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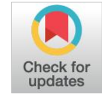

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"Words, Words, Words.—Between Who?": Alterations and Interpolations in the RSC Chinese Translation of *Hamlet*[1]

Abstract: This article is a case study examining the Royal Shakespeare Company's Chinese translation of *Hamlet,* which is part of its "Shakespeare Folio Translation Project" that was launched in 2015. Textual interpolations and alterations of the plot in this version are demonstrated, ranging from cuts of critical scenes and roles to lines and single words rendered in an "audience-friendly" way into an alleged Chinese context. Based on an analysis of the translator's edits, textual transpositions, and choices of Chinese wording, this paper recognizes this version's contribution to the diversity and acculturation of Shakespeare for a special intellectual community in a different culture in twenty-first-century China. Nevertheless, it proposes that this edition be more accurately entitled "RSC *Hamlet* for the Chinese Stage" rather than the officially designated "RSC Chinese Folio *Hamlet*" in order to avoid possible misconceptions of "acknowledged authority" that Chinese readers and audience may conceive under the halo of RSC and the misleading label of "Commissioned Folio Translation."

Keywords: *Hamlet*, First Folio, Chinese translation, community.

Introduction

The opening exchange in *Hamlet*—"Who's there?"—evokes more questions than it answers. It is the first line uttered by the first character who enters the stage. It is not only asked of the soldier's rival in the assumed darkness, but it

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also raises a question to the audience who are watching the play around the stage and the readers around the world. Who are they, and of what community, of what time period? Readers and audience, as well as Shakespeare the playwright himself, are in the hands of the editors, translators and directors. The shaping of Shakespeare has always been an interplay among authority, politics and communities. In her book *Shakespeare and East Asia*, Alexa Alice Joubin points out that translations and adaptations are "strangers at home" because "they defamiliarize canonical works and everyday utterances while offering something recognizable through a new language and form" (Joubin, *Shakespeare and East* 1). Are we reading the "true original" Shakespeare? Who is the editor? Who is the censor? Who is the translator? Who is the director? For which readers or audience, in what cultural context? All of these factors matter in the translation and reception of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's works have now been appearing in China for more than a century. After Lin Shu's translation of Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* in 1904, the translation, teaching, performing and studying of Shakespeare had some periods of flourishing in mainland China: 1920s to mid-1940s, mid-1950s to early 1960s, late 1970s to 1990s, and 2000 to 2010s (Meng 12-98, Sun 20-44). The Mandarin translation of *Hamlet* has had the same trajectory. Simon Chau (1981), He Qixin (1986), Cao Shujun and Sun Fuliang (1989), Meng Xianqiang (1994), Zhang Xiaoyang (1996), Li Weimin (2002), Li Ruru (2003), Yang Lingui (2003), Murray J. Levith (2004), Alexa Alice Joubin (2009, 2021, 2022), Sun Yanna (2010), Li Weifang (2011), Li Jun (2013), Hiroshi Seto (2016), and Jenny Wong (2017, 2018), among others have done extensive research on the making of Shakespeare in China and the shaping of Chinese culture with Shakespeare. In her *Sinophone Adaptations of Shakespeare*, Joubin has identified a number of recurring themes in Chinese-language translations and adaptations, including localization of the plays and dramatic situations and attempts to preserve Shakespeare's politically useful "foreign-ness" (Joubin, *Sinophone Adaptations* 16-18).

The basic work for any translation is to decide the "base text" from which to start. This is especially so for *Hamlet*, which was printed in two different quarto versions in Shakespeare's lifetime, the First Quarto (Q1, 1603) and the Second Quarto (Q2, 1604), and a folio (F) version edited by Shakespeare's friends and Globe shareholders John Heminge and Henry Condell, in 1623, seven years after his death. Each edition claims in its title page either "as it has been different times acted" (Q1), or "according to the true and perfect copy" (Q2), or "according to the true original copies" (F). Modern editions also have such claims as "offers authoritative texts from leading scholars in editions" (Oxford, Stanley Wells as general editor), "the definitive edition of Shakespeare's work" (Arden the 3rd series), and "loyal to the First Folio," "simultaneously authentic and modern" (RSC, eds, Jonathan Bate and

Eric Rasmussen). But as a matter of fact, besides correcting obvious mistakes and modernizing the spelling and capitalization, most of the additions or cuts are not accompanied by explanatory notes. On some occasions, the translator indicates the "original copy" he/she draws upon: Q2, or F, or Q1, or as Philip Edwards does, to "move between the two (Q2 and F)" (Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor 517).

