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4 Asian Shakespeares in Europe: From the Unfamiliar to the Defamiliarised

Alexander C.Y. Huang

Why do you dress me
In borrowed robes?
Macbeth (1.3.108–9)[1]

On 10 December, 1981, in the *Cartoucherie de Vincennes*, France, a medieval English court scene was being created by a group of French performers in eclectic costumes bursting – like Kabuki actors – through a paper screen. The scene took place on a square carpeted area connected by Kabuki-style *hanamichi*-bridge ramps to curtained cubicles in the four corners. Some performers sported *commedia dell'arte* or Noh masks, while others (including the king) were clad in royal kimonos with ruffled collars.

This performance marked the beginning of an era of intensified European-Asian cultural cross-currents around Shakespeare's works. The occasion was the premiere of Ariane Mnouchkine's controversial "Orientalised" adaptation of *Richard II*, which toured to the Theaterfestival in Munich in 1983 and the Olympic Arts Festival in Hollywood in 1984, among other places.[2] Accompanied by percussion, the faux-Kabuki pageant was led by Georges Bigot (Richard). This piece was the beginning of Mnouchkine's four-year cycle, "Les Shakespeare" (*Richard II*, 1981; *Twelfth Night*, 1982; *Henry IV*, 1984), in which the director experimented with other Shakespearean plays and Asian performance traditions. Her visually lavish productions with a peculiarly Asian flavor have attracted praise and criticism. Dennis Kennedy, for example, finds Mnouchkine's productions "highly appealing," but he finds her "tasty oriental Shakespeare" and the "enormous cultural dislocation" problematic. Kennedy uses Mnouchkine's works as the prime examples of what he terms "Shakespearean Orientalism," or the "importation of eastern modalities into Shakespeare performance in the west." Dominique Goy-Blanquet, on the other hand, justifies Mnouchkine's approach and defends her against Kennedy's criticism.[3]

Despite the controversy, more Asian-themed productions in Europe followed – by European directors, by Asian directors, by Asian immigrant artists to Europe (such as Prague-based Noriyuki Sawa or London-based David Tse), or by collaborating artists from different countries.[4] Perhaps not coincidentally, the 1970s and the early 1980s also witnessed the rise of new critical interests in cultural otherness, especially Asia, as evidenced by the publication of such influential books as Julia Kristeva's *Des Chinoises* (1974), Maria-Antoinetta Macciocchi's *De la chines* (1972), Alain Grosrichard's *Structure du sérail: la fiction du despotisme asiatique dans l'Occident classique* (1979), and Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (1978).[5] Another well-known instance is the intense interest in communist China of members of the Parisian literary journal, *Tel quel*, a major force in the development of French avant-garde Orientalism and poststructuralist theory. Motivated by their ideological interest in Maoism and the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Philippe Sollers, and other Tequelians traveled to China in 1974. A few years after the publication of Said's *Orientalism* a conference was held at the University of Essex (1984), where Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and other postcolonial critics presented their key works on the study of Europe and its Others.[6] Standing behind the cultural practices of "borrowing robes" and defamiliarising canonical texts is a long history of shifting relationships that have connected and disconnected the ideas of Asia and Europe. The history of Asian Shakespeares in Europe is part of the revived European interest in Asia and the long-standing tradition of performing Shakespeare in various European languages.

This article examines the logic behind the production and reception of East Asian Shakespeares in Europe. Asian-themed Shakespearean performance in Europe raises critical issues about cultural tourism and the identities of Shakespeare's text, Europe, and Asia. While various national Shakespeare traditions around the world also raise similar issues, the additional layer of defamiliarisation of performing Asian-themed Shakespeares for an European audience – rather than a home (Asian) audience or an English-speaking audience who often assume native familiarity with either Asia or Shakespeare – makes both Shakespeare and Asian audio-visual idioms seem at once familiar and alienated, which complicates the idea of the "original" and the "derivative." If, as John Russell Brown argues, Asian theatres not only provide new sites for Shakespeare but also shed new light on the theatre for which Shakespeare wrote, how do new sites of performance (Europe) and a non-Asian canon (Shakespeare) affect the traffic between European and Asian identities?[7] One of the most salient features of this eventful history is that the notion of Asian Shakespeare in Europe demands constant reassessment of unarticulated assumptions of cultural identities. Neither Shakespeare nor the hybridised Asian performance styles can claim the status of a sole borrower or lender, to take a cue from a new journal, *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation*.

EUROPEAN SHAKESPEARE'S ASIAN IDIOM

Many productions have concentrated on theatrical stylisation found in traditional Asian theatres (Chinese opera, Jatra, Kutiyattam, Kathakali, Noh, Kabuki, among others) while focusing on Shakespeare's tragedies. However, more and more productions are experimenting with modern forms of Asian theatre and Shakespearean comedies and histories. Quick snapshots of representative productions show the diversity of the European experience of Asian Shakespeares.

One of the more memorable (and one of the earliest) Asian productions to tour Europe was Yukio Ninagawa's Kabuki *Macbeth* at the Edinburgh Festival in 1985. In the witches' opening scene, behind transparent screens on stage, Kabuki female impersonators (*onnagata*) clad in kimonos danced as colorful cherry blossoms fell from above. The pink, white, and red cherry blossoms – an unexpected backdrop for a bloody tragedy – operated on several different levels of signification, inviting the European audience to see it variably as an iconic image of Japaneseness, an ironic presence (Andrea Nouryeh suggests that the scattered petals be seen as "a reminder of the violent deaths and madness spawned by Macbeth's murder"), or a symbol of the deceptive and transient nature of beauty in the Japanese context as it would be seen by an informed audience.[8] When the production toured to London in 1987, it was hailed as a visually stunning celebration of both Kabuki and Shakespeare, "the first Kabuki *Macbeth* to be seen in London since 1913."[9]

Also in 1987, a Chinese *kunju* opera adaptation of the same play from Shanghai, titled *Story of Bloody Hands* (directed by Huang Zuolin, a Chinese theatre guru who studied in England), toured Edinburgh, London, and other European cities. Another Chinese opera adaptation of *Macbeth* premiered at around the same time and went on to become one of the most extensively toured Chinese opera Shakespeares. The *jingju* (Beijing opera) *The Kingdom of Desire* (conceived, directed, and performed by Wu Hsing-kuo of Taiwan's Contemporary Legend Theatre) has been repeatedly staged across the European continent throughout the 1990s at premier performance venues and festivals: London's Royal National Theatre, 1990; Festival de Chateauvallon, 1994; Aachen and Heerlen, 1996;

Festival d'Avignon and Millennium Festival in Santiago de Compostela, 1998; Utrecht and Rotterdam, 2001; and elsewhere.

