

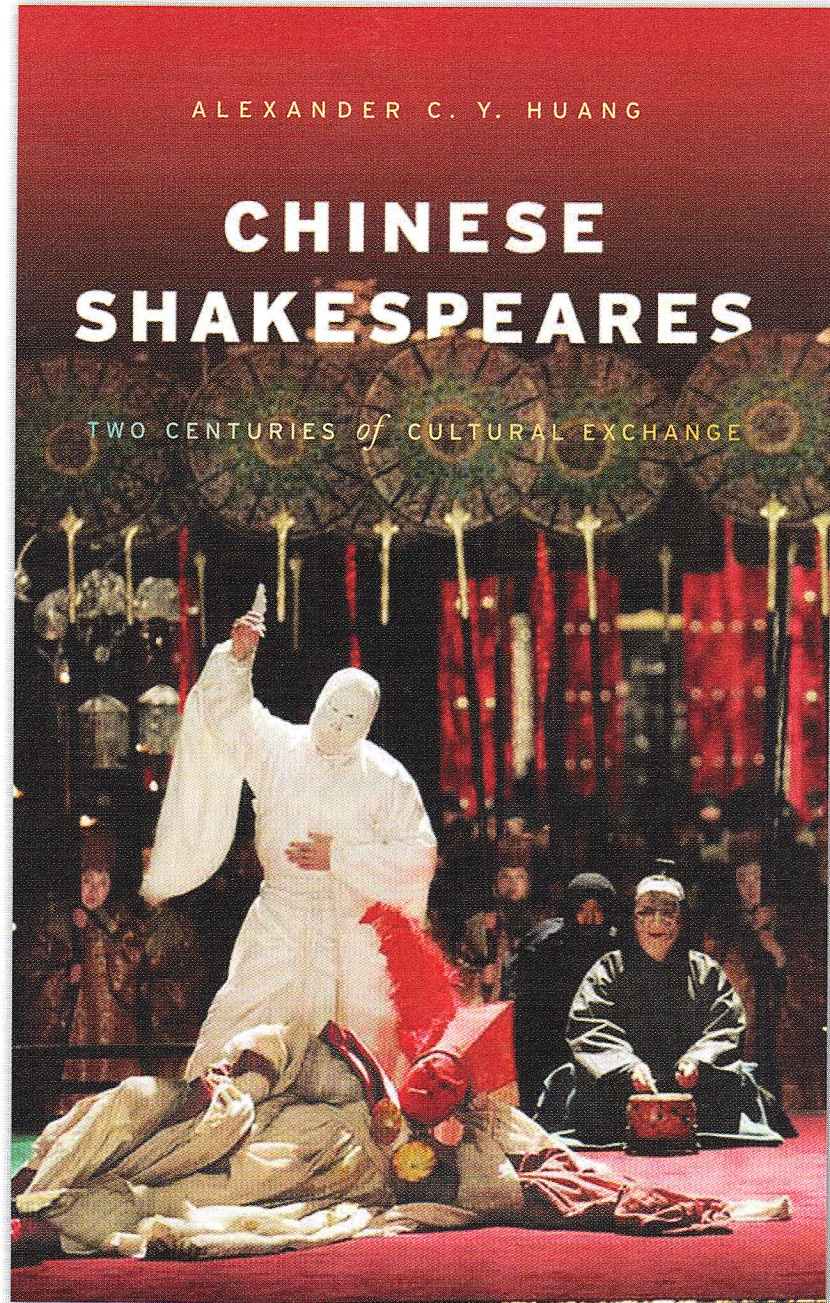
An examination of Shishi's attachment to and trust in Kaizi reveals that it is inspired by his friend's inner longing for her father, whereas Shishi's painful infatuation for and pursuit of Tangdi reveal his persistent adhesion to an inner self-idealism. Therefore, a story about a lonely young person growing up is not only an emotional journey in which a frail soul seeks gentle shelter but is also an exploration of the painful psychological experience caused by the existential debate between our ideals and social realities.