In 2015, the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) set about sponsoring a new Chinese translation of Shakespeare's plays, designed to offer "more theatrically viable, actor friendly, and audience accessible scripts" than had its precursors. Li Jianming, the translator of *Hamlet 1990*, which was directed by Lin Zhaohua, got the commission from RSC to translate *Hamlet* for the Chinese stage. It was subsequently staged under the direction of Li Liuyi in 2018.

This paper considers which community was actually served by RSC project's *Hamlet*. How far does this translation follow the RSC's advertised commitment to the Folio text? What does it subtract and what does it add, and how does it reconcile an alleged fidelity to the Folio with a determination to transpose the action of *Hamlet* and to choose certain Chinese words for the interests of local comprehensibility of a community of intellectuals "here and now" in the first two decades of the 21st century? By examining details of the translator's alterations from her earlier version translated in the last decade of the 20th century for Lin Zhaohua's *Hamlet 1990* and the interpolations she made to the RSC Folio edition, it is shown that both her adapted version based on Zhu Shenghao's widely respected 1940s translation and this RSC commissioned Chinese *Hamlet* look somewhat "far gone" from the "original copies" she based, but "there is method in't." This paper takes Li Jianming's 2018 version as a case study, in comparison with her 1990 translation, to show a different community she was intending to serve with different strategies.

"The Trick to See't": Workaround and Alterations from the Base Texts of *Hamlet 1990* and RSC Folio *Hamlet*

Shakespeare's First Folio was edited and printed in the Jacobean era, in which an "Act to Restrain Abuses of Players" was passed in 1606 to prohibit profanities from being spoken in public places such as theatres. Janet Clare (1990), Michael Dobson (2007) and Hugh Gazzard (2010) have written full-length analyses of the historical context, contents and consequences of this act. One of the consequences is that the First Folio was made "tongue-tied." As a result, F made significant changes in the wording of "God" in Q1 and Q2 to the workaround expressions of "Heaven" or the pagan plural "gods."

In the migration of Shakespeare's text to China, this kind of workaround has frequently been seen in translations of Shakespeare. Jenny

Wong's analysis of Lin Shu's translation of Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare* is illuminating. The same strategies of "picking and choosing what to domesticate in the translated work to suit his ideology, and how a society's expectations and ideologies shape the translation product" (Wong 389-404) are apparent in the two versions of Li Jianming's *Hamlet*, one translated in the last decade of the 20th century, the other in the second decade of the 21st century. The following examples illustrate how thoughtfully her careful omissions and alterations have been used to reach communities separated by three decades.

Zhu Shenghao's translation, which was based on the collated Oxford Shakespeare and completed in 1943, presenting itself in a very decent and elegant Chinese language, was composed for an intellectually sophisticated readership. References to the Christian context were not unfamiliar to the educated Chinese readership of the 1930s and 1940s. The 39 "上帝" (*Shangdi*, indicating Christian "God") in his version reveal the translator's intentions. Li's *Hamlet 1990* is an edited or adapted version of Zhu's translation. Echoing the depressing social atmosphere of late 1989 and early 1990s, Li's translation and stage director Lin's stage production appeared restrained, suppressed, and conservative with their stage text, though it is regarded as a "rebel against the classics" by Li Ruru (83-99). Almost all Christian references were omitted or skillfully rendered in a roundabout way. In *Hamlet 1990,* "*Shangdi*" appears a mere five times. The other mentions of "God" were either carefully omitted, along with words or lines in the immediate contexts, or converted into traditional Chinese or pagan expressions. While no evidence points at the absence of "God" in *Hamlet 1990* as a consequence of official censorship, it is highly plausible that the careful filter applied was an intentional choice by Li and Lin. By minimalizing references to "God," they adhered to their guiding philosophy: "Everyone is Hamlet" in the special political and cultural context in late 20th century China when few people would make religious utterings of the Christian God publicly.

