



## Book Reviews

**Van, Nhan Luong. *Translation & Shakespeare in Vietnam*. Saarbrücken: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2016. Pp. 9 + 284.**

Reviewed by *Shao Huiting*\*

In 2016, to commemorate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare, scholars, publishers, theaters and commercial medias turned to Shakespeare's works worldwide. In the same year, Dr. Van Nhan Luong published his monograph *Translation & Shakespeare in Vietnam*, which was originally his Ph.D. thesis at the University of Southampton in 2014. He declares that the translation in Vietnam has never been studied systematically before (i). This pioneering work provides a comprehensive study, which engages in evaluating the functions and contributions of translation in Vietnam and clarifying problems through a case study of *Romeo and Juliet* (i).

Dr. Van Nhan Luong holds an international perspective as he acquired education both from Britain (Post-doctor, University of Huddersfield; Ph.D., University of Southampton) and Vietnam (M.A., University of Da Nang). According to his Linkedin page, he has recently been a lecturer in English Studies in Aston University (UK), Dean of the Faculty of English Language and Culture in Dong A University (Vietnam), and Director for Language Studies at UK-Vietnam Institute of Education Development. His subsequent career shows his continuous efforts on education, language and culture developments between the two countries.

*Translation & Shakespeare in Vietnam* is a well-structured, balanced and logical work, consisting of seven chapters and two appendices. Appendix 1 lists English Source Text (ST) and Vietnamese Target Text (TT) of Dang The Binh's translation (1963) Chapter V analyzes. The one-page Appendix 2 includes Chapter VI's examining of ST and TT of 34-line conversations between Romeo and Juliet in Act III, Scene 5 translated by Bich Nhu and Truong Tung.

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This research is also scientific and highly academic, which presents ideas and theories of global scholars, opens a window for translation research of Shakespeare's plays in Vietnam, and refreshes a comparative perspective in Shakespeare studies in Asia.

Chapter I introduces research questions and structure, explains the importance of translation in intercultural communication and clarifies research methods. Chapter II builds a theoretical framework for the research with a survey of translation theories and strategies, which are used in Chapters V and VI to analyze the semantic features between ST and TT (3). Dr. Van firstly defines what translation in question is. Quoting from different scholars, who take translation as a science, an art and a skill (8), as well as a general field of study, a product and a process (9), Dr. Van traces the etymological meaning in Latin and looks it up in the *OED*. Many other scholars explain "translation" in terms of semantics, stylistics and cultures (10). Translation theories, such as Philological theories, Philosophical theories, Linguistic theories, Functional theories and Poly-system theories, are introduced while analyzing the Vietnamese translation of *Romeo and Juliet*. Dr. Van also expounds the concepts of equivalence, literary translation, back translation and translation of metaphor. Peter Newmark's translation methods and Mona Baker's translation strategies are also applied.

In Chapter III, Dr. Van, with patriotic concerns and critical attitudes, honestly evaluates the achievements and criticizes problems of education and translation in Vietnam by comparing with the neighboring Asian countries, such as Japan, China, Korea and Thailand, where translation excellently fulfills its social role in bringing new knowledge to its readers, while translation in Vietnam still focuses on the entertainment (78). Another non-negligible issue is that the number of professional translators who can do quality translations remains small in recent years (75).

Consequently, there are obvious gaps in translations of Shakespeare's plays among Japan, China, Korea, Thailand and Vietnam. "The complete Shakespeare in Japanese had long been available (by Tsubouchi Shōyō [1859-1935], published in 1928, previously in separate volumes since 1884 and first collected in 1909)" (Baker and Hao 28). Chinese translator Zhu Shenghao (1912-1944) "translated into Mandarin thirty-one and a half of the thirty-seven plays in the First Folio, including *1 and 2 Henry IV*, *Richard II* and *King John*" (Baker and Hao 26). Similarly holding strong patriotic feelings, Zhu translated those plays with fire, famine and sickness during the second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), retranslated and edited after wholesale fire destruction in 1937 and partial loss in 1941. The publication of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (*Shashibiya quanji*, Beijing, 1978), based on Zhu Shenghao's work and supplemented and edited by various scholars, was considered as the most significant event marking the revitalization of Shakespeare after the Cultural

Revolution (Baker and Hao 26-27). Dr. Van mentions that “Zhu’s translation is the core for the full Chinese version of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare in 2000*” (104), which is actually not the earliest version. Shakespeare was introduced to Korea in 1906 in Samuel Smiles’s *Self-Help*, a book of Victorian didacticism popular as a guide for westernizing (Im 260). “Until experimental theatre came into vogue in the late 1970s, *shingeuk* companies dominated the theatre, presenting Western classics in full, faithfully translated texts and adopting realistic acting conventions and Western costumes and wigs” (Im 260). In Thailand, the name of Shakespeare became widely known in Siam in 1916 as one of his plays, *The Merchant of Venice*, was translated by King Vajiravudh under the Thai title, *Venit Vanit* (104). Previously, “Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* had been translated by Prince Narathipprapanpong between 1890-1893, and *The Comedy of Errors* by Luang Thammapiban in 1893” (104). In Vietnam, however, it was not until 1963, that the first translation of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* made by Dang The Binh came to readers, which had been used as a national textbook for fifty years to 2013 (2, 113).

