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COVER IMAGE: Daniel Wu as Prince Wu Luan (the drummer) in a pantomime in *The Banquet* (inspired by Hamlet), directed by Feng Xiaogang, 2006. (Courtesy of Media Asia Distribution)

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TWO CENTURIES OF CULTURAL EXCHANGE

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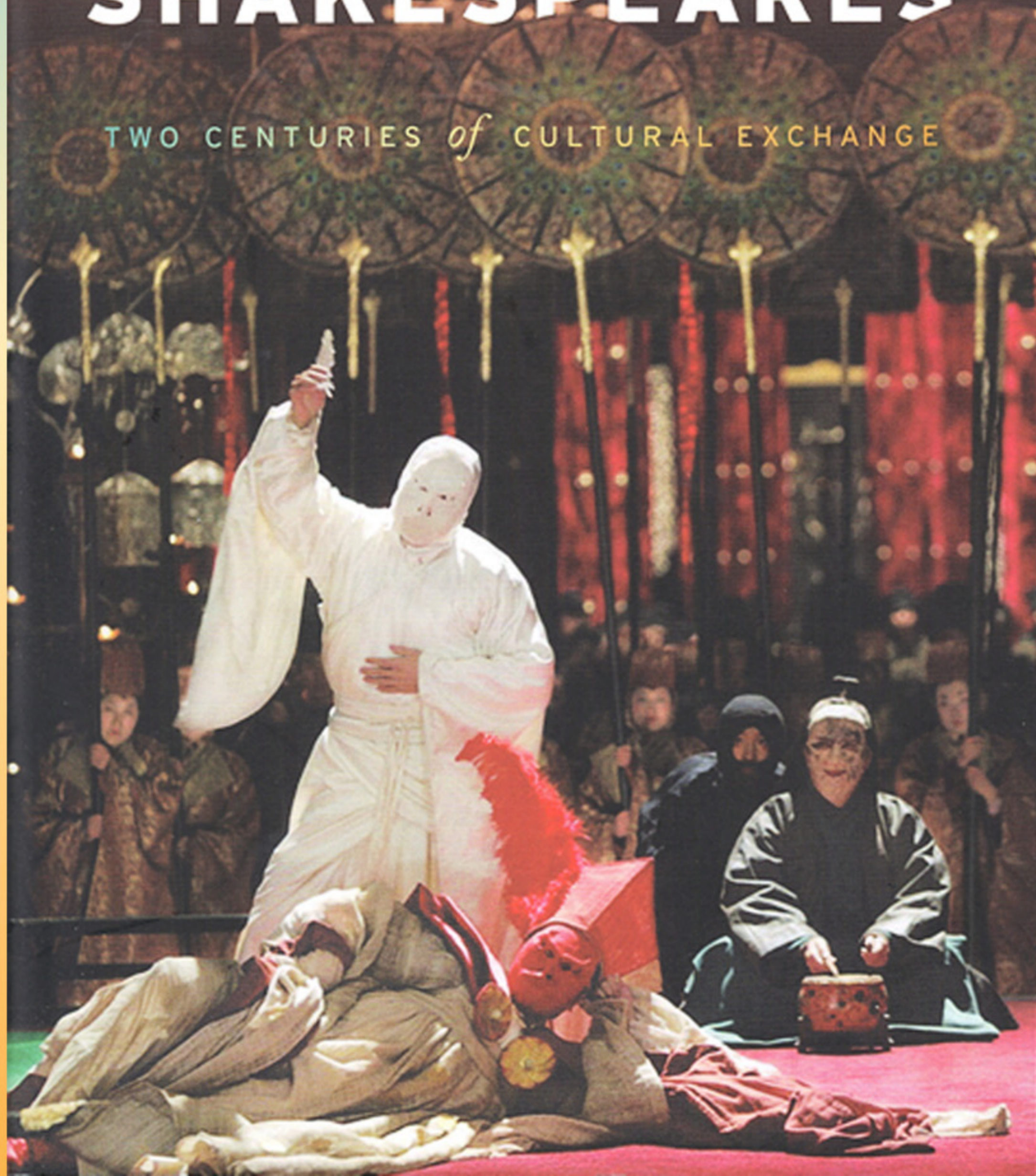


ALEXANDER C. Y. HUANG

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and  
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Honorable Mention

# CHINESE SHAKESPEARES

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CHINESE SHAKESPEARES

*Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange*

Alexander C. Y. Huang

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Title page: *Lady Macbeth*, a solo Sichuan-opera performance (Berlin, 2006) by Tian Mansha.  
(Image courtesy of Tian Mansha)

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## A Note on Texts and Translation

Scene and line references of Shakespearean plays are keyed to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., edited by G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), with modernized spelling and punctuation. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. I have adopted the *pinyin* romanization system for Chinese throughout, except for names or phrases that are commonly known in a different form. Historical or official names are also preserved (for example, Canton and Peking University).

Further transcriptions, translations, and critical notes for selected works (accompanied by streaming videos and photographs) will be available online through "Shakespeare Performance in Asia," a multilingual, freely accessible digital database at <http://web.mit.edu/shakespeare/asia/>.

Readers not familiar with the history of Shakespeare performance, Chinese cultural history under discussion, or the critical discourses in either field are invited to consult the select chronology and chapter notes.