Due to the Act of 1606, the base text F mentions "God" far less frequently, whereas the RSC Chinese *Hamlet* has 30 occurrences of "*Shangdi*." The restoration of the wording of "God" in this 2018 version indicates that the translator believed that intellectuals of 21st-century China were now more open to and more willing to accept Western ideas. For example, in 1.2,[2] after Horatio

[2] Scene and line references of *Hamlet* follow the RSC Folio Shakespeare, 2nd ed., edited by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, 2022. Lines from Q1 are spelt as they are in the original copy of 1603 in the Huntington Library facsimile, with line references in *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, 2015, while line references to Q2 follows their Arden 3 *Hamlet*, 2020. The old spelling of F follows the British Library's 2023 edition published on the 400th anniversary of first publication in 1623.

told Hamlet that he and the sentinels had seen the ghost of Hamlet's father, Hamlet asked Horatio to let him hear it. In Q1, it is "For God loue let me hear it." (2.109), and in Q2, "For God's love let me hear" (1.2.194), while in F, it is changed to "For Heaven's love let me hear." (198) RSC *Hamlet* follows the F version. Zhu's translation of Oxford's wording "For God's love let me hear" is "看在上帝的份上，讲给我听" meaning "For God's sake, let me hear." Li's 1990 version turned it into a line without "God": "怎么回事？怎么回事，快讲给我听!" which literally means "What's the matter? What's the matter? Let me hear!" In the RSC *Hamlet* translated and staged in 2018, Li reinserted the word "*Shangdi*" in Zhu's version "看在上帝的份上，告诉我" meaning "For God's sake, tell me," though in F and RSC F the wording is "Heaven," a word deeply rooted in the Chinese mindset for thousands of years, and which would be more "friendly" and "accessible" to the common Chinese audience.

Another example is in the ghost scene in 1.5. Between the ghost's two lines—"If thou didst ever thy dear father love" (1.5.27) and "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (1.5.29)—is Hamlet's exclamation "O God" in Q1 (5.19) and Q2 (1.5.24), and "O heaven" in F (1.5.28). Zhu translated it into "上帝啊!" ("*Shangdi* oh", meaning "God, oh!"). Hamlet's line here was quietly cut in Li's 1990 version, while she rendered "O Heaven" into "啊，上帝" ("O *Shangdi*," meaning "O God") in her RSC version, instead of the ready-made Chinese word "上天" ("*Shangtian*," meaning "Lord Heaven").

For some Christian references where there is no literal "God" in the original lines, Li used the same strategy. For example, based on Zhu's translation, "上帝的恩惠和慈悲保佑着你们，宣誓吧 (God (*Shangdi*) blessing you with grace and mercy. Swear.)" for "So grace and mercy at your most need help you, / Swear" (1.5.197), Li worked it into a Chinese oath: "上天作证，宣誓!" in *Hamlet 1990*, meaning to swear with the witness of Lord Heaven (*Shangtian*), while in her RSC version the word "*Shangdi* (God)" comes back "你们要发誓，上帝的恩赐会保佑你们！/发誓。 (If you swear, God will bless you with his mercy. Swear)."

It is worth noting that as we enter the third decade of the 21st century, Pu Cunxin, who played in both Lin's 1990 and Li Liuyi's 2018 productions, directed a Mandarin *Hamlet* cast by the Tibetan students of Shanghai Theater Academy (STA) in 2021. Interestingly, Pu chose Li's translation of *Hamlet 1990* as his base text, not the new version for the new century, which he played two years ago, in 2018 and 2019. This might be a further workaround balance when an ethnic minority with their own "God" engaged, for Shakespeare "[…] was from an age, and the timelessness of some of his utterances must be balanced by the contemporary rootedness of others." (Tiffany Stern 160). This case affirms Joubin's statement when she comments on a STA previous Tibetan *Hamlet* based on the cast's film version, *The Prince of the Himalayas*: "These works, in turn, enriched the interpretive possibilities of Shakespeare […] The transformation

of cultural forms and values operates in both directions, thus informing and giving voice to the individual interpretations" (*Chinese Shakespeares* 35).

