of refugees of the civil war fled from China and Chiang Kai-shek's government retreated to Taiwan, Chiang's Kuomintang Party enacted the martial law on the island in 1949 and stifled artistic freedom of expression for subsequent decades. Beginning 1987, the budding process of democratization enabled newfound freedom of expression in the arts in Taiwan.[2] For example, renowned actor Wu Hsing-kuo and his dancer wife Lin Hsiu-wei co-founded the Contemporary Legend Theatre in Taipei with a new play, *Kingdom of Desire*, a *jingju* (Beijing opera) adaptation of *Macbeth*. With a more prominent role for Lady Macbeth, the adaptation has impressive, and still growing, international touring records. Like *Shamlet* and *The Story of Bloody Hands*, Wu's debut production has continuously been revived and has now become a classic in Sinophone theatre.

This anthology charts the artists' achievements and mutual influences in this vibrant period in Sinophone theatre by showcasing two contrasting approaches to each of the three plays. The influential adaptations are published here for the first time in English. During this period, these plays were staged as political theatre, comedic parody, Chinese opera, avant-garde theatre, and experimental theatre. The tragedies were transformed from stories whose meanings are governed by chronological events to a collection of snapshots and non-linear narratives with echoes of Shakespearean and Sinophone themes.

---

[2] Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang, *Literary Culture in Taiwan: Martial Law to Market Law* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); David Blundell, ed., *Taiwan since Martial Law: Society, Culture, Politics, Economy* (Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2012).

The Region as Method

My regional method of cultural studies[3] features a built-in comparative perspective that amplifies what Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman call "a relational mode of thinking."[4] The plays featured in this volume shed new light on the intra-regional influence of Shakespeare across a geo-cultural area, and they help us transcend siloed, national perspectives on the development of performance cultures. From literary history to social sciences, scholars are recently calling for renewed attention to the region as a unit of knowledge. A regional methodology attends to intra-regional idiosyncrasies and connections by breaking down perceived, clear cultural boundaries between nation-states. In this model of regional studies, there are no singular, unitary centers and peripheries in the cultural exchange, because the diffuse nature of disseminating ideas on varied but connected cultural terrains enables us to have a more comprehensive vision of artists' claimed affinity with, indifference to, and resistance of Shakespeare and the idea of Chineseness. In fact, while the "Sinophone" may be a discrete aesthetic or linguistic unit, it has no official geographical borders. The Sinophone encompasses artistic creation in Mandarin and a wide range of Sinetic dialects and practices. Using the region as a unit of knowledge helps us transcend "local" exceptionalism, as Marisssa Greenberg points out in her study of critically regional Shakespeare which treats regions "as variable and colloquial" and sheds new light on "complex dynamics of space, history, and identity."[5] My research has found that positivist and antithetical strands coexist in the Sinophone reception of Shakespeare. Relational, cultural meanings emerge through negation of and negotiation with Shakespeare.

Building upon Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of "intersectional" experience and identities,[6] my use of the region as method honors multiple

---

[3] Alexa Alice Joubin, "Afterword: Towards a Regional Methodology of Culture," *Disseminating Shakespeare in the Nordic Countries: Shifting Centres and Peripheries in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Nely Keinänen and Per Sivefors (Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2022), 291–296.

[4] Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman, Introduction. *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses*, ed. Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 1–12.

[5] Marissa Greenberg, "Critically Regional Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 37.3 (Fall 2019): 341–363; 342.

[6] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989: 139–167; 140.

identity positions within the Sinophone world and counters the People's Republic of China's official narratives of "unification" that seek to justify its military threat against Taiwan, Xinjiang, and Tibet. This regional methodology also reveals the penumbra around the seven adaptations. While they come from different cultural and historical locations, the adaptations share an intertextual penumbra. When light is cast over an opaque object, it casts a shadow with a partially shaded outer region. In Judith Buchanan's theory, this body of extra-textual information, or a "textual penumbra," enriches the meanings of the adaptations.[7] The penumbra around these adaptations consists of discrete plot elements of Shakespeare and overlapping culturally specific themes. An innocuous penumbra could be audiences' or readers' awareness of previous works by the artist. A more intrusive penumbra could be directors' statements on record or the significance of the venue.

The current phase of global studies is challenging fixed notions of cultural authenticity, drawing more attention to regional Shakespeares that blur the lines between central and peripheral locations of cultural production. Attending to intra-regional, mediated influences, this anthology is an attempt to move the field beyond narrowly defined national Shakespeares. One challenge that global studies have faced is the collation of empirical data across geocultural areas. Globalization is difficult to study empirically when "evidence is far better organized on a national rather than cross-border basis."[8] Regional data is widely available but difficult to classify, as I have argued elsewhere.[9] Other than English translation of three Japanese adaptations of Shakespeare in 2021, very little primary research material about East Asian Shakespeares is available for further study in Anglophone classrooms or academia.[10] The dearth of available primary texts has led to ghettoization of Asian cultures and institutional siloes. This anthology promotes the treatment of Asian performing arts as what Rossella Ferrari

---

[7] Judith Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Film* (Harlow, 2005), 10.

