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**Alexander C.Y. Huang, "Shakespeare and the Visualization of Metaphor
in Two Chinese Versions of *Macbeth*"**
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Abstract: In his paper, "Shakespeare and the Visualization of Metaphor in Two Chinese Versions of *Macbeth*," Alexander Huang proposes that, in addition to political uses, visualization is an important dimension of cultural translations of Shakespeare. In recent studies, Shakespeare's global presence has been investigated from various perspectives of critical inquiry, especially with postcolonial theories and in East-West literary relations. Instead of faulting cultural imperialism or foregrounding political statements in theatre, Huang explores the visual dimension of cultural translation found in *Kingdom of Desire* (a Beijing opera adaptation of *Macbeth*) and *Story of the Bloody Hand* (a Kunqu opera appropriation of the same play). Both adaptations re-write Shakespeare in visual terms and translate verbal metaphors by stylization and initiating the development of new appropriative modes and performing idioms. Metaphors encoded in verbal messages are transformed into visual signs in temporal-spatial terms. Thus, both productions foreground the visual nature of the metaphors, especially the color red.

Alexander C.Y. HUANG

Shakespeare and the Visualization of Metaphor in Two Chinese Versions of *Macbeth*

In recent studies, Shakespeare's increasingly global presence has been investigated from various perspectives of critical inquiry, especially postcolonial theories and East-West literary relation (see Dobson; Cartelli; Taylor; Cartmell; Joughin). Chen Xiaomei argues that Shakespeare has played the role of a "counter Other" in mainland China's Occidental theatre in the post-Mao era (43-58). Jyotsna Singh, on the other hand, draws our attention to the cultural imperialism that has been incorporated, and concurrently resisted, in productions of Shakespeare in India. Through stage productions, Singh argues, "the myth of the English cultural ... superiority" was "kept alive" to serve the political interests of colonial rulers (446). Instead of faulting cultural imperialism or foregrounding political statements in theatre, I would like to explore the visual and physical dimensions of cultural translation in a Beijing opera and a Kunqu opera adaptations of *Macbeth*. The past ten years have witnessed drastic changes in the dynamic relationship between writing (drama and literary translation) and other forms of cultural production (media, theatre, and film).



In response to these changes, I use the term cultural translation to distinguish the translations or dramatic appropriations that involve verbal and non-verbal signs from printed literary translations. With very different formalistic and aesthetic features (and different audience groups) from those associated with speech drama plays, Chinese opera adaptations exhibit unique strategies to negotiate cultural differences in foreign texts. Many Chinese opera adaptations re-write Shakespeare in visual terms and

translate verbal metaphors via stylization. Shang Changrong as Lear in the storm, in *King Qi's Dream*, a Beijing opera adaptation of *King Lear*.

Both Chinese productions of *Macbeth* localized the story but nonetheless captured both local and international audiences. Wu Hsing-kuo's *Kingdom of Desire* became the repertoire of his troupe, the Contemporary Legend Theatre Company, based in Taipei. Wu's *Mabeth* has toured internationally several times since its premiere in Taipei in 1986. These two Chinese opera *Macbeth*'s were planned and staged across the Taiwanese Straight, independent of each other, in 1986. The Kunqu opera *Macbeth*, directed by Huang Zuolin and staged by the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Theatre Company, was specifically commissioned for the spectacles of the first Chinese Shakespeare Festival in Shanghai and Beijing. Running through the press reviews and audience responses is a strong current of nationalistic and pseudo-cosmopolitanist narrative, as it were, that by staging and enjoying plays by a world dramatist like Shakespeare, China is initiated and re-qualified to join the world. This was only ten years after the devastating experiences of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)



and still a few years before the official opening of China's door to the world. On the other hand, the Beijing opera *Macbeth* in Taipei, initiated by the innovative Beijing opera actor, Wu Hsing-kuo, who, like Ma Yongan, specializes in male martial role type, took on a commercial and practical concern from its inception. Its purpose was to astound and amaze, with spectacles and Shakespeare, so as to attract audiences back to the decaying Beijing opera theatre. Unlike the Kunqu *Macbeth*, the Beijing opera *Macbeth*, toured Europe and England successfully and has since entered the repertoire of the Contemporary Legend Theatre of Taiwan. *Macbeth* returns to Scotland in Chinese dress. Ji Zhenhua as *Macbeth* in *Story of the Bloody Hand* in the Edinburgh Castle, 1987. In fact, it is the most profitable production for the company since its founding in the