After having premiered in Kerala, India, in 1989, the *Kathakali King Lear* (directed by David McRuvie and Annette Leday) was performed across the European continent; it was revived in 1999 and performed at Shakespeare's Globe in London as part of the annual Globe to Globe Festival. The adaptation pared down the plot to accommodate the rhythm requirements of the Kathakali dance-theatre. It had an ambitious goal: to be "more than a superficial dressing up of Shakespeare's *Lear* in colorful Kathakali costumes as an exotic novelty for Western audiences; [it was intended to] speak equally to both its original [Malayalis and European] audiences."[10]

Since the 1990s, European and Asian artists have worked more closely together. Some Asian productions were commissioned by European festivals (such as Lin Zhaohua's Chinese *huaju* spoken drama *Richard III* at the 2001 Berlin Asia Pacific Cultural Festival), while others were inspired by European directors. For example, in 2000, Ariane Mnouchkine invited Wu Hsing-kuo to conduct a performance workshop for Théâtre du Soleil located just outside Paris. Fragmented scenes Wu designed and performed there became the basis of his solo performance *Lear Is Here*, a Beijing opera play inspired as much by Shakespeare as by the workshop co-organised by Wu and Mnouchkine. Wu's production has toured extensively; its latest staging in Europe was at a Haus der Kulturen der Welt festival in Berlin in March 2006, co-organised by Tian Mansha, Johannes Odenthal and others. Tian is a Chinese Sichuan opera actress who had conceived and performed a solo piece titled *Lady Macbeth*, which toured to Bremen and other European cities a few years earlier. Still others are initiated by European and Asian artists. In 1994, Emma Brown of the Leeds University Workshop Theatre worked together with the mainland Chinese director David Jiang, Li Ruru (Beijing opera coach), Tony Doyle (drummer), and other British and Chinese designers and performers to stage a *Macbeth* performed in English in the Black Box at the Shanghai Theatre Academy as part of the second Chinese Shakespeare Festival. Some of the most interesting cross-cultural aspects of the production include its Beijing-opera inspired *mise-en-scène* (using percussion to "externalise inner feelings"), Beijing opera techniques (formulaic crowd and boat-rowing scenes, among others), and cross-dressing (Macbeth was played by an actress and Lady Macbeth by an actor, who "exchanged their roles … after the murder of Duncan").[11]

While there has been a dizzying array of styles and interpretive approaches, the European reception of Asian Shakespeares has seen a unique focus on the visual and sensory dimensions of the experience. Take the Korean director Oh Tae-suk's *Romeo and Juliet* (Mokhwa Repertory Company) for example. Set in Chosong Korea, the adaptation featured *p'ansori* (one-person operetta) and other elements from traditional Korean theatre. Both the British reviews of its performance at the Barbican Centre, London, 2006, and the German reviews of an earlier version of this production at the 2001 Bremer Shakespeare festival emphasised the sensory power of Asian theatre by saying that "every scene is as beautiful as a picture postcard." The Barbican Centre reassured its audience that this production "create[d] a sensual fusion that lacks nothing from the absence of the Bard's language." Being marginalised were the innovations in Oh's production, such as a masculine Juliet (Kim Mun-Jung) who showed off her muscles to the audience as she waited for Romeo. In the balcony scene, Juliet practiced swordsmanship and later threw Romeo (Kim Byung-Cheol) on his back and sat astride his stomach, demanding that he confess his love.

Such expectation of "Asian sensuality" and specularity is rather widespread, making Shakespearean verbalisation and theatrical stylisation seem to be antithetical practices. It is not limited to theatre only. When an adaptation is perceived to be running too "close" to Shakespeare's text, it disappoints. When Feng Xiaogang's *Hamlet*-inspired film, *The Banquet* (*Yeyan*), premiered at the Venice and Cannes film festivals in late 2006 and was subsequently screened in its native China, heated debates ensued. The feature film was initially promoted in Cannes as a Shakespeare film with *kungfu* elements, but many European judges found the film to be too "Shakespearean" in outlook to be a viable Chinese film.[12] Most Chinese critics, on the other hand, found the film disappointingly "Western," faulting the director's focus on a "completely non-Chinese audience."[13] *The Banquet*'s dilemma is not an isolated instance. European reception of Asian Shakespeares is often dictated by the productions' contested double identities – definitely Asian to European spectators but decidedly un-Asian according to Asian audiences. Akira Kurosawa, for example, was regarded by the Japanese as so thoroughly Westernised in his acclaimed films (*Ran*, *Throne of Blood*, and *The Bad Sleep Well*) that his name was often printed in the *katagana* which was used for Japanese transliteration of non-East Asian names. The disparity in reception raises the questions of how adaptations are seen and why.

