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When *Macbeth* Meets Chinese Opera: A Crossroad of Humanity

Abstract: As one of the four Shakespeare's great tragedies, *Macbeth*, with its thrilling story line and profound exploration of human nature, has been adapted for plays and movies worldwide. Though *Macbeth* was introduced to China just before the May 4th Movement in 1919, its characters and plot have attracted the world in the past 100 years. *Macbeth* was firstly adapted into a folk play *Theft of a Nation* during the modern play period, to mock Yuan Shikai's restoration of the monarchy, who was considered as a usurper of Qing dynasty, followed by Li Jianwu's adaptation *Wang Deming*, Kun opera *Bloody Hands*, Taiwanese version of Beijing opera *Lust and the City*, Hong Kong version of Cantonese opera *The Traitor*, Macao version of small theater play *If I were the King*, Anhui opera *Psycho*, Shaoxing opera *General Ma Long*, Wu opera *Bloody Sword*, a monodrama of Sichuan opera *Lady Macbeth*, and an experimental Kun opera *Lady*. Therefore, this essay aims to comb the relations among various adaptations of *Macbeth*, to discover the advantages and disadvantages of different methodologies by examining the spiritual transformations of the main character Macbeth and reinvention of Lady Macbeth, and ultimately to observe acceptance of Chinese public, which might give thoughts to communications of overseas literature in China.

Keywords: Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Chinese Opera, Intercultural Theater, Sinolization.

It is undeniable that Shakespearean plays were highly welcomed by Chinese audience. Dozens of genres of dramas including Beijing opera, Kun opera, Shaoxing opera, Shanghai opera, Cantonese opera, Sichuan opera, song-and-dance duet, Chaozhou opera, Yu opera, Huangmei opera, Anhui opera and Wu opera have tried to reinterpret famous classics of Shakespeare such as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *The Twelfth Night*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Merchant of Venice*. Distinctive features hence come into the picture, drawing a booming scene. As one of the most popular adaptations, *Macbeth* becomes the source of inspiration of several outstanding Chinese operas such as Kun opera *Bloody Hands*, *Lady*

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Macbeth, Beijing opera *Lust and the City*, Cantonese opera *The Traitor*, Wu opera *Bloody Sword*, Anhui opera *Psycho*, Shaoxing opera *General Ma Long* and Sichuan opera *Lady Macbeth*.

Researches on adaptations and performance of intercultural theaters are key academic topics for global theater institutes and scholars in latest ten years, making great progress in both practice and theory. A number of scholars such as Patrice Pavis, Erika Fischer-Licht, Julie Holledge, Richard Schechner and Rustom Bharucha had been discussing the issues related to intercultural theater from different aspects in their works. Basing on works of Western playwrights such as Shakespeare, Ibsen and O'Neill, Chinese adaptations and performances are generally considered by the international theater institutes and scholars as intercultural dialogues which are not only copies of translation, but also recreations combining styles of Chinese performers and aesthetic experience of Chinese audience. Therefore, we can reach an agreement of intercultural adaptation of Chinese traditional theaters that is a practice of recreation based on the foreign theaters. Needless to say, it's an arduous task as adaptors have to deal with cultural shocks while retaining its own characteristics of traditional opera and the original spirit of work. In this case, Chinese operas, which speak for loyalty and righteousness, might be hard to express all the profound depictions of humanity in Shakespearean plays. For this reason, every adaptation often comes with criticism. In this essay, the most adapted play *Macbeth* and some Chinese adaptations will be an example for investigation and exploration for Shakespearean plays' Sinolization.

***Macbeth* in China**

It was in 1916 when *Macbeth* for the very first time appeared on China's stage. At that time modern play was a hit. So, Zheng Zhengqiu, director and scriptwriter of Yaofeng Theater directed this improvisational performance, *Theft of a Nation*, aiming at mocking Yuan Shikai's restoration of the monarchy, who was considered a usurper of Qing dynasty. It won a big applause when the performer was cursing fiercely the emperor and making fun of the usurper. "The public was very touched by the opera; each sentence was highly appraised" (X.Q. Meng 139). Ill news flies apace. Yuan Shikai put the main performer Gu Wuwei in jail, accusing Gu of disturbing public order and peace, and sentenced him to death. Until the collapse of his regime, this notable unjust grievance was finally redressed.