[8] Bryan S. Turner and Robert Holton, "Theories of Globalization: Issues and Origins," *The Routledge International Handbook of Globalization Studies*, 2nd edition, ed. Bryan S. Turner and Robert J. Holton (New York, 2016), 3–23; 5.

[9] Alexa Alice Joubin, *Shakespeare and East Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 1–21.

[10] Tetsuhito Motoyama, Rosalind Fielding, and Fumiaki Konno, eds., *Re-imagining Shakespeare in Contemporary Japan: A Selection of Japanese Theatrical Adaptations of Shakespeare* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

calls "active producers of original epistemologies rather than merely as providers of ethnographies and derivative adaptations."[11]

This book has risen to meet this challenge by presenting differentiated but connected layers of influence and creative processes in seven adaptations. In some cases, national boundaries were significant factors in the dissemination of Shakespeare and evolution of local cultures. In other cases, the nation-state was not as useful as an organizing principle through which to understand Sinophone Shakespeares. While at times the Sinophone cultures had antithetical relations with one another, there was also significant cooperation that went beyond the nation-state. This book employs a regional methodology within a transnational framework to identify shared and conflicting patterns of cultural dissemination. This method disrupts "nationalist and globalist paradigms," according to Aaron Nyerges and Thomas Adams.[12] The region as method is marked by a fundamental departure from the national and nationalist lenses; it emphasizes the connections between what appears to be isolated instances of artistic creation. As Kuan-hsing Chen has proposed in his theory of Asia as method, using Asian cultural texts themselves as a methodological hub is an important step toward de-colonizing knowledge production. It deconstructs the hegemonic idea of "the West as method" by default and Asia as merely ethnographic case studies.[13] The inter-Asian focus of the present volume draws attention to connections across the Sinophone world.

THE SINOPHONE WORLD

Helping us achieve these goals is the concept of the Sinophone. In contrast to the term "Chinese-speaking," which presupposes the central position of China as homeland in a settler colonial mentality, the Sinophone is a more inclusive notion that points to a network of cultures. This book collects Sinophone works that have emerged from the multilingual and polyphonic but site-specific performance cultures. These cultures are in

[11] Rossella Ferrari, *Transnational Chinese Theatres: Intercultural Performance Networks in East Asia* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave, 2020), 10.

[12] Aaron Nyerges and Thomas Adams, "Introduction: Regionalizing American Studies Within and Beyond the Nation." *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 36.2 (2017): 3–10; 6. See also Marjorie Pryse, "Afterword: Regional Modernism and Transnational Regionalism," *Modern Fiction Studies* 55.1 (Spring 2009): 189–192.

[13] Chen Kuan-hsing, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 216.

dialogue with one another beyond nationalist contexts and sometimes circumvent "China" altogether. Shu-mei Shih uses the Sinophone to refer to communities that are connected to or are resisting various forms of dominant Sinocentric ideologies.[14] These communities have produced artworks in languages in the Sino-Tibetan language family, which consists of 400 languages that are used in Tibet, China, and other parts of Asia.[15] The Sinitic languages include Cantonese (often the language of choice for Hong Kong performances and films), Hokkien (one of the primary dialects spoken in Singapore), and Hakka and Taiwanese (which feature in many performances in Taiwan). As Shih points out, the Sinophone cultural sphere is "multi-local" with practices from multiple cultural locations.[16] Examples include Cantonese culture in Hong Kong under British rule (which is distinct from Cantonese culture in Guangzhou) and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region after 1997; Hakka and Taiwanese cultures in Taiwan; and Tibetan culture in the Tibet Autonomous Region. The Sinophone framework helps us move beyond the limiting scope of national profiling to consider intra-regional networks of Shakespearean performances. Sinophone is an equally useful concept for understanding theatre productions in China that are wrestling with the idea of a monolithic Han-Mandarin culture.

Shakespeare's plays in translated and rewritten forms have coexisted in the stage genres of the operatic *xiqu* and the dialogue-based *huaju*. The dialogic nature of Shakespeare's dialogue-based plays provided inspiration for the development of *huaju*, or spoken drama, away from singing or dancing in the stylized *xiqu* theatre which is more economical with speeches. The renovation of stylized theatre through the infusion of Western classics went hand in hand with the innovation of the new genre of spoken drama. As Siyuan Liu notes, new, speech-based theatre forms "exhibit uniquely hybrid features" reflective of China's "interaction with Euro-American powers … in the shadow of global colonialism."[17] As for *xiqu*, Shakespeare's plays contributed psychological realism, among other elements. The earliest documented *xiqu* Shakespeare, *Killing the Elder*

[14] Shu-mei Shih, "The Concept of the Sinophone," *PMLA* 126.3 (2011): 709–718.