In addition to the usual centres of Shakespearean performance in Europe such as London, Stratford-upon-Avon, and major theatre and film festivals, some unexpected sites have had more than their share of Asian Shakespeares. A prime example is the famed "Hamlet castle" (Kronborg, Denmark) – an authentically fake "historical" site for *Hamlet* which boasts connections to the fictive setting of Shakespeare's play. The Hamlet Sommer Festival, held at Kronborg each summer, commissioned a piece from the Singaporean director Ong Keng Sen (TheatreWorks). Ong created a *Hamlet*-inspired performance and dance event in which the titular character is missing. Aptly titled *Search: Hamlet*, the 2002 production sent its performers and audience in search of new cultural identities in a globalised age. Ong experimented with an international cast and mixed-and-matched European and Asian performance styles. The Ghost was played by Carlotta Ikeda, a Japanese-French dancer, Gertrude by Pichet Kluchun, a cross-dressed Thai dancer, and Polonius by Ann Crosset, a Danish-American actress.[14] In 2005, Shanghai Beijing Opera Company's adaptation of *Hamlet* (titled *The Revenge of the Prince*) was staged at the same festival in Helsingør. It also toured to the Netherlands. In 2006, Eugenio Barba staged *Ur-Hamlet*, a play based on Saxo Grammaticus's *Vita Amlethi*, in the courtyard of the Kronborg castle as part of the Hamlet Sommer festival. Though similar to Ong's piece in terms of its multicultural framework, this production had an even more ambitious scale. Its cast included forty-eight Japanese (Noh actor Akira Matsui), Balinese (Gambuh dancers), Indian, Afro-Brazilian, and European performers and musicians, as well as a chorus of forty actors from twenty-five countries. Hamlet was played by the Condomblé dancer Augusto Omolù with headdress, simultaneously distancing and reproducing the familiar princely figure.

Three Modes of Asian Shakespeares in Europe

Over the past four centuries, Shakespeare's plays have become as European as Anglophone – the German and French traditions being two of the best documented branches of the global Shakespeare industry. Not only do Shakespeare's plays have an "international" scope (Scottish, English, Mediterranean, and other European settings), they were also first performed on the European continent shortly after appearing on London stages. As Ton Hoenselaars and A. Luis Pujante point out, "there is no continent whose history has fed more conspicuously into the production of Shakespeare's own work than Europe"; in later centuries "the excessive degree to which ... the ideology of European nations was associated with the image of Shakespeare" was equally remarkable.[15]

However, the idea of Europeanness has become more and more malleable and contested as the globalisation processes accelerate in late capitalist societies. Shakespeare's Europeanness is equally defined by European traditions of engaging his plays *and* by Europe's relationships with the rest of the world. Anglo-European performances of Shakespeare have been imported, emulated, and parodied for over two centuries in post/colonial India and Hong Kong, Meiji and modern Japan, Southeast Asia, Korea, China, and other parts of Asia in different historical periods. However, Asian Shakespeares – along with postmodern theatre – did not emerge in Europe until the 1980s. The appearance of non-Anglo-European Shakespeares has dramatically changed the landscape

of European theatre and the ideas of Shakespeare's Europeanness. While the European tendency to seek theatrical renovation from Asian traditions is not new – Bertolt Brecht being a well-known example – European tours of Asian productions are a relatively recent phenomenon.

The belatedness of the emergence of Asian Shakespeares in Europe (as opposed to Shakespearean performances in Russian or European languages) was conditioned by wars and circumstances of globalisation. In addition, postmodern – and, by extension, non-Anglophone – experiments with Shakespeare were hindered by the "powerful routines" of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Canadian Stratford festival, which asserted "the centrality of the text" and of textual-analysis-based acting.[16] Commenting in 1988 on his career as a Shakespearean director, Peter Hall said in an interview that "unless what's on the stage looks like the language, I simply don't believe it."[17] Free from such self-imposed linguistic limitations but confronted by new problems of representation, Asian performances delight in the tension between the local and the foreign, highlighting the interculturality, international space, and transnational nature of the business that is Shakespearean performance. A third factor that has contributed to the vitality of Asian Shakespeares in Europe is jet travel and increased movement of cultural goods and population. The recent influx of people of Asian descent (from the Indian subcontinent and East Asia) into Great Britain and Western Europe has fueled cross-cultural blending, imposition, and appropriation. Cultural tourists and local spectators have found it ever easier to find "foreign" Shakespearean performances in their "native habitat."[18]

Whether "made in Europe" or "imported from Asia," these performances have compelled Anglo-European audiences to negotiate the unfamiliar and foreign forms of the familiar and "local" canon that is Shakespeare. The phenomenon of Asian Shakespeares in Europe – or, for that matter, non-Anglo-European Shakespeares from Africa and elsewhere – has redrawn the boundaries between local and global circuits of artistic works and, more importantly, helped to reconfigure the relationships between European and Asian localities.

Asian Shakespeares have appeared in Europe through three inter-connected channels:

1. Since the 1980s, Asian theatrical idioms (such as Kabuki and Chinese opera) and Asian motifs have become more common in European directors' theatre works and films (such as Mnouchkine's stage production of *Henry IV* in the 1980s, and Kenneth Branagh's screen adaptation of *As You Like It* in 2006). For example, in the process of making strange a familiar canon, Mnouchkine redefined what was once homely to her European audiences and made unfamiliar forms of representation accessible. This type of performance may

also inadvertently domesticate wildly foreign materials for consumption by a local audience enabled by their presumed familiarity with a relatively "local" canon – Shakespeare.

2. Subtitled Asian productions have also toured Europe with increasing frequency and influence (for example, the *Kathakali King Lear* and Ninagawa's *Macbeth*, *Pericles*, *Titus Andronicus*, and other productions). Negotiating every turn in the maze of cross-cultural fusion, these productions have broadened both the repertoire of Asian and Anglo-European theatres. They have also challenged received (Anglo-centered) interpretations of Shakespearean characters and plays, as evidenced by Ninagawa's stylised reinterpretation of the nature of violence in his 2006 *Titus Andronicus* (part of the Royal Shakespeare Company's Complete Works Festival) and by Lü Boshen's extensive use of sonatas and music not "in tune with" the violence in *Macbeth* in his Taiwanese-language adaptation titled *The Witches' Sonata – Poetic Macbeth* (Tainan Jen Theatre), which was staged at the Festival d'Avignon OFF in 2007.
3. European-Asian co-productions also account for a growing area of new theatre practice; some of these performances have featured two or more languages (such as Ong Keng Sen's and David Tse's works). Others emphasise, and indeed capitalise upon, their transnational networks of artistic exchange, financial support, and points of origin (of ideas, artists and audiences, and performance styles).

