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中国舞台上的塞缪尔·贝克特—— 跨文化戏剧演出研究（1964-2011）

施清婧·著

南开大学出版社

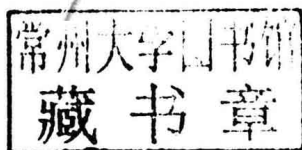
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——跨文化戏剧演出研究（1964~2011）

**Samuel Beckett on Chinese Stage (1964-2011):
A Study of Intercultural Performances**

施清婧 著



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Textual Notes

This book adopts the *pinyin* romanization system for Chinese names such as Chen Tao and phrases such as *jingju* and *taiji* except in those cases where terms are more commonly accepted in the Wade-Giles Romanization, such as Taipei (for Taibei).

With regard to people's names specifically, this book follows both the official spelling that appears in the publications and the Chinese tradition of family names preceding first names, for example, Tu Wei-ming for "Du Weiming [杜维明]" and C. T. Hsia for "Xia Zhiqing [夏志清]."

The English titles of Chinese plays are renditions rather than transliterations of the original. The translations are based on the meanings of the Chinese titles, such as *Godot Comes* for *Dengdao Geduo* (等到戈多), *Beckett in Ancient Chinese Garden* for *Gucuo zhong de Beikete* (古厝中的贝克特), etc.

All references to Samuel Beckett's lines are cited from *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1990). All Chinese translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

Abbreviations

WFG: Waiting for Godot

BPAT: Beijing People's Art Theater

SDAC: Shanghai Dramatic Arts' Center

CAD: Central Academy of Drama

CLT: Contemporary Legend Theater

ALT: Alice Laboratory Theater

Prologue

Since the premiere of *Waiting for Godot* in Paris in 1953, Samuel Beckett, the Irish-French writer and 1969 Nobel Prize winner, has made his name with the unique absurd style on the post-WWII theater stage. Writing in French, English and German, Samuel Beckett was no doubt a European writer. Though no evidence shows that the author took interest in Chinese culture, nor did his works involve anything about China, his essentially European works were received and welcomed in China in spite of the wide cultural gap. His works were translated into Chinese in the mid-1960s, and his plays have been continuously performed in the Mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan for nearly half a century, which established his canonic status in China.

However, the international and domestic Beckett criticism has attached far more attention to textual analysis than performance study, which leads to a considerable lack in the latter and which does little justice to the participating artists who, though very often were under all kinds of criticisms, help to shape the Chinese people's understanding of Beckett and even absurd theater visually and directly. This book intends to make up for this deficiency and to explore deep into the reasons as why Beckett's absurd plays are welcomed and staged continuously in China for half a century in

different historical periods by examining 16 typical Chinese Beckett performance cases. The study will be carried out through contextualizing the performances in particular socio-historical conditions, reconstructing the motives behind, pinpointing the adaptation strategies employed, and reproducing the theatrical effect in response to certain historical periods.

The main body of this book is divided into 7 chapters. Chapter One contains a systematic literature review of both international and domestic Beckett criticism, revealing their strength and their lack in performance area. Underlying the main body of research work are three related lines of theoretical inquiry expounded in Chapter Two, namely “cultural translation,” “intercultural performance” and “marginal discourse,” among which the latter two are subsumed under the idea of “cultural translation.” In the first place, the Chinese Beckett performance as a whole is regarded as cultural translation of Samuel Beckett in the Chinese context. In this book, Homi Bhabha’s concept of “cultural translation” is employed to highlight the “newness” that localized adaptations bring into the established ideas. On one hand, cultural differences do exist when the author encounters another culture, which may hinder the diffusion of the “standard,” European Beckett interpretation. On the other hand, however, cultural differences, though disturb or even destroy the reference structure in the source culture, do not simply negate it but rather negotiate the disjunctions so that “newness” is created in the interstitial space and thus hybridizes the “standard.” In the second place, the intercultural performance is treated as a concrete way to realize “cultural translation” which mainly tackles the legitimacy of