[15] Victor H. Mair, "What Is a Chinese 'Dialect/Topolet'? Reflections on Some Key Sino-English Linguistic Terms," *Sino-Platonic Papers* 29 (September 1991): 1–31.

[16] Shu-mei Shih, "Introduction: What Is Sinophone Studies?" *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, ed. Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernards (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 1–16; 8.

[17] Siyuan Liu, *Performing Hybridity in Colonial-Modern China* (New York: Palgrave, 2013).

Brother and Snatching the Sister-in-Law, was based on *Hamlet* and was performed in *chuanju* (Sichuan opera) in 1914. Although performances of Shakespeare in different genres of Chinese opera have existed since the early twentieth century, the 1980s were a turning point. *Story of the Bloody Hands* is one of the most notable and widely toured operatic productions from the period. Shakespeare became more regularly performed and entered the collective cultural memory of Chinese performers and audiences.

In contrast to China, Taiwan and Hong Kong have more exposure to American and British, respectively, political and cultural institutions. They are fraught cultural crossroads, caught between China, the former colonial powers of Britain and Japan, and the culturally dominant Anglophone West. Performances of Shakespeare at theatre festivals in Taiwan in the 1980s and 1990s were artistically and commercially driven. China's post-Cultural-Revolution Shakespeare boom was initiated by state-endorsed and government-sponsored Shakespeare festivals in 1986 and 1994. The monthlong Shakespeare in Taipei festival of 2003, in contrast, focused on providing a platform for artistically innovative and commercially viable experimental works rather than serving cultural diplomacy or a narrative of the rise of a nation, as was the case of festivals in China. In a post-martial-law Taiwan focused on fostering newfound diversity, it became possible for locals to speak Mandarin, Taiwanese, Hakka, and aboriginal languages. As a result, Taiwan has produced a significant number of mainstream performances either entirely in one dialect, in a mixture of Mandarin and a local dialect, or in English. Some of these works reflect Taiwan's multicultural history; others question that history and whether Taiwan is part of China. These tendencies provide interesting contrasts to the ways Chinese artists imagine China. Although China is certainly multilingual, it is Taiwan and Hong Kong that have established strong performance traditions in one or more dialects. The linguistic diversity of Taiwan and Hong Kong theatres fosters distinctive views of Shakespeare and of what counts as Chinese.

Hong Kong culture has not resisted Shakespeare as an imperial symbol despite Hong Kong's colonial history. If the practitioners of the new theatre were resisting anything, it was Hong Kong's tangential connection to Mandarin Chinese culture. With its strong dual traditions of English and Cantonese performances in two genres, *huaju* and *yueju* (Cantonese opera), Hong Kong theatre is a cultural site where the southern Chinese culture and the British legacy fight for primacy. After China ceded Hong

Kong to Britain for 150 years in 1841, Englishness was given significant cultural weight throughout the social structure but not imposed as it was in India. The indirect colonial structure that Mao Zedong later called semi-colonialism[18] informed Hong Kong's performance culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Since the 1980s, a considerable amount of energy has been directed toward Hong Kong's status as a cultural crossroad, as evidenced by the productions of Hong Kong Repertory Theatre (founded in 1977), the largest professional theatre in Hong Kong, and performances by students at Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and other universities. Performances often draw on Hong Kong's hybrid status between Cantonese and British cultures.

Contrasting Approaches to the Tragedies

The first section examines Hamlet's existentialist questions in post-socialist China and post-martial-law Taiwan, turning points in history for the two countries. *Hamlet* has been a popular play for political appropriation. In contrast to aforementioned Lee's facetious approach in *Shamlet* (Chap. 3), China's preeminent director Lin Zhaohua offered a despondent interpretation of *Hamlet* (*Hamuleite*, Chap. 2). Staged by the Lin Zhaohua Theatre Workshop in the wake of the student demonstration in Tian'anmen Square, Lin's version can be interpreted as critiquing, though it did not directly allude to, the Chinese government's crackdown on the democratic movement in Beijing, which culminated in the massacre on June 4, 1989. As Saffron Vickers Walkling notes, Lin turned to Shakespeare when his own plays were censored. Unlike his contemporaries, such as the Nobel literature laurate Gao Xingjian, Lin did not choose the artistic "freedom" afforded by self-imposed exile. He remained in Beijing to stage his works. His reimagination of Western classics is a force to be reckoned with.[19]

Scholars have used the term "post-socialism" to describe post-1989 China. Lin would agree with this assessment which captures a lost, Hamletian generation who emerged from the contradiction between the nominally socialist Chinese Communist Party and the country's capitalist

---

[18] Rebecca E. Karl, *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth-Century World: A Concise History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 56.