Li's intention to serve the Chinese intellectuals of the 21st century who had been more widely and intensively exposed to the Western modern and contemporary philosophers can be illustrated with her rendering of the following two lines into philosophical terms. In her *Hamlet 1990*, she simply followed the exact words of Zhu's famous translation for "To be or not to be" (3.1.62) with "生存还是毁灭 (to live or to die, to survive or to be destroyed)" which had almost become cliché in the language of all walks of life in China. She added a repetition of these words in the same line with the two verbs reversed. In her RSC translation, she smartly and adeptly translated it into "在还是不在," literally equivalent to "to be or not to be." This is an everyday Chinese interlocution meaning "Are you here or not / at home or not / present or absent?" But to the educated audience who by "now" in the second decade of the 21st century and "here" in China, the philosophical implications of Martin Heidegger's ontological term "being," or "Dasein" in German, will immediately come to mind when reading or hearing this sentence. With her educational background and research work experience in Germany, and her conscious efforts to add a philosophical air and the pleasure of thinking to Chinese academia and theatre (2019) (235-245), this sophisticated wording can be taken as a signpost to evaluate Li's translation. The translation of "How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable" (1.2.133) is another example. The surface meaning of her translation "如此地恶心、空洞、乏味和毫无意义" is "disgusting, decaying, boring, uninteresting," but all the four words are deliberately selected from Jean-Paul Sartre's vocabulary, which equals to the existentialist notions "nausea, void, banality, and nothing."

There are some other "disloyal" changes in Li's RSC *Hamlet* translation, where the RSC Folio *Hamlet* is found not faithful to its base text, the F. One example is in the line "O, treble woe, / Fall ten times treble, on that cursed head" (5.1.189-190), in which the RSC Folio *Hamlet* takes the word "woe" from Q2's wording "O treble woe, / Fall tenne times double, on that cursed head" (5.1.235-236), while taking the "ten times of treble" from F and neglecting the "woer" in F: "Oh terrible woer, / Fall ten times trebble, on that cursed head." In Li's 2018 translation, she goes back to the original F and uses "woer" in her translation, neglecting the "woe" in the RSC *Hamlet*. Other inauthentic cases could be found in the translator's decision in her use of plural or single forms, such as to include Hamlet's aside at the presence of Corambis/Polonius "Olde doating foole" (7.233) in Q1, rather than the line in her base text RSC F or the old "original copies" of F (2.2.216) and Q2 (2.2.214) "These tedious old fools." With a "trick to see't" the remarkable craftsmanship and deeply rooted philosophical and political concerns in them could be easily identified.

Other than the changes and alterations here and there in Li's editing and translating, there is one more point which looks not "loyal" to her English base text of the RSC *Hamlet*. RSC's version has copious footnotes stipulating the actors' imagination in and acting on the "country matters" because of its editing guideline to be "theatrically viable and actors friendly." However, Li's 2018 version remains "loyal" to its Chinese base text Zhu's translation as she did in her *Hamlet 1990* in this regard. No obscene language is found anywhere in her two translations of *Hamlet*, though the sexual expressions are no longer taboos in the Chinese mindset or in publications and stage productions.

In terms of discovering nuances in the original meaning and locating a closer or roundabout expression in the target language, the practice of the RSC Shakespeare Chinese Translation Project is exemplary. Greg Doran points out in his introduction to this project that: "One of the first things to recognize about the play is that there can be no such things as a definitive production as there is no definitive text" (qtd. in Li Jianming 3). Thus, they invited the translators of the commissioned plays and the RSC playhouse directors to work in depth together at lengthy stage readings and workshops with the target actors and audience for an actor-friendly and audience-accessible text. This kind of textual and theatrical "proofreading" is very constructive and effective for the benefit of the target communities, as well as for Shakespeare's original text and the originality of the creative work of the rewriters (Cong "Shakespeare's Plays").