Li Jianwu, a famous dramatist and writer, adapted *Macbeth* into a play named *Champions of Chaos*, which was firstly debuted at Lafayette cinema in Shanghai, 1945, performed by several opera troupes. The dramatist chose to transform the original work into a Chinese historical story in the Five Dynasties.

He also borrowed the scenario when Shaohu, a courtier in Zhou dynasty, gave away his own son in exchange for the life of the prince. Though it is even much more touching than the scenario when Macbeth assaults Mr.&Mrs. Macduff, the key delivering message has been far from the humanistic spirit during the Renaissance.

Likewise, the Kun opera *Bloody Hands* was firstly launched on the 1st Shakespeare Festival in the April of 1986. It was at that time only an episode until it gave its full performance in Shanghai Children's Art Theater in the June of 1987, performed by the local troupe. Then after more than half a year of revision, Shanghai Theater Academy repeated the performance. The same year, invited by The Edinburgh International Festival, *Bloody Hands* gave touring performances in 23 cities in Britain including Edinburgh, awarded as Show of the Year. However, compared with comments in China, it was facing two very different views: one is rather positive on its revolution on music, singing and formula; the other is somehow negative on its bold adaptation to the original with the loss of the Shakespearean spirit (Cao and Sun 166).

Just in the same year, Beijing opera *Lust and the City* was performed by Taiwanese Contemporary Legend Theater. It represented the highest level of production from costumes, set dressing, lighting, characterization and emotion performance, holding the record of performances at home and abroad. Despite many disputes, major scholars and audience admitted its success in adaptation. However, when it went to London in 1990, uproarious response did not come twice as audience found the singing and ideological contents were far from pleasant.¹

In 1999, Sichuan Youth Opera Troupe performed Sichuan opera *Lady Macbeth*. In this condensed thirty-minute one-man show, it went straight to the flashback of Lady Macbeth, depicting her psychological development, criminal motive and thus revealing the evil of human nature. Later *Lady Macbeth* was successively invited to the 2nd International Shakespeare Festival in Bremen, German, Chinese Opera Tour Performance in Munich, German and Holland National Stage Art Awards in 2000. It was highly praised for its poetic and modern expression, pursuing the perfect harmony between tradition and Shakespearean esthetics. Again in 2010, Chengdu Sichuan Theater performed this play on the 22nd Cairo International Experimental Theater Festival. Again, it received high marks for its insight into foreign drama and Chinese opera.²

In addition, various adaptations illustrated a modern personal tragedy through characterization and emotional conflicts, including Wu opera *Bloody*

¹ For further discussion, see: Dai, Yawen. *Crazy Opera, Innocent Audience: Ten Years of Audience and Performance in Taiwan Theater (1988-1998)*. Translated by Lv Jianzhong. Shulin Press, 2000, p. 56-60.

² <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceegy/chn/zgzk/t762118.htm>

Sword performed by Zhejiang Baihua Dongyang Troupe in 1985, Cantonese opera *The Traitor* by Hong Kong Jinyinghua Troupe in 1996, small theater play *If I were the King* performed by Macao Xiaojue Theater in 1997, Shaoxing opera *General Malong* performed by Shaoxing Baihua Troupe in 2001 and Anhui opera *Psycho* by Anhui Opera Theater in 2013. Until 2015, experimental Kun opera *Lady* tried for the very first time to build the story from a feminine angle of view.

A straw shows which way the wind blows. From these different characteristics, styles, regions and audience composition of adapted performances, we could see a whole picture of Shakespearean plays on Chinese opera stage.

Shakespearean Plays in China

Cultural shock is the gulf between original work and its adaptation. The adapted work could be facing the rough situation where domestic and overseas audience both will not buy it, given the opposite views between *Bloody Hands* and *Lust and the City*, *Lady Macbeth* and *Lady*. Therefore, playwrights have to consider public acceptance, and more importantly, the spirit of original work. In this case, Chinese playwrights find two ways to solve the problem: one is to sinicize the original work by fully or mainly localizing the character, period, location and custom; the other is to keep its western figures. As Sun Qiang, scriptwriter of Shaoxing opera *General Malong* said, “We choose to stick to the original spirit of Shakespeare while making it completely a Chinese story” (Sun 48). Obviously, Sinolization has become the best choice of Chinese playwrights.