[19] Saffron Vickers Walkling, Hamlet *and the Legacy of 1989: Politicising the Mise-en-Scène in Lin Zhaohua's* Hamlet *(1990/1995), Jan Klata's* H. *(2004/2006) and Sulayman Al Bassam's* The Al-Hamlet Summit *(2002/2004).* PhD thesis, University of York, 2020.

pursuits. Arif Dirlik notes the "ideological contradiction and uncertainty" in a government that both promotes integration into capitalist world economy and uses nationalist socialist revolution to direct citizens' attention away from its authoritarianism.[20]

Lin's *Hamlet* (1989, 1990, 1994), set in contemporary China, used three actors to play the titular character in order to demarcate different stages of psychological development of the prince. The three Hamlets drive home the message that, in Lin's post-socialist society, "everyone is Hamlet." While Lin had little knowledge of German playwrights, his use of sequences of monologues, rather than a conventional, linear plotline, echoes Heiner Müller's postmodern play *Die Hamletmaschine* (1979) in which the protagonist reflects on his role as an actor.

Whereas Lin's play suggests that in his post-socialist society, everyone is a morally coward Hamlet, prolific playwright and director Lee Kuo-hsiu uses Shakespeare's tragedy as a pretext in his metatheatrical play, *Shamlet* (1992). Set in post-martial-law Taiwan, *Shamlet* turns high tragedy into comic parody. A struggling theatre company tours *Hamlet* around Taiwan, seeing Shakespeare as part of their strategy to reboot their company. However, instead of following the typical arc of redemption, this play, rife with scripted onstage mishaps presented as improvisation, concludes with the company's eventual defeat.

Lin's and Lee's plays bear marks of the social exigencies of China and Taiwan of their times. Their adaptations of *Hamlet* have contradictory cultural meanings that emerge in processes of continuous negotiation and reflect the realities of theatre making in Taiwan and China. Although Sinophone performances of Anglophone dramas initially developed out of Western modes of representation, especially the dialogue-based theatre (*huaju*), these works are sites of simultaneous, sometimes contradictory cultural meanings. They estrange familiar tropes while creating new performance techniques.

The second section turns to *Macbeth* in *kunqu* opera in China and avant-garde theatre in Taiwan. *Kunqu*, also known as Kun opera, is one of the many variations of the traditional *xiqu* theatre. It has been deemed a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The relative brevity of *Macbeth*—with few subplots—lends itself to

[20] Arif Dirlik, "Postsocialism? Reflections on 'socialism with Chinese characteristics.'" *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars.* 21.1 (1989): 33–44; 34 and 43.

adaptations in musical genres that prioritize singing and dancing over speeches. The adaptations in Chaps. 4 and 5 are in local dialects rather than standard Mandarin: Suzhou vernacular and Taiwanese. Even though most Chinese theatre practitioners and critics believed that only *huaju* in Mandarin—a form with closer affinity to the Western naturalistic theatre—was a more effective medium for performing Shakespeare, the well-received *kunqu Macbeth* (sung in Suzhou dialect, featured in Chap. 4) changed the perception. Produced by Huang Zuolin, co-founder of Shanghai People's Art Theatre, the operatic *Story of Bloody Hands* (Shanghai and Edinburgh Festival, 1987; revival in Shanghai, 2008) deployed *Macbeth* and *kunqu* to de-familiarize each other and add psychological depth to traditional *kunqu* characterization. Huang is renowned for his hybrid aesthetics that draw on Stanislavsky, Brecht, and *jingju* actor Mei Lanfang's techniques of female impersonation.

Chapter 5 features Lü Po-shen's *huaju*-musical adaptation. The 2007 production by Tainaner Ensemble interpreted *Macbeth* through a feminist lens. Entitled *The Witches' Sonata* and accompanied by percussion and classical piano music, the production was a high-profile Taiwanese-language performance of Western drama. The choice of language is important, because most productions in Taiwan are in Mandarin. Focusing on minimalism and the "musicality" of drama, Lü has staged several plays in his "Shakespeare Unplugged" series which translated the vitality of early modern English drama through a media-rich mise-en-scène. The adjective "unplugged" signals Lü's emphasis on centering actors' somatic presence and on detaching his productions from modern, realist stage technologies. Working with translator Tēng-pang Suyaka Chiu, Lü has established himself as a pioneer in staging Classical Greek and Shakespeare's plays in Taiwanese. He noted that, owing to it having more tones than Mandarin, the tonal Taiwanese language is better suited to translating poetic drama.[21] *The Witches' Sonata* focused on the three "weird sisters," each sporting a mask of a bearded man on the back of their head while wearing an emotion-less mask on their face. Its 13 scenes elided Shakespeare's battle scenes and excised male characters, re-narrating the play from feminine perspectives. To drive home the message that the witches are both

[21] Cecilia Liu, Joseph C. Murphy, Joseph C., and Llyn Scott, "An Interview with Lü Po-shen." *Fu Jen Studies: Literature and Linguistics* 38 (2005), https://www.thefreelibrary.com/An+interview+with+Lu+Po-Shen.-a0165939816, accessed August 20, 2021.

attractive and grotesque, with several faces and personalities, Lü had the three witches wear masks of old men with beards and other personas.