Chao Xing

Translated by Guo Liang

Alexander C. Y. Huang. **Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange.** Nonfiction. New York. Columbia University Press. 2009. xvi + 350 pages. \$26.50. ISBN 9780231148498

In January 2011, the Modern Language Association of America awarded the Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for Comparative Literary Studies to Alexander C. Y. Huang's *Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange*. The citation reads in part: "Remarkable not only for its sophistication but also for its scholarly depth, *Chinese Shakespeares* is a landmark in the renewal of comparative literature as a discipline." As a believer in and practitioner of comparative literature myself, I found Huang's work particularly inspiring for two reasons. First, *Chinese Shakespeares* sets up a new approach to reflecting upon cultural translation and transmission. While conventional studies of reception place great emphasis on tracing a clear lineage of the arrival and translations of a particular masterpiece or a canonical author, *Chinese Shakespeares* highlights "site-specific readings" and artistic innovations generated



from the host cultural context. The former approach constantly leads to the anxiety of influence or fear of infidelity, but the latter demonstrates brilliant performances and stories that transform both the local and the foreign. The prologue reveals that the book is not a study of Shakespeare in China, because "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" (39). Instead, *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 (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" (39).

Second, situated at the intersection of Asian studies, Shakespeare studies, comparative literature, and global cultural criticism, *Chinese Shakespeares* has made a palpable impact on multiple disciplines, as evidenced by the excellent reviews it has received in major journals in the fields of China studies, Asian studies, English and Shakespeare studies, comparative literature, and theatre studies. In addition to the MLA award, the book also received an Honorable Mention from New York University's Joe A. Callaway Prize for the Best Book on Drama or Theatre, and won the Colleagues' Choice Award from the International Convention for Asian Scholars. Since the publication of Rene Wellek's 1958 paper "The Crisis of Comparative Literature," scholars have attempted to tackle the ongoing identity crisis of comparative literature as a discipline. Some decry the death of the discipline while others celebrate the triumph of the discipline. Very few scholars in comparative literature can make a real difference beyond their primary field. In this regard, Alexander Huang offers a welcome and much-needed model.

Spanning from the first Opium War in 1839 to the present, *Chinese Shakespeares* explores intriguing ways in which Chinese writers, filmmakers, and theater directors have engaged Shakespeare in a wide range of contexts. The book is divided into eight chapters. Chapter one lays out the theoretical framework as well as the terms of engagement. Promoting "locality criticism," Huang challenges the fetishization of the universal values of Shakespeare and shifts the spotlight to the local. The rest of the book tells a series of stories within which the ideas

of Shakespeare and China work unexpected magic. One such brilliant moment is Jiao Juyin's production of *Hamlet* in a Confucian temple during the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). Such historically and culturally specific case studies comprise the core of *Chinese Shakespeares*.

Chapter two looks at Shakespeare's early presence in China (1839–1900). Shakespeare was known in China only as a name or idea for decades until he was partially translated in 1904 by Lin Shu and Wei Yi in their classical Chinese rendition of Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*. The first complete translation of a Shakespearean play did not appear until 1921 when Tian Han's *Hamlet* was published (50). Scholars who view the reception of Shakespeare in China as a linear evolution regularly neglect or dismiss this period as an insignificant preparatory stage. Alexander Huang, in contrast, shows no interest in a grand evolutionary narrative, but places emphasis on each historically specific China-Shakespeare encounter. As a result, what emerges from this Shakespeare in absentia are some memorable moments, including Lin Zexu's "know thy enemy" discourse, which first introduced Shakespeare to China, and Liang Qichao's fascinating kunqu play *New Rome*, which deployed Shakespeare as a character on stage alongside Dante and Voltaire.

Chapter three focuses on Lin Shu and Lao She's rewrites of Shakespeare in early twentieth-century China. Huang provides an excellent analysis of why Lin Shu chose to translate Shakespeare from the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare* rather than from an original text, and how he made further changes to bring Shakespeare closer to the Ming and Qing narrative

tradition of love, filial piety, and exotic fairytales. As a traditionalist, Lin sought to counter his contemporary radical reformers by presenting a Shakespeare founded on ancient Chinese ideas (85). Lao She's novella *New Hamlet*, written in the mid 1930s, comments on "a problem of hesitation of a society caught between contending values." Lao She's protagonist parodies not only the popular imagination of Hamlet, but also the self-righteous moral criticism practiced by some Chinese intellectuals of the time (87–88).