"There Is Method in't": Major Interpolations, Subtractions and Additions in RSC Chinese Folio *Hamlet*

One of the most striking identifiable features of the First Folio is the four o's of Hamlet's very last line before he dies: "The rest is silence. O, o, o, o" (5.2.305). The Second Folio, printed in 1632, has the same dying line. The Third Folio, printed in 1663, and the Fourth Folio, printed in 1685, have three o's left. Q2 ends with "The rest is silence" (5.2.342) with no "o", while Q1 has a different last line for Hamlet: "Farewel Horatio, heauen receiue my soule" (17.111). Most modern editions delete these o's, perhaps for the same consideration of the editor of the new Oxford *Hamlet* G. R. Hibbard who follows the suggestion of E. A. J. Honigmann who, in turn, categorizes them as one of Shakespeare's "crypto-directions" which should be replaced with an "appropriate equivalent" stage direction such as "with a long sigh" (Hibbard 352, Honigmann 123). However, this may not be an "appropriate" strategy for editing Shakespeare, for Shakespeare's dramatic language speaks for itself, though the stage directions are scarce in F.

Li Jianming and Li Liuyi's version is the only stage production in China that officially claims being a production based on F. They advertised this

on every occasion, as well as printing “Royal Shakespeare Company Folio Translation Project” on the playbill and “RSC First Folio Text” on the book cover of the preview text officially printed by the Chinese publisher. But this translation ends with “The rest is silence” without the four hallmark o’s. Other than the minor and major subtractions and additions, Li’s translation has the “Q2 only” soliloquy, “How all occasions do inform against me” (4.4.31). With this evidence, we can safely say this is a “pick and mix” version, actually more a quarto than a folio. Or, it can rightly be called a collated adaptation, a new artistic creation by the translator and the director, especially when we consider the end of this version:

> HAMLET:
> I die. Thou shall live behind me!
> If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
> Absent thee from felicity awhile,
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
> To tell my story.
> The rest is silence.
> HORATIO:
> Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince.
> And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!
> (Exeunt marching, carrying the bodies. Cannon is fired.)
> (Finis)

This ending looks abrupt. Lines about news from England and the prophecy for Denmark, together with the English Ambassador and Fortinbras, are put to silence. But it does not clash with Doran’s guidelines when he initiated the RSC translation project. A passage from his “Call for Translators” for the project specifies: “They will draw upon the RSC’s extensive archive of different production edits (including cuts, textual transpositions, and doubling or combining of characters) going back well over the last half-century. This long history of theatre-making, and the RSC’s deep understanding of the challenges arising from performing these 400-year-old plays, will form the bedrock of the translations’ ‘theatrical viability.’”

On the bedrock of this principle, RSC has a long tradition of making cuts and interpolations in their productions. One example of such a cut was by John Caird, erstwhile associate director of RSC. In an interview, he said: “In any event, it seemed to me that Fortinbras has absolutely no moral right to say what has been written for him. We don’t know him, we don’t care about him, […] So I cut Fortinbras and all that goes with him, ending the play with Horatio’s lines” (217-218). However, he was not the first director who cut the part of Fortinbras to make Shakespeare’s work “maimed and deformed”, to quote from “To the Great Variety of Readers” Heminge and Condell put in the First Folio before

Shakespeare's plays. Dobson's account for Fortinbras having been "on the endangered list for more than three centuries" is exhaustive and informative (Dobson, "Cutting, Interruption" 269-275). Among such practices, the generation of Li Jianming must know Laurence Olivier's cut. He not only cut Fortinbras but also left Rosencrantz and Guildenstern out of his 1948 film version. This film was the first movie version of *Hamlet* introduced to China in the 1950s, which was censored from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s during the Cultural Revolution, then revived in the 1980s. It was a cultural icon of two or three generations in China, which must be part of the cultural memory of Li Jianming and Li Liuyi.

Along with Fortinbras, Li also cut the ambassador from England who is among Hamlet's chief concerns before he dies, which is obviously a chief concern of Shakespeare the playwright himself, for Fortinbras and the ambassador(s) from England enter the stage in the last scene in all the three versions of Q1, Q2 and F.