All three modes of producing Asian Shakespeares in Europe share one common feature, because they are part and parcel of the uneven acquisition of knowledge. The staging and reception of most Asian-themed Shakespearean performances in Europe are structured around alternativeness and a break – a break with realism, a symbolic abandonment of the "normative" representational practices in Europe. The distance between languages in Asian theatre (verbal expressions and physical language in coded gestures and movements) and European languages and theatre conventions also contribute to this critical gap. This gap and articulated difference have defined the paths of diffusion and the meanings of Asian Shakespeares in Europe. In an article appropriately titled "'Mind the Gap': Using Shakespeare," Peter Holland theorises the implications of a gap "caused by extensive knowledge of one area of theatre practice and equally extensive ignorance of another" in Shakespearean performance and reception.[19] The gap is not a void but a site for productive reading of both Shakespeare and the contemporary performing art.

Under the assumption that Shakespeare and selected aspects of twentieth-century European theatre practices such as realism are "familiarly known" (though not necessarily properly known) to European audiences, and that Asian modes of performance are alien to varying degrees, each of the aforementioned three modes of engagement approaches this gap differently. (1) European directors incorporating Asian performative or decorative elements (but still using a European language) exploit the gap of knowledge to create a sense of freshness, to make Shakespeare foreign through the foreign art form that now embodies the text. (2) Touring Asian productions with European-language sur- or subtitles serve as a constant reminder of the presence of this gap, inviting the local (European) audience to participate in an immersion experience of the foreign. (3) European-Asian co-productions – usually the best funded and most transnational in scale among the three – seek to bridge the gap in their production process. Performers – usually of different ethnicities – borrow and mix different performance traditions and reinvent their own.

Despite these differences, all three groups rely heavily on the role of Asia as an ultimate Other. Shakespeare seems to remain a constant, while Asian forms of representation – masks, decorative elements, movements, costumes, music – are constantly summoned to provide a sense of outlandishness. This tendency is especially evident in our time when it has become harder and harder to achieve an exotic effect in our global village where, as evidenced by new developments in the travel industry, the competition for the most "away-from-it-all" places is keen.

The result is a positive stereotype which is negative in outcome. Charles Spencer summarises it as *de rigueur* endorsement of Asian Shakespeares – "because it is foreign and strange ... it must therefore be good."[20] There is another side of the coin to this stereotype. Like many adaptations, the value of Asian Shakespeares is measured by European critics in terms of standards derived from textual analysis and in terms of how closely the productions "realise" Shakespeare's play-text. The stature of Shakespeare in world literature has made it difficult, if not impossible, for the general audience and some critics to view Shakespearean adaptations *as* adaptations. While it is true that Shakespeare is a convenient source for fresh dramatic ingredients that can help to expand Asian theatre's repertoire, the remedial effect of Shakespeare and Asian performance on each other has frequently been exaggerated. Of a Chinese opera production of *The Winter's Tale* in 1986, Philip Brockbank wrote, "conventional Chinese theatre was apparently in need of the intimate attentiveness to life to be found in Shakespeare's plays, while the plays themselves are clarified by the energies and styles of an exotic, simultaneously courtly and popular tradition." Jang Tso Fang, a professor at Peking University, followed suit and claimed "Shakespeare is sick in the West, and much in need of traditional Chinese medicine."[21] Many European directors readily endorse this view. Mnouchkine, for example, came to Shakespeare and Asian theatres to seek renovation of European avant-garde performance. John Russell Brown's and Dennis Bartholomeusz's views of Asian Shakespeares are representative of this critical inclination to determine the worthiness of a production by its textual proximity to Shakespeare (the psyche of the characters, "universal" motifs, and other elements) and to the habitually mystified Asia. In an essay titled "Shakespeare Imagines the Orient: The Orient Imagines Shakespeare," Bartholomeusz examines a number of different Indian, Chinese, and Japanese Shakespearean productions and applauds how these productions recover and even uncover hitherto ignored or forgotten elements in Shakespeare's plays, "touching the mythic dimensions of Shakespeare's art."[22] Being marginalised are the transformation of Asian theatres and the impact that "doing" Asianised Shakespeare in Europe has on the artists.

It may seem too much to ask for a "more equitable analysis of cultural exchange" since the gap of knowledge appears to be insurmountable, but what is at stake is not how well Asian theatres translate in Europe, or how well Shakespeare translates in Asian-infused enactments.[23] Rather, as Peter Holland recognises, what is important is how a particular production uses Shakespeare for what may be "judge[d] to be non-Shakespearean ends." Holland contends, "the extent to which Shakespeare is used (or abused) is not a justifiable basis for evaluating the worth of the production."[24]

Yet the double logic of intercultural performance relies on both the knowable elements of otherness and irreconcilable outlandishness. Global Shakespeare and Asian-inflected intercultural theatre operate on the basis of the contrast between a knowable component of the Western canon and an "unknowable" Other. For most European spectators, Asian theatres remain the ultimate Other – unlearnable and indecipherable because names are (usually) backwards, cultural values are completely alien (spring-like cherry blossoms are "perversely" connected to death and madness), and the performers are often trained from birth. As a result, Asian representations of Shakespeare seem invariably more localised, operating as allegorical extensions of Shakespeare's text.

The third group of Asian Shakespeares – co-produced or multilingual events – can sometimes provide a way out of this labyrinth. Not only do the transnational networks of collaboration and the physical presence of actors of different ethnicities on stage complicate the idea of "Asian" Shakespeare in Europe, the hybrid identities of the artists themselves (some of whom are members of ethnic minority in Europe) – accentuated by the use of both European and Asian languages on stage – expand the repertoire of meanings. Since the *Kathakali King Lear*, Ong Keng Sen's multicultural *Search: Hamlet* and multilingual pan-Asian *Lear*, and Ninagawa's works have traditionally received more critical attention and are relatively well documented, I will discuss in the following section the dynamics of cultural exchange in one of the latest British-Chinese co-productions, a Mandarin-English bilingual adaptation of *King Lear* staged in 2006 as part of the Royal Shakespeare Company's Complete Works festival.