1980s. The diverse fates of these two productions have bearings on their political and cultural environs. These two productions also invariably translate their cultures onto the stage. They have been met with severe criticism from avid lovers of traditional Chinese opera theatres, as both Chinese / Taiwanese and Western critics have questioned their fidelity to Shakespeare. Not heard in that debate, however, were the ways in which the structure of emotions of a foreign play found their way onto the intercultural stage. Both modern stages (English or Chinese) and modern media (films or multimedia) deviate from Shakespeare's media so widely that stage translations should be understood in terms of the structure of emotions and metaphors rather than the language of the original text. Interesting is also the cover of the program of *A Kingdom of Desire*, a Beijing opera adaptation of *Macbeth*, conceived and directed by Wu Hsing-kuo, the Contemporary Legend Theatre Company, Taipei, 1986.

In these dramatic adaptations, the plot and the spirit of Shakespeare are preserved but also relocated into characteristically Chinese contexts. As in Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*, Shakespeare's metaphors and plot lines in these two *Macbeths* are given local contexts and restaged with characters and behavior patterns in Chinese terms. The significance of this transformation goes beyond the invention of Chinese names for characters and places. Mnouchkine understood how the Chinese version modified the original and jumped at the idea of making an intercultural performance a way to undermine both hierarchies and difference (see, e.g., Singleton). When conventional methods of expression can no longer communicate the foreignness of Shakespeare and of the theatrical selves, the directors turn to signs wholly foreign to their spectators. Li Jiayao and Wu Hsing-kuo use Shakespeare's foreign aesthetics and metaphors to refresh the Chinese formalistic style of presentation. In the trajectories of intercultural transplantation of Shakespeare into Chinese opera forms, directors find inspirations from one another's work and move toward various versions of *Macbeth* with East Asian characteristics.

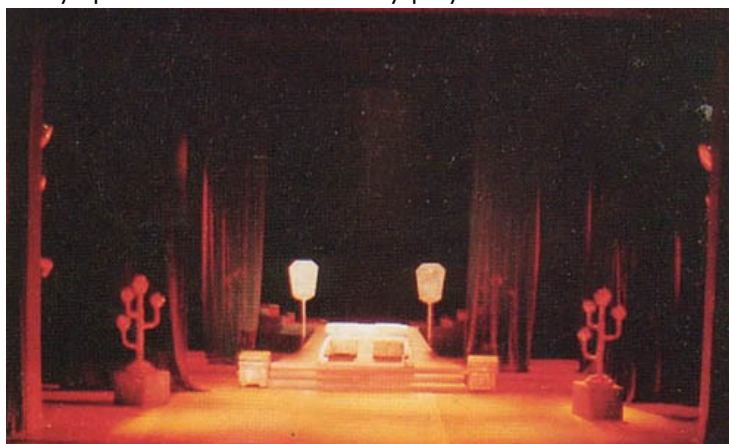
Li Jiayao, the director of a Kunqu opera adaptation of *Macbeth* in 1986, admitted to have encountered many difficulties in staging Shakespeare as a Chinese opera, but he also claimed that it was the foreign-ness of Shakespeare that enriched and expanded the performing techniques of traditional Chinese theatre (see Yu). The directors of these two productions and many other Chinese adaptations share a common agenda to reform and save the traditional theatre from the aesthetic, political, and pragmatic perspectives. The experience of staging and attending intercultural performances of Shakespeare resembles that of writing and reading a palimpsest on which modern rewrites never quite conceal the "original" writings of the past that are scraped. Cross-cultural adaptations often refer to one another, as in the case of Wu's *The Kingdom of Desire* and Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (with its original Japanese title meaning *The Castle of Spider's Web*), as well as to the Elizabethan field of reception, which is referenced but intentionally lost, as in the case of Li's *Story of the Bloody Hand*. It is not always a pleasant experience, because these radical dislocations of Shakespeare challenge the established positions and frames for performance by East and West. One of the crucial components of such reworking of a foreign text is the transformation and metamorphosis of metaphor, not only from page to stage but also from Early Modern England to "Cultural China" of the modern and postmodern era.