In Chapter IV, Dr. Van takes performance as translation, and actor and director as translators and illustrates the historical development of drama translation. Drama in Vietnam has been greatly acculturated. The traditional Vietnamese drama is only in *singing drama*, which has different types inclusive of *Tuong* (*Hat Boi*, originating from China from the 13<sup>th</sup> century), *Cheo*, and *Cai Luong* (early 20<sup>th</sup> century) (98). These three drama types always use Chinese classic stories and characters conveying moral lessons and the contributions of heroes (99). After the French arrival in 1858, French *oral drama* with new acting styles, structures and contents as well as tragedies and comedies became popular at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (99). Different from Chinese classic stories, French *oral drama* contains modern stories and characters closer to real life. “Nguyen Van Vinh (1882-1936) was the first person who introduced his translated French comic plays of *Molière* (1622-1673) ... in which *Le Madade Imaginaire* was the first play performed in the Vietnamese language on 25/04/1920 at the Central Theatre in Ha Not city” (99).

Translation has also developed through multilingual practices, such as Tao Ngu’s plays (Cao Yu, 1910-1996) (99). His plays follow the structure of western playwrights to describe social reality, explore human nature and express strong emotions. For instance, “in terms of plot, *Thunderstorm* partly follows *Hamlet*; in terms of poetic spirit, *Thunderstorm* is like *King Lear*” (Hao 169). Dang Thai Mai’s and Nguyen Kim Than’s translations of Tao Ngu’s plays became popular in Vietnam before 1950 (99). During the 1940s and 1950s, literature, especially oral drama, often focused on contents while paying less attention to artistic features (100-101). The translations of Dang Thai Mai are quality works because they clearly maintain Tao Ngu’s artistic and writing style, and they are suitable for stage performance and reading (100). Therefore, Dang

Thai Mai introduced his translation of Tao Ngu's *Peking Man* (1941) in 1963 (101). Meanwhile, the first Vietnamese translation of *Romeo and Juliet* by Dang The Binh was published in the same year (101). As for the abstract artistic features of *Romeo and Juliet* and Chinese plays, one of my articles "The Poetics of Love in *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Peony Pavilion*" could be referred to. The former by Shakespeare was published in 1597, and the latter by Tang Xianzu in 1598. They similarly explore the connection between love and death. Despite cultural and geographical gaps, Shakespeare and Tang as writers, as well as their characters in loving, resonate with each other. The two plays, one tragedy and the other comedy, both show the strong spirit for love and freedom in sixteenth-century Europe and China. Similarly, the year 1963 was not far from September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1945 when Vietnam ended its feudalism and started communism (118). Tao Ngu's and Shakespeare's plays also brought that strong spirit of freedom to the Vietnamese people through translation around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In Vietnam, theater had not received significant attention in the field of translation studies until the 1980s (83). Vietnam was at war with the U.S. from 1954 to 1975, so it is reasonable to infer that Shakespeare's plays were first on stage after 1978 (105). The Youth Theatre was inaugurated in 1978, where besides modern plays, classic plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello* and *Thunderstorm* had been performed (105). It was not until 2009 that Vietnamese audiences had the first opportunity to watch *Romeo and Juliet* in English directed by Paul Stebbings (1953), which was difficult for them to understand (105), while the Vietnamese version was first introduced in the Idecaf Theatre in Ho Chi Minh City in 2011, which is an adaptation using the basic content of *Romeo and Juliet* and combining *Tuong* and Western oral drama (105). As a contrast, the performance of Shakespeare's plays in China proceeded over 100 years earlier:

*The Merchant of Venice* was acted in Hong Kong in 1867 and 1871, and in Shanghai by students of St. John's College in 1896 and 1902. Then, in 1927 it was made into a silent film, the first Chinese Shakespeare movie, *Woman Lawyer*, directed by Qiu Qixiang. Ten years later, in June 1937, to satisfy the degree requirements, the first graduating class of the National Drama School performed *huaju The Merchant of Venice* in Nanjing, directed by Yu Shangyuan ... According to *Shen-pao*, Shakespearean civilized plays were staged 108 times between 1914 and 1918. (Hao 169)

