

*Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange.* By ALEXANDER C. Y. HUANG. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. xvi, 350 pp. \$84.50 (cloth); \$26.50 (paper).

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Alexander C. Y. Huang's *Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* demonstrates why the study of Shakespeare in Chinese contexts is a vital topic of such significance. Panels, and even entire conferences, on the topic are common in Asian performance circles, but I always felt that such studies, and even the performances that inspired them, were undertaken primarily to attract audiences who might find Shakespearean material more accessible than plays with more "authentically" Chinese content. Huang's volume has completely transformed my viewpoint. His meticulously researched and thoughtfully constructed study demonstrates that Chinese Shakespeares are as Chinese as any other performances in the Chinese-speaking world. Huang has turned this skeptic into a believer, and I invite any scholar who is interested—or not interested—in this topic to read Huang's thought-provoking volume.

In the prologue and mostly theoretical chapter 1, Huang explains his intention to reveal the complexities within two rather large, weighty categories—"China" and "Shakespeare"—and to show their interplay over the past two centuries. Seemingly every major Chinese intellectual has had something to say about Shakespeare, who is frequently used in Chinese contexts as an emblem of modernity, in sharp contrast to his classical status in the West. For Huang, "authenticity" as a framework for analysis is far too limiting, for either Shakespeare or Chineseness. Just as "China" has multiple meanings and multiple localities—Huang's study also incorporates Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Chinese diaspora—Shakespeare, too, is subject to a discourse of multiplicity.

As Huang proceeds with his case studies, another multiplicity emerges: the multiplicity of genre. Theater does not appear until the fourth chapter, reflecting how Shakespeare first emerged in China in nondramatic genres. In chapter 2, Shakespeare arrives in China as a concept; before Shakespeare's actual writings had even been read there, he became a prime example of a strong national literature and, by extension, a strong national identity. Shakespeare appears in textual form in chapter 3, first as a Shakespeare with Confucian values in Lin Shu's 1904 classical Chinese translation of Charles and Mary Lamb's prose volume *Tales from Shakespeare*, and later in Lao She's modern vernacular novel *New Hamlet* (*Xin Hamuleite*, 1936), which views Hamlet, in his indecisiveness, as a metaphor for a China equally indecisive in its struggle to reach modernity.

Chapters 4 and 5 bring Shakespeare to the stage and (silent) screen through analyses of works by a diverse group of artists: Li Jianwu, Huang Zuolin, Qiu Yixiang, Bu Wancang, Jiao Juyin, Hu Dao, and the Soviet director Yevgeniya Lipkovskaya. Chapter 4 explores the adaptation of Shakespeare to local Chinese settings and circumstances, including *Macbeth*-inspired tragedies that responded to

wartime calls for relevant, utilitarian drama. Huang also discusses silent films from 1927 and 1931 that adapted Shakespeare to the local “new woman” (*xin nüxing*) discourse. In chapter 5, Huang explores theater in specific times and venues, including a wartime staging of *Hamlet* in a rural Confucian temple and a Sino-Soviet joint production of *Much Ado about Nothing* that illuminates how Shakespeare first became Marxist/Soviet and then how that particular Shakespeare became yet another Chinese Shakespeare. Huang also analyzes a private Shakespeare event: intellectual Wu Ningkun silently reading a smuggled copy of *Hamlet* in a Cultural Revolution labor camp.

Chapters 6 and 7 continue with stage explorations, including Shakespeare in *xiqu* (Chinese opera) contexts. In chapter 6, Huang articulates how *xiqu* Shakespeares, generally labeled “Chinese” by Western critics yet considered Westernized by most Sinophone viewers, have generated productive debates on intercultural performance, and how that exposure has in turn altered *xiqu* practice. Huang refers to numerous performances, with a particular focus on *jingju* actor Ma Yong’an’s 1983 adaptation of *Othello* in Beijing. In chapter 7, Huang examines recent productions by two of Taiwan’s leading contemporary theater artists, Wu Hsing-kuo and Stan Lai, who connect elements from *King Lear* with their own personal concerns. Their productions’ reliance on their audiences’ familiarity with *King Lear* bolsters Huang’s idea that Shakespeare has become an element of Chinese culture, and that these, and all of the works Huang analyzes, are truly Chinese Shakespeares.

Huang concludes his epilogue, which expands the range of genres into contemporary film and multimedia performance, by noting the transformative power of Chinese Shakespeares. The future is an interesting space, for as the notion of “China” develops, so do the possibilities for Chinese Shakespeares. Moreover, the star power of Shakespeare begins to be balanced by the star power of the Chinese artists doing these productions. This change exemplifies a transformation of Shakespeare in the Chinese world over the past two centuries. Shakespeare arrived in China as a concept far larger than any man, but he has evolved, over time, into just one artist among many.

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This book presents itself as a “systematic study” (p. 1) of the *Zuozhuan*, “a heterogeneous and layered text that took shape over a long period of accretion”