

## Re-modelling a Masterpiece:

A seminar on the performance by Leeds University students of *The Sun is Not for Us*

Friday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2012 (9:30—12:00)

Seminar Room, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Foxi Building, Shanghai Theatre Academy

National Association of Dramatists (Shanghai Branch)

Shanghai Theatre Academy,

stage@leedstouring, University of Leeds, UK

### Attendees:

孙惠柱 Sun Huizhu (Shanghai Theatre Academy STA)

李如茹 Li Ruru (University of Leeds UoL)

蒋维国 David Jiang (UoL)

Susan Daniels (UoL)

姜学贞 Jiang Xuezhen (General Secretary, Shanghai Branch, National Association of Dramatists)

曹树钧 Cao Shujun (STA)

邹平 Zou Ping (Theatre Critic, Former Editor of Shanghai Theatre Journal)

丁罗男 Ding Luonan (STA)

李伟 Li Wei (STA)

周锡山 Zhou Xishan (Shanghai Research Institute of Arts)

余忠 Yu Zhong (STA)

何曼 He Man (PhD candidate from Ohio State University)

濮波 Pu Bo (PhD candidate from Eastern China Normal University)

吴琼 Wu Qiong (PhD candidate from University of Manchester)

李孟谦 Lee Meng-chian (PhD candidate from UoL)

Tamara Courage (PhD candidate from UoL)

孙韵丰 Sun Yunfeng (PhD candidate STA)

Chair: 孙惠柱 Sun Huizhu

Minute taker: 桂菡 Gui Han (Postgraduate of STA)

Interpreter: 董维拿 Dong Weina (Postgraduate of STA)

Video: 赵穆 Zhao Mu (Postgraduate of STA)

**Sun Huizhu:** Good morning everyone.

I am honoured to chair today's symposium which has been commissioned by Gong Baorong, the Vice President of Shanghai Theatre Academy. I am especially delighted to welcome back two distinguished alumni of Shanghai Theatre Academy, Professors David Jiang and Li Ruru. They have brought with them an exceptionally creative performance from the University of Leeds. May I welcome you and all of our other participants here today.

Originally it had been the Shanghai branch of the National Association of Dramatists, represented here today by their General Secretary Jiang Xuezhen who was planning to hold this meeting. I first heard about all of this at the beginning of July when I was visiting Leeds University. Li Ruru and David Jiang told me about their performance at the Shanghai International Contemporary Theatre Festival, and I felt strongly that it should be the Shanghai Theatre Academy who held the symposium because this was after all a project by our alumni and was a performance of Cao Yu's works. So I suggested that they contacted Gong Baorong and as a result we were granted permission to hold this meeting.

It is therefore with great pleasure that I welcome both you David Jiang and you Li Ruru along