Various adaptations of *Macbeth* all respond to the socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics, namely, story background, period, territory, character, custom, clothing and tongue. But that is just the coat of Sinolization; narration transformation is the core. As Chinese opera is grown within the context of Chinese narration, which emphasizes the integrity of story, full of winding scenario and legendary tales from a hero’s perspective.

Macbeth is certainly the first choice for Chinese playwrights, as this character Macbeth links to all scattered scenes and thus stands out in the whole storyline, which perfectly accords with Chinese narrative methods. Huang Zuolin, art director of *Bloody Hands* once pointed out that “there are a lot of similarities between the stage in Shakespeare’s time and the traditional stage of Chinese opera, both constantly highlight the major characters instead of setting” (Huang 4). Therefore, he has made great efforts to add traditional singing and dancing to *Macbeth*, making it a complete typical Kun opera (Huang 4). Wu Xingguo, director of *Lust and the City*, also found the similarities between *Macbeth* and Beijing opera. “Both stress the function of languages, the

application of poetry, narrative usage, character sequence, various sessions and interaction between actors and audience” (Wu 50). “An indispensable lubricant of all the scattered scenes” (Wu 50).

Thus, the Kun opera *Bloody Hands* only keeps the major scene when Mr. & Mrs. Macbeth murder the king. It consists of eight sessions such as *Knighted, Scheme, Framed, The Assassin, Banquet Troubler, Witch, Insanity and Blood*. In this play, the leading role Macbeth was changed into Mapei, who believed in the witch’s words and murdered the king and his wife. The couple framed someone else for the sin, but the wife soon lost her mind under too much pressure. In the end, the real prince had his revenge with his soldiers, while Mapei fell at Waterloo. *Bloody Hands* basically follows the framework of the original story, as well as Chinese narrative features, revealing an individual transformation from hero to tyrant. Similarly, *Lust and the City* featuring the basic structure of drama – act and scene cut the original number to 4 acts with 14 scenes, in order to highlight the definite plot line of regicide. In addition, such as *Wang Deming*, adapted by Li Jianwu, Cantonese opera *Traitor*, Wu opera *Bloody Sword*, Anhui opera *Psycho*, Shaoxing opera *General Malong*, all local theaters have, without exception, adopted the same strategy by transplanting the story to ancient China and Chinese personages. Most importantly, the strategy is meant to abandon subsidiary storylines giving place to its core – the regicide. By doing so, all characters, including Macbeth, got simplified yet strengthened.

French scholar Daniel-Henri Pageaux once stated in his article *Imagologie* that the image of comparative literature is not duplicate of reality, yet it is regrouped and rewritten by observers according to the mode and formula routed in his own culture (H. Meng 157). Both preexist in image (H. Meng 157). This so-called exotic image refers to a reproduction of overall understanding of the other’s culture in its own cultural context. This definition consists of two dimensions: first, a prototype of an exotic image truly exists; second, a chemical reaction with the local culture in the process of translation, resulted in the birth of a new image. This cognitive bias based on cultural differences, known as “misreading”, includes individual differences in image-makers, historical differences in cultural development, and information-dissolving in the process of cross-cultural communication. In the process of Chinese opera’s adaptation of *Macbeth*, the “misreading” of the character’s “image” is very obvious.

Firstly, the two kings are very different. Duncan in *Macbeth* “hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been so clear in his great office, that his virtues will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu’d against the deep damnation of his taking-off” (Shakespeare 19). However, the king in *Bloody Hands* is afraid of Mapei’s glorious achievements and becomes extremely suspicious. In *Lust and the City*, the king is even weaker, considered as a nose of wax. In the scene of Three Retributions, he even, to some extent, agreed with Mrs. Ao Shuzheng, namely, the Mrs. Macbeth, that a weak king should be replaced by a strong hero.

In addition, Banquo in *Macbeth* has always been considered by researchers as an important reference in sharp contrast to Macbeth. His noble character is not only praised by Macbeth, but also makes Macbeth feel inferior. But Chinese version of *Macbeth* simplified this character. Further, after “Macbeth” killed “Banquo”, the battle with its ghost can be considered bluffing. In the original work, Macbeth fears the ghost of Banquo because, in his view, the latter is the embodiment of justice. “If it’s not all, at least part of the ghost is Macbeth’s inner illusion” (Nicoll 130). Banquo is here questioning Macbeth’s soul. But in the Chinese adaptation, Banquo’s ghost, in addition to adding a shady and terrible atmosphere, does not have too much sublime and tragic color, nor does it play a role in deterring Macbeth’s mind.