A Bilingual *King Lear* in Stratford-upon-Avon

> It is as easy for me ... to conquer the kingdom as to speak so much more French.
> *Henry V* (5.2.184–85)

What Shakespeare's King Henry V tells Princess Katherine of France in the famous wooing scene also speaks to many of us today – as Shakespeareans and as cultural tourists. Multilingual or bilingual theatre has remained a rarity until relatively recently. It may be as easy to tour globally as to employ performers proficient in other languages and theatres, but does watching bilingual or multilingual Shakespeares – through subtitles or surtitles – overcome or reinforce cultural boundaries? Are such encounters with otherness (other Asia, other Shakespeares) legitimising local reading positions or the operation of cultural imperialism?

In contrast to traditionally defined national Shakespeares around the world which may see uses of sporadic foreign phrases, these productions feature extensive use of two or more languages and often produce very different aesthetic and political meanings. In addition, the extensive use of multiple languages in a production differs from the use of foreign characters or foreign speech in Shakespeare, Thomas Middleton (pidgin English as Dutch in *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's*), Thomas Kyd (*The Spanish Tragedy*), and other Renaissance playwrights' works. Foreign speech in English Renaissance drama was used almost exclusively for comic effect.[25] Foreign languages in performances of our time function rather differently. They put differences and languages to question, challenging simultaneously any philosophical investments in the Other and any ideological understanding of Shakespeare's plays.

Since the 1980s several bilingual or multilingual productions have been staged in Europe and in the US, though some were better toured than others. In 1983, a Mandarin-English bilingual *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Tisa Chang, was staged in New York by Pan Asian Repertory Theatre. The different languages were used as markers of emotions and differences among characters. Some characters spoke English with occasional use of Chinese when under stress, but Mandarin was the language of the royal court. Puck also spoke Mandarin.

In 1995, Karin Beier directed a multilingual *Midsummer Night's Dream* in Düsseldorf that featured actors from nine European countries performing in their native languages. Dennis Kennedy noted that the innovative production, "a Babel of miscommunication from Europeans desperately trying to be one," made Shakespeare a lingua franca, a "common canon for post-industrial and post-Cold-War Europe."[26] Wilhelm Hortmann was equally drawn to that which was made absent by the multilingual presentation:

> The play as a poetic cosmos dropped out of sight. [Shakespeare's] words were there [in different languages], but only as a reminder that they once, and in a different language, carried meaning.[27]

In 1996, a year after Beier's pan-European *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Ong Keng Sen directed a pan-Asian multilingual *Lear* in which performers from several Asian countries spoke in their mother tongues and employed the performance styles "representative" of their countries of origin. But unlike Beier's production, linguistic difference is hardly the only marker of class and identity. Ong aligned each language with a symbolic traditional theatre form that presumably represented that culture. The power-thirsty Goneril spoke only Mandarin and employed *jingju* movements. Stately Japanese and Noh performance idioms were adopted by the Old Man (the counterpart to Lear in this production. The confrontation between Goneril and Lear in the play thus took on additional significance generated by the clashes of Japanese and Chinese cultures. More such productions are in the works. The distinguished performance studies scholar and theatre director Richard Schechner is working on a multilingual *Hamlet* with top theatre groups from three major Chinese-speaking cities: the Shanghai Theatre Academy in collaboration with the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts and the Taipei National University of the Arts.

Whereas Said and the artists and critics of the 1980s focused on perceived, essential difference between cultures, intercultural-theatre artists have now turned upon the logic of sameness, using intercultural performance to prove – as it were – the universal dimensions of human emotions, Shakespeare, and theatre experience. One of the most recent examples is a British-Chinese co-production of *King Lear* in Mandarin and English, with bilingual surtitles, directed by London-based David Tse (Yellow Earth Theatre).[28] Here too, though communicating with the audience is certainly an important goal for any production, recognising the "Shakespeareness" in unfamiliar territory seemed to be unduly emphasised by the audience and even by the artists at the expense of other key issues. Peta David, for example, wrote in a review that "it is uncanny that even though I don't have a word of Mandarin to my name I could still tell it was Shakespeare."[29]

Staged in Shanghai and Chongqing in October 2006 before touring the UK, Tse's *Lear* represents a new breed of Asian-European Shakespeare in what might be called "post-national" global Shakespeare industry.[30] While major venues in Britain, including the Edinburgh Festival, the London Globe, the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, and the Barbican Centre, are no strangers to such Asian directors as Ninagawa, Yellow Earth's *King Lear* provides a different experience than the one available through more traditionally defined "foreign" Shakespeares. Playing to full houses throughout the UK, Tse's *Lear* stages several contradictions and precarious conditions of globalisation.

A mixed cast of Chinese and British performers explore the promise and perils of globalisation in the context of local conditions of translation, highlighting the themes of miscommunication and intergenerational conflict. The performance embodies the tensions between different linguistic spaces marked off by the bilingual dialogues and the bilingual surtitles. The dialogues and surtitles compete for the audience's attention and often intrude into each other's processes of signification.

One may wonder whether the Chinese language and stage idioms function in Tse's production the same way *hanamichi*-bridge faux-Kabuki pageantry functions in Mnouchkine's *Richard III*, or whether such Asian elements were designed to satisfy the European audience's appetite of Orientalism? This article is not conceived as a "rescue" of Tse's or Mnouchkine's projects, nor is it intended to join the authenticity-derived discourse that defends or condemns an intercultural performance based on how close it approximates an imagined origin. I will, however, attend to the processes of signification of Tse's production.

From the beginning to the end, Zhou Yemang's Lear commanded a powerful presence on stage, but other actors had some rough moments because they were required to constantly switch back and forth between their native tongue and a foreign language. The artistic merit or success of the desired effect aside, Tse's arrangement prominently highlighted the felt presence of cultural difference and displacement. The actors' performance embodied such anxieties because none of them were bilingual actors in this demanding bilingual production that required British and Chinese actors with extremely different training to share the same stage.