## Prologue

Readers travel. Texts are passed to new territories. But myths tend to stay, which is why the space between China and Shakespeare as cultural tokens is exhilarating and frustrating in equal measure. These days, English-speaking metropolitan audiences and jaded cultural tourists have grown used to a Shakespeare who figured prominently in other national cultures, particularly that of Germany, where the notion of *unser Shakespeare* (our Shakespeare) needs no more illustration than the wedding march that Felix Mendelssohn composed for Ludwig Tieck's celebrated production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1843). The story of Shakespeare's worldwide appeal may go like this: In Shakespeare's times, shortly after appearing on London stages, his plays migrated to foreign shores. The English Comedians toured Europe in the late sixteenth century, staging semi-improvised performances frequently attended by both the locals and British travelers who became outsiders to the once familiar plays.<sup>1</sup> In 1607, Shakespeare's plays were sailing east. *Hamlet* and *Richard II* were performed on a makeshift stage on board an English East India Company ship, the *Red Dragon*, anchored near Sierra Leone; *Hamlet* was performed again in 1608 on the island of Socotra, at the entry to the Gulf of Aden (now part of the Republic of Yemen).<sup>2</sup> The *Red Dragon* arrived in colonial Indonesia in 1609. Shakespeare's name and works spread rapidly

to other parts of Asia. Prompted by the worldwide cultural phenomena that have materialized around Shakespeare's name and dramas, many directors and scholars have recognized the malleability and collaborative nature of Shakespeare's play texts.<sup>3</sup> Named the Writer of the Millennium, Shakespeare has come full circle and become a cliché, embraced by marketers and contested by intellectuals.<sup>4</sup> Similar narratives about China's rise in global stature have been told with equal gusto, championed and denounced in turn by optimists and critics.<sup>5</sup>

This seems to be old news. On the positive side, Shakespeare seems to belong to the whole world, representing the metropole and the Global South. But that sense of belonging is immediately problematic. Shakespeare's global career was not tied entirely to the spread and retreat of the British Empire or the rise of intercultural performance. Even in contemporary Anglophone culture, the persistence of Shakespeare's plays as popular material for the entertainment industry is an odd phenomenon.<sup>6</sup> While in our times the presence of Shakespeare in world cultures appears to be ordinary and commonplace, the global history of Shakespeare's afterlife reveals the limit of the universal as an artistic concept. If Shakespeare now has worldwide currency, how is the sense of belonging and betrayal configured chronologically and spatially? The old news—our journalistic familiarity with Shakespeare's provenance in global contexts—calls for careful reconstruction of a historical foundation for theorization.

Many people have seen one or more Asian performances, but few are aware that for almost two centuries, East Asian writers, filmmakers, and theater directors have also engaged Shakespeare in their works in a wide range of contexts. The ideas of Shakespeare and China have been put to work in unexpected places. Every year, hundreds of works emerge in Mandarin and a wide range of Chinese dialects, performing styles, and genres, including fiction, theater, cinema, and popular culture. The exchange goes both ways. Outside China, Asian theatrical idioms such as Beijing opera (*jingju*) are becoming more common in English- and European-language Shakespeare productions.<sup>7</sup> International productions have appeared in the Chinese-speaking world with increasing frequency, ranging from British burlesques in nineteenth-century Hong Kong and Soviet-Chinese productions in mid-twentieth-century China to a truly global array of approaches in contemporary Taiwan and rich intraregional citations in East and Southeast Asia. As more and more Chinese productions tour in Great Britain, the United States, and Europe, Shakespeare has evolved from Britain's export commodity to an import

industry in the Anglo-European culture, giving birth to Asian-inflected performances outside Asia.

If meaning is shifting and debatable, what does "Shakespeare" do in Chinese literary and performance culture? Conversely, how do imaginations about China function in Shakespearean performances, and what ideological work do they undertake—in mainland China, Taiwan, and other locations?

It is best to begin with stories. In 1942, when China was at war with Japan, a Chinese-language production of *Hamlet*, set in Denmark, was staged in a Confucian temple in Jiang'an in southwestern China. The director, Jiao Juyin (1905–1975), wed the foreign setting to the allegorical space of the temple and the historical exigencies of the time. The balcony in front of the shrine of Confucius was used as a makeshift stage, and the audiences were seated in the courtyard—with a clear view of the shrine and the action on stage. The temple thus becomes both a fictive space of performance and a context for the reading of China and Hamlet's Denmark. This extraordinary moment has several implications. The meanings of this wartime *Hamlet* were complicated by the intruding presence of the Confucian shrine on the makeshift stage and the setting of the temple. Jiao insisted on the primacy of his locality, and the performance created a communal experience during the war intended to stir patriotic spirit in Confucian, moral terms. The production subscribed to a national agenda during a time that witnessed a deteriorating economy, intensified conflicts between the Chinese Communist (CCP) and Nationalist (KMT) parties, and major setbacks in the Chinese resistance to Japanese invasion. While Laurence Olivier's similarly jingoistic *Henry V* (1944) has been considered as an example of what Walter Benjamin called "the aestheticization of politics," Jiao's *Hamlet* is an exercise in the politicization of art. Shakespeare has been absorbed into the political life during times of war.<sup>8</sup>

While the temple *Hamlet* readily connected Shakespeare with the connotations of the local venue, other directors used allegory to reconfigure Shakespeare and Asian identity multinationally. In Ong Keng Sen's multilingual *LEAR* (1997), staged with English subtitles, actors from several Asian countries and their characters were poised for a search of cultural identities as the pan-Asian production played to full houses in Singapore, Tokyo, other parts of Asia, and Europe. The power-thirsty eldest daughter (performed cross-dressed), who spoke only Mandarin and employed *jingju* chanting and movements, confronted the Old Man (Lear), who





FIGURE 1 Umewaka Naohiko as the Japanese-speaking Old Man (Lear) and Jiang Qihu cross-dressed as the Mandarin-speaking Older Daughter (conflated from Regan and Goneril) in the multilingual *LEAR*, directed by Ong Keng Sen, TheatreWorks and Japan Foundation Asia Center, 1997. (Courtesy of TheatreWorks, Singapore)

speak only Japanese and walked the stage in the solemn style of *nō* performance (figure 1). The subtitles defamiliarized (in Victor Shklovsky's sense) the Shakespearean lines and decorporealized Asian performance practices at once.<sup>9</sup> The sensual overload of the performance overwhelmed its international audiences, who, despite their best effort, would always miss something. While this uniquely multilingual performance recast the questions of race and nation in a new light, its bold experiments of hybrid Asian styles were controversial. The performance physicalized, in linguistic and dramaturgical terms, the promise and perils of globalization and the uneasy coalition among participants of this transnational project.<sup>10</sup> Seen afar from the European perspective, the contrasts between the Asian languages and styles were flattened by their similarities. However, seen from an Asian perspective, the difference between Asian cultures was accentuated by the performance. The production highlighted the discrepancy between Asian languages and styles, and between Chinese and Japanese perspectives on World War II.

