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孙艳娜 著



Shakespeare in China

河南大学出版社

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Preface

The following quotation from William Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It* is widely known: "All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players; / They have their exits and their entrances, / And one man in his time plays many parts." The same may as well be said about the Chinese theatre, although stages, theatre buildings, actors and whatever else has to be considered as a precondition to the performance of a play in general have changed considerably during the last four or five hundred years. And above all, the cultural traditions giving birth to the theatre here and there were altogether different, at least in the beginning, and they are still so, despite the contacts between the East and the West. Thus it needs scholars with intercultural competence to analyse how and where there are still gaps and misunderstandings, or, on the other hand, promising

perspectives. This is why a topic like Shakespeare in China, that Dr. Yanna Sun began to study at the German University of Dresden, helps the reader to delve into different worlds, will help to create new perspectives in the age of globalization.

As the eminent Marxist critic, Raymond Williams has said: the term culture is “one of the two most complicated words in the English language”, adding that it is to be considered as “a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, or a group”. This is why I have to add some remarks about the popularity of Shakespearean drama that began to flourish at the end of the sixteenth century and has remained the most popular form of theatrical entertainment till the present times. Thus in 1626 Fynes Moryson remarked in his *Itinerary*: “The City of London alone hath four or five companies of players with their peculiar theaters capable of many thousands, wherein they all play every day in the week but Sunday, with most strange concourse of people ... as there be, in my opinion, more plays in London than in all the parts of the world I have seen, so do these players or comedians excel all others in the world.” Back then there existed a great number of play grounds, private and public theatres, performing indoors and outdoors, the best known of these being The Globe, erected in 1599, burned down in 1613, but reconstructed for present-day visitors some years ago. Others were named The Theatre (1576), The Curtain (1577), The Rose (1587), The Swan (1596), The Fortune (1600), The Red Bull (1605), The Second Globe (1614), The Hope (1614); and there were the private or indoor stages: The Blackfriar’s (1576~1600) and The Whitefriar’s Theatre (1608), or The

Salisbury Court, the Phoenix; and players' companies began to be organised on a economic-pre-capitalist basis with shares, hired men, and apprentices, like The Queen's Men, The Admiral's Men and Lord Strange's Men, The Chamberlain's Men (that is, Shakespeare's own company) and several others, amongst them even children companies. Public theatres were built for an audience of 2,500, whereas the private indoor theatres could have an audience of from 400 to 500 spectators. All of them used to compete with one another, trying to lure away the theatre goers. According to modern calculations, London was a city of 150,000 to 200,000 inhabitants, and each day of the week an audience of approximately 15,000 went to see the performances of the two theatres playing on a regular basis, that is 15% ~ 20% of the whole population was interested in what was going on in the playhouse or the adjoining bear-gardens (where there was bear-fighting, not beer drinking).

No wonder that the authorities were suspicious of what was presented on the stage. In the beginning, players were classed with beggars and vagabonds and they were similarly punished, according to a 1572 Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds, being "grievously whipped and burned through the gristle of the right ear with a hot iron of the compass of an inch about". This changed with the interest of the lords in players' companies, and in 1574 the queen's patent allowed the Earl of Leicester's men to present their plays "as well for the recreation of our loving subjects, as for our solace and pleasure when we shall think good to see them". Although the comedies, tragedies, interludes, and stage plays had to be inspected by the "Master of the Revels" in order to prevent

“wherein either matters of religion or of the governance of the estate of the common weal shall be handled or treated” (Proclamation of 16 May 1559), or “words, examples or doings of unchastity” (Act of the Common Council of London of 1574), a Privy Council Order of 1589 required “to deliver . . . their books (the producers’ prompt books) that they (the committee) may consider of the matters of their comedies and tragedies, and thereupon to strike out such parts and matters as they shall find unfit and indecent to be handled in plays, both for divinity and state, commanding the said companies of players in Her Majesty’s name that they forbear to present and play publicly any comedy or tragedy other than such as they three (the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Mayor of London, and the Master of the Revels) shall have seen and allowed, which if they (the players) shall not observe, they shall then know from their Lordships that they shall be not only severely punished, but made incapable of the exercise of their profession forever hereafter”. And King James’ Act of 1606 declared that “if at any time or times after the end of the present session of Parliament any person or persons do or shall, in any stage-play, interlude, show, May-game, or pageant, jestingly or profanely speak or use the holy name of God, or of Christ Jesus, or of the Holy Ghost, or of the Trinity (which are not to be spoken but with fear and reverence)”, they had to pay a certain considerable sum.

On the other hand there were religious groups such as the Puritans, who were opposed to the theatre, publishing *A Treatise against Idleness, Vain Plays and Interludes* (1579), an *Anatomy of the Abuses* (1583) or advocating the *Overthrow of*

the Stage Plays (1599). This happened during the sixteen forties in times of Civil War, of religious and political turmoil, as “public sports do not well agree with public Calamities, nor public Stage-plays with the Seasons of Humiliation, this being an Exercise of sad and pious solemnity, and the other being Spectacles of pleasure, too commonly expressed lascivious Mirth and Levity; It is therefore thought fit, and ordained by the Lords and Commons and set times of Humiliation do continue, public Stage-Plays shall cease”. It was only at the beginning of the so-called Restoration period with the return of the king from exile in France that theatres were opened again, but at that time these were mostly upper or middle class indoor theatres, representing a new aristocratic and bourgeois interest in theatre-going. Shakespeare’s plays were still popular, although mostly badly mutilated or re-written for the court and the aristocracy. And it was only one hundred years later that Shakespeare was said to be the most important playwright of the world, especially in Germany where his plays were produced on various stages from the beginning of the seventeenth century onward. From Wilhelm Hortmann’s seminal study *Shakespeare on the German Stage: The Twentieth Century* (1998) we learn: “On a quantitative count alone the difficulties appeared alarming: during most of the period under review Shakespeare was the most frequently performed dramatist, averaging between one and two hundred productions per year, which occasionally added up to two thousand performances or more. These astonishing figures may be evidence of the vigorous theatrical life and Shakespeare’s lasting popularity.”