Chapter V concentrates on the semantic features of the first translation of *Romeo and Juliet* in Vietnam. The country was at war with France, so the social conditions did not allow the translator to choose the type of target audience (113). As we know, the prologue of *Romeo and Juliet* is a standard Shakespearean sonnet, but most of the poetic features with rhythmic iambic

pentameter were lost in the TT (113). The Vietnamese language cannot keep the iambic pentameter with 10 syllables in each line, and each line has a different number of syllables. For example, the first line of the prologue “Two households, both alike in dignity” is translated into “Ngày xưa, ở thành Vêrôna tươi đẹp.” It cannot retain the exact rhyme scheme either, for English is polysyllabic while Vietnamese is mono-syllabic, and words in English have many different meanings while Vietnamese words are rarely used in such multi-level meanings (109). Skipping the first and last lines, the translation turns the prologue’s original rhyme scheme ABAB CDCD EFEF GG into AA BB CC DD EEEE in Vietnamese, with the following rhymes of the twelve lines: anh/bình; đở/hộ; nhân/phân; thác/nát; thù/giờ/cổ/trở (110, 111). Dr. Van concludes that the equivalent effect and the relevant rhyme are maintained, so the TT is a translation, not an adaptation (111).

95% of the population of Vietnam in the Vietnam war was illiterate, so *domestication strategy* (‘Vietnamization’ with Cultural Substitutions) is a better method to bring *Romeo and Juliet* closer to the Vietnamese audience (117). Despite the fact that they witnessed a social transformation from feudalism to communism, older Vietnamese people still kept their feudal language in daily communication and writings. With many Kanji-Nôm expressions following Chinese historical legends, Dang The Binh uses cultural substitution through popular Vietnamese expressions (118). The next positive point of this translation is that, thanks to Binh’s life experiences, the language candidly expresses the emotion of Shakespeare’s characters (156).

The famous love scene Act III, Scene 5 in *Romeo and Juliet* is the only extract for teaching in Vietnam (159). Chapter VI compares Bich Nhu and Truong Tung’s and Dang The Binh’s translations of the flowery conversations between Romeo and Juliet in this scene (159). Based on word-to-word analyses, Dr. Van discusses their ambiguities, examines them with back translation and explores omission, concluding that Dang The Binh, like Bich Nhu and Truong Tung, cannot convey connotative meanings in some lines (177). In general, the translation of Bich Nhu and Truong Tung omits some lines in the ST while that of Dang The Binh, despite excessively diverging in some cases from the ST meaning, keeps close to the original in terms of lines and structure (189). Dr. Van provides an alternative translation after discussing the previous advantages and disadvantages. His version strongly focuses on “the rhythm of speech patterns,” preserves the original *gesture* and *behavior*, pursues faithfulness to transmit messages as well as evokes the same feeling and effects (192).

The final Chapter VII summarizes the book by presenting the answers to the research questions, examining its limitations and pointing out future research directions. As Dr. Van realizes himself, there are limitations in his monograph. The historical documents are randomly selected, for it is the first systematic study. The resources related to Shakespeare in Vietnam both at schools and

theatres are rare. The language gap between English and Vietnamese is difficult for readers and researchers. This research only introduces an overview on performance as a translation, which could be carried out in further research (201).

This academic book, with great structures, knowledge, theories and practices, focalizes Vietnam, extends to Asia, and also gives a glance at Shakespeare's globalization in the East. From a critical perspective, some scholarly details about historical developments in other countries need to be updated, a flaw I attempt to rectify in this book review. This monograph is a good sample for translation and culture studies itself, and also marks a milestone for translation studies in Vietnam. Previous and subsequent Vietnamese scholarly works often concentrate on historical, cultural, spiritual, religious and linguistic studies when they probe into the translation in Vietnam, while Dr. Van not only explores intercultural reaction and multilingual practices in this work but also exercises many specific translation theories to analyze Dang The Binh's translation of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1963, when Vietnam was at a turning point in culture and politics. North Vietnam was tainted with Russian culture and the South with French and American cultures. Moreover, Chinese culture has been rooted in Vietnam for more than 1000 years. The stage performance after the 1980s is also psychotherapeutic for local people after Vietnamese civil conflicts and wars (Ali and Wolfert). Therefore, the first research work on analyzing the 1963-translated version and drama performance in Vietnam is socially influential.

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**Wang Gaidi 王改娣. *A Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets from the Ethical Perspective* 《伦理视域下的莎士比亚十四行诗研究》. Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2021. Pp. 104.**

Reviewed by *Wang Aisu*\*

Professor Wang Gaidi's monograph, *A Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets from the Ethical Perspective*, published in 2021, introduces and practices an innovative approach to reading Shakespeare's sonnets. Wang argues that, with a deep probe into the motivation of Shakespearean sonnets, it is not impossible to find the vivid life experience of Shakespeare and his emotional traces, which helps the further study of Shakespearean biography. Wang's study is genuinely instructive to both scholars and students who are interested in the society, culture, and ethics in the Shakespearean age.