*Chinese Shakespeares* moves to theatrical and cinematic performances in chapter four with a discussion of two silent film adaptations of Shakespeare plays: *The Woman Lawyer* (1927), adapted from *The Merchant of Venice*, and *A Spray of Plum Blossoms* (1931), loosely based on *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Both films pictured the rise of the new woman, reflecting society's anxiety over and fascination with female professionals. Interestingly, while Anglo-European interpretations of *The Merchant of Venice* have been dominated by a profound awareness of racial and religious tensions, the Chinese reception of the play remains focused on the economy of exchange (116).

Chapter five investigates three mid-twentieth-century site-specific readings: Jiao Juyin's 1942 production of *Hamlet* in a Confucian temple in wartime China; Wu Ningkun's reading of *Hamlet* in a labor camp during the Cultural Revolution; and a Soviet-Chinese production of *Much Ado about Nothing* before and after the Cultural Revolution. Huang takes into account the "locality" of an encounter—the historical and cultural specificities of a contact zone.

Chapter six goes on to examine xiqu performances of Shakespeare from the Sinophone world,



taking as a primary example Ma Yong'an's jingju opera *Aosailuo* (*Othello*), performed in 1983 in mainland China, in which Ma blackened his face to play the title character. Huang offers a detailed discussion of what happens when Beijing opera meets Shakespeare and how issues such as racial difference usually associated with post-colonial productions of *Othello* are sidestepped in this context.

Chapter seven examines two fascinating recent adaptations of *King Lear* by Taiwan's leading contemporary theater artists Stan Lai and Wu Hsing-kuo. Both rewrites reveal a personal turn, or what Huang calls "small-time Shakespeare," that "has turned public performance and the international cultural space into a forum for personal script" (197). Wu's solo jingju performance addresses not only the father/child complex in Shakespeare's text, but also Wu's own conflicting self-identity, as well as the conflict between revising jingju by infusing the new or seeking to preserve the traditional form. In other words, Wu Hsing-kuo renders Shakespeare's play expressly in his own autobiographical terms.

Readers of *Chinese Shakespeares* will come away with substantial knowledge of China-Shakespeare encounters in a wide range of genres and of many unforgettable moments of cross-cultural imagination and rewriting. While the book is not an encyclopedia, one does wonder why Zhu Shenghao and Liang Shiqiu, two of the most prominent translators of Shakespeare, do not have a place in the volume. The chronology does mention that Liang published the first complete Chinese translation of Shakespeare's works (forty volumes) in 1967, and it would be useful to incorporate this significant moment of cultural transla-

tion into the analysis of "encounters of Shakespeare and China as a transformative process." All in all, *Chinese Shakespeares* is highly recommended for its extensive archival work and innovative research.

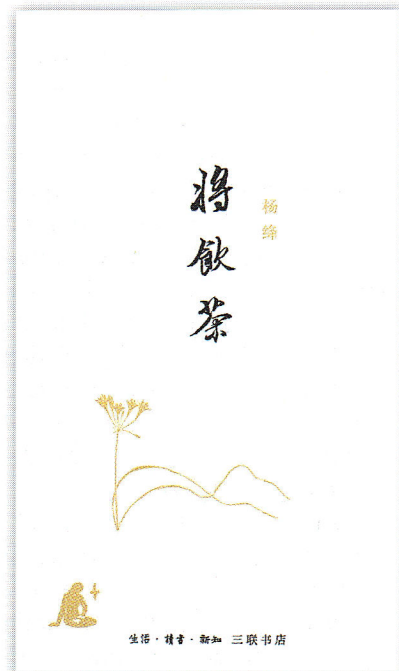
Gang Zhou

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Yang Jiang. **About to Drink Tea.** Non-fiction. Beijing. SDX Joint Publishing Company. 2010. 179 pages. CNY 20. ISBN 9787108034588

*About to Drink Tea* is a collection of Yang Jiang's biographical essays, split into four sections: "Remembering My Father," "Remembering My Aunt," "Qian Zhongshu and *Fortress Besieged*" and "Record of 1966 and '67." The last of these, "Record of 1966 and '67," is a recollection of the abuses she and her husband faced during the first years of the Cultural Revolution and can be understood as a sequel to her *Six Chapters of Life in a Cadre School*. Though only a slim volume, the characters and events described within cover more than half a century of turbulent history. Of particular interest are the preface, "Mengpo Tea," and the epilogue, "The Invisibility Cloak," as they are stylistically unique and also reveal much about the author's motivation to write as well as her personal philosophy.

