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Global Shakespeares and Shakespeare Performance in Asia: Open-Access Digital Video Archives

Alexander C. Y. Huang

Asian performances of Shakespeare in Asia, Europe, and beyond have transformed both Shakespeare and Asian cultures. Global Shakespeares *and* Shakespeare Performance in Asia (SPIA) *chronicles this exciting new wave of East-West cultural exchange and makes primary research material including videos freely available to researchers, educators, and students. This review discusses the philosophy behind* Global Shakespeares *and* SPIA, *a collaborative archival and research project, and the unique resources it provides, including video highlights with English subtitles, photos, and texts from Asia, the United States, and Europe.*

   Alexander C. Y. Huang is an associate professor in the Department of Comparative Literature at Pennsylvania State University, a research affiliate in literature at MIT, general editor of The International Yearbook *and vice president of the Association for Asian Performance. His recent book,* Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange *(Columbia University Press, 2009), received the Modern Language Association's (MLA) Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize and an honorable mention in the competition for the Joe A. Callaway Prize for the Best Book on Drama and Theatre. He recently served as distinguished visiting professor at the Seoul National University (Korea). He is currently working on a book on comedy, sponsored by an American Council of Learned Societies fellowship.*

The importance of digital video in performance studies has been widely recognized, but reliable and vetted video resources remain elusive. To address the urgent need in research and the classroom, Peter Donaldson and I have been working with an international team of scholars and artists to collect and process video records of key productions of Shakespeare in Asia. Shakespeare Performance in Asia and around the globe. The result is *Global Shakespeares* (http://

globalshakespeares.org) an online archive and educational project based at Massachusetts Institute of Technology with portals to Asian, European, U.S., U.K., Latin American, and Arab performances. Its first and most extensive wing is *Shakespeare Performance in Asia* (*SPIA*, located at web.mit.edu/shakespeare/asia/). *SPIA* was launched in April 2009 as the first component of a global collection (see Figure 1). *SPIA* currently includes more than forty hours of video recording of complete performances of Shakespeare plays and adaptation in a wide variety of genres, forms, and languages. *SPIA* documents the diversity of Asian approaches to Shakespeare over the last twenty years.[1]

With an extensive collection of video recordings of complete theatrical performances, annotated clips with English subtitles, photos, and texts from Asia, the United States, and Europe, the project is intended to make Shakespeare in performance more widely available and serve as a core resource for students, teachers, and researchers. The project shifts the mode of passive viewing of global Shakespeare into active engagement with these new materials through robust video and image searching, and tools for composing multimedia essays. *SPIA* is a site created by academics but intended, as it grows, to be open to broad participation and designed with attention to its colocation on the Web with the immense user-generated resources such as Wikipedia, Google Images, and YouTube. *SPIA* includes a catalogue, full videos, and clips with subtitles.
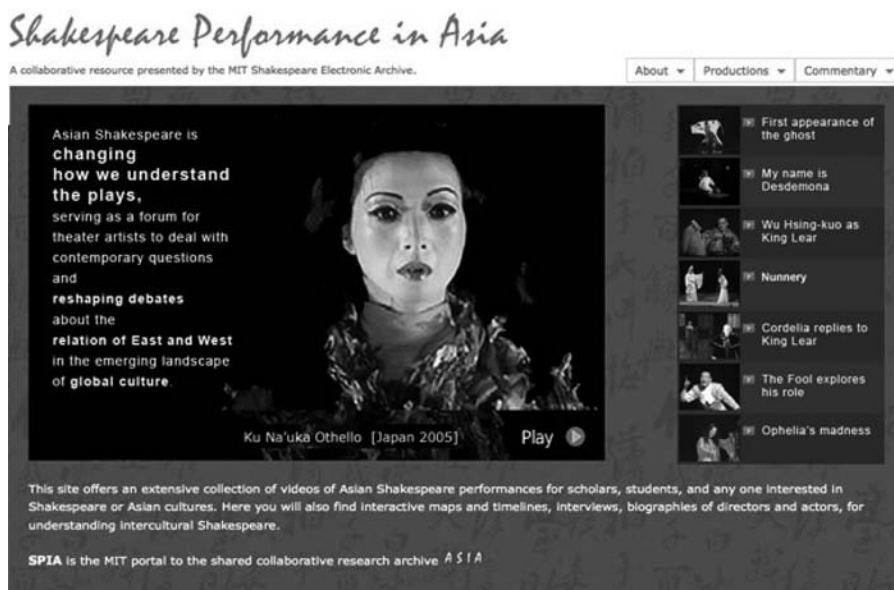

Figure 1. User interface of *Shakespeare Performance in Asia*.

At press time, the catalogue contains metadata and annotations for 241 twentieth- and twenty-first-century Asia-related performances in Asia and the Asian Pacific, North America, and Europe, researched and compiled by Alex Huang since 2001, with another 100 entries in the pipeline. Titles can be located through free search or by using faceted browsing, which allows users to narrow results by selecting one or more choices from lists of plays (Shakespeare play titles), directors, genres, cities, and countries. Further sets of browsing categories will be added as the project proceeds, and among these several levels of user-created tags are planned. First, there will be tags created for individual use by researchers, which may or may not be added to what is publicly available for searching depending on whether their creator wishes to publish them. The results obtained can be viewed as a table (see Fig-

Figure 2. Table view.

ure 2), plotted on a world map with satellite and hybrid map-satellite options (Figure 3), or viewed on a time line (Figure 4).