“other” Becketts. In recent decades, the interpretative diversity has significantly challenged the traditional standards of “fidelity” and “authenticity” with the support of adaptation study and the postmodern discourse of hybridity in theory, and the increasing amount of international adaptations in practice. In this background, it is reasonable to recognize the “other” Becketts as autonomous artwork instead of slavish repetition or derivative interference. In the last place, “marginal discourse,” an important aspect of Bhabha’s “cultural translation” is employed to reveal the periphery/center pattern underlying the Chinese Beckett performances which enables the performances to take the minority experiences into consideration. By referring to the marginal discourse, this book argues that Beckett’s plays are performed from the marginal stand to question the dominancy of the center while trying to make up for the problematic central values by showing the peripheral experiences.

Chapter Three to Chapter Seven are focused on the specific performance cases^①. Chapter Three deals with Gao Xingjian’s *Chezhan* (“车站” 1983), an adaptation imitating *Waiting for Godot*;

① Since this is a study about Chinese Beckett performance, only those performances in Chinese are included as research subjects. But it should not lead to the assumption that no Beckett performances in English or French exist in China. The total number of the Chinese Beckett performances since the 1960s till the present is hard to decide since many took place without leaving any materials, especially those in the early years and carried out within small circles. In this case, the 16 cases here are selected based on two standards, i.e., their publicity and the accessibility of the first and second-hand materials about the performances. The first-hand materials of the performances diversify. Some full-length performance videos are either publicly available online or generously provided by the artists or theaters. These include the works of Meng Jinghui, Lin Zhaozhua, Li Ran, Ren Ming, Chen Tao and SDAC. Some artists and theater companies only provide video footages due to copyright’s concern. These include works of CLT, “Tainaner Ensemble,” and ALT. And there are still other performances whose videos that are either too old to be retrieved or temporarily unavailable, including that of Gao Xingjian, *The Theater Quarterly*, “Hard Man” Café Theater, Lai Sheng-Chuan, Sarah-Jane Scaife and Gu Lei. In view of the shortage of first-hand materials, more secondary materials are included to support the analysis such as interviews, pictures, reports, articles, and reviews both in traditional media and the new one like the Internet resources.

Meng Jinghui's *Waiting for Godot* (“等待戈多” 1991); and the first *Waiting for Godot* (“等待果陀” 1965) in Taiwan organized by *The Theater Quarterly* magazine, which shared the theme of question and challenge in a time of political and cultural turbulence, echoing the international atmosphere of Cold War and the successive domestic movements. In this period, the rebellious quality in Beckett's plays was favored and highlighted in the performance, and Beckett was regarded as a rebellious “icon.”

Chapter Four takes Lin Zhaohua's *Three Sisters/Waiting for Godot* (“三姐妹·等待戈多” 1998), Li Ran's *Godot Comes* (“等到戈多” 2004), and Lai Sheng-Chuan's *Footfalls: Beckett in the Ancient Chinese Gardens* (“落脚声：古厝中的贝克特” 1988) as illustrative examples of the postmodern craze in the art world in China around the 1990s when postmodern techniques such as parody, pastiche, collage, fragmentation, and discontinuity of time, became popular with the artists. And in this period, Beckett's plays were turned into laboratory where postmodern techniques were tested out on stage. In the three cited cases, Lin Zhaohua made a collage work of Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* by underlining the intertextuality between the two and uniting the difference under *Chan* Buddhism. Li Ran appropriated the localized postmodern rhetoric of “mo lei tau” to rewrite *Waiting for Godot* into an absurd story in contemporary Chinese context; while Lai Sheng-Chuan in Taiwan sets the performance in a film studio of Chinese gardens, borrowing the Western environmental theater in the anticipation of activating new spectator experience. In this historical moment, the “gist” of the plays, or what the author meant by the plays, gave way to the local artists'

intention to “make it new” by utilizing the postmodern art forms.