These transformations and stage translations necessarily call into question the ways in

which Shakespeare's plays are represented on Chinese-language stages. Metaphors are transformed in accordance with specific dramatic codes, Chinese conventional mixtures of the serious and the comic, as well as interpersonal relationships in the Chinese cultural landscape. However, cultures do not interact with each other in a mechanical way, and metaphors in dramas are not simply replaced by another set of words in a successful stage translation. All bilingual dictionaries and line-by-line translations of plays are based on a powerful but questionable assumption that language and signs are made of equivalent counterparts. Metaphor, more so than words, operates on a constantly transforming plane of consciousness. The earliest model is offered by Aristotle, who said that metaphor serves to divert and give pleasure, and the "meanings" of a metaphor can therefore be expressed in alternative modes. Max Black sums up different conceptualizations of metaphor throughout the history of Western philosophy. I suggest that, at least in theatre, metaphor is simply a better expression for specific emotions or situations, and there are no literal equivalences. Metaphors have to be staged, which is even more urgent in intercultural theatre. The best and most effective way to translate cultural texts would be to translate semantically or, in the language of theatre, to translate visually and acoustically, with colors, dance, steps, gestures, and songs in a stylized performance like Chinese opera.

In the cases of Chinese operatic adaptations of *Macbeth*, the Shakespearean metaphors are not transformed or translated mechanically into neatly assigned and pigeon-holed pitches of Chinese counterparts. Not only do religious, cultural, political, and social codes get replaced, but a matrix of moral valences, connotations of gestures and actions, as well as visual metaphors, has to be recreated in the Chinese theatre to effectively Sinicize its cultural Other. It can be more accurately described as a palimpsest-like rewriting rather than a one-to-one, itemized cross-cultural transformation of signs. The result is a heavily visualized and *Gestus*-centered representation of Shakespeare's plays, which depends on metaphors to convey verbal messages. The term visual here relates not only to the stage design and setting but to the physicality and physical embodiment of metaphors on the particular stages of Beijing and Kunqu opera. For example, the metaphors of destiny, the supernatural, and ambition are embodied in the meaning and bodies of the three witches, which, when transformed onto the Chinese operatic stage, become mountain ghosts and deformed spirits that are known to divert, pervert, and confuse the minds of heroes. Word-to-word accuracy is not at stake in this transformation of Shakespearean metaphor, for the Chinese theatre has neither the English Renaissance concept of ghosts nor the Jacobean obsession with the witches. If, like novels, the play also contains what Raymond Williams terms "the structure of feelings" that holds the piece together, this structure must be the core of the transformation operation that crosses cultural boundaries (133-34). The first priority of the production is audience acceptance, as directors seek to preserve the play's feelings and emotions. *Macbeth*, a play with the most visually striking and humbly simple imagery and metaphor, suits such cultural crossings, since it can be boiled down to a set of emotions and mental pictorial images rather than culturally or historically specific allusions in history plays.