Tse's *Lear* was set in 2020 in London and Shanghai, the same cities where it was performed. The play opened with an updated division-of-the-assets scene. Set in the Shanghai penthouse office of the modern Lear's transnational corporation, the scene involved a creative re-interpretation of the miscommunication in Lear's famous test of love. A Shanghai-based business tycoon who solicits confession of love from his three daughters, Lear (Zhou Yemang, a Chinese film star) spoke fluent Mandarin Chinese, as did Regan (Xie Li) and Goneril (Zhang Lu). However, the English-educated Cordelia was a member of the Asian diaspora no longer proficient in her father's language. Standing behind a semi-transparent screen that represented a video link from London, she could only say nothing. It was unclear whether Cordelia intentionally used silence as a means of protest because her asides were cut. According to Tse, Lear represents "oppressing" Confucian family values that implicate family roles into the social hierarchy, which is why Lear insisted upon respect from his children. The test of love becomes a process of reaffirmation of one of the key Confucian virtues: filial piety. For Lear and for Tse, unconditional love of a family member is beside the point.[31]

In the brief but tense confrontation between Cordelia and Lear, the word "nothing," articulated along with its Chinese counterpart "meiyou," shook the worlds of Lear, Cordelia, and the audience. This was a moment when Asian Shakespeare in Europe was made into something that was disruptive and new again dramaturgically. As Goneril and Regan carried on their confession of love, Chinese fonts projected onto the screen panels and onto Cordelia's face. "Meiyou" was the only Chinese word Cordelia used; and yet it signified "nothing." Lear briefly probed the ontological significance of nothing in this exchange and urged Cordelia to give him something:

> Cordelia: Nothing, my lord.
> Lear: *Meiyou?* [spoken in Mandarin]
> Cordelia: *Meiyou* [spoken in Mandarin].
> Lear: Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again [spoken in English]
> (1.1.89–92)

Just as the aesthetic functions of nothing and *meiyou* in the production rely on their double takes in different languages, so too the touring production "made sense" through the gap of linguistic and cultural knowledge of its different audiences. In its Stratford performance, where the majority of the audience did not know Chinese, the phrase *meiyou* created an ontological hollow space that embodied "nothingness," key to the conflict in this scene and to Tse's Buddhist interpretation of Lear's redemption later in the play. The absence of meaning became the meaning of absence. The hollow space was highlighted by the presence of English *and* Chinese surtitles and by the tension between Lear and Cordelia on stage. In its performances in China, where the majority of the audience could not easily follow the English portion of the dialogue without the surtitles (just as the UK audience had to rely on the English half of the bilingual surtitles), the word *meiyou* stood out as a powerful signifier of the

scene. The division-of-the-kingdom scene thus embodied the uneasy coalition among different cultures and among diasporic artists.

Another scene capitalising on the presence of two cultures was the duel between Edgar and Edmund. Following the rhythms of *jingju* percussion beats, the actors – still in their eclectic future-retro costumes – engaged in a highly stylised sword-fight. Reminiscent of the stylised fights staged to a videogame rhythm on the minimalist stage set of Nancy Meckler's production of *Romeo and Juliet* for the RSC (Rupert Evans as Romeo and Morven Christie as Juliet) during the same season in Stratford-upon-Avon, this arrangement embodied a common strategy to stage otherwise incongruous duels.

Tse's *Lear* offers an innovative interpretation tightly connected to late-capitalist globalisation. However, that goal is undermined by technical difficulties. In a production that took an ironic stance toward globalisation, it is not surprising to see a tendency to disown the notions of authentic Shakespeare and authentic Asian aesthetic values. Whether fragmented *jingju* elements should or can be put to use in the production is beside the point. It is worth noting that, throughout the performance, the actors spoke their native languages most of the time, which both emphasised the theme of miscommunication in an age of global migration and ensured strong delivery of the lines. However, although this is an interesting idea, it is difficult to realise on stage. Much of the incongruity of the performance emerged through garbled lines and accents (in Mandarin and in English). Some dialogues were challenging to follow, because actors switched between the two languages in the same block of lines or even mid-sentence. The audience was forced to switch between the bilingual surtitles and action on stage. Whether the director intended it or not, the flawed bilingual dialogues served as a constant reminder – even to those who are proficient in both languages – that translation is by necessity a fragmented cultural process that cannot be concealed even by a calculated performance designed to stage the appearance of effortlessness.

In addition to the hybrid performance idioms and bilingualism, other design elements also helped to foreground the metaphor of translation, such as the future-retro costumes, Buddhist-themed music, a chorus, mobile phones, text-messaging, flickknives and swords, aerial work, multimedia elements, and *jingju* movements. Lear's costumes contained both traditional Chinese and modern Western design patterns. He wore a velvet regal robe with white shirt underneath. His cane symbolised his authority and frailty as he pointed the walking stick at Regan in a moment of rage and leaned on it in a moment of epiphany. The Fool was replaced by a chorus in white cloaks that chanted rhythmically when delivering their lines, dramatising Lear's conscience. Goneril and Regan were sharp-suited, evoking femme-fatale figures in a global boomtown (Shanghai).

Edmund (Matt McCooey) wore a leather skirt, but Edgar's (Daniel York) costume contained explicit elements of traditional Chinese robes worn by gentry.

The performance took advantage of the intimate stage in the Cube at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, an innovative make-shift black-box theatre constructed in the auditorium while RST was undergoing renovation. At the center of a brightly lit open stage with sparse scenery stood three interlaced floor-to-ceiling screens comprised of rectangular reflective panels evoking both contemporary skyscrapers and ancient armor. Taoist-inflected video footage of a crying newborn, awash in techno-blue light, was projected onto these panels. Most action took place in front of these screens that were transformed through lighting from a regal façade to a semi-transparent video screen to the wilderness of the storm scene.