*A Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets from the Ethical Perspective* begins with a literature review of Shakespeare's sonnets in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Then, the following chapters discuss the ethical environment in Shakespeare's time (chapter two), the ethical relations in Shakespeare's sonnets (chapters three-five), and the "misreading" and "reinterpretation" of the ethics in Shakespeare's sonnets by early modernists, like Oscar Wilde (chapter six). The body of this monograph, which lies in chapters three to five, unscrambles ethical relationships and emotions between the Renaissance friends, couples, lovers, and the paternal relationship and offers readers a self-contained body of information on the ethical truth underlying "love," "friendship," and "family affection" in Shakespeare's sonnets.

The studies on Shakespeare's sonnets in the 21<sup>st</sup> century feature a wide range of global research, which not only refers to the historical background of the text, but also some other disciplines, such as culturology and philosophy, thereby presenting a more flexible and diverse approach. Besides, the historical research into Shakespeare's sonnets has gradually stepped out of the influence of art and aestheticism. While some scholars have shown a strong passion to seek out the verifiable historical context of the Renaissance, the new criticism turns its attention to Shakespeare's narrative poems and plays, and interprets his works through close reading. For example, Patrick Cheney and William Flesch

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examine respectively the sonnets in Shakespearean plays, Shakespeare's sonnets and his plays, so as to find out their inner-related wholeness (Schoenfeldt 7-8). Additionally, cultural studies have enabled new arguments regarding Shakespeare's works, such as the contentions that he is more sympathetic towards homosexual love than that of the couples (Matz 71), and that Shakespeare sympathizes with and respects women in the patriarchy (Bell 309-311). The study of Shakespeare's sonnets in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by interdisciplinarity and globalization, since human culture and human biology are inseparable (Barker 82).

Wang's study is innovative in terms of research perspective, object, and method. Firstly, it is based on the premise that Shakespeare's sonnets are regarded as being closely connected with the ethical order and moral code of the Renaissance, rather than artistic works transcending time and space. Wang proposes that "humanism is the core of Renaissance culture, and the interpretation of various social relationships in Shakespeare's sonnets should be based on it" (Wang 2021, 33; for the reviewed book, page numbers only henceforth). Secondly, unlike previous analyses of male or female images in Shakespeare's poems, it focuses on the relationships between men, men and women, and men and children, which foregrounds the ethical relationship and its significance in the Renaissance. Finally, it adopts the method of case study in Shakespearean research. In this way, the study of Shakespeare's sonnets as a case can provide a valuable reference for the study of Shakespeare's drama and poetry. Put simply, Wang's study juxtaposes the ethical and moral ideas of Shakespeare's time with the concerns of modern research, which enables the reader to be aware of contextualization and intertextuality of sexual significance in Shakespeare's sonnets.

According to Wang, since the ethical order and moral code in the Renaissance were succinctly and accessibly presented in Shakespeare's sonnets, her study focuses on the ethical environment of the Renaissance and highlights the culture of the Renaissance expressed in these sonnets. Wang's study starts with the analysis of the ethical environment in Shakespeare's time by consulting Robert Matz's *The World in Shakespeare's Sonnets: An Introduction*. "This book works on the cultural conventions of the Renaissance within Shakespeare's sonnets. While reading, we often come across some interesting cultural facts" (29). She thereby distinguishes her viewpoint of ethics from the multitude of controversial standpoints in Shakespeare studies, making her study on Shakespeare's sonnets innovative. In other words, it does not recommend a study of the sonnets as that which would reveal the biographical story of Shakespeare, but, conversely, begins from a biographical perspective in order to elucidate the Renaissance culture in these sonnets. Wang's study tries to balance Shakespeare's sonnets and the poet himself. At the same time, the studies of Shakespeare's works rationalize the mystery of the characters and their



relationships in the poems. Take the roles of women for example, Wang examines them meticulously and completely that “the roles of wife, mother, nurse, widow, mistress, queen, besides daughter, appeared, thus, to reveal the mystery and importance of female roles” (56). In addition, Wang attempts to identify the cultural customs and social etiquette between the lines, deliberately avoiding seeking the relation between the characters in the poem and their corresponding persons in the reality. During Wang’s research processing, a clear logic and a progressive approach are adopted. Then, the main characters and their relationships in the sonnets are summarized by means of generalizing Robert Matz’s understanding of creative motivation, environment, and core content, with a focus on the culture of love, marriage custom, etiquette, and clothing in the Renaissance period. When evaluating Matz’s *The World in Shakespeare’s Sonnets: An Introduction*, Wang responds to several important points of contention. For example, who did the personal pronouns “you” and “I” in the sonnets refer to? (15) Which “grammar school” did Shakespeare attend? (17) How was Shakespeare’s experience in seeking for literary patrons? What was the cultural connotation of “friend” in the Renaissance? What were the identities of the women in the sonnets?

