

*AHRC Translating Cultures 27 June 2013*

# *Staging China*

舞台中国



Staging China



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

# A brief overview of our current work

## Primary research question:

How is China constructed and projected through intra/inter/trans-cultural stage productions in Chinese (including different dialects) & in English, and how can research into languages and translations between medias contribute to understanding of the perceptions of contemporary and historic China?

## An example:

- Why has the ancient play *The Orphan* (first written in the 13th century based on historical events during 600-500BC) fascinated so many artists? What images do various Chinese productions and Nigerian, Korean and the RSC's attempt to create? How can a classical Chinese play be made relevant to today's youth and how do we tackle language, culture and generation barriers?
- Is 'translation' involved in theatre even within China's own territories? Does 'translation' only mean 'verbal rendition' and what happens when a written text transfers to performance and travels from one regional genre to another in different dialects and stage vocabulary? What levels of translation are involved when an English poet adapts *The Orphan* to be directed and performed by British artists? How does the intracultural encounter contribute to the intercultural work?
- How does theatre shape perception of China and Chinese culture through the languages and translations it involves?

***The Orphan of Zhao (2003)***  
**A *huaju* (spoken drama) production**



***Cheng Ying Rescues the Orphan (2005)***  
**A *yuju* (Henan regional opera) production**



## *The Orphan of Zhao (2010)*

**A Chinese production in the Western operatic style**



*The Orphan of Zhao*

(Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria, English 20-22 May 1979)



***The Orphan of Zhao***  
**(Seoul, Korean 2006)**

**The National Theatre  
Company of China &  
Michoo Theatre  
Company**



***The Orphan of Zhao* (Stratford-upon-Avon, English 2012-13)  
Royal Shakespeare Company**





- to reflect on the place of ‘Translating Cultures’ in the disciplinary field or fields in which we are operating,
- to consider the ways in which engagement with the ‘Translating Cultures’ theme has enhanced our work in terms of conceptual underpinnings, methodology, interdisciplinary working, etc.

# Inter cultural performance

- Adapt subject matter & situations from one culture to another
- Transports/translates elements & perspectives across cultures
- The translator / the audience / director 'fill in gaps'

Eugenio Barba et al *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*

To what extent must one 'know' the cultures engaging with each other?

# The professionals

‘ Anyone who practises a craft belongs to his/her own culture, but also to the culture of the craft itself. S/he has a cultural identity and a professional identity.’

Eugenio Bara Cultural Identity and Professional Identity in Hastrup, K et al (ed) *The Performers' Village: Time, Techniques and Theories at ISTA* p28

# Criss Cross

- ‘An over simplification of cultural categories ignores how worldwide identities have grown increasingly complex, multilayered and often paradoxical or conflicting.’ p33
- The gap between the actor’s experience and the spectator's expectations in regard to culture and authenticity is often at the core of intercultural critiques. .... The romanticised search and praise of ‘pure’ or ‘original’ cultures actively impedes critics of intercultural performance from seeing how the genre creates its own world of the play through creating a “practised space”, one sustained by its own intrinsic artistic value.’ p34
- Nascimento, C (2009) *Crossing Cultural Borders Through the Actor’s Work : Foreign Bodies of Knowledge* London:Routledge