The third section presents two adaptations of *King Lear* in two variations of *jingju* in Shanghai and Taipei. *Jingju*, Beijing opera, is a widely circulated form of the stylized *xiqu* theatre known for its use of percussions and Beijing dialect (declared to be the Standard Chinese, Putonghua, by the PRC in 1955). Today, there are prominent *jingju* troupes beyond Beijing, including Shanghai and Taipei with their own twists of the two-century-old theatre.

The two adaptations in this section are diametrically opposed in ideology yet resonate with each other in their understanding of "modern" *jingju*. Chapter 6 features Shanghai *Jingju* Opera's Confucian *King Qi's Dream* (directed by Ouyang Ming, 1995) in a more traditional form of Beijing opera, while Chap. 7 showcases Taiwanese actor Wu Hsing-kuo's solo, experimental *jingju* entitled *Lear Is Here* (*Li Er zaici*, 2001) with Buddhist inflections. The king's name in Ouyang's production, Qi, signifies a divergent path, implying his failure as both a monarch and a father. The king's name in Wu's production, Li Er, is homophonous with the birth name of Taoist philosopher Laozi (ca. 571 BCE–501 BCE). Read side by side, these two adaptations showcase the elasticity of *jingju* and contrasting interpretations of Lear's sufferings.

Starring Shang Changrong, recipient of the Plum Blossom Award, China's highest honor for actors, *King Qi's Dream* depicts the nightmarish scenario of an aging father's disgrace in the hands of his impious daughters. Playing an eccentric Lear, Shang tiptoed cautiously between Stanislavski's psychologically immersive acting method and traditional *jingju*'s binary presentation of heroes and villains. The adaptation excised the role of Gloucester, traditionally a foil to Lear in Shakespeare's text, and turned Gloucester's illegitimate son Edmund into an ambitious courtier and a catalyst for Lear's downfall. Despite Shang's innovative, hybrid performance techniques, the adaptation overall followed the typical *xiqu* allegorical structure and dramatized characteristic *xiqu* themes of filial piety and political loyalty.[22] Opening with King Qi's birthday celebration and closing with a scene of "rebirth" of the reconciled king's and his redeemed daughter's relationship, the adaptation

---

[22] Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak read it as an allegory concerning Mao Zedong and his self-indulgent "dream" of Cultural Revolution, Wichmann-Walczak, "'Reform' at the Shanghai Jingju Company and Its Impact on Creative Authority and Repertory," *TDR* 44.4 (Winter, 2000): 96–119; 109.

framed filial piety and fraternal love as part of a naturalized Confucian, patriarchal order that brings hope. The production adhered to the traditional narrative pattern of ending with an allegorical reunion scene. Similar to *The Story of Bloody Hands*, *King Qi's Dream* localized the plot and setting of Shakespeare's play and assimilated *Lear* into local worldviews.

While *King Qi's Dream* transplanted *King Lear* into the soil of *jingju* and followed the genre's principle of singular plotline focusing on the paternal monarch,[23] Wu staged a series of iconic scenes to tell an autobiographical story in his solo *Lear Is Here*. Even though the story was performed in a *xiqu* form, filial piety is not the central focus. Among the plays collected in this volume, *Lear Is Here* is unique in having originated outside of the Sinophone sphere. Ariane Mnouchkine invited Wu to lead a workshop for Théâtre du Soleil in Paris to address the limitations of European avant-garde acting methods. He created the solo adaptation of *Lear* as a means to introduce *jingju* techniques to non-specialists and to innovate *jingju* by fusing the operatic form with a Western high tragedy. Like *Shamlet*, Shakespeare's work is merely a pretext for artistic innovation here. Having been invited to the Edinburgh Festival, New York's Lincoln Center, and other prestigious venues, *Lear Is Here* is still touring internationally today.

The first innovation is Wu's tour-de-force performance of ten characters: Li Er in the first act, the Fool, a Dog, Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, Earl of Gloucester, Edmund, and Edgar in the second act, and himself (Wu Hsing-kuo the actor) in the third and final act. In taking on male and female roles of all ages and *jingju* role types outside of his specialization, Wu entered an experimental territory and accomplished what few *jingju* actors have attempted. The second innovation lies in Wu's mapping of his life story onto that of Lear's. He used the idea of king's two, spiritual and carnal, bodies and Lear's monarchial and paternal identities to address his own divided identities as a Taiwanese *jingju* actor. Beijing opera is seen on the island as a decidedly, and problematically, Chinese art form. Taiwan has been constantly under threat of invasion from the People's Republic of China, and Sinophobic sentiments have been growing stronger since the

---

[23] The *jingju* studies term is *yiren yishi* (lit. one character, one event). See Chen Fang, "Yuyan, biaoyan, kua wenhua: *Li'er wang* and Sha xiqu (Language, Performance, and Cross-culture: *King Lear* and Shake-*xiqu*)," *Xiju yanjiu* (*Journal of Theatre Studies*) 18 (June, 2016): 113–144; 134.

lifting of the martial law in 1987. Both Li Er and Wu are on a quest for self-identity, asking "who am I?" The third innovation is Wu's departure from *jingju's* allegorical, Confucian structure to explore the idea of Buddhist redemption. Playing himself in the final act, Wu circled the stage and meditated in a Buddhist monastic robe. Here he drew on the Buddhist meditative practice of walking around a sacred pagoda.