Both Jiao's and Ong's intercultural productions stage contradictions and raise complex issues related to cultural politics and international touring. They register similar concerns about shifting localities. Jiao

relates Shakespeare unabashedly to the Confucian tradition evoked by the temple. Ong notes that his project, a "multicultural playground," is a platform for him to "work through his ambivalence about tradition."<sup>11</sup> Are such theatrical encounters with a foreign-language Shakespeare and with a Shakespeare-inspired Asian director symptomatic of cultural tourism rather than the logics of internationalism? Does watching Shakespeare with subtitles overcome or simply redraw cultural boundaries? Shakespeare has been used to construct political relevance for Ong's project, local urgency for Jiao's, and many other meanings in Asia since the nineteenth century.

These intriguing cases constitute only the tip of an iceberg of larger questions and pervasive cultural practices that have yet to be admitted to the scholarly discourse on Shakespeare and Chinese modernity. Standing behind these practices is a long history of constantly reconfigured relationships that have connected and disconnected Shakespeare and China. The currency of Shakespeare in the modern world is partly determined by political and historical forces that are often located outside the plays but that have been claimed to be located within or derived directly from the text itself.

Special to Chinese Shakespeares and unexpected for English-language readers are not only the edgy or dissident voices but also Chinese artists and audience's unique (ab)use of cultural authorities and insistence on "authentic" Shakespeares in various forms. To say so is not to suggest that the Anglocentric view of Shakespeare ought to be replaced by a Sinocentric one, as in some nationalist imaginary or de rigueur celebration of ethnic authenticity. Much of this work will undermine the fantasies of cultural exclusivity of both "Shakespeare" and "China," attending to the fact that even though every reading is a rewriting, more rewritings of a canonical text do not always translate into more radical rethinking of normative assumptions. It is with this conviction that I examine the transnational imaginary of China in Shakespearean performance and Shakespeare's place in Chinese cultural history from the first Opium War in 1839 to our times.

### Sites of Fixation

A long view of history will reveal the multidirectional processes that contribute to the mutually constructive grammar of the global and

# 1 Owing Chinese Shakespeares

... for the eye sees not itself  
But by reflection, by some other things.  
—Julius Caesar

One of the possibilities enhanced by the encounter between China and Shakespeare might be found in *The Tempest*:

ARIEL: Nothing of him that doth fade,  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange. (1.2.400–402)

Although one cannot say that nothing of Shakespeare or China fades in these historical processes, there has been a sea change in how the world sees them. The cultural space between "Shakespeare" and "China" is a space of (re)writing that is found outside of what is written. It subjects the artists and their local and foreign audiences to see, and be seen, from afar.

As the ideas of Shakespeare and China enter the global cultural marketplace, they initiate collaborative processes by which readers and audiences in different cultures grasp or exclude certain literary meanings and values. *Chinese Shakespeares* investigates what I suggest is a central moment in Shakespeare's afterlife and in the cultural alterity of China.<sup>1</sup> Attending to both the local and the transnational mechanisms through which the expressive and political values of literature emerge, I consider

what the Shakespeare–China interrelations are, why they have been used to rhetorically construct narratives about difference and universality, and how such narratives have unleashed new interpretive energy.

The answers proposed in *Chinese Shakespeares* suggest that the rewrites of Shakespeare and China turn them into syntactical categories that are used to generate meanings. Like words and grammatical patterns, Shakespeare and China are used to generate specific meanings in different contexts. Focusing on how artistic interventions modify the transnational knowledge bank about ideas of Shakespeare and China, my case studies of several major cultural events and texts reveal that Shakespeare and China are narrative systems read and written within the framework of performance and cultural translation. The symbiotic “narrative system” consists of writers’, directors’, and audiences’ (whatever their locations and cultural identities) uses of Shakespeare to accentuate the perceived uniqueness of Chinese culture and vice versa.

That is what the Shakespeare–China interrelations are and how they operate. The provenance of Shakespeare or China in different times has allowed the cross-cultural (for example, intercultural performance) and intracultural operations (for example, Chinese social reform) to be carried out. That is why these networks of meanings are dictated by artistic and ideological forces. However, textual fluidity is not a *carte blanche* for every reader to concoct his or her own meaning. Certain historical moments demand reading to be carried out in the reader’s cultural context, while other historical junctures provoke interpretations that claim to depend on the “text” itself. These patterns of interpretation are informed by recursions to various sites of origin and the reinvention or repression of specific meanings within these sites.

It is commonly recognized that the history of Shakespearean performance is the history of “what we mean by Shakespeare.”<sup>2</sup> The Shakespeare–China relations not only reveal what Asian and Anglo-European readers mean by “Shakespeare” and/or “China,” but also constitute histories that, constructed over time, reveal shifting perspectives on the question of the migration of texts and representations. Shakespeare’s plays have acquired a number of different political and aesthetic functions, allowing Chinese artists and audiences to see China through the eyes of the Other (Shakespeare). This, in turn, makes Chinese interpretations of Shakespeare a visual projection of the gaze of Shakespeare’s Other (Chinese perspectives). This rich network of interpretations and positions enables multifaceted modes of reading both Shakespeare and China.

With the acceleration of economic and cultural globalization, the present time is particularly propitious to investigate the topic of Shakespeare and China. And yet the significance of multiple Chinese Shakespeares extends beyond the clichéd but frequently cited reasons, such as Shakespeare’s connection to the formation of world cultures or China—making headlines with increasing frequency—as an important nation to know about in our century. For people who know, or think they know, what China and Shakespeare stand for, the questions are: Whose Shakespeare is it? Whose and which China?

### Locality Criticism

The unnatural longevity of Shakespeare’s viability begs the question of the value of local reading positions. The question of where Chinese Shakespeares are situated is ultimately connected to the question of where critics and audiences discover themselves. This question—along with the relationship between the local and the global—calls for a reexamination of Shakespeare and China as two amorphous discursive entities.

An awareness of the fetishization of the universal values of Shakespeare has prompted scholars to forsake the character criticism established by A. C. Bradley and G. Wilson Knight and turn to various forms of historical knowledge. Interpretive possibilities have multiplied when Shakespeare’s text is lodged in its social networks, then and now. Elizabethan knowledge has been brought to bear on the operation of Shakespeare’s theater.<sup>3</sup> Cultural materialism and new historicism have also transformed other fields through their attention to the interplay between decidedly local forces and artistic production.