The prevalence of postmodern techniques, however, is not an isolated aesthetic phenomenon; instead, it is accompanied by the rapid development of China into the postmodern condition featuring mass consumerism. Chapter Five discusses women’s situation in the consumerism society, using the cases of Ren Ming’s *Waiting for Godot* (1998), “Hard Man” Café Theater’s *Waiting for Godot* (2001) and “Tainaner Ensemble” Theater Club’s *Endgame* (“终局” 2004), all of which employed female-cast. The previous two productions (Ren Ming and “Hard Man” Café Theater’s female productions) showed the position of women as both empowering subject and exploited object reified in the consumerist metropolitan localities, while the last one (“Tainaner Ensemble” Theater Club’s women-cast) belonged to a larger agenda to assert a so-called “Taiwan” identity by associating femininity with the local *Minnan yu* and treating the vernacular as cultural capital. The three performances pointed out women’s dubious position: while being allowed certain autonomy, they were often used to achieve a greater goal.

Chapter Six and Chapter Seven concentrate on the Sino-Western interaction since the mid-2000s, a period more intensively globalized than before. Chapter Six combines the performance, reception, and media report of three cases of Dublin Gate Theater’s *Waiting for Godot* (2004), Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center’s *Endgame* directed by the German director Walter D. Asmus (SDAC 2005) and “Beckett Workshop” organized by Irish director Sarah-Jane Scaife in Central Academy of Drama (CAD 2006) to illustrate that though the growing intercultural communication and exchange helped clarify certain

points in Beckett texts and performances, the cultural superiority of Western countries co-constructed by Western condescendence and local complicity in staging canons still lay outside of the critical attention most of the time, which should be paid enough attention in future cooperations.

Chapter Seven manifests the local artists' efforts under the pressure of the Western "authority" in globalization through productions by artists from Taiwan, the Mainland, and Hong Kong: *Waiting for Godot* of Wu Hsing-Kuo's Contemporary Legend Theater (CLT 2005), Chen Tao's *Waiting for Godot* (2011), Gu Lei's *Waiting for Godot* (2006), and the Beckett project of "Alice Laboratory Theater" (ALT 2007). The first two adaptations of *Waiting for Godot* not only rewrite Beckett's script but also undermine the genres of *jingju* (京剧) and dance theater (舞剧). And the third project exposes the Western double standard applied in canon representation by presenting well-produced and text-based straight performances.

The value of a play lies both in the text and in the performance. The study of Beckett's plays in China should not only include translation on page but also that on stage. The cultural difference between Europe and China inevitably leads to divided opinions on what "Beckett" means and how his plays should be represented in practice. On one hand, Beckett performance exerts great influence on Chinese theater. These performances constantly revisit and re-employ the "absurd" narration mode and performance style in different theater forms under different circumstances after Beckett was introduced in the 1960s. Theater practitioners of *huaju*, *jingju*, and dance theater learn from Beckett and make innovations in their

respective field, some of which produce astonishing effects not only within the theatrical art but also in larger socio-political terms. On the other hand, Chinese Beckett performance as interstitial and intercultural theatrical activity also generates “newness” in the process of circulation which often seems to deviate from the Euro-American “standard” Beckett interpretation. Despite the fact that such deviation runs the risk of dispensing with certain layers of meaning and pinning down the plays with cultural specificity, it is still important to recognize that the “misunderstanding,” “misinterpretation,” and “misrepresentation” have cultural significance of their own right. In many ways they break the boundary drawn by Euro-American Beckett criticism and expand the interpretive possibility through contextualizing the performances in specific socio-historical conditions, endowing the images and discourses with local shades, and thus enriching the plays with more details. Viewed in this perspective, the negotiation between the “newness” and the “authority” is worth examining as why such negotiation should happen, how it is carried out, to what extent the “newness” that enters “Beckett” in the localized adaptations can make up for the “loss” of Beckettian originality, and in what way such transformation can draw the local audiences to or repel them from the author. All history is contemporary history, and all performances reflect the contemporary thinking. It is the hope of this book to explore into related questions of Beckett and contemporary China; and to provide possible answers to these questions which, incomplete and temporary may they appear, are to serve as an incentive for further studies on the correlative subjects.