King Qi's Dream and *Lear Is Here* have several things in common. Both of them explore the self-identities of their creators and *jingju* as a genre in modern times, and both toured internationally. While Ouyang and Wu endow variously articulated "redemptive" quality on *King Lear*, they had different visions for the future of *jingju*. Both condensed *King Lear* and excised or subsumed the subplots, and both capitalized on the complex idioms of *jingju* as an asset in creating international demand for traditional theatre forms.

King Lear has held a special place in Asia. In the Sinophone world, the tragedy has been adapted as a story of social reparation and of aging and dying with dignity. The theme of domestic tragedy in *Lear* has inspired works that speak to multigenerational diasporic communities. Hong Kong–British director David Tse Ka-Shing staged a Mandarin–English version of *King Lear* in 2006 with his London-based Yellow Earth Theatre, in collaboration with Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre, in Shanghai and Stratford-upon-Avon (part of the Royal Shakespeare Company's Complete Works Festival). Instead of filial piety, Tse sees the conflict in the story as informed by the questions of heritage. Set in Shanghai in 2020, the production presented the ideological conflicts between Lear and Cordelia through linguistic difference. Lear, a business tycoon, solicits declarations of love from his three daughters during a family meeting. Regan and Goneril live in Shanghai and are fluent in Chinese. Cordelia has been living in London and does not speak Chinese. Her silence is both a result of her inability to speak her father's language and a form of resistance of the patriarchy. Distance does not make the heart grow fonder when she is not even there in person. Cordelia, a member of the Chinese diaspora in London, participates in this important family and business meeting via video link. Ironically but perhaps fittingly, the only Chinese word at her disposal is *meiyou* ("nothing").

Language also emerges as an important identity marker in other productions, such as Singaporean director Ong Keng Sen's multilingual adaptation of *Lear* (1996 and 1999) in collaboration with Japanese playwright Kishida Rio. The Lear figure speaks Japanese, while the Older Daughter,

a composite figure of Goneril and Regan, speaks Mandarin. The division-of-the-kingdom scene is presented as a ritual in which the father and daughter have a philosophical conversation about fatherhood in two languages and two distinct performance styles. The younger sister (Cordelia) speaks Thai, although she remains silent most of the time. Ong uses *Lear* to critique colonialism.

Bringing together all of these threads of redemption and identification in the foregoing three sections is Liu Qing and Tao Jun's meta-theatrical play *To Be, or Not to Be*, featured in Chap. 8. Staged in parallel to the fanfare of the first Chinese Shakespeare Festival in Beijing and Shanghai in 1986, Liu and Tao's production remixes contemporary commentary and iconic motifs and lines from not only *Hamlet* but also *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*. Built around the conceit of the Modern Man wandering into a graveyard to converse with the Shakespearean protagonists—resurrected from the state of a statue, the production makes links between the dramatic situations faced by the tragic heroes and modern Chinese social conditions.

Conclusion: Recurring Themes

Several themes recur in Sinophone adaptations of Shakespeare, as evidenced by the plays featured in this anthology. Some directors believe Shakespeare has universal appeal or morals. This strategy has produced plays that were performed "straight." Advocates of this approach wish to preserve Shakespeare's "foreignness" as a means to inject new aesthetics into their performance genres. Also helpful is the ideological and cultural distance between Shakespeare and these directors' cultures. Lin Zhaohua does not Sinicize the setting, characters' names, or verbal metaphors in Shakespeare's plays. Characters' names appear in Mandarin transliteration; Hamlet as Hamuleite, for example. When asked by *The Guardian*: "why Shakespeare?" during the tour of his *Coriolanus* to the Edinburgh Festival, Lin referred to tacit freedom: "It gives me the freedom to say what I want."[24] Lee Kuo-hsiu takes the notion of "foreignness" to a new, parodic level. Lee does not need to work around censorship; rather, he aims to deconstruct Shakespeare's canonical status. *Shamlet* shows us snippets of rehearsals and performances of iconic scenes from *Hamlet* only to raise