However, the local knowledge that informed our contemporary performance has remained marginal in the scholarly inquiries into the meanings of “Shakespeare.”<sup>4</sup> Many contemporary rewrites, especially non-Anglophone ones, are seen as obscure bits of Shakespeariana and too far removed from the core of Shakespearean knowledge to matter. Despite their recognized status as an integral part of postcolonial and performance criticism, literary and dramatic adaptations have long been regarded as secondary and derivative, and the field has accordingly been relegated to the status of an “[un]acknowledged genre in criticism.”<sup>5</sup> To counter this bias, we need to consider the itinerant projections of Shakespeare and various localities where Shakespeare has been put to work.

As Konstantin Stanislavsky suggested, “spectators come to the theatre to hear [and see] the subtext, [because] they can read the text at home.”<sup>6</sup> Elements of cultural politics, nationalism, revolution, and postmodernism form a prominent set of subtexts in which Shakespeare and China are read. Since literary interpretation is always done from specific cultural locations, at the center of my study lies the notion of locality. Artists and critics work through various cultural locations, some of which lie at the crossroads of fiction and reality, such as “Hamlet’s castle,” Kronborg Castle in Denmark.<sup>7</sup> I distinguish not only between historical hindsight and blind spots, but also between individuals reading in the same historical period but in different contexts. Any manifestation of Chinese Shakespeares must be understood in relation to the subtexts of the multiple deferrals to local and foreign authorities, authenticity claims, and unexamined silences.<sup>8</sup> Such an approach opens up the notions of Shakespeare and China to new temporalities and locations. As representations of Shakespeare multiply, so do the localities where these representations themselves are appropriated. These localities constitute a set of historically significant practices—the practices of locating global Shakespeares and transmitting such location-specific epistemologies as the idea of Chinese opera.

While Shakespeare in other locations often speaks simultaneously in the coercive voice of Prospero and the agonized accents of Caliban, the case of Shakespeare and China does not fit easily into the postcolonial theoretical models commonly used to interpret Asian rewrites of Anglo-European literature.<sup>9</sup> Michael Neill rightly observes that Shakespeare’s plays were “entangled from the beginning with the projects of nation-building, empire and colonization” in many cases.<sup>10</sup> However, regions with more ambiguous relationships with the West can be doubly marginalized when dominant critical paradigms, such as postcolonial criticism, are deployed. There are two historical forces behind Chinese Shakespeares’ unique mythology in the historical record of globalization. Except for Macao, Hong Kong, and a handful of treaty ports, China was never quite colonized by the Western powers in the twentieth century. In most parts of the Chinese-speaking world, Shakespeare has rarely been resisted as a dominant figure of colonialism. Further, throughout its modern and contemporary history, China often played multiple and sometimes contradictory roles simultaneously, including the oppressor and the oppressed. In relation to the paradox of China’s status, one may legitimately ask:

“Is China a postcolonial nation?” or “Are contemporary Chinese cultural discourses too ‘nationalistic’ and potentially hegemonic to be included in that cultural frontier?”<sup>11</sup> Cultural production in the territories that were not directly influenced by European colonial forces has begun to attract the attention of scholars such as Gayatri Spivak and Prasenjit Duara.<sup>12</sup> While such locations as India, Africa, and Latin America continue to be the core of postcolonial criticism, my study suggests that it is precisely by virtue of being in an estranged, ambiguous relationship to the postcolonial question that Chinese Shakespeares can provide rich opportunities for reexamining the logic of the field.

Such rethinking may find its inspiration from the cultural-historical contexts of traveling texts and their readers. Locality is a useful concept to understand the audience–performer or reader–text interactions. The concept of locality is a lynchpin of sociological theory that is only beginning to be applied to literary and cultural criticism.<sup>13</sup> The term takes into account the cultural coordinates of a work, including the setting of a play, its performance venue, and the specificities of the cultural location of a performance such as Jiao Juyin’s wartime *Hamlet* in 1942, in which parallel and antagonistic readings of local and world histories are evoked. The performance in a Confucian temple in rural China offered particular articulations of various localities recognized both in medias res and in retrospect: Hamlet’s Denmark, Fortinbras’s Norway, a China under Japanese invasion, and symbolically defined Chinese virtues. The crux of these readings of Confucianism and *Hamlet* emerges from the temple, a venue that becomes a fictive and historical space for reflection. These localities shape and define Shakespeare’s extensive posthumous encounters with the world. While it has now been recognized that Shakespeare has occupied an international space for centuries, the theoretical implications of this international space remain unclear. The Shakespeare–China interrelations are determined by interactions between local histories embedded in and superimposed on the works of art, shaping an interchange repeatedly staged since the nineteenth century. The notion of locality recognizes that representations signify relationally. Cultural difference, as Homi Bhabha observes, often introduces into “the process of cultural judgment and interpretation the sudden shock of the successive, non-synchronic time of signification” rather than a simple contention between different systems of cultural value.<sup>14</sup>

The local is not always the antithesis to the global or an antidote to the hegemonic domination that has been stereotypically associated with the West in the shifting reconfigurations of Shakespeare and China in this history. We live in an age when global or universal claims are suspect and the local is often celebrated as a Quixotian hero resisting hegemony or guarded as an “endangered space” in need of being “produced, maintained, and nurture deliberately.”<sup>15</sup> In China, the global finds subtle articulation in the institution of cultural translation and in politically divisive discourses of modernity. There are indeed times when artists who appeal to Shakespearean universalism are deluded and complicit, although a performer can also let his or her politically driven agenda set up the work as alternative to dominant academic or artistic practices. Odd as it may seem, in other times, such as the Cultural Revolution, the local is the coercive and oppressive agent. Likewise, rampant Sinophobia in Taiwan’s cultural institution subjugates *jingju* performers in the name of preservation of “local” performing arts. In those moments, the global represents a potential space for liberation. While the local is sometimes deployed to confront transnational values represented by Shakespeare’s increasing, or decreasing, global clout, in other instances the additional purchase of the global is summoned to reduce the authority of the local. The dispersed nature of these transmissions necessarily detaches both the Shakespearean texts and Chinese cultural texts from their perceived points of origin. Contrary to what one might expect, such detachment does not always liberate these texts for reinterpretation. Far from threatening the canonical status of Shakespeare, some rewrites reinscribe the authorial authority and cultural essentialism into the discourse of cultural exchanges. As much as Shakespeare and China are powerful cultural institutions, they are also repositories of emotions and personal histories. Traditionally, the temporal dimension of Shakespeare’s afterlife has received more attention. Locality criticism emphasizes the physical and geocultural dimensions of the processes of rewriting.