In contrast to that, Shakespeare was hardly known in China, especially since Western values were only considered foreign to Chinese culture, and Chinese theatre rested on altogether different traditions of performance and staging. During the Sino-British Opium War (1840 ~ 1842), Shakespeare's reputation as an eminent Elizabethan poet and playwright was limited to a small circle of scholars; his name was transliterated: sha shi bi ya (莎士比亚). It was only in 1902/1903 that two translations of Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* appeared. 1921 saw Tian Han's translation of *Hamlet*. In 1930, *The Merchant of Venice* was performed for the first time, and in 1984 the Chinese Shakespeare Society was founded, two years later hosting the Shakespeare Festival simultaneously in Beijing and Shanghai. This is what we learn from the well-researched study of Dr. Sun, analysing the various periods of adaption, ranging from the late nineteenth century to the immediate present. It took a long time for Chinese scholars to get interested in Shakespeare. And as Dr. Sun makes clear, Chinese scholars were confronted with a great number of problems: a different language and sign system, different cultural and historical traditions, every now and then leading to fundamental misunderstandings of the respective backgrounds of the plays and their meanings.

In his essay "The Paradox of Shakespeare in China" (1998) the famous Shakespeare scholar Murray J. Levith has criticized Chinese adaptations for appropriating the English playwright for their own purposes, presenting him in the various Chinese opera styles, forcing him to be an apologist for Marxism-Leninism, excising sex, religion and contrary politics

from his texts, and at times simplifying, corrupting, or misunderstanding his characters and themes. According to Levith, the Chinese should rather follow the dramatic traditions of Shakespeare's times. Dr. Sun does not agree with this, by pointing out the similarities between Western and traditional Chinese theatre, devoting a chapter on the early and later translations of the texts, on Shakespeare criticism in China, and on performances of select plays.

Dr. Sun starts from the assumption that Chinese performances of Shakespeare fall into three categories: the Western style, the Chinese style and a mixture of the Western and the Chinese style. The Western style contains those performances that maintain the Shakespearean spirit by employing the Western theatrical conventions ranging from original plot, characterization, scenery to costume and make-up. For example, the Chinese performers dress themselves up like real westerners by whitening their naturally yellow faces, wearing wigs or dying their hair blonde, or putting on prosthetic noses. The Chinese style refers to the sinicization of Shakespearean plays by transplanting Shakespeare into the Chinese culture and adopting the traditional Chinese theatrical style. As a result, the characters have their Chinese names, wear traditional Chinese costumes and observe stylized theatrical movements on the stage. Concerning the hybridization of the Western and the Chinese traditions, the theatrical practitioners combine elements from both cultures in terms of textual interpretation and theatrical technique. Dr. Sun's examples are *Richard III*—*li cha san shi* (《理查三世》) (1986), *Hamlet*—*Ha mu lai te* (《哈姆莱特》) (1989), and

Much Ado About Nothing—*wu shi sheng fei* (《无事生非》) (1986). Her conclusion is that Shakespeare has been transformed to a certain extent on the Chinese stage in terms of theatrical methods or textual interpretations inasmuch as Chinese performance of Shakespeare calls for a comprehensive theorization of different forms of interculturalism in introducing Shakespeare to more and more Chinese audiences. Dr. Sun agrees with the opinion of the eminent film director and head of the Royal Shakespeare Company Trevor Nunn: “Since imitations can never surpass the originals”, the theatrical practitioners should depart from the text and present a version of their own which “throws open the gates of interpretation to all sorts of different approaches, dependent on virtually any factor: differing personalities of performers, historical revision, desired visual interpretation, and need for contemporary social comment”. Thus Dr. Sun’s study is a welcome stepping stone on the way to a more intimate understanding of Chinese and British cultural and theatrical traditions and the popularizing of the great English poet’s plays on the Chinese stage.

Textual Notes

Due to the complexity of Chinese *pinyin* with four tones, I prefer to give the exact corresponding Chinese characters in the footnote when Chinese names and phrases are mentioned for the first time in the book, so as to help the Chinese to read them more fluently. I have used this method for those distinguished scholars in Chinese literary circles, Shakespearean studies in particular.

With regard to the Chinese authors mentioned in the book, their names are given in the Chinese tradition, that is, family names come before given names. When listing the sources of the quotations from their works in the footnotes and bibliography, the westernized customs are adopted. For example, He Qixin (何其莘) for the Chinese Shakespearean scholar in the body of my work and Qixin He, *China's Shakespeare* in quotations. If the author has written his or her

paper in Chinese or German, I have translated it into English giving a free translation; in the meantime, the original Chinese and/or German text is copied in the footnote. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

In addition, all the quotations from Shakespeare's plays are taken from editions which are indicated in the footnote. For example, *Romeo and Juliet* is from William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, repr. ed. Jill L. Levenson (Oxford: University Press, 2004), and all the quotations from *Richard III* are from William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Richard III*, ed. John Jowett (Oxford: University Press, 2000).

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