This could lead to the third point that the ghost in the Chinese traditional context is symbolizing revenge. The same goes to the Chinese adaptation of *Macbeth*. As a piece of commentary says that, “the supernatural power not only makes the play more exciting, but also makes audience to ignore the moral responsibility of the couple” (Lei 288); “Replaced by superstition, the play is no longer in the pursuit of humane and ethical value” (Hu 79). All the characters, and even parrots, who were killed by the couple, became physical ghost figures, chasing Mrs. Macbeth, using the traditional stunt of “Spitfire”. The Shakespearean ghost is thus interpreted from form to connotation into a Chinese ghost who, according to the tradition, chases the sinners out of revenge.

Witch prophecies in the original and adapted works also reflect the different attitudes of Chinese and Western cultures towards fate. The witch’s prophecy in *Macbeth* is subtle, hinting at his thriving ambition. Yet the Chinese opera adaptation strengthens the mysterious power of fairy and ghosts, so that their prophecies are considered by Mrs. Macbeth as the will of Heaven. It thus becomes a powerful basis for the wife to persuade her husband. Shakespeare took advantage of the common notion of fate in ancient Greek tragedies, but he “never allowed God to intervene directly in human affairs, nor did he intend to articulate his belief in supernatural power” (Nicoll 134). So, it is not hard to understand that instead of letting the witch decisively influence on Macbeth, Shakespeare allowed Macbeth to make his own decision. At the same time, “Christian morality” (Nicoll 205) has also affected Shakespeare to create a character with both ambition and self-consciousness. However, the Chinese version has made the “attempt at political ambition subtly transformed into a submissive act to the will of God” (Lei 301).

As Professor Zhang Longxi stated in his paper *The Metamorphosis of Shakespeare: From Text to Performance*, “The spirit of the typical Oriental civilization that stresses the moral purpose and highly stylized performance technique of shaping the characters, is very different from Shakespeare’s play. This simple symbolic technique not only greatly affects the performance of Chinese opera, but also affects the acceptance of Chinese audiences, making us

accustomed to dividing all the characters into good and bad people. This simplified model is not different from the multi-angled approach of Shakespeare's characters, and it creates some obstacles in understanding Shakespeare's works in China" (Zhang 69). In the process of the Sinolization of Shakespeare's plays, "Some of the traditional mode of Chinese opera are actually very similar to those of the Elizabethan era in Britain: simple props and scenes, a few rhymes before the characters come off the court, common monologues and narrations, and so on—all of which are commonly used in local operas in China. It may have played a positive role in the successful production of Shakespearean adaptations on the Chinese stage" (Zhang 69). However, it still needs to be further explored and perfected to not only truly achieve a successful adaptation, considering the spirit of the original and local culture while maintaining the depth of the original, but also take full advantage of the opera, avoiding ideological contradictions.

Mental Deformation of *Macbeth*

Lounsbury once said: "In *Macbeth*, the punishment eventually goes back to the evil husband and wife. But that is only a side effect. It does not play an important role in the progress of the whole play. However, it is worth noticing the power of evil, as once it has mastered a man's soul, it will gradually spoil and produce different tragic effects in different personalities."³ The success and value of *Macbeth* lies in its mastery of universal human nature and its delicate portrayal of psychology. If it is significant in indoctrination, the audience will have to experience it in their own way, rather than adhering to the author's advice and guidance.

Supplemented by a number of sidelines, Shakespeare's play presents a rich development from beginning till the end. But this structure is difficult from Chinese opera, especially when it comes to concrete performances. As mentioned earlier, the various "Macbeth" adaptations have focused on Macbeth and his wife. Unrelated plots have either been deleted, reassembled, or skimmed over. If contradiction between Macbeth and morality, justice is regarded as multiple vortexes, then the adapted structure of "Macbeth" is indeed compact, but the vortexes get smaller and fewer. Therefore, due to alleviation of the moral contradiction, the embattled tension is released, the complex emotion such as hesitation, terror, resistance is replaced by simplified violence and fear, thus the desperate spirit with a certain heroism of the Chinese "Macbeth" is not well demonstrated. Compared with the original, the Chinese Macbeth is no longer a tragic figure in the numerous contradictions, but a king slayer and ambitious

³ Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Translated by Liang Shiqui. Fareast Books, 1989, p. 8.

schemer, resulting in softening intrapsychic conflicts. Despite a creative development in represented operas such as *Bloody Hand*, *Lust and the City* and *Psycho*, which all depicted a clear outline of the original and present a logical and consistent storyline, the character shaping and the overall spirit in adaptations are still weakened, showing Macbeth's mental deformation due to a lack of description on the clash of his desires.