Unlike previous analysis of individual male or female images in Shakespeare’s sonnets, Wang’s humanist research focuses on the relationship between men, men and women, and men and children, and profoundly analyzes the ethical relationship and its connotation of patriarchy in the Renaissance. The men in the sonnets, whether literary patrons or rival poets of Shakespeare, represent the patriarchal nature of early modern English society. Previous studies on Shakespeare’s sonnets argue that women had no right to join in the movement of the Renaissance (King 4) and are not described as independent subjects in these sonnets. Therefore, we interpret female images as being refracted through the patriarchal discourse that prevailed throughout Shakespeare’s sonnets. Even though women are frequently mentioned as having very important roles in Shakespeare’s sonnets, such as wife, mother, nurse, widow, mistress, and queen, they usually appear together with the male images, such as husband and male lover. Thus, the patriarchal ideology prevails in Shakespeare’s sonnets. Take Queen Elizabeth for example: “she is the woman Shakespeare worships most; however, she is appreciated from the male standpoint in his sonnets” (85). Furthermore, the images of children in Shakespeare’s sonnets are blurred or even not mentioned at all. They usually appear accompanied by adults. Therefore, children, especially sons, as the offspring of men and the inheritors of property, are products of patriarchal culture. According to Wang’s study, Shakespeare took a different approach by juxtaposing poetry and “the son” and then replacing “the son” within poetry, so that poetry skillfully becomes the successor of “father” of youth and beauty. Take sonnet 17 for example, the last lines “And stretched meter of an antique song: / But were some child of yours

alive that time, / You should live twice, in it, and in my rhyme” (Wang 2010, 96) place his sonnets on an equal footing with the descendants of his young friends, telling them that what the descendants of his friends can do, so can his sonnets. Shakespeare challenged how the family lineage was passed down under the cultural values of his time, launching a battle between poetry and the succession of “the son.” In Wang’s opinion, though Shakespeare made his poetry the inheritor of young people’s lover and friends, he had neglected the children, since they were always mentioned vaguely or utilitarianly, without any positive personality.

Wang’s case study provides a model for studying Shakespeare’s other works. “Many scholars believe that Shakespeare’s sonnet sequence has the flavor of autobiography and try to analyze Shakespeare’s personality and life through his sonnets, also as a way to understand the 38 plays he wrote” (Chiu 127). However, for Wang, Shakespeare’s sonnets, insofar as they are closely related to his actual life experience, consist of more complicated relationships between characters and exemplify the specific ethical relationship in the Renaissance. That is why these sonnets are to be taken as a case among his large numbers of plays, poems, and other works. Moreover, Wang’s interpretation of the deconstruction and rewriting of identity and themes in Shakespeare’s sonnets presents them as a forerunner of the traditional rebellion of modern literature within the ethical context of the Victorian period. Take the British writers, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, and Frank Harris for example, their intentional “misreading” aims to challenge the classic writers, like Shakespeare, and to bring him down from his pedestal, revealing him to be a man, real and interesting (Shaw 49-50), and declares the advent of modern literature. While Shakespeare’s sonnets are negated and destroyed by these modern writers, they are passed down by other writers when they are alluded to or quoted in their novels or plays. Thus, to study Shakespeare’s sonnets as a case can not only set an example for studying his other plays, but also reveal the significance of his works in the current ages.

Generally speaking, what underlies the value of *A Study of Shakespeare’s Sonnets from the ethical Perspective*, is Wang’s multi-disciplinary research approach. Firstly, it is meaningful to examine Shakespeare’s biography, his motivation of writing, and the trajectory of his life and emotion. Then Wang’s study concentrates on the objective historical environment, the tremendous social and ethical themes contained in the sonnets, which are often overlooked by contemporary scholars. Finally, Wang attains the multi-disciplinary research results of ethics, philosophy, history, literature, etc. when her study relates the ethical environment of Shakespeare’s time to the latest trends in the research of Shakespeare’s sonnets in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However, cautious readers can find some imperfections in this book. Take chapter two for example, Wang presents the ethical environment by consulting

Robert Matz's book *The World of Shakespeare's Sonnets: An Introduction*, which is not sufficient to satisfy the reader's desire to know more about the ethical viewpoint at that time. As for the last chapter, it is too vague to provide an understanding of the function of early modernists' "misreading" and "reinterpretation" of ethics in Shakespeare's sonnets. Moreover, the main part of this book, at only 100 pages, is not abundant enough to account for all the relationships in Shakespeare's age. The readers who have a desire for a much more comprehensive survey of the culture of Shakespeare's times would suffer disappointment. Therefore, a more well-rounded elucidation is necessary to improve the study. Concerning this problem, Wang explained to Professor Hao Tianhu that the parts on another relationship between men, namely, homosexuality, were deleted from her original manuscript, as a result of the censorship. Therefore, the readers who have a desire for more information on this topic are encouraged to turn to her other publications, such as *Re-reading Literary Classics* (2022) and "The Displaced Cultural Space in *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.*" (2012). Indeed, the publication of *A Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets from the Ethical Perspective* makes a contribution to the further study of Shakespeare's sonnets and other works. It is safe to say that the reader enjoys the reading experience of this book and really appreciates its great efforts to enable a better understanding of the connotations of Shakespeare's sonnets and the Renaissance English culture.