Another aspect of *Macbeth* being foregrounded in the two adaptations is the politics of signs and the visual nature of its metaphors. Verbal messages sustain the play and display of colors. Visual impressions we recall after reading the play include the red of dripping blood, crimson stains that would "incarnadine" the green "multitudinous seas" (2.2.60-2) the glow of an imagined dagger at night, the limbo light of dawn, the unnatural pitch of black night, the transparent devil that would "damn [one] black" (5.3.11-12), and the equivocal colors associated with the deformed images conjured up by the watches in act



four. These vivid visual images have been noticed by quite a few critics and directors, including A.C. Bradley and Wu Hsing-kuo. The two Chinese adaptations of the 1980s relentlessly exploited the connection between the symbolic nature of the play's language and the symbolic Chinese operatic stage, and used the connection to transform and sustain otherwise untranslatable Shakespearean metaphors. In the stage design of *Story of the Bloody Hand*, a Kunqu opera adaptation of *Macbeth* (see picture), the color red is prominently featured throughout the production, its costume, lighting, and stage design. Both directors rendered in colors, dance, and music the metaphors for unnatural crime, disillusioned overreaching, and the anxiety of adulteration and the loss of masculinity in the face of different forms of femininity ranging from Lady Macbeth to the witches. Of course, Li and Wu are not the first ones to render *Macbeth* in stylized performance. The operatic adaptation of Sir William Davenant, their English predecessor, held the English stage from 1663 to 1744, with the witches dancing, singing, and flying through the air on machines (see Barnet 187-88). If the Anglophone theatre, and stage productions in general, has already been translating Shakespeare into visual and audio metaphors, what would the difference be between the English and the Chinese operatic adaptations? The answer lies in the different level of mimesis and metaphorical transformation of plots and language that the Chinese operatic adaptations sustain. *Story of the Bloody Hand* and the *Kingdom of Desire* are plays and displays of colors and gestures within the codes of the forms in which they are performed. Unlike Davenant's operatic adaptation, the physical and the visual in intercultural theatre are not expressions of Shakespearean metaphors but the metaphors themselves.

Not only is the color red an important metaphor, but natural and painted colors in general have become a metaphor. Lady Macbeth says that her hands "are of [Macbeth's] color" in the murder scene (2.2.54-60). She also tries to comfort Macbeth by comparing the illusory nature of "the sleep and the dead" to pictures that cannot pose threats. Only "the eye of childhood" will fear a "painted devil." (2.2. 50-51) However, the three weird sisters, Furies, or Biblical demons, is not really perceivable in the Chinese context. Combining the role types of dwarf specter and a taller ghost, the spectacles of *The Story of the Bloody Hand* find a way to represent the grotesque in the Kunqu universe. This version effectively transforms the metaphors of a "painted devil" and the illusions of the "pictures" in Macbeth's mind's eye. *The Story of the Bloody Hands* opens with a spectacle of painted devils. A gender-neutral witch stands at the center of the stage with a long cloak that wavers as the witch moves. This witch says that "I am good and evil." At the same time, with a sudden move he shakes the figure of a dwarf witch out of one side of his cloak. The dwarf says, "I am true and false," and then another dwarf appears in the same manner from the other side and chants that "I am the beautiful and the repulsive." The three witches sway and swirl as they turn their heads to reveal grotesque masks on the back of their heads. Metaphors for fluidity of words, double takes, evanescences, and inconstancies become a stunning spectacle of movements and masks. The witches are visually striking as they physically embody the doubleness that lies behind the plays theme of equivocation. Ma Pai, the Macbeth recast in this Kunqu opera, sees only half of the witches' faces and destroys himself in credulity of the prophecy.

In the scene "seeking advice [from the witches]," Macbeth is surrounded by the three deformed mountain spirits and dances with them as prophecies are poured out. His dance and movements eventually harmonize with those of the spirits, signifying his thought is being synchronized with deformity. Dance and music occupies a strikingly important place in this adaptation, as metaphors are danced out and sung. Lady Macbeth, in the following scene, is surrounded by ghosts of people they have murdered, as the royal doctor watches from the dark her sleep walking. She also ends up dancing in synchronize with the ghosts. The three mountain spirits return to the stage at the very end of the play and comment on Macbeth's actions and thereby offer some kind of a moral lesson. They turn their heads, altering between their smiling and grotesque faces. The program note for the production self-consciously exploits this sensuality and claims that the *Story of the Bloody Hand* replaces Shakespeare's metaphors with spectacles. Lois Potter's amazement at the spectacle of the *Story of the Bloody Hand* confirms this point. She says that: "Whereas Shakespeare's play stages the supernatural ... but keeps most 'real' events offstage, [Story of the Bloody Hand] is almost pure spectacle. It shows everything except the

murder of Duncan and even that is so audible that the royal physician rushes off to tell the heir-apparent to escape" (1253).