Dynamic time lines and maps, used in conjunction with faceted browsing and tagged video, allow users to trace the paths of production and diffusion of Asian and touring productions. Maps and time lines of the large number of productions for Asian Shakespeare can suggest new questions and unexpected relationships, and—especially important for the study of worldwide performance and emerging forms in a global context—counter the biases of metropolitan constructions of the field of study.

SPIA currently includes full video of more than twenty-five Asian productions, including key works such as Ong Keng Sen's *Desdemona, King Lear,* and *Search: Hamlet;* Wu Hsing-kuo's *Kingdom of Desire* (based

Figure 3. Map view.

FIGURE 4. Time line.

on *Macbeth*), *Hamlet, Lear Is Here,* and *The Tempest; Shamlet* (a long-run-
ning Taiwanese Hamlet spoof); Deguchi Norio's *Timon of Athens;* the
Ryutopia *Hamlet;* and other titles.

   SPIA also includes annotated and subtitled clips from these
and other productions. These clips offer an introduction to the larger
archive and also play a crucial role in creating a performance-intensive
video environment in which the text of the plays is not the center or
even the default center of attention, but rather the performance videos
themselves, and in which one can choose between searching in famil-
iar text-driven ways or remaining within the video domain and moving
from one video to another more freely. In studying performance, and
especially in studying performances comparatively and closely, salient

Shakespeare Performance in Asia

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Lorem ipsum d   ng elit. Maecenas nisl. Nulla mauris lectus, egestas a, consectetuer adipiscing elit lobortis in, faucibus vel, nisi.

Lear Tse: Act 4, Scene 7

I am back again.
Just now...Lear was dreaming!

Play: Fool
Play: King Lear
Genre: Jingju

Company: Contemporary Legend Theatre Company, Taipei, Taiwan (Peking opera)
Venue: Taipei, Taiwan
Production Title: Lear is Here
Date: 2001
Director: WU Hsing-kuo
Players: Fool

Figure 5. *SPIA's* experimental video matrix user interface.

details, crucial performance choices, and relationships for which we might, at first, have no ready discursive label are of the essence, and so it is important to explore ways in which one may browse through video materials not only by category or concept-driven data structures, but by more fluid linkages among the performance videos themselves, aided by tags, brief descriptions, and thumbnail images.

The annotations for each clip and production include brief user-created tags. Currently these include a wide range of categories such as genres, motifs, artistic forms, and references—allegory, Beijing opera, cross-dressing, ghost, Kurosawa, metatheatre, surveillance, voice-over, water sleeves, and *yueju* (Yue opera) are just a few examples of what is already a long list. Videos, so tagged, can be retrieved by full search or faceted browsing. The tag sets for the production were created for this first version of *SPIA* by the research group, but the ability to add tags will extend in later versions to researchers and students and to the public. This is a significant way to move toward an archive in part created by its users, and also supports the user creation of ad hoc pathways through the video information space. In addition to being able to tag video, users will in later phases of the archive also be able to create their own clip definitions, playlists, and sets of annotated clips and contribute videos, metadata, and multimedia commentary to the archive.

The current *SPIA* interface provides one example of a video-

centric interface, and we are experimenting with others, including a video matrix that, at first, presents only videos (Figure 5). As users choose among the videos, the matrix will change, depending on what they have chosen. Having chosen a first clip to view, one can continue by clicking on another in the matrix, or by filtered or free text search.

At its best, these open access perfomance archives offer visual and textual cues for exploration. One can compare, for example, dozens of recordings of a single operatic aria, or follow the trajectory of a single artist through a career, or branch off into other works by the same composer, or begin, in ways not previously possible, to follow the history of the staging of a particular work, at each point choosing a path through description, title, tags, or simply the visual content of the automatically generated selection of related videos. While such user-generated video sites themselves offer valuable resources for scholarly inquiry—especially in the early stages of a project—they are notoriously under-annotated and often unreliable, and they do not provide systematic metadata. SPIA's aim might be thought of as providing both a video-driven and a more familiar catalogue and filtered search method of moving through the collection, with the option to switch modes at any time.

The cofounders and coeditors of *SPIA,* and *Global Shakespeares* believe that a digital, video-based global Shakespeare archive, beginning with a substantial body of work in Asia, with new tools for annotating, replaying, and sharing user-defined video segments, has the potential to transform how we use performance materials.

NOTE

1. Under "commentary" *SPIA* offers essays, interviews, artist biographies, brief introductions to a number of theatrical companies represented in the archive, and a bibliography for Asian Shakespeare. The essays currently include "Shakespeare, Asian Actors and Intercultural Spectatorship" by Li Lan Yong, "Shakespeare, Performance, and Autobiographical Interventions" by Alexander Huang, and "*Hamlet* in China: Translation, Interpretation and Performance" by Ruru Li, with another five essays in preparation. The essays will range from scholarly pieces to general introductions to national traditions and performance genres to pedagogical pieces. In the next phase, many of the essays will be illustrated by video clips and images, and as our Web tools come on line it will be possible to use them to create and submit multimedia essays for publication all within the *SPIA* and *Global Shakespeares* application itself.