Macbeth is undoubtedly ambitious. Otherwise he will not be encouraged by the witch's prophecy and his wife's persuasion, leading him to death. Alongside Hamlet, Othello and King Lear, the reason why Macbeth shares the glory is not to reveal through Macbeth how a heinous man is retried, but yet to point out, "it is too full o'th'milk of human kindness to catch the nearest way" (Shakespeare 14). His nature is not evil, but when the darkness in his heart is provoked, the evil gradually grows like a snowball, allowing him to move step by step towards the end of destruction. In spite of choosing a road that cannot be turned back, Macbeth still has a sense of guilt. It is this sense of guilt and unyielding spirit that has made him a tragic hero. As one commentator said: "In spite of his sense of guilt, he has never changed course. In his view, the path of life is chosen only by stepping forward. His wife failed the game under mental burden, but he will never lose the dignity of a king and soldier, even under the worst situation... His courage reminds people of Xiangyu, the tragic hero in Chinese history" (Hu 83). Even in the hopeless situation when he finally finds himself bewildered by witch's lie, he insists on fighting until the last minute: "From this moment, the very firstlings of my heart shall be the firstlings of my hand" (Shakespeare 68). His spirit is indeed breathtaking.

If looking back on Chinese Macbeth, we can find out that witch's prophecy is here considered as Confucianism's "destiny" theory. Once they get hesitant and afraid, they immediately come up with the idea of Buddhism such as "Life is a dream in man's world", "He who is worn out lives by mental perplexity; he who works in vain lives by physical labor." Once encountered with difficulties, they immediately ask the fairies to "eliminate the disaster", or complain about the "arrangement of heaven", showing a sense of Taoism and fatalism instead of ethics. As Mr. Liang Shuming pointed out: "Although China has a long history, its religion is still out of avoiding misfortune and seeking blessing, long-lived and immortal pursuit, without any idea of confess or fraternity" (Liang 95). Hegel once said: "Orientals believe that there is only one force of physicality, which governs all the characters created in the world, and determines the fate of all characters in a relentlessly fickle way. Thus, subjective initiative of self-examination and self-defense is constantly absent in Oriental awareness" (Hegel 297). Wu Xingguo, director of *Lust and the City*, also mentioned that "Chinese have never created a role, who is vicious but gains in the end appreciation or even sympathy from public, because of confession to a crime" (Dai 52). Thus, the Chinese Macbeths, covered by the God's will, never

dare to admit their intentions, wandering among ambition, conscience and the charge of sin. The Chinese Macbeths do not lack psychological conflicts, but the content has been distorted. They lack the “sublime” (Nicoll 159) that can move the audience, namely the self-condemnation of conscience. Or it should be said that such “Macbeth” is a typical character in Chinese history and on the opera’s stages, that is, “King killers are not rare given corruption of political ethics” (Dai 42).

The different approaches to death also show Macbeth’s mental deformation in Chinese versions. In the original, Macbeth understands well the justice of sentence, calm in the face of death. This “acknowledgment of his own crimes is just the glory of the great man” (Hegel 309). Yet the Chinese Macbeth is not only unwilling to face his death at a loss, but also ends up with swords and arrows. To some extent, Chinese belief in karma and fatalism just corresponds to the original storyline that Mr. & Mrs. Macbeth, who have made all the efforts in vain, eventually lead themselves to fatal ending. For this reason, every adaptor underlines this concept and virtually diverts audience’s attention away from the original idea. In fact, karma, which indeed refers to the original, is only covered by the character’s psychological activity. Once it meets the Chinese opera, which values traditional moral enlightenment, it is reinterpreted and strengthened. So, some people regard the Beijing opera *Lust and the City* as a success, “there is a very sly reason: Shakespeare’s original play is actually about how people’s desire devours themselves step by step, but the story framework and ending match perfectly with the traditional Chinese concept – karma, which is able to satisfy audience’s needs of flushing soul and moral enlightenment” (A.Q. Wang 148). This view can successfully apply to several other adaptations.