However candid this observation may be, some critics like Catherine Diamond and Antony Tatlow have pointed out the tendency, especially by Western audiences not familiar with codes of stylization, to concentrate on sheer spectacle and to ignore the language of the body. Still others point toward a consumerist attitude toward Shakespeare in rendering his plays as spectacles. I do not think that such an emphasis on the effect of the spectacles will lead to a demise of performance. Stylized performance and the visual representation of verbal metaphors can easily be confused with pantomime and said to be child's play imitating a higher art form. The speech of the body incorporated and newly forged speeches on stage combine to bring forth a new mode of expressing emotions. As metaphors are unique and do not have literal equivalences either in the same language or in a different language, the stage serves as a venue of cultural translation through enactment of emotions conjured up by foreign metaphors.

The Kingdom of Desire also uses dance and mask to create a sense of fluidity and uncertainty. The famous dancer Lin Xiouwei's dance in the banquet scene is almost a parallel to the three witches in the *Story of the Bloody Hand*. In a costume and style with Japanese elements, she plays a dancer offering a entertain Macbeth and the lords of the court. She holds two masks in her hands and alternately covers her face with them as she swirls, bends, and crosses the stage. In the picture, Lin Xiouwei as the dancer in the banquet scene in *A Kingdom of Desire*. She dances with three masks on her face and in her hands. When the dance is over, she reveals a third mask on her face, which has been covered by the two masks she holds in her hands. After Duncan is murdered and the ambition of Macbeth realized, this interlude ironically comments on Duncan's own words: "There's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face" (1.4.10-11). The dance itself is also an intervention to the narrative and to the harmony of forms, since it combines Japanese techniques and ballet steps and does not align itself to the norms of the Beijing opera.



In both versions of *Macbeth*, encounters with the supernatural and the anxiety of the unnatural take the form of whirling dance movements performed by masks or deformed bodies. While linguistic codes strike faster and gestural codes move more slowly, the visual metaphors are more memorable and impressive. Excess dance and singing concentrate such adaptations on selected episodes. The conventions of the Chinese operatic stage call for the condensation of the plot of an already short play, the shortest of Shakespeare's tragedies. This shortening also contributes to the intensified visual and gestural metaphors on stage, which serve to synthesize the emotions and not to analyze them. For example, in the episode, "Madness in the Chamber," in the *Story of the Bloody Hand*, Lady Macbeth is dressed up in a red robe washing her hands in a crimson-red chamber. Wei Haimin as Lady Macbeth in *A Kingdom of Desire*, which, just like *The Story of Bloody Hands*, foregrounds the gestural codes and heightened emotions in the hand-washing scene through contrasting colors. While Lady Macbeth wears a red robe in *The Story of Bloody Hands*, the character is dressed in white in *A Kingdom of Desire* (see picture). The red of her robe corresponds to the color of the royal chamber and the color for joyful occasions in Chinese contexts, especially weddings, although it is also the color of crime and danger. Red also symbolizes various feminine codes, including the birth of a child. In this creative and imaginative lyrical



transposition of actions into song, dance, and devouring, the color denotes terror, madness, and death, as Lady Macbeth encounters the ghost of Lady Macduff. It is a perplexing moment for any one familiar with Chinese social codes, as the connotations of red on stage are joy and connections, i.e., marriage. There was once a harmony between the signifier and the signified in the banquet scene in which red symbolizes joy. Later, the very same red robe transgresses the conventional connotation and comes to signify the schizophrenic state of mind of Lady Macbeth. The use of colors is charged with psychological and moral allusions, and the irony and tension successfully transforms the Shakespearean metaphor of anxiety and guilt into a matrix of conflicting connotations on stage represented by dance and stage sets.