What exactly does "about to drink tea" mean? Here, the "tea" the author is "about to drink" is Mengpo tea, a mythical beverage imbibed by the souls of the newly dead that erases all memory of past life. In acknowledgment of her own eventual death, the author recorded people and events she was unwilling to forget, voluntarily offering up the most treasured stores of her memory. These are the memories of the wise, expressing the dialectic synthesis between recollection and forgetting.



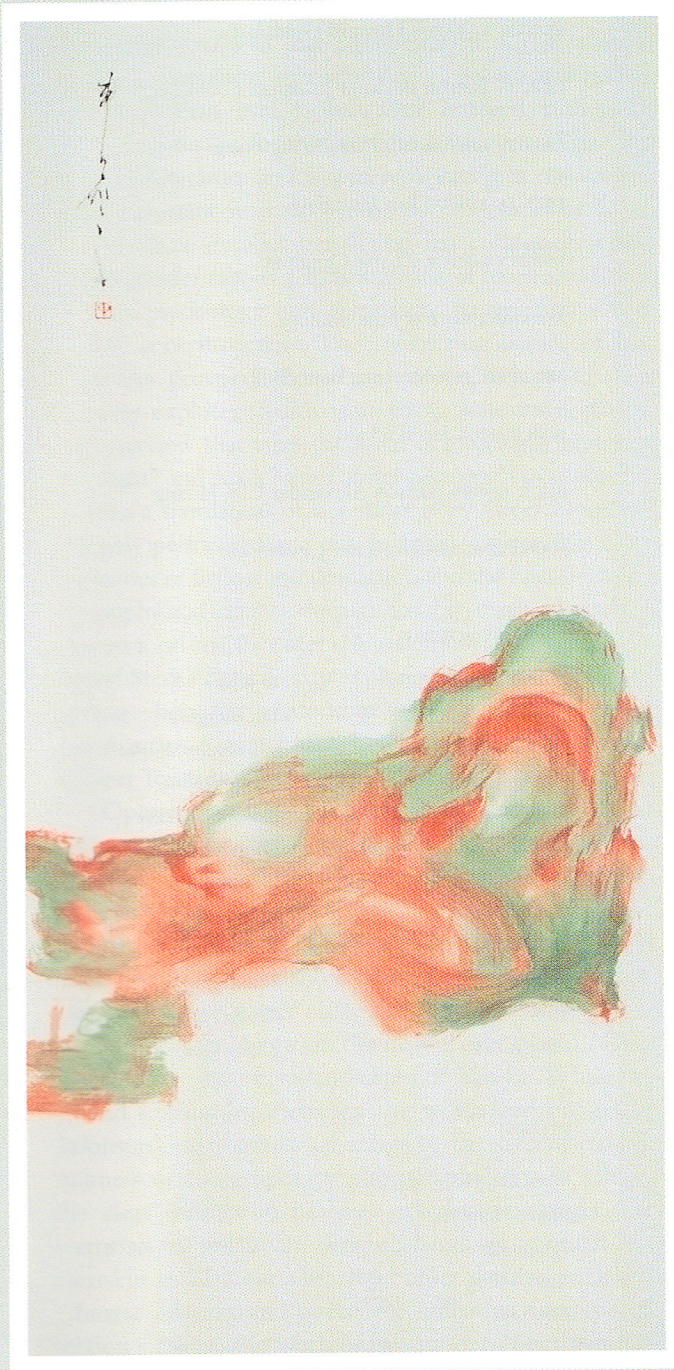
Though biographical in nature, the essays are not organized chronologically, nor do they focus exclusively on subjects of historical importance. The author writes only what she remembers, including random scenes from her own life. Life is short and fate hard to predict; such use of multidirectional narration can avoid the trouble of artificial construction or intentional whitewashing of the story.

Biographical essays—particularly biographies of loved ones—often misconstrue their subjects in accordance with the author's personal sentiments. Yet, after reading *About to Drink Tea*, one does not suspect the author to have fallen prey to this bias. Yang Jiang says clearly, "Everything I have recorded is the truth." Whether her subject be a person or an event, Yang Jiang does her best to leave "relatively truthful representations" of them for history. Her records of family members are written objectively and fairly in simple, appropriate language. "Remembering My Aunt," boldly explores the unlucky marriage and



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宝玉 (*Primordial Stone*), by Che Qianzi, on rice paper, 34  
cm x 70 cm, 2009

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