Reinvention of Mrs. Macbeth

Several representative works such as Kun opera *Bloody Hands*, Taiwanese version of Beijing opera *Lust and the City*, Hong Kong version of Cantonese opera *Traitor*, Macao small theater play *If I were the King*, Wu opera *Bloody Sword*, Shaoxing opera *General Malong*, Anhui opera *Psycho* are all following the main storyline of the original, focusing on the tragic fate of Macbeth himself; Nevertheless, other two seek for alternative path, from the perspective of Mrs. Macbeth, presenting an enriched role of party, participant, promoter and bystander as a whole. These are Sichuan opera *Lady Macbeth* and experimental Kun opera *Lady*; both have endowed brand-new interpretation of an eternal classic.

Lady Macbeth is a Sichuan opera with a strong expressive style. It has condensed the original of 5 acts and 27 scenes into a thirty-minute one-man show. Smart playwright is always loyal to the overall spirit of the original. So, in

this show, it directly enters into Mrs. Macbeth's "sleepwalking" memory. Focusing on her psychological descriptions, it reveals the evil of human nature in continuous "flash-forwards and flashbacks". It's not Macbeth who was awakened by the mysterious knock, but lady Macbeth, the drowsy night dreamer. With a sneer on her face, this "knock" shattered her evil heart, but also whipped the soul. In this way, the context of events, character relation, psychology and background could all be presented in Mrs. Macbeth's frightened soul.

It is invaluable that *Lady Macbeth* does not attribute the break out of ambition to the prophecy of Three Witches; nor arrange a peaceful death in her sleepwalking, or by dementors, which are symbolic of traditional Sichuan opera. From the script structure to the performance, psychological dynamics in this play are all presented through stream of consciousness. This structure of performance is based on the flow of the character consciousness. Macbeth's silent appearance is shadow in her mind of the "shadow", indicating her complex mental state. In particular, the maids' grotesque and strange dance performances enlarged the subjective spirit of Mrs. Macbeth into a concrete stage image, which played an important role in foiling atmosphere, strengthening the rendering power and causing the expressive art effect. Even in feminist literary criticism, *Lady Macbeth* can still be regarded as one of the most successful Chinese opera adaptations of Shakespeare's play.

Lady, greatly cut and condensed into one act, is a small theater experimental Kun opera performed in 2015. It focused on lady Macbeth's psychology, exploring the whole course of her participation in the events of regicide. Each "wife" and "husband" in different periods has a rival play, interspersed with "witch" and other characters, who become the pusher, or atmosphere foil. It is the husband's capriciousness that has made the wife full of worry. Each wife communicates with the husband not about her desire but fear for power, her panic for the act of regicide, the disappointment and affection for the husband. A regicide which should be the theme has now become a background of a game between a couple. The exploration of human nature is there to scratch the surface. "Love" has become an important guide to the wife's self-awareness, and the most important point of conflict between her and her husband. Lady Macbeth is mentioned more than once in the play: "I married a valiant warrior, the greatest hero at the age of 28. I am a wife of my man."⁴ Her self-awareness is built on the concept that she belongs to one noble man, far from the modern philosophy of feminism. Therefore, if Shakespeare portrays Lady Macbeth as the most vicious bad woman, Kun opera *Lady* portrays her as an abandoned woman instead.

⁴ <https://www.bilibili.com/video/av18142444/>

“Wife is only an identity, but this play tries to express an emotion attitude.”⁵ Director of *Lady*, Yu Manwen agreed with that “it is a small theater Kun opera, but also a female psychological drama” but disagreed with that Mrs. Macbeth was described by Goethe as a “super witch” and a top conspirator. He thought this kind of positioning is unfair and it is important to explore the most fundamental motive for Mrs. Macbeth’s actions: “It should carry the feminine values that are common in China and the West. Can women eventually gain a sense of respect? How is a woman’s social status?”⁶ He added: “Nowadays people still relate a woman’s social status to her husband, but the outward honor and glory will be easy to lose. Kun opera *Lady* arranges a process of self-rescue, which should be a contemporary universal value.”⁷ However, from the actual results, the interpretation of the theme did not meet the expectations of the creators and was even criticized because of the destruction of the unique beauty of Kun opera, especially failing in the expression of modernity.