Tse, his contemporaries, and his predecessors such as Mnouchkine, have found themselves to be in a difficult position as scholars and the general public became increasingly sensitive to any use or abuse of local and foreign cultures. Whatever its deficiencies, Tse's *Lear* sums up the dilemma of performing the most international playwright in "foreign" styles and languages in his place of origin. Juxtaposed by the bilingual surtitles and modes of presentation, even those lines taken directly from Shakespeare's text and recited in English seem foreign. The reception of this production in China – where a completely different set of cultural variants are at work – is another story.[32]

Conclusion

> Today, when we hear the word global, the word local is rarely far behind. But it is not always clear what the local means, except it is widely considered an endangered space. … Locality – material, social, and ideological – has always had to be produced, maintained, and nurtured deliberately.
>
> Arjun Appadurai[33]

What is the future of Asian Shakespeares in Europe? And what might this growth industry mean for performance and Shakespeare criticism? Changing circumstances of this global conversation may be hard to predict, but we do know that Asian Shakespeares in their various incarnations on stage and on screen are here to stay and are no longer accidental products of history. The clashes and fusion of Asian and European localities, two sets of "local" aesthetic practices, have been framed by Shakespeare's globe-trotting texts. Michael Billington once used "Euro-Shakespeare" to criticise the serious lack of racial diversity in British theatres' casting practice.[34] The belated emergence of Asian-British theatre, as exemplified by Tse's *King Lear*, suggests things may be changing and

"Euro-Shakespeare" may no longer be monotonous or Eurocentric, though the question of cultural identity will haunt the future of Shakespearean performance. Today Asian-inflected "Euro-Shakespeare" performances pose a different set of questions about cultural difference. Intercultural Shakespeare, wherever and whatever it is, needs to confront its own fixation upon the exotic and its insistence on *both* the local and the foreign as nothing more than material for exploitation. Authenticity will certainly continue to be problematised by the presence of Asian Shakespeares in Europe, but we need not assume that cultural rootedness or authenticity are no longer meaningful. We need not assume that anxieties and the gap of knowledge would be counter-productive.

As I have shown, Asian Shakespeares in Europe have evolved from something that is unfamiliar to something that is familiarly known at major festivals but that needs to be defamiliarised again, with Ninagawa being a prominent example. Ninagawa's *japonisme* has elicited fierce debates among scholars from both Japan and the West.[35] It is clear that the European audience is no stranger to Asian performances of Shakespeare. Shakespeare is being presented for both his familiarity (as in the characters and motifs) and his newly-acquired foreignness (as seen through a new mode of representation). Asian theatres, too, are being reinvented through the presentation of a non-Asian playwright (Shakespeare) in a non-Asian location. Whether watching these performances at their places of origin or in Europe, with or without the cultural and linguistic competence to understand them fully, the audience will become keenly aware of the gap between unexamined assumptions. Asian Shakespeares will continue to inspire new cultural identities and implicate their global audiences in new anxieties brought forth by the necessary gap of knowledge.

Notes

1. All Shakespearean quotations are from *The Oxford Shakespeare*: *The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells et al., 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
2. Gautam Dasgupta writes, "France and Japan ... stand in close proximity insofar as both cultures are given to purely aesthetic social and cultural formations, a fact that may have led Mnouckine to a heavy reliance in her recent work on Japanese models. But at the same time there looms large that haughty ... thesis propounded by Edward Said in his *Orientalism*, where the author blatantly states that the Orient is a product of the Occidental imagination" (pp. 85–6). Gautam Dasgupta, "*Richard II* and *Twelfth Night* Directed by Ariane Mnouchkine," *PAJ: Performing Arts Journal* 6:3 (1982): 81–6. For reviews with different perspectives on Mnouchkine's interculturalism, see Florence Delay's review, *Nouvelle revue française* 351 (1982): 117–19; Valida Dragovitch's review, *Cahiers élisabéthains* 22 (1982): 99–102; and Arnd Rühle's review, *Münchner Merkur*, 20 May 1983.

3. Dennis Kennedy, "Afterword: Shakespearean Orientalism", in *Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance*, ed. Dennis Kennedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 294 and 296; Dominique Goy-Blanquet, "Shakespearean History at the Avignon Festival", in *Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. Ton Hoenselaars, with a foreword by Dennis Kennedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 228–43.
4. Noriyuki Sawa, a Japanese puppeteer and an instructor at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, has been active in Europe since 1991; his productions have toured to Paris, Berlin, Budapest, Athens, and elsewhere). He has conceived and performed a number of acclaimed solo mime theatre pieces with masks and puppets. Among the Shakespearean plays he has adapted are *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Sawa won the 1999 Franz Kafka Medal and the Grand-Prix at the 2001 International Puppetry Festival in Pecs, Hungary for his *"A Plague o' Both Your Houses!" – Shakespeare's* Romeo and Juliet.
5. Julia Kristeva, *Des Chinoises* (Paris: Éditions des femmes, 1974); *About Chinese Women*, trans. Anita Barrows (New York: Marion Boyaers, 1977). Alain Grosrichard, *Structure du sérail*: *la fiction du despotisme asiatique dans l'Occident classique* (Paris: Seuil, 1979); *The Sultan's Court: European fantasies of the East*, trans. Liz Heron (New York: Verso, 1998). Maria-Antoinetta Macciocchi, *De la chine* (Paris: Seuil, 1971). Macciocchi, an Italian journalist, arranged the trip to China for the Tequelians.
6. *Europe and its Others: Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature, July 1984*, ed Francis Barker et al., 2 vols (Colchester: University of Essex, 1985). Exemplary essays in this collection include Edward W. Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered", 1:14–27; Homi Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817", 1:89–106; Peter Hulme, "Polytropic Man: Tropes of Sexuality and Mobility in Early Colonial Discourse", 2:17–32; and Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak, "The Rani of Sirmur", 1:128–151.
7. John Russell Brown, *New Sites for Shakespeare: Theatre, the Audience, and Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).
8. Andrea Nouryeh, "Shakespeare and the Japanese Stage", in *Foreign Shakespeare*, ed. Dennis Kennedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 263.
9. Photo caption, *Independent*, 22 September 1987.
10. Phillip Zarrilli, "For Whom Is the King a King? Issues of Intercultural Production, Perception, and Reception in a *Kathakali King Lear*", in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph Roach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 1992), 22.
11. Li Ruru, *Shashibiya: Staging Shakespeare in China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 198 and 208.
12. Mo Honge, "Venice Critics Want a More Chinese 'Banquet'", *Xinhua News* 5 September 2006 (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2006–09/05/content_5050440.htm, accessed 10 June 2007).
13. Kozo writes, "*The Banquet* is a member of that suddenly popular Asian Cinema genre: the indulgent, overproduced costume epic aimed at a completely non-Chinese audience many thousands of miles away" (http://www.lovehkfilm.com/panasia/banquet.htm, accessed 10 June 2007).
14. Alexander C.Y. Huang, "Site-Specific *Hamlets* and Reconfigured Localities: Jiang'an, Singapore, Elsinore", *The Shakespearean International Yearbook* 7 (2007): 22–48.