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Chapter One Introduction

On January 5, 1953, Théâtre de Babylone in Paris saw the beginning of the legendary theatrical career of Samuel Beckett with the premier of his *Waiting for Godot*. Before *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett was a novelist who had produced works such as *Murphy* (1938), *Molloy* (1951), *Malone Dies* (1951), and so on. But it was his plays that established and consolidated his fame as one of the most outstanding writers of the 20th century. When asked why he turned from novel to theater, Beckett was said to reply jokingly that theater for him was a “diversion” from the “awful depression” that prose writing had led him into (qtd. in Albright 28). Since the premiere of *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett continued to challenge the stereotypes in theater. Thanks to his incessant innovation, Beckett’s plays became “a magnet for performers and artists ... with the idea of the work’s immense capacity for performance” (Worth 146). And the theoretical inclusiveness constitutes one important feature in international and Chinese Beckett criticism though more often than not this feature ceases to exist when it comes to the performance area.

1.1 Literature Review of International Beckett Criticism

It did not take the academia too long either to discover the charm of Beckettian theater as Beckett criticism thrive after the

performance of *Waiting for Godot*. The beginning of the canonization of Beckett was no doubt his winning Nobel Prize in 1969, and the publication of *Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics* in 1970 on the other hand marked the academic institutionalization of Beckett criticism.

The mainstream Beckett criticism in the early period focused on the philosophical connection between Beckett's theater and the Existentialist ideas. Martin Esslin's seminal book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961) was undoubtedly among the most influential works analyzing Beckett's plays. This book, as its title suggests, treated Beckett as an artist of the absurd theater, closely connected with such Existentialists as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and so on^①. Considering the historical and cultural background of Beckett's creation, Esslin suggested that the theater of the absurd was "part of the 'anti-literary' movement" (26) of the time. The research into the philosophical connection boomed after the publication of Esslin's book in the following decades as more and more evidences seemed to be found in the other plays. Till now, some critics still take an interest in the "strong evidence of the strategic relevance of Beckett's work for philosophical engagement with literature in France for the whole second half of the last century" (Hill 77). But since the late 1970s, Beckett criticism has undergone significant changes as the literary theories quickly transformed from traditional thematic, syntactic, and rhetoric dimensions to new theoretical discourses.

① Beckett himself never agreed with such categorization. In fact, Beckett seemed indifferent to and uninterested in critics' comments on his works. A famous example is his answer to the enthusiastic critical speculation about the identity of "Godot" after the success of *Waiting for Godot*: "if I knew I would have said so in the play." His antipathy toward critics' words might also be marked by abusive term "Crrritic!" of the two tramps in *Waiting for Godot*.

Theories such as psychoanalysis, feminism, gender study, and postcolonialism began to exert influence on the critical field, which brought to many critics' realization of the "perceived susceptibility to theory-oriented critical approaches" of Beckett's works (Worth 221). Therefore, the current text-based Beckett scholarship includes myriad themes supported by the contemporary theoretical exuberance, such as the postcolonial perspective that connects Beckett with Ireland, the phenomenological body in Beckett's works, the politics of alterity, etc.

Compared with textual analysis, the study about the performances of his plays started relatively late. *Journal of Beckett Studies*, one of the earliest and most important Beckett study journals, set up the "Play Review" section only since 1976. However, while occupying a scant amount of space in each issue, the early reviews in this section were majorly focused on the performances in Britain, France and the U.S., with rare exceptions on those in other European countries such as Finland and Spain. It was not until 1989 that performances in Asia were mentioned when the 1989 issue published one review about the "Israeli *Godot*" by Linda Ben-Zvi, and another one by Irving Lo about the first public Beckett performance in 1987 in Mainland China. Lo's review, "*Waiting for Godot* in the People's Republic of China," was extremely precious because it was probably the only published account available which, in mere two-and-half pages, recorded almost every detail including the exact date of the performance, the location of the theater, the entire cast, the introductory notes on the printed program, the stage setting, the "affinity to the tradition of the Peking Opera" in performance (Lo