Conclusion

On the basis of various examples above on Chinese adaptations of *Macbeth*, this essay gives a glimpse of the dilemmas faced by cross-cultural adaptation. Due to the limitations of cultural barriers, cross-cultural adaptation will certainly change the features of the original. The crucial challenge is how to make the local audience to understand and accept, while taking into account the spirit of the original, and how to strike a balance between tradition and innovation, conservatism and reform. In fact, adaptation to some extent has an independent literary and artistic life. If the playwright has clear ideas and can really grasp the characteristics of the play, fully understand the original thought and cultural differences, the adaptation is even possible to have a dialogue with the original. As Patrice Pavis stated, a strategic feature of intercultural theater is productive misinterpretation which will transform the misinterpretation into a positive driving force. In his opinions, the original intention of adapting foreign theaters is not to introduce foreign countries, but to solve problems in their own culture. What stimulates adaptations and performances is often the awareness towards the problems rooted in their own culture (Pavis 12). Hence, the intention of borrowing foreign stories is to transform it into our own versions which can help the local audience to restructure self-perception. On this point, the exotic stories inspire the audience from a new perspective and help them to develop critical thinking towards their own culture. From the gain or loss of Chinese adaptations,

⁵ <https://www.bilibili.com/video/av18142444/>

⁶ <https://www.bilibili.com/video/av18142444/>

⁷ <https://www.bilibili.com/video/av18142444/>

we can see the influence of deep-rooted Oriental traditional thought on the theme of the play, and the interpretation of the character's behavior and psychological aspects, which are more directly related to the tension and depth of the play. Each version of *Macbeth* adaptation has its own success and controversies, but their attempts and efforts have undoubtedly injected a new vitality into Chinese operas, and provided more possibilities for traditional themes, contents and performances.

Compared with Chinese adaptations of *Macbeth* in recent years, the immersive drama *SLEEP NO MORE*, produced by the Punchdrunk Theater Company and the American Theater Company, is a very subversive and representative adaptation paradigm. The play completely changed the traditional theatrical form. The performers and the audience are all banned, allowing the silent play and dance alone to control the whole scene. The show takes place at the McKittrick Hotel, a place specially created for the play, with rooms of excellent workmanship on 5 different floors. All the audience wearing unified white masks, thus are able to freely walk with 21 actors who are playing different roles. Once released in March 2011, the show unfolded a vigorous mass campaign in New York and performed for thousands of times. So, when *SLEEP NO MORE* for the first time came to Shanghai, Asia's first stop, Chinese audience responded enthusiastically. Limited to space, this article would not in-depth analyze the reasons for the worldwide popularity of the play, but what we can see from this phenomenon, is that the vitality of classic works would not fade with time. Its artistic spirit can be preserved and also be integrated with the general public.

In China, there are always different voices and opinions on the future of operas. The conservatives believe that the tradition of opera has to be completely preserved and the performance must be authentic while the liberals believe that the opera should be creative by absorbing the latest and exotic culture. In the modern context of globalization, one can't help but wonder if every national opera will inevitably be diversified or mixed. In my opinion, the traditional and modern ones should coexist and thrive. Both have their own responsibilities to take either from a perspective of cultural identity or aesthetics. In every region, ordinary people will witness this process as playwrights and artists do. In this process, some traditions will be preserved, and some will be integrated with new elements. However, neither of them will stay unchanged at all as audiences are changing as well. Chinese scholar Zhang Longxi proposed in the end of his paper *The Metamorphosis of Shakespeare: From Text to Performance*: "... Because nowadays the main task of the directors and the actors is not only to show the original framework of Shakespeare, but also to enrich their own cultural traditions by integrating Shakespeare's play art. As traditional Chinese opera generally presents simplified characters with distinguished good and evil, it is necessary to make the Chinese audience understand more complicated roles

by performing Shakespeare on the Chinese stage” (Zhang 70). Obviously, it turns out that the complexity of Shakespearean characters can be greatly welcomed by the Chinese audience. Hence, great difficulties for contemporary art workers to motivate the audience and deliver the spirit of Shakespeare is yet to be overcome.

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