An investigation of the spelling of the word "struck" and its variants might be helpful to identify the irony that the editors of F sophisticatedly and adeptly put into the role of Fortinbras and the end of the whole play. Throughout the play according to the original printing of 1623 F, there are seven places with the word "struck" or its old spelling "strook/strooke/stroke":

1.1.7 Barnardo: 'Tis now strook twelue.
1.4.5 Marcellus: No, it is strooke.
2.2.510 Hamlet: Bene strooke so to the soule
3.2.226 Hamlet: Why, let the strucken deere go weepe
3.2.269 Rosencrantz: Then thus she sayes: your behauior hath stroke her into amazement, and admiration.
5.2.26 Hamlet: My head shoud be struck off.
5.2.315 Fortinbras: So bloodily hast strooke.

Unfortunately, the ingenuity of the "textual logic" (Kastan 8) created by the First Folio editors is completely erased by the modernization of the spelling of this word by RSC Folio *Hamlet*, as well as other modern editions, in which they were all spelt as "struck/stricken," perhaps with an assumption that the variants were made by Jaggard's compositors' mistakes and that all spelling must be "modernized". More disastrous is the "silent change" by Bate and Rasmussen to give Marcellus's line in 1.4 to Hamlet (2007, 2008, 2022), a misprint which could be regarded as a blunder that has the humanistic and artistic value of the First Folio *Hamlet* greatly diminished. Of all the seven uses of "struck," only two are in the regular modern form in the original printing of the First Folio, both when Hamlet addresses others. Three are "strook/strooke/stroke" spoken by the "baser nature" (to quote from Hamlet

when he talks to Horatio about how he sent Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to death): Barnardo, Marcellus, Rosencrantz. Of the two "strooke"s left, one is by Hamlet when he soliloquizes. He does not use "struck" as he does when talking to others. He is using his own sociolect to speak to himself. As a matter of fact, what Rosencrantz passes on to Hamlet in 3.2 is from Hamlet's mother's tongue, which could be inferred as Hamlet's native sociolect. The last one is by Fortinbras, with "strooke" instead of the modern "struck". With a pun "I am now, sir, mudded in Fortune's mood" from *All's Well That Ends Well* (1.2.4), Appleton Morgan illustrates how Shakespeare might be heard when his English was pronounced in London, with "brook" heard as "bruck" (Morgan 397) and "muddy" sounding similar to "moody" (419). Thus, we could logically infer that "strook/strooke/stroke" was pronounced "struk" in the Warwickshire dialect in Shakespeare's time. The seven places in Q2 are all spelt with "oo" as "strooke" or "strooken". The deliberate editing of changing two of them into "u" in F should not be ignored by later editors. In the 400 years history of editing Shakespeare's works, "although none of these announced any editorial changes, each in fact took small steps to update language usage and correct obvious errors. Each also inadvertently added its own mistakes or mistranscriptions in the process of resetting the nine hundred pages of type" (Smith 183). To use Shakespeare's hometown dialect pronunciation might be an effective "trick" to zoom in on the "rustic" playwright and the upstart of another "rustic crow" to the throne of Denmark, and to lay the tragic irony with Fortinbras at the very end of the whole play. It is somewhat a pity that Li's translation also turns awry by giving Marcellus' line to Hamlet, a point which may mislead the Chinese readers and theatre workers.

The rediscovery of Q1 shows that all three extant versions end with the Norway Prince Fortinbras taking the Danish throne without any effort. This is also a strong point that can help justify that the role of Fortinbras should not be cut. This is the irony and absurdity that Shakespeare so carefully infused into the play: Hamlet, committed to the great cause of revenge, dies in a duel that is not his choice, though he reluctantly claims that "readiness is all." The four o's were added by the First Folio editors to show the inner frustration and helplessness of Hamlet—the rest seems not yet silence. Its significance is much more than a stage direction for the actor to give a long sigh. "There's matter in these sighs, these profound heaves" (3.4.208). They must be "translated" (3.4.209), for the readers and audience should "understand them" (3.4.209). This is one of the "very necessary" (Johnson 54) tasks fulfilled by Heminge and Condell as the editors, whose duty, is to "have before him all possibilities of meaning, with all possibilities of expression" (Johnson 55).