---

[24] Andrew Dickson, "Guitar hero: *Coriolanus* goes rock," *The Guardian* August 6, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/aug/06/guitar-hero-coriolanus-edinburgh

our awareness of potentially monolithic, contrived interpretations of, for example, the Ghost's instructions to have his son avenge his murder. Lee's strategy involves pastiche and dramaturgical collage. He changes the genre of *Hamlet* from high tragedy to postmodern parody. The emergence of parody is a sign of Taiwanese audiences' (claimed) familiarity with Shakespeare. While Lin preserves the play's foreignness in terms of semantic and dramaturgical structures, Lee reinstates a sense of foreignness through his parody to defamiliarize clichéd tropes of *Hamlet*. In the program to *Shamlet* (1992), Lee suggests his play is a revenge comedy that "has nothing to do with *Hamlet* but something to do with Shakespeare."[25]

The second strategy deploys Shakespearean characterization as a tool to renovate the performance genres in which the directors work. Through Macbeth, a villainous hero, Huang introduces more nuanced subtexts to *kunqu*'s characteristic uses of role types. A self-confident general would have been performed traditionally in the warrior role type, but elements from several role types would need to be fused to present the coexisting strands of Macbeth's personality: shifting loyalty, bravery, cowardice, questionable moral compass, and deferral to his wife on important decisions. Likewise, Lü Po-shen uses several Shakespeare's plays as the testing ground for his project to elevate the cultural status of Taiwanese-language theatre. He believed the musicality of iambic pentameter could enrich the musicality of Taiwan's tonal language onstage.

The third strategy involves localization of Shakespeare's plays to create new, Sinophone repertoires. The two plays in section three of this volume are examples of successful endeavors in this regard. Ouyang Ming clearly states his goal for adapting *King Lear* into *King Qi's Dream*: "I aim to fit Shakespeare's play into the *xiqu* and Chinese cultural contexts including our customs and aesthetics. I would like my audiences who happen to know Shakespeare to see shadows of *Lear*, and those who do not know Shakespeare to simply enjoy it as a story from ancient China."[26] Both *King Qi's Dream* and *Lear Is Here* take inspiration from *King Lear* and present newly written narratives that resonate with Chinese and Taiwanese cultures, and both have successfully entered the repertoire of their respective theatre companies.

[25] Quoted in Lee, *Shamuleite*, 119.

[26] Xia Yang, "*Li'er wang* hua *Qiwang meng*: Yanzhiyuan lun de yu shi" (Transforming *King Lear* into *King Qi's Dream*: Advantages and Disadvantages), *Zhongguo dianshi xiqu* (Chinese Television and *Xiqu*) 1 (1996): 12–13; 12.

These three approaches do overlap with one another, as they are not mutually exclusive. While creating plays that speak to and belong to them, Ouyang and Wu also use *King Lear* to enrich *jingju*'s idioms of stylized characterization, similar to how Huang and Lü draw on *Macbeth* to carve new paths for *kunqu* opera and Taiwanese-language theatre.

Intended as a tool for the teaching and research of both global Shakespeare and of Sinophone theatre's engagement with Western classics in late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, this anthology showcases the rich range of performance genres and artistic creativity that reinvented those genres. There is growing scholarly literature on Sinophone theatre and adaptations, but play texts have remained difficult to access. This anthology turns influential plays into stable, citable, common objects of study. Researchers and students can access primary research material rather than relying on partial impressions captured by performance reviews.

The Global Shakespeares series, edited by Alexa Alice Joubin, explores the global afterlife of Shakespearean drama, poetry and motifs in their literary, performative and digital forms of expression in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Disseminating big ideas and cutting-edge research in e-book and print formats, this series captures global Shakespeares as they evolve.

Editorial Board:
Mark Thornton Burnett, Queen's University Belfast, UK
Peter Donaldson, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA
Mark Houlahan, University of Waikato, New Zealand
Douglas Lanier, University of New Hampshire, USA
Dennis Kennedy, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland
Sandra Young, University of Cape Town, South Africa
Margaret Litvin, Boston University, USA
Ryuta Minami, Tokyo Keizai University, Japan
Alfredo Michel Modenessi, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico
Ayanna Thompson, Arizona State University, USA
Poonam Trivedi, Indraprastha College, University of Delhi, India

More information about this series at
https://link.springer.com/bookseries/15016

Editor
Alexa Alice Joubin
Department of English
George Washington University
Washington, DC, USA

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Contents

Expanded Table of Contents

Notes on Contributors

Dongshin Chang is an associate professor in the Department of Theatre at Hunter College/CUNY. His research interests include intercultural performance, Chinese theatre, and writing pedagogy. He has published *Representing China on the Historical London Stage: From Orientalism to Intercultural Performance* (2015). His other publications have most recently appeared in *Theatre Topics* (2019), *New Directions in Teaching Theatre Arts* (2018), and *Asian Theatre Journal* (2017). He is the President of the Kunqu Society in New York.

Yilin Chen, PhD, Royal Holloway, University of London, is Professor of English and Director of the Global Foreign Language Education Program at Providence University in Taiwan. She has close ties to the Tainaner Ensemble whose adaptation of *Macbeth* she translated for this anthology. She has also co-translated a *Noh Macbeth* into Chinese. Her research interests include *manga* adaptations of Shakespeare and issues of gender and sexuality in theatre.