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**Zhang Ying 张瑛, *Intercultural Adaptations of Shakespeare's Plays in Contemporary China* 《中国的, 莎士比亚的——莎士比亚戏剧在当代中国的跨文化改编》. Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2021. Pp. 243.**

Reviewed by *Jiayuan Zuo*\*

The adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in China have been fascinating for both the audience and scholars. In the wake of China's first Shakespeare festival in 1986, *Shakespeare in China*, compiled by the Shakespeare Society of China, came out in 1987, wherein the operatic adaptation was discussed extensively and fervently with the blossoming concept of "intercultural theatre." From then on, China witnesses an increase both in the quantity and quality of performances and adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, which constitute an ultimate fountain for Zhang Ying, a professor of Nanjing University, to complete her monograph titled *Intercultural Adaptations of Shakespeare's Plays in Contemporary China* in 2021.

In the monograph, Zhang Ying foregrounds two types of Shakespearean plays' intercultural adaptations in China, namely, operatic adaptation and film adaptation, and renders an in-depth exemplification via twelve carefully selected cases. Operatic adaptations, the main focus of Chapters 2 to 9, encompass Peking opera, Kun opera, Yue opera, Huangmei opera, Yu opera, and other major ones adapted in both mainland China and Taiwan. Additionally, the bilingual collaborative theatre in this book, a type of multilingual theatre, also falls under the category of operatic adaptations, aside from the traditional operatic adaptations and experimental one-man opera. These operatic adaptations not only satisfy the expectations of domestic audiences and invigorate traditional Chinese operas (228), but also introduce Chinese operatic culture to overseas audiences through touring productions (123). In Chapter 10, Zhang examines Chinese film adaptations and productions of Shakespeare's plays, a field in which she specializes. Overall, Zhang scrutinizes the strategies and methods employed in the adaptations, the rewrites and variations that occur, and the new connotations and meanings that emerge. The adaptations and performances of Shakespeare's plays on the Chinese stage and screen, as she contends, demonstrate the universality and timelessness of Shakespeare's plays, and also evince a strong sense of local identity (16).

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Before delving into case studies, Zhang Ying builds a comprehensive background and rationale for her research. In the Preface, Zhang reviews the adaptations and performances of Shakespeare's plays in China and extracts two major forms she categorizes as intercultural theatre: *huaaju* performances and the adaptations to traditional Chinese opera (6). The latter, arguably a successful transformation from the Western to the Chinese theatrical system, is Zhang Ying's focus. In Chapter 1, Zhang investigates whether it is viable to practice the operatic adaptation of Shakespeare's plays in China. Chinese opera and Western theatre are two distinctive theatrical systems, but she perceptively reveals that the architectural structures of performance venues in Shakespeare's plays and the ancient Chinese opera share similarities, laying the foundation for the operatic adaptation of Shakespeare's plays (17). By tracing the evolution of early performance venues in China and Britain, she finds that performance venues in Chinese opera and British drama are alike in site selection, architectural design, and stage layout. In addition, their themes are both accessible to the audience. Their languages cater to both refined and popular tastes. Both value communication and interaction with the audience. The stage sets are simple, while the costumes are relatively gorgeous. The lines signify the story background. These resemblances rationalize Chinese operatic adaptations of Shakespeare's plays (22-49). Zhang also explores how the four artistic methods in Chinese opera, that is, singing, dialogue, dancing, and martial art, promote the expressiveness and transformation of Shakespeare's plays.

For operatic adaptations, Zhang Ying first chooses *Kun* opera *Macbeth* (Chapter 2), *Huangmei* opera *Much Ado About Nothing* (Chapter 3), *Yue* opera *Twelfth Night*, *The Winter's Tale* (Chapter 4), and *Hamlet* (Chapter 5) as cases, all of which were from the two Shakespeare festivals held in China in 1986 and 1994. Zhang notices that behind these adaptations lie two inevitable choices the adapters make to preserve the spirit of Shakespeare's plays while emphasizing a sense of localization, so as to showcase "the symbiosis and connection of Eastern and Western cultures in intercultural theatre" (67).

One choice is transplantation, a wholesale localization, as shown in *Kun* opera *Macbeth*. In addition to localized names, costumes, and props, what Zhang Ying dissects is how the adapters seamlessly transform the key characters from the Elizabethan stage, such as Macbeth and his wife, the witches and ghosts, into the context of *Kun* opera. For Macbeth and his wife, there are no corresponding character types in *Kun* opera, so *Kun* opera *Macbeth*, in order to revivify the quintessence of the original characters, prioritizes the actors' performance as an effective compensation, such as singing, dancing, soliloquy, and dialogue (56-66). Zhang perceives that one of the plots in operatic *Macbeth*, in which Mrs. Tie (Lady Macbeth) is forced to die by a ghost, weakens the original inner torture of Lady Macbeth, but it befits the traditional ideal of a happy ending in Chinese opera (67). *Yue* opera *The Winter's Tale*, after being

transplanted into a Chinese context, turns more localized and congruent with the tradition of *Yue* opera (94). Compared with the original play, the adaptation downplays the religion, divine power, and supernatural elements in accord with the principle of “preserving the essence of Shakespeare’s play and ignoring unnecessary forms” (96), thereby skillfully and reasonably resolving the cultural conflicts. Nevertheless, Zhang regrettably indicates that the second half of the adaptation seems too rushed to match the elaborate characterization and progressive plot of the first half or to show the amazement elicited by the Queen’s resurrection, as in the original play (101-102).