In fact, the two mature versions, Q2 and F, have brilliant foreshadowing ironic lines such as "Long live the King" in the opening of the whole play. Even in the "bad quarto" Q1, such effort can be found in the

opening lines of Claudius, which are not those with which we are familiar in Q2 and F about the death of Old Hamlet and his "sometime sister now our queen," but rather the words to the two ambassadors whom he is sending to Norway to show his chief concern—Fortinbras. The stage directions of the last scene in Q1 doubly emphasize the role of Fortinbras. There are two stage entries, one for "Voltemar and the Ambassadors from England," the other, in a separate line, "enter Fortenbrasse with his traine." Fortinbras is deliberately not placed in the same line as the others. He enters distinctively, strikingly, not only in the last scene but also in this world of absurdity that the whole play of *Hamlet* illustrates. The triumph of the upstart Fortinbras from Norway at the end of the tragedy of the Prince of Denmark is a masterful magic touch for the plot of the play, which highlights Shakespeare's deep thinking on the absurd reality of human life as a humanist thinker. Shakespeare would be "cut short" with this kind of "abridgements of humanity" (Shaaber 382) if Fortinbras and the relevant plot were omitted.

With the cutting of Fortinbras in Li's translation, the most valuable part of the play and the gist of this great work of Renaissance are lost. Another major textual interpolation of Li's text is the position of Hamlet's "To be or not to be" (3.1.62-96) and Ophelia's "What a noble mind" (3.1.144-154). Li moved this "nunnery scene" to 2.2 immediately after Polonius declaring he has found the "very cause of Hamlet's lunacy" (2.2.52) and offering to "loose" Ophelia to meet Hamlet. Thus Hamlet's first encounter with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and the players, his speeches about "prison", "nutshell" (2.2.232-245), and "What a piece of work is a man" all appear in a later position, so does Hamlet's decision to use the "Mousetrap" and his 58 line soliloquy "Now I am alone […] catch the conscience of the King" (2.2.467-524) as well. Psychologically and dramatically, this sequence of actions, dialogues and soliloquies seems broken, though it might be convenient for the stage movement of the "lawful espials" (3.1.35) and Hamlet. As noted by S. L. Riep, the translator who translated *Hamlet 1990* back to English that, "Lin Zhaohua's *Hamlet* is an adaptation rather than a straightforward translation of the original Shakespeare play" (qtd. in Joubin *Sinophone Adaptations* 23). This kind of adaptation is tolerable when considering that the target audience is not the general public but intellectuals who are quite familiar with the "original" *Hamlet* and who do not lack humanistic education, since *Hamlet* has long been included in the reading list of required literary classics by China's Ministry of Education for high schools and colleges (Cong "The 1964 Shakespeare Jubilee" 378). But for the sake of ordinary readers and theatregoers, it is crucial that the translator and the team of the stage production clearly make known that this is an adaptation or appropriation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, not the "original" *Hamlet* produced in the time of English Renaissance, though the base text has a tag of "Royal Shakespeare Company First Folio Edition." Actually, as Li Ruru observes,

because of Lin's devise of role-switching, "even those from the intellectual elite found the production more fascinating than accessible… Seeing this performance, audiences were too busy trying to work out who was who, and why, to keep track of the plot or fully appreciate the lines" (97). Li Liuyi in his 2018 production took a step further. He had the same actress play Ophelia and Gertrude who intentionally offers no obvious cues in costume, speech voice and body movement to distinguish between the two characters on the stage. Once again, "the play lost its basic power of communication" (Li Ruru 97).