If we accept that cultural translation not only occurs in the space between these entities but also defines the interstices of global cultures, we must treat Asian- and European-informed conceptions of Shakespeare and of China as intertwining sets of formulations, as epistemic foundations for a critical understanding of Chinese Shakespeares. Only an adequate theory of what it means to localize Shakespeare can let us decide what does or does not succumb to the ideological forces driving these new works.

## Other Shakespeares as a Theoretical Problem

It has become impossible to speak of Shakespeare without becoming aware of other Shakespeares, the othering of Shakespeare, and the linguistic and political diaspora of Shakespeare. Since all interpretations—including criticism and my own positions—bear the imprimatur of specific locations and historical moments, it takes both metacritical and historical modes of inquiry to effectively understand the institutional forces (academic, political, artistic) and cultural forms (fiction, theater, cinema) that produced Chinese Shakespeares. My aim of metacriticism is to examine the unique logic and structure of a work or an artistic claim, and its critical reception.<sup>16</sup>

There is little doubt that the field of cultural globalization has yet to properly define its object and grasp competing claims made in the name of local/global culture and the tradition of text-and-representation criticism. Since the 1990s, Shakespearean film and theater scholars have repeatedly called for the necessary refinement and application of theories for cross-cultural appropriation, but not all scholars—even those critics on the lookout for new performance trends—agree on the implication of theorization.<sup>17</sup> Patrice Pavis, for example, cautions that it may be “too soon to propose a global theory of intercultural theatre” when we are “uncertain as to whether [intercultural performance], the tip of an iceberg, . . . signals a depth of startling proportions hidden from view, or whether it is already in the process of melting away.”<sup>18</sup> Pavis’s question of timing is an interesting one, but the obstacle to theorization is not the critic’s temporal proximity to the events that may impede a full appreciation of the discursive fields. Even when critics find themselves within the structure being read, meaningful intellectual work can still be carried out. Rather, the lack of in-depth critical histories of these events impedes the development of any theory, which is why I have opted for a wider range of coverage of historical and critical issues to contextualize the case studies.

The differences and similarities between ideas of Shakespeare and of Asia, rather than the dynamics of the interstitial space, have historically received more critical attention. This in part has hindered the development of a theoretical model for global Shakespeare. The distance between Chinese and Shakespearean aesthetic principles bears dwelling upon, but it can lead observers of cultural exchange to focus instead on the questions of assimilation, defamiliarization, or compatibility between Shakespearean and Chinese representational practices. This tendency leads to

somewhat predictable conclusions about what and how these new works contribute to the host culture and to Shakespeare's afterlife. A related difficulty is an urge to reconcile fundamental differences between the aesthetics named by Shakespeare and by Asia, and to use their philosophical and structural similarities to support claims of universality.

This is precisely what has occupied the rewriters' attention, as evidenced by their philosophical investments in authenticity claims and *conventions* of interpretive authenticity. For example, some early-twentieth-century Chinese polemicists used Shakespeare and the iconic proposal for a new China to construct nuanced cultural signifiers that were deployed to the exclusion of other competing reformist agendas. Authenticity became a trope that was manipulated to exercise authoritative claims over political and cultural reforms. In a different period, authenticating discourses played another role. In the global cultural marketplace of the late twentieth century, the notion of authenticity enabled marginalized artists to counter oppressive cultural practices such as certain forms of interculturalism that efface local traditions. While the arbitrariness of the conventions of authenticity has to be recognized, it is equally important to be cognizant of what ideological work authenticating discourse can perform. It builds bridges in some places but blocks avenues for exchange elsewhere.

The lack of theorization means that the topic of Shakespeare *and* China is usually met with surprise and suspicion.<sup>19</sup> Yet our reaction of surprise in relation to the subject is itself surprising. The ideas of Shakespeare and China add several levels of discordance to the fields of Shakespeare and Chinese studies and to the praxis of performance. As much as such discordance is challenging, it can also be the source of exciting and provocative intellectual and artistic works. Despite the increasing currency of transnational studies in the humanities, the politics of recognition has continued to operate not only in the study of minority cultures—as Françoise Lionnet, Shu-mei Shih, and Charles Taylor point out—but also in Shakespeare studies.<sup>20</sup> Selective attentiveness, if not valorization, has routinely been given to the most dominant and the most resistant readings of Shakespeare, highlighting a linear relationship of either assimilation or opposition between Shakespeare and world cultures.

Therefore, one of the first questions to be addressed in the study of Chinese Shakespeares is: Why should we concern ourselves with the place of "China" in Shakespearean criticism where non-European cultures do not seem to have a place? Why should Shakespeare be associated

with China at all, since they appear to be antithetical to each other? The same question could be rephrased as one from the perspective of Asian studies: What can the presence and absence of Shakespeare in the Sino-phone world tell us about Asian modernity and postmodernism? Scholars disagree on the theoretical implication of these questions. Jonathan Bate takes the middle ground and posits that Shakespeare's global appeal results neither from his linguistic virtuosity nor the power of the British Empire.<sup>21</sup> Dennis Kennedy, however, takes a more radical position and argues against the idea of cultural ownership and "the native familiarity that English-speakers assume for Shakespeare."<sup>22</sup> There are similar debates about essentialism and the hybridity of modern Chinese literary culture. One of the most contested notions is Chinese culture's purported independence from other cultures, or China's exclusivity. James Liu considers twentieth-century Chinese literature and theories too "Westernized" to merit serious study, while Rey Chow defends the necessity to read "modern Chinese literature other than as a kind of bastardized appendix to classical Chinese and a mediocre apprentice to Western literature."<sup>23</sup>

These initial points of contention have motivated my study, and cultural and performance theories inform the exploration of the shifting localities of the so-called unfaithful or self-syndicated authentic representations of Shakespeare and China. We should concern ourselves with foreign Shakespeares, because Shakespeare, for the past century, has been writ larger than his text. Specifically, artistic interpretations of Shakespeare and histories of the Sinophone world provide rich materials for locality criticism. The fact that this cultural phenomenon does not settle comfortably into the grammar of our current critical vocabulary can also initiate useful reflection on the critical enterprise itself. The task of cultural criticism in this context is not simply to evaluate how "successfully" a given work represents the source texts or symbols of the host culture, but to locate its logic of representation within the collective cultural memory, politics, and the personal dimension of history.