From this brief analysis, we draw two conclusions. The significance of this transformation goes beyond the inventing of Chinese names for characters and places, or the reconfigurations of Chinese counterparts of the story of *Macbeth*. The enactment of the foreign and of its Chinese counterpart necessarily threatens and modifies the original, and Mnouchkine jumps at this idea and takes intercultural performance as a way to undermine both hierarchies and difference. Second, when conventional methods of expression can no longer communicate the foreignness of Shakespeare and theatrical personae, directors turn to signs wholly foreign to their spectators. Mnouchkine turns to signs used by the Japanese theater, including masks, steps, and styles of speaking. Li Jiaoyao and Wu Hsingkuo turn to Shakespeare and attempt to use his foreign aesthetics and metaphors to refresh the formalistic style of Chinese presentation. In the trajectories of intercultural transplantation of Shakespeare into Chinese opera forms, directors find inspirations from one another's work and move toward various versions of *Macbeth* with East Asian characteristics. A proliferation of East Asian types combine to define *Macbeth*, as these intercultural texts refer to one another and implicitly to Shakespeare. Performance is a palimpsest.

In the two Shakespearean appropriations, cultural signs intersect on stage not only through an amalgamation of Shakespeare's texts and Beijing opera verse, but through actors who embody different cultural signs as well. *Kingdom of Desire* and *Story of the Bloody Hand* concentrate on color symbolism and the visual aspects of the verbal metaphors found in key scenes in *Macbeth*. They epitomize a paradigm shift from seeking authenticity to foregrounding artistic subjectivity in modes of cultural production that re-produce global texts. Changing modes in the representational practice of stylized theatres have induced changing attitudes to Shakespeare and to Western classics. This shift has received increased scholarly attention. Michael Billington, for example, is struck by Shakespeare's "infinite adaptability" in productions in "a variety of cultures and languages." He suspects "something more significant is going on" and notices "changing attitudes to Shakespeare, particularly in performance" (15).

On the other hand, Asian stylized appropriations of Shakespeare's plays share some features of what Stephen Greenblatt terms "appropriative mimesis" in cross-cultural encounters. In his study of the European encounters with the New World, Stephen Greenblatt identifies a cross-cultural strategy to domesticate the foreign by linguistic means. This kind of imitation, according to Greenblatt, is carried out "in the interest of acquisition" and does not "entail any grasp of the cultural reality of the other, only a willingness to make contact and to effect some kind of exchange" (99). Early modern European colonizers did not invest interests in the cultural reality of the Other as such; the intercultural directors and actors of *Kingdom of Desire* and *Story of the Bloody Hand* were also not interested in the Elizabethan field of reception, which was either vague or intentionally lost. However, the two cases I discussed ultimately depart from the European "appropriative mimesis." While the European travelers in Greenblatt's case imitated only to possess the Other, inter-cultural travelers in these two Chinese production of *Macbeth* did not share any anxiety of acquisition. Images of the Other presented on stage were connected to images of the self.

Further, these two productions demonstrate a very different force of performance. Critics of culture such as Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer have expressed concerns about the machinations of the culture industry (1944; see online at <<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/adorno.htm>>) and, by extension, the ways in which global dissemination of Shakespeare's name and plays might

eradicate "the personal, the local, [and] the different" (Desmet 5). *Kingdom of Desire* and *Story of the Bloody Hand* consciously mobilize cultural differences to create new performing styles. The local and the different are foregrounded in this cultural translation. These two plays reveal exactly the opposite potential of cultural appropriation. They fuse foreign verbal metaphors with local visual signs and non-verbal codes. Re-imagined metaphors on stage bear out histories of the evolving inventory of appropriative modes off stage.

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