15. Ton Hoenselaars and A. Luis Pujante, "Shakespeare and Europe: An Introduction", in *Four Hundred Years of Shakespeare in Europe*, ed. A. Luis Pujante and Ton Hoenselaars (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), 19.
16. Dennis Kennedy, "Introduction: Shakespeare without His Language", in *Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance*, ed. Dennis Kennedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 14.
17. Interview with Ralph Berry, in *On Directing Shakespeare*, 2nd ed. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989), 209; quoted in Kennedy, *Foreign Shakespeare*, 14.
18. Dennis Kennedy, "Shakespeare and the Global Spectator", *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 131 (1995): 50–64.
19. Peter Holland, "'Mind the Gap': Using Shakespeare", *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 131 (1995): 34.
20. Charles Spencer was commenting on *The Kingdom of Desire* (*Macbeth*) by Wu Hsing-kuo of the Contemporary Legend Theatre (Lyttelton Theatre, London). Charles Spencer, "A *Macbeth* Made in Taiwan", *Daily Telegraph*, 16 November 1990.
21. J. Philip Brockbank, "Shakespeare Renaissance in China", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 195. Jang's comments are quoted by Brockbank, 195.
22. Dennis Bartholomeusz, "Shakespeare Imagines the Orient: The Orient Imagines Shakespeare", in *Shakespeare and Cultural Traditions The Selected Proceedings of the International Shakespeare Association World Congress, Tokyo, 1991*, ed. Roger Pringle, Tetsuo Kishi, and Stanley Wells (Newark: University of Delaware Press. 1994), 201.
23. Parmita Kapadia, "Postcolonial Shakespeare: The Ethics of Reception", Shakespeare Association of America annual meeting, San Diego, April 2007. While fully agreeing with Kapadia's proposal, Andreas Höfele asks in his response to Kapadia's paper how Western theatre audiences can realistically be expected to achieve the noble goal. Höfele writes, "The bifocal vision of productions like the *Kathakali King Lear* requires an intercultural awareness many spectators simply don't have".
24. Holland, "'Mind the Gap': Using Shakespeare," 42.
25. This tendency had been noted and critiqued by some Renaissance writers. In his *Defence of Poesie* (1595), Sir Philip Sidney critiques the often derogative and comical portrayal of foreign accents: "For what is it to make folks gape at a wretched beggar or a beggarly clown, or, against law of hospitality, to jest at strangers because they speak not English so well as we do". Philip Sidney, *Miscellaneous Prose of Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan Van Dorsten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).
26. Dennis Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth-Century Performance*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 329 and 332.
27. Wilhelm Hortmann, *Shakespeare on the German Stage: The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 474.
28. *King Lear*, directed by David Tse (Yellow Earth Theatre and Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre), The Cube of Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Royal Shakespeare Company's Complete Works Festival, Stratford-upon-Avon (November 2006).
29. Review of *King Lear* in *The Stage* (17 November 2006); http://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/review.php/14916/king-lear; accessed 24 June 2007.
30. The bilingual *Lear* was Tse's second engagement with *King Lear*. In 2003 he directed *Lear's Daughters* (Yellow Earth Theatre), a play co-authored by Elaine Feinstein and the Women's Theatre Group (1987). *King Lear* and the moral questions it poses hold great interest for Tse, who explores the play's capacity to comment on troubled father–son,

and by extension local–global, relationships (David Tse, interview with Alexander C.Y. Huang, Stratford-upon-Avon, 16 November 2006). Other Asian intercultural directors, such as Ong Keng Sen and Wu Hsing-kuo (solo Beijing opera performance of *Lear*, 2001), have been equally intrigued by similar issues in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein, *Lear's Daughters*, in *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*, ed. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 217–33.

31. Tse, interview, 16 November, 2006.
32. Claire Conceison, "Review of *The Crucible*, *4.48 Psychosis*, *King Lear*, *The Scholar and the Executioner*, and *Crows and Sparrows*", *Theatre Journal* 59.3 (October 2007): 491–3.
33. Arjun Appadurai, "Globalization and the Research Imagination", *International Social Science Journal* 51 (1999): 231.
34. Michael Billington, "From the Stage of the Globe", *The Guardian Weekly* (5 May 1991): 22.
35. Tetsuo Kishi, "'Bless Thee! Thou Art Translated!': Shakespeare in Japan", *Images of Shakespeare: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the International Shakespeare Association, 1986*, ed. Werner Habicht, D.J. Palmer and Roger Pringle (London: Associated University Press, 1988), 245–50; Ronnie Mulryne, "From Text to Foreign Stage: Yukio Ninagawa's Cultural Translation of *Macbeth*", in *Shakespeare from Text to Stage*, ed. Patricia Kennan and Mariangela Tempera (Bologna: Editrice CLUEB, 1992), 131–43; Yukio Ninagawa, Interview, 4 July 1995, in *Performing Shakespeare in Japan*, ed. Ryuta Minami, Ian Carruthers and John Gillies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 208–19; Yeeyon Im, "The Pitfalls of Intercultural Discourse: The Case of Yukio Ninagawa", *Shakespeare Bulletin* 22. 4 (Winter 2004): 7–30.