The other choice is transformation, an integration of two theatrical modes, as demonstrated by the following three cases. The love theme and certain carnival scenes in *Much Ado About Nothing*, claims Zhang Ying, echo the orchestral and lyrical nature of *Huangmei* opera (69). Faced with the challenge of how to couple Chinese life with an exotic touch, the director presupposes a certain border area in an unknown dynasty as the background to make the plot, characters, and costumes reasonable (71). *Huangmei* opera *Much Ado About Nothing* has made breakthroughs in combining the spirit of Shakespeare’s plays with the form of *Huangmei* opera, which credits to the director team’s decision to “preserve the rich spirit of Shakespeare’s play and perform it with the unique singing style of *Huangmei* opera” (70) and earns Zhang Ying’s praise for its “exquisite” execution (83). *Yue* opera’s eclecticism and inclusiveness allow it to forge an early relationship with Shakespeare. Guided by Zhu Guangqian’s “psychical distance” of tragedy (Zhu 280), a concept in *The Psychology of Tragedy* that stresses the alienation effect, Zhang analyzes the efforts made by *Yue* opera *Hamlet* to retain the necessary features of a Western tragedy. By using Chinese “ghost opera,” the supernatural atmosphere in the original play is flawlessly integrated into the adaptation. Although Hamlet’s inner turmoil and tragic trait may be compromised in *Yue* opera, Zhang notes that the audience is empowered to judge the characters’ nature and empathize with them, which, in turn, would enhance the aesthetic effects and ethical implications of the adaptation (119). The transformation process enables Western tragedy to achieve its emotional value within the Chinese cultural context and the form of *Yue* opera (120). In *Yue* opera *Twelfth Night*, the integration of the two cultures is more salient. Zhang remarks that *Yue* opera *Twelfth Night* has completely abandoned its tradition in terms of costumes, props, and stage sets. Even if the sentence pattern is retained, the actors’ lyrics intermingle Western cultural imagery, such as “knights” and “Zeus,” with traditional Chinese idioms (90). Thus, Zhang regards this adaptation as “a very bold attempt” (94).

Cross-cultural communication is always mutual among these operatic adaptations, as Zhang Ying asserts. Ren Mingyao once advocated a marriage between Shakespeare and Chinese opera, as it is a necessity for cross-cultural communication (203). *Peking* opera *Hamlet* in Chapter 6 verifies that the

audience in China encounters Shakespeare through Chinese operas, while in return, overseas audiences enjoy them through the lens of Shakespearean plays' plots. *Peking* opera, led by Mei Lanfang and featuring a Chinese operatic culture, has had a profound influence on world theater (122). Since 2005, *Peking* opera *Hamlet*, adapted by the Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company, has been touring around the world. Zhang Ying observes that operatic *Hamlet* fully embodies the traditional linear structure of Chinese opera and the expression of emotion through dance and song. *Peking* opera *Hamlet* maximizes Chinese opera's aesthetic characteristics, makes adaptations proper for tour, and provides subtitle translation to reduce language barriers (127-130). Despite the fundamental differences between Chinese and Western theatre, the integration of *Peking* opera and Shakespeare's play effectively conveys the cultural concept of "seeking harmony in diversity" and offers overseas audiences an opportunity to experience the traditional aesthetics of *Peking* opera (142).

Besides mainland China, Zhang Ying switches her attention to Taiwan in Chapters 7 and 8, where the innovative amalgamation of opera and Shakespeare's plays has been developed since the 1980s. *Peking* opera in Taiwan, though insistent on conventional performance norms, creatively incorporates modern theater concepts and dramatic performance techniques into the traditional staging (143). In Chapter 7, Zhang specifically mentions the experimental *Peking* opera *King Lear*, a one-man opera performed by Wu Xingguo. While still maintaining *Peking* opera's technical and role-based traditions, he shows a "deconstruction and alienation" from *Peking* opera and Shakespeare's play (158) and injects the actor's subjectivity into the adaptation (153), reflecting the "experimental and pioneering nature" (157) of this performance. By tracing Wu Xingguo's trajectory, Zhang intends to interpret the unique connection and interaction between Wu Xingguo and the characters in *King Lear*. For example, the misunderstandings between Wu Xingguo and his master Zhou Zhengrong mirror the misunderstandings between Gloucester and Edgar (156). *Yu* opera in Taiwan is of high status and has been moving forward with modernization (159). In Chapter 8, drawing on Patrice Pavis' "hourglass" model (Pavis 4), Zhang argues that the three *Yu* operas, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Measure for Measure*, and *King Lear*, successfully rewrite local culture by transforming religious conflicts and Christianity into regional ethnic discrimination and into Taoism respectively, which, as it were, reflects the dominant factor of local culture and adapts to the cultural connotations of Taiwan (161).

Chapter 9 goes on to the multilingually collaborative theatre, a new form of intercultural adaptation that facilitates cross-cultural communication. Even though China had previously attempted bilingual theatre, the Sino-British *Kun* opera *The Handan Dream* is a more sophisticated example of multilingual theatre. Combining the *Record of Handan* by Tang Xianzu, a famous Chinese



playwright and poet of the Ming Dynasty, with eight of Shakespeare's works, covering tragedies, comedies, history plays, and romance plays, *The Handan Dream* embodies the dual qualities of intercultural theatre and bilingual theatre. Zhang Ying labels this as a "fusion" (191). *The Handan Dream* discards the unique Taoist overtones in the *Record of Handan* and uses the universal truths and values embedded in both Eastern and Western plays as a hidden line, pursuing harmony while subtly retaining the differences between East and West. These changes not only prevent homogenized performance (209) but also expand the diversity of intercultural theatre with a new stage style (189).

Zhang Ying also canvasses, apart from operatic adaptation and multilingual theatre, Chinese films adapted from Shakespeare's plays in Chapter 10. She briefly traces the production and release of Shakespearean films worldwide, with a specific focus on China, and mainly evaluates *The Banquet*, a film adaptation of *Hamlet*. *The Banquet*, released in 2006, "pioneered the intercultural and cross-media adaptation of *Hamlet* in China" (213). Although the film adheres to *Hamlet*'s plot, mission, and tone, it has a noticeable shift in artistic framework and cultural concepts. *The Banquet*'s framework is transposed to a Chinese martial arts film with highly symbolic Chinese cultural symbols, such as the *Nuo* opera. The themes of revenge and procrastination are replaced with power and desire, transforming *The Banquet* from a tragedy of a prince's revenge to that of a woman's destruction by desire. Zhang takes the film as a successful convergence of Eastern and Western cultures according to the market's response. *The Banquet* disintegrates and reconstructs *Hamlet*, and highlights differences and oppositions within, which is special and significant in the intercultural adaptation of theatre (225).

In this monograph, Zhang Ying pays much attention to a comparative perspective, capturing the changes in transformation and seeking out the specific reasons for those changes, all of which root in a variety of materials. Intercultural adaptations between Shakespeare's plays and Chinese operas are restored from multiple resources, such as quotations from the directors' interview records, essays from directors and actors, and even the actors' statements. In Chapter 2 and Chapter 6, Zhang utilizes the main actors' self-analysis as supplementary materials to explain how the transformation of the original play is achieved through operatic lines and actions, which helps to revive and outline the process of operatic adaptation. Interviews with several directors conducted by *Theatre Arts* after the 1986 Shakespeare Festival (e.g. Ma), such as the directors' inspirations and thoughts, also provide valuable information. Additionally, Zhang never confines herself to textual materials, but also resorts to visual materials to observe the details of the actors' actions on the stage. More noteworthy, Zhang Ying impressively and meticulously reads the female characters in the adaptations within a historical and cultural context. She speaks highly of the transformation and portrayal of Queen Huo (Queen

Hermione) in *Yue* opera *The Winter's Tale*, whose virtuousness is her main characteristic, a virtue more familiar to Chinese audiences. In *Yue* opera *Hamlet*, the tragedy of the female suffering and that of the prince are interwoven to arouse Chinese audiences' sympathy, and Lei Liya's tragic fate (Ophelia) is vividly displayed and attributed to women's lower social status. In *Huangmei* opera *Much Ado About Nothing*, Li Aiqiao's (Leonato) hatred for his daughter is transformed into his final self-blame and suicide, an adaptation to embrace the Chinese belief that "to feed without teaching is the father's fault." Zhang ponders that such a revision is closely related to the growing popularity of gender equality in China during the 1980s (83).

In this work, Zhang Ying does not forget the audience that should have participated in the construction of the opera, yet she only adumbrates them in an imagined way with envisioned reactions. The directors have mentioned the audience's age structures and their actual reactions on several occasions, but Zhang does not include them in her study. It seems not objective enough to neglect the audience's on-site reactions when making evaluations and judgments about the adaptations. In addition, it is somewhat puzzling that *Wu* opera *Macbeth*, which has appeared in the Preface, is carelessly excluded from the appendix, a chronology of Shakespeare's operatic adaptations and film adaptations. Anyway, be that as it may, these foibles cannot overshadow or undermine the overall excellence of the book.

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