Alexa Alice Joubin is Professor of English, Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Theatre, International Affairs, and East Asian Languages and Literatures at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., where she serves as founding co-director of the Digital Humanities Institute. She is the author of *Shakespeare and East Asia* (2021), co-author of *Race* (with Martin Orkin, 2018), editor-in-chief of *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Global Shakespeare*, and co-editor of *Onscreen Allusions to Shakespeare: International Films, Television, and Theatre* (Palgrave, 2022) and *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation* (Palgrave, 2014).

Ronald Kimmons has BA degrees in Chinese and English from Brigham Young University. He has worked as a professional Chinese-English translator, having translated contemporary Chinese poetry featured in the anthology *Push Open the Window* as well as commercial and industrial publications. He owns and manages Wingfire Media Company, a digital marketing agency.

Lia Wen-ching Liang is Associate Professor at the Graduate Institute of Performing Arts, National Taiwan Normal University. Her main research interest lies in the development of a Deleuzian approach to theatre studies in order to explore issues such as aesthetics, theatricality, and representation. On behalf of Taiwan Shakespeare Association and in collaboration with National Museum of Taiwan Literature and Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust, she curated the exhibition entitled All the World's a Stage: Shakespeare in Taiwan. Her book, in Chinese, *Collaborating with Shakespeare* (*Yu Shashibiya tongxing,* Taipei: Net and Books Publisher, 2016), is a collection of interviews with scholars and theatre practitioners conducted for that exhibition.
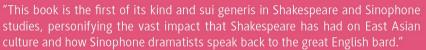
Siyuan Liu is Editor of the *Asian Theatre Journal* and past president of the Association for Asian Performance. He is Associate Professor of Theatre at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. His books include *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre* (edited, 2016), *Modern Asian Theatre and Performance 1900–2000* (co-authored, 2014), *The Methuen Drama Anthology of Modern Asian Plays* (co-edited, 2014), and *Performing Hybridity in Colonial-Modern China* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). His work has appeared in such journals as *Asian Theatre Journal, Theatre Journal, Theatre Survey, Theatre Research International, TDR*, and *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*.

Christopher G. Rea is a prolific translator and Professor of Modern Chinese Literature at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. His books include *Chinese Film Classics, 1922–1949* (2021), *China's Chaplin: Comic Stories and Farces by Xu Zhuodai* (translated, Cornell, 2019), *Where Research Begins: How to Choose a Research Project That Matters to You (and the World)* (co-authored, 2022), *The Book of Swindles: Selections from a Late Ming Collection* (co-translated, 2017), and *The Age of Irreverence: A New History of Laughter in China* (2015), among others.

Steven L. Riep is an associate professor in the Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages at Brigham Young University, where he teaches

courses in modern and contemporary Chinese literature, cinema, and culture and comparative literature. His research interests include cinema studies; disability studies; war, memory, and literature; and ecocriticism. His articles and reviews have appeared in such venues as *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture, Modern China, The Oxford Handbook of Disability History,* and *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles and Reviews.* He has also translated contemporary fiction, poetry, essays, and drama from both China and Taiwan. He is completing a book manuscript on the depiction of disabilities in literature and the visual arts from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

GLOBAL SHAKESPEARES
Series Editor: **Alexa Alice Joubin**

"This book is the first of its kind and sui generis in Shakespeare and Sinophone studies, personifying the vast impact that Shakespeare has had on East Asian culture and how Sinophone dramatists speak back to the great English bard."
—**Christopher Lupke**, recipient of the MLA Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for translation and Professor, East Asian Studies Department, University of Alberta, Canada

"Seven historic yet hitherto hardly accessible texts are introduced and translated by Joubin and a team of top scholars, and finally made available to a wide readership. Meticulously researched and annotated, yet highly readable, the plays and related media will provide essential research and teaching resources for years to come. Unique in its genre, this important collection confirms Joubin's status as a leading voice on Global Shakespeares."
—**Rossella Ferrari**, Professor of Chinese Studies, University of Vienna, Austria

"This first-of-its-kind anthology is an indispensable tool for researching Sinophone Shakespeares that supplements performance reviews and other textual penumbra. By adopting a thematic and (intra)regional methodology, the collection successfully moves the discipline beyond narrowly-defined national perspectives and deconstructs the hegemonic idea of the West as method."
—**Adele Lee**, Associate Professor, Emerson College, Boston, USA

Hamlet, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*, three of the most frequently adapted tragedies, have been performed in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China for over two centuries as political theatre, comedic parody, Chinese opera, and avant-garde theatre. Each of this book's three sections offers contrasting adaptations of each tragedy for comparative analysis.

Alexa Alice Joubin is Professor of English, Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Theatre, International Affairs, and East Asian Languages and Literatures at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., USA, where she co-founded and co-directs the Digital Humanities Institute.

palgrave
macmillan