We do not know whose hand is heavier, who is more responsible for the translated text, Li Jianming as the translator, or Lin and Li Liuyi as the director? Graham Watts argues in his *Shakespeare's Authentic Performance Texts: The Case for Staging from the First Folio* that what is set out on the page is not Shakespeare's text but an editor's or director's script, and that in some cases this script differs so greatly from the First Folio that it should rightly be called an adaptation (3-29, 213-218). Such creative scripts of translation and stage production undoubtedly have played their own, different roles in the cultural accumulation and the acculturation in China in the 20th and the 21st century. However, in a picture that the significance of Shakespeare in China as part of humanistic education in the current special historical context is profound, the "true original Shakespeare" should not be distorted and misrepresented when there is a remarkable demand in contemporary China for the access to Shakespeare. For instance, on August 3, 2024 *Sleep No More* in-residence in Shanghai completed its 2000th performance since the British company Punchdrunk first introduced it to China in 2016. In the past seven and a half years, 600,000 people have had the immersive theater experiences with this dance adaptation of *Macbeth*. Based on the observation of the audience practice in *Sleep No More*, D. J. Hopkins discusses the "slippery" discourse of Shakespeare performances: "[…] a performance of a play by Shakespeare will mean different things to different audience members." The audience would most probably fail to appreciate the essence of this play if they had not read any text faithful to the original play. In contemporary China where there is an urgent need for intellectual enlightening, for the understanding of the fundamental human values and the dignity of all human beings, the efforts to increase access to the "true original" Shakespeare matter a lot.

Conclusion

The RSC *Hamlet* is somewhat "gone" from the First Folio as they advertised being "loyal" to the "original copy." The RSC Chinese translation is "gone" from the commissioned base text "RSC Folio Edition", and "far gone" (2.2.194) from the First Folio. As Dobson noted in his book review for the RSC Folio:

"There is no suggestion that the RSC has ever performed Shakespeare's plays in the versions given here, or that they ever intend to do so" (Dobson, "For His Nose"). The examples displayed in this paper illustrate that since there is no "perfect original text," it is impossible to achieve a perfect Chinese translation. Without "perfect" translations, perfect stage-texts are also out of the question. Each version has its merits. Every text edition, every translation, and every adaptation is original. It is a value-added "dialogue" with Shakespeare's "spirit" (Kastan 136) in a new historical context and cultural space, provided that the "true original" is accessible to the communities concerned.

Alexa Alice Joubin's theorizing of the ethics and the "pleasures of (in)fidelity" is enlightening and stimulating. She indicates that ethics is "an essential" but "often missed term in discussion of Shakespeare and appropriation" (Joubin and Rivlin 2). Though "the interplay between Shakespeare and China thus reveals the plurality and the referential instability of these discursive entities" (Joubin, *Chinese Shakespeares* 32), there is the possibility to secure one certainty amongst so many uncertainties, that is the humanity, the tragic pity and fear, and the beauty and rhythm of Shakespeare's original artistic creation, to capture the inner power of humanity in Shakespeare which can enlighten human beings of all times. It is vitally important and valuable to produce a faithful translation of either F, Q2 or even Q1 here in China aimed at a community, including the educated and the elites, who are not quite familiar with the original texts either. And more specific clarification and acknowledgement should be required for print editions and stage scripts in research documentations, book publications and stage productions. The pluralistic intertextuality of adaptations should be encouraged in the endeavors of "owning Chinese Shakespeares" or "disowning Shakespeare" (Joubin, *Chinese Shakespeares* 23-43, 195-227). Translations could be enhanced by a variorum approach. Copious textual notes and lengthy explanatory notes should accompany the translation and re-scripting of each line, displaying the differences between the translated text and the base text(s) to give a full picture of the "original Shakespeare," rather than "quietly" picking and mixing non-transparently. This could convey a full range of information and help build an understanding equal to the original text in its original cultural and historical context. Otherwise, it is unfair to deprive the Chinese audience of access to the full range of meanings of the English text. A hypertext (Kastan 124-133) of facsimiles of extant old spelling copies and all existing English and translated texts, including literary or stage and screen adaptations, might provide a textual utopia which will be helpful for different communities with different needs. As to the Chinese text discussed in this paper, I would propose it be entitled "RSC *Hamlet* for the Chinese Stage" rather than the officially designated "RSC Chinese Folio *Hamlet*" if the project could be resumed and further implemented in the post-pandemic era, to help avoid the possible misconception of

"acknowledged authority" that Chinese readers and audience may conceive under the halo of RSC and the misleading label of "Commissioned Folio Translation". After all, the initiating idea for this project is simply to produce as many plays as possible in the catalogue of the First Folio in a viable way on the Chinese stage rather than committed to providing faithful translations with the Folio copies as the base texts.

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