### The Pleasures of (In)fidelity

The reception of both Anglophone and non-Anglophone performances of Shakespeare has been dominated by morally loaded discourses of fidelity and authenticity ("Did they get Shakespeare or Chinese opera right?"), informed by variations of such questions as "Is it

still Shakespeare?" or "Is the performance 'Chinese' enough?"<sup>24</sup> Even a more established field, such as Shakespeare on film, is still grappling with similar issues.<sup>25</sup> Although debates still rage about the status of translated canonical literary works, at stake are such questions as how Shakespeare and China are connected, how the connections are celebrated or contested in different times and places, and what these interactions create (films, theater pieces, ideologies, literary works, and new visions). These two entities are also connected via the market law. Shakespeare's currency in the Anglophone world generally, and the revival of Shakespeare in England particularly, is connected to the demands of the international cultural markets. The Anglophone cultural globalization in turn complicates the vested interests in Shakespeare among writers and performers in the non-Anglophone world. These interests are frequently marked by signs of resistance, apologia, and many other agendas. The interplay between Shakespeare and China thus reveals the plurality and the referential instability of these discursive entities.

I would now like to think these issues through the rhetoric of fidelity. It bears reiterating that adaptation has to be considered on its own terms. Characterized by its nature of in-betweenness, adaptation is neither a simple rejection of the idea of the singular author—as some avant-garde artists believe—nor an unproblematic tool to unsettle the tyranny of the author—as Gilles Deleuze idealizes.<sup>26</sup> Recognizing the discourses about fidelity is the first step to treat rewriting as a site where citations, recitation, and echoes collide to form new meanings.<sup>27</sup>

The first obstacle to overcome is the assumption of an ethics of fidelity.<sup>28</sup> Recent work has shown an acute awareness of these perils, reorienting the relationship between text and performance. Rewriting is not an appendage that gives way to the literariness of Shakespeare's text, but an agent that participates in the play's signification process. Even though the word "localization" was not in use until the nineteenth century, resistance to various activities named by localization has created a major ideological force throughout Shakespeare's afterlife.

The widespread investment in the particularities of Shakespeare's text and non-Anglophone traditions cuts across a range of otherwise divergent artistic movements and critical schools, including—perhaps surprisingly—those that may be deemed radical and even iconoclastic. This dominant paradigm bears an ethical dimension. Despite the recent shift of the object of inquiry from Shakespeare the text to the cultural institution of "Shakespeare," many artists and critics continue to be preoccupied

with the issue of fidelity, as evidenced by interpretive strategies that riff on authenticating marketing moves, by mutually implicating historicist and presentist claims, and by artistic and scholarly activities united by the name of appropriation—a problematic term.<sup>29</sup> Although there is greater latitude for parody in East Asia than in Anglophone culture, varying degrees of essentialist reverence of the local culture or Shakespeare dictate that many artists see themselves as speaking for Shakespearean or Chinese aesthetics, or both. Despite having translated and directed several of Shakespeare's plays in Mandarin and Cantonese (and staged *jingju* plays in English), Daniel Yang fundamentally rejects the notion of transcultural performance.<sup>30</sup> Ong Keng Sen's postmodern pronouncements in *LEAR*—despite his challenge of cultural essentialism—focused on the purported authenticity of cultural locations ("New Asia" or elsewhere). Another equally revealing example is Feng Xiaogang's *Hamlet*-inspired feature film. When the high-profile film *The Banquet* premiered at the Venice and Cannes film festivals and subsequently screened in the Chinese-speaking world in late 2006, it generated heated debates about the film's dual identity.<sup>31</sup> Is the film Shakespearean enough? Is it Chinese?<sup>32</sup> Critical discourses about this film demonstrate the needs of multiple interpretive communities, including two opposing forces: the tendencies to exalt the hybridity of postnational cultural spaces and to reinscribe the nation into cross-cultural dialogues.<sup>33</sup> Behind these forces is the common tendency to essentialize cultural difference and mistake rigidly defined equivalents for intertextual work.

Even as some artists strive to seek the real, authentic Shakespeare or China, they are able to create only a sense of fullness that satisfies the desires for particular types of experiences dictated by historical circumstances. Therefore, the relation between cultural texts and representations is not a mimetic one, but an enabling relation between two mutually imbricated subjects.<sup>34</sup> The ideas of Shakespeare and of China are informed by performances of all kinds. They are producing subjects in the sense that they do not provide those kinds of reliable and immutable points of reference that many artists and audiences aspire toward.

Ironically, the familiar news about Shakespeare's global and transhistorical appeal can sometimes dull the critical attention.<sup>35</sup> What is worthy of attention is the selective inattentiveness to the dynamics of "unfaithful" rewrites, or how the process of rewriting itself faithfully reproduces the economic and cultural dynamics of globalization. The distinctions between faithful and unfaithful break down where Shakespeare's afterlife

is concerned, since the plays are so subject to multiple manifestations. In fact, a particularly compelling point of departure for exploring Shakespeare's afterlife is the ethical assumption at work in the seemingly commonsense distinction between normative and alternative interpretations (English versus foreign Shakespeares; faithful versus unfaithful adaptations; authentic versus inauthentic representations of China). The so-called alternatives are in fact central to our contemporary performance culture, in which classic plays can still be performed for entertainment and intellectual stimulation. Local Shakespeares are not a binary opposition to canonical metropolitan English-language representations that are perceived to be "licensed" and more faithful.

It is important to recognize that any system of performance, like any mode of cultural production (for example, *jingju*), is not an alternative to a legitimate, naturalized, mode of representation (for example, English-language or *huaju* "straight" performance).<sup>36</sup> There is nothing outside the very system of signification that is being constantly reconfigured by each instance of performance and by the cumulative history of these reconfigurations. Therefore, it is more fruitful to pursue the question of "alternative to what" than to substantiate authenticity claims. At the risk of appearing to fall back into the remedial mode that defines new theoretical models in negative terms, I would like to point out that theorizing from the margins carries its own rewards.<sup>37</sup> Rather than a revelation of the supposed fidelity or infidelity of rewrites, this study focuses on the development of varied and often paradoxical articulations of Shakespeare and China and the tensions between their varied localities, emphasizing the cultural space between Shakespeare and China that sustains a heavily trafficked two-way exchange.

By two-way transactions, I mean the processes that revise and enrich the repertoire of knowledge about Shakespeare and China, as exemplified by Jiao Juyin's *Hamlet* (1942), which transformed Hamlet's philosophy in part through the use of a specific performance venue—a Confucian temple in southwestern China during the second Sino-Japanese War. Interrelations between Shakespeare and China constitute networks of signifiers that are themselves reconfigurations of other cultural signs. Some works have expanded the repertoire of Shakespearean and Asian performance idioms to create interconnecting Shakespeare traditions that are both Asian and Western. One example is Wu Hsing-kuo's *Kingdom of Desire* (1986), a play inspired as much by *Macbeth* as by *Throne of Blood* (1957) by Kurosawa Akira, who has been identified as an "intensely Japanese

[but] paradoxically not solely a Japanese film maker."<sup>38</sup> Two mainland Chinese feature films based on *Hamlet*, *The Banquet* (2006) and *The Prince of the Himalayas* (2006), further expanded the interpretive frameworks for both the Shakespearean and Chinese texts. *The Banquet* produced a highly elastic vision of ancient Chinese imperial court culture; at the same time, it reinterpreted the structure of emotions in *Hamlet* through the stylization enabled by the knight-errant (*wuxia*) film genre. *The Prince of the Himalayas* was so popular in China that Mandarin-Tibetan *huaju* (spoken drama) stage versions based on the film, with the same cast and director, have been mounted in Shanghai and Beijing. This was a case where the performance idioms of the screen and the stage converged to create a new space for ethnic minority performers.

These works, in turn, enriched the interpretive possibilities of Shakespeare, just as Sarah Bernhardt's and Asta Nielsen's female Hamlets at the beginning of the twentieth century expanded the traditions of cross-dressed performance in Europe and the United States.<sup>39</sup> The transformation of cultural forms and values operates in both directions, thus informing and giving voice to the individual interpretations.

## Myth Making

Despite these rich critical possibilities, studies of Shakespeare in popular culture and performance still tend to concentrate on Anglophone examples, relegating Asian Shakespeares to cocktail-party definitions of exotic spectacles. Likewise, the topic continues to strive for legitimacy within Asian studies. This is due in part to the technological operations of globalization as they play themselves out across nation-state structures and value systems.

Marginalization and myth making are mutually constitutive processes. Three main factors contribute to the marginalization of non-Anglophone Shakespeares and the mystification of Shakespeare's and China's exclusivity in the pedagogical and research contexts. First, due to the ephemeral nature of live theater, even the most commercially successful and the most extensively toured productions can never be as accessible as feature films. The other two factors are closely connected to the politics of the field: the misconception of the referential stability of performances at familiar centers—the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States—and the widespread journalistic mode in writings about non-Anglophone



Shakespearean performance that reduces its subject of study to fleeting news items.

The marginalization of the field is a result of not a lack of publications but, ironically, an overflow of "reports" without theoretical reflection ("This is how they do Shakespeare over there; how quaint").<sup>40</sup> The reportage mode is unfortunately lacking in ideological analysis. It can be valuable for new works to be made accessible through descriptive reviews, but that cannot constitute the sole model of inquiry in the field.<sup>41</sup> Ultimately, cultural criticism has a different mission than a documentary film about an exotic object. It takes readers into a cultural event or a play in performance within its historical contexts not by replicating a full visual record of it, but by analyzing the logic of vested interests in visual, verbal, and textual signs.

Paradoxically, as an increasing number of rewrites become "familiarly known," they also become ornamental and predictably exotic objects that are never positioned to be properly known.<sup>42</sup> Many books on Shakespearean appropriation have a "non-West" chapter, but that itself is the problem. The dominance of the British-American axis in scholarship also contributes to the disinterest in non-Anglophone Shakespeares. Editors would not think of including a token chapter on American or British productions. Even scholarly works that engage a globally articulated subject such as racial difference are engulfed by the American and British "obsessions with black and white."<sup>43</sup> The hierarchies of subject dictate that only selected examples are concentrated on. However, even when non-Anglophone Shakespeares are analyzed, there is a critical neglect of the appropriation of the local interpretive practices (performance, translation, rewriting, reception). A few new works have responded to this critical impasse by demonstrating that symbiotic negotiations over Shakespeare's works do not occur only in traditionally defined peripheral localities but also at the Anglophone centers of Shakespearean performance.<sup>44</sup> What is needed is a necessarily more capacious and polymorphous sense of China or Shakespeare as a continually evolving repository of meaning rather than a fixed textual corpus. Just as the field of cinematic Shakespeare has recently adopted new paradigms that challenge "the notion that Shakespeare film is only of interest for its immediacy," the assumption about the ephemeral value of Asian Shakespeares can be fully examined only when we shift the critical energy from documenting individual rewrites as pieces of exotica to historicizing and theorizing their interrelated trajectories.<sup>45</sup>

In the past few years, as the contingency of performance and the referential instability of Shakespeare are being reexamined,<sup>46</sup> Chineseness has been likewise reassessed as a theoretical problem.<sup>47</sup> One of the most contested notions is the purported exceptionality of China in both scholarly discourse and popular culture.<sup>48</sup> On the one hand, European Sinologists (such as François Jullien) and philosophers (such as Leibniz) have repeatedly used rhetorically constructed differences of China to form an antithesis to European philosophy.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, intellectuals and directors in China, especially those who are actively engaged in cultural translation, often turn China into a repository of idealized cultural values. Subscribing to the idea of identifiable and fixed cultural boundaries, they have developed an obsession with "Chineseness" that contributes to the fantasy that everything Chinese is "somehow better—longer in existence, . . . more valuable, and ultimately beyond comparison."<sup>50</sup>

The habitual mystification of China is present in many other areas. Within the purview of theater studies in North America, Asian performance remains the ultimate Other, "unknowable, unlearnable, unfathomable, [because] the languages are imagined to be indecipherable, . . . names are backwards, . . . cultural values . . . totally alien, [and] performers are trained from birth."<sup>51</sup> Ironically, some scholars of Asian studies are willing to endorse this attitude, readily confirming the difficulty of their own specialty and the challenges of cross-cultural dialogues. As recent scholarship has recognized, Chinese institutions—cultural, social, political—are often imagined as though they "began in times immemorial."<sup>52</sup> On the one hand, contradictory images of China in the popular and academic discourses around the world repeatedly challenge Western conceptual frameworks. On the other hand, assumptions nourished by "an entrenched Eurocentric worldview prevalent in both China and the West" have hindered the development of more productive ways to think about China.<sup>53</sup> Michel Foucault articulates this problem when he writes in his comments on Jorge Luis Borges's imaginary "Chinese" encyclopedia: "In our dreamworld, is not China precisely this privileged *site of space*? In our traditional imagery, the Chinese culture is the most meticulous, the most rigidly ordered, the one most deaf to temporal events, most attached to the pure delineation of space."<sup>54</sup>

Such dreams abound. Early-twentieth-century Chinese writers have been said to harbor an "obsession with China,"<sup>55</sup> whereas contemporary Chinese writers, as David Der-wei Wang observes, have attempted to "break away from hard-core obsession with China" by engaging in a

frivolous “flirtation with China,” approaching the country—“the most serious serious subject”—from very different perspectives.<sup>56</sup> This detachment of political action from literature may be characteristic of cultural production of the postmodern era, but positivism and a redemptive discourse continue to haunt the production and reception of Chinese Shakespeares. Since the late nineteenth century, Chinese artists and intellectuals have repeatedly recast new ideas—local or foreign—in a remedial mode, failing to recognize the fictional space occupied by “China.”<sup>57</sup>

I hasten to add that these obsessions with Chineseness that mystify China are as pervasive among the artists as among the critics, both in and beyond the Sinophone world, who participated in the production of China as a mythic Other in Shakespearean performances. In fact, the double logic of intercultural performance relies on both recognizable, knowable elements of otherness and irreconcilable outlandishness. Both global Shakespeare and Chinese performance operate on the basis of the contrast between a knowable component of the Western canon and an “unknowable” Other. Studies of the phenomenon also share a mystified and undefined vocabulary.<sup>58</sup> China has repeatedly been summoned to fill in for the role of the Other, while Shakespeare remains a constant, a set of texts with established meanings. In an increasingly globalized world where outlandishness becomes harder and harder to achieve, artists and writers resort to even more drastic tactics to produce this otherness to contrast the readily familiar (although not really properly known) canon—Chinese, English, or otherwise.

The history of Chinese-themed performances of Shakespeare in and beyond the Sinophone world is complicated by these stereotypes that sustain social and literary imaginaries about Shakespeare and China. However, the illusion of antithetical and isolated identities of local and global cultures leads to a tendency either to ignore the connections between Shakespeare and China, or to explain the “odd” presence of Shakespeare in the Sinophone world and “China” in Shakespearean performances by the absence of a linear teleological history.

### Terms of Engagement

Shakespeare’s impact on non-Anglophone cultures is a two-way process, but the complexity of the two-way transaction is often obscured by confusions about categories and the limits of such dated terminology

as cross-cultural “filtering” that pushes the acts of reading and writing across time and media into a discourse of commensurabilities that simply reaffirms ideological formations of identities.<sup>59</sup> It is no more productive to propose an Asia-centered paradigm to counter the dominance of pre-established Western-centered rubrics, but it is important to be attentive to both what these cross-cultural exchanges enable us to see and what the process of rewriting obscures or denies.

To that end, I will now discuss the basic terms through which I examine Chinese Shakespeares. Much of the dispersion of Shakespeare has been triggered by the more familiar defining factors of diaspora culture, such as the demographic movement of people across different regions (hence the categories of “touring Shakespeare,” “Shakespeare in North America,” and “Shakespeare in colonial India”).<sup>60</sup> However, the global movement of ideas has also played a key role in the course of the long and eventful history of Shakespeare’s afterlife. For my purposes, the more commonly used means of reference, Shakespeare *in* China, or a brand-name writer *in* any given culture for that matter, is not a viable critical category.<sup>61</sup> Such categorization obscures the dialectics of exchange between different cultures and implies the imposition of one culture upon another, investing certain texts with a transhistorical status. As its title suggests, *Chinese Shakespeares* examines encounters of Shakespeare and China as a transformative process (for example, expanding the meaning of traditional China through Lin Shu’s bold rewriting of Shakespeare), as a cultural practice (for example, reading Shakespeare during the Cultural Revolution or quoting Shakespeare to support the agendas of the nouveaux riches and political leaders), as texts (fiction and reviews), and as performances.

By the term “Chinese Shakespeares,” I identify the theoretical problems and multiple cultural locations of the ideas associated with China and Shakespeare, rather than the audience simply by nationality. “China” refers to a number of ideological positions (for example, the imaginaries of China) as well as a range of geocultural locations and historical periods that encompass late imperial China (1839–1910), Republican China (1911–1949), Communist China (1949–present), post-1949 Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Chinese diaspora.<sup>62</sup> As the multidirectional traffic among these richly diverse locations include touring performances and intraregional collaboration, it is important to consider the networks of cultural production within, on the margins of, and outside “China.”<sup>63</sup> Registering these asymmetrical cultural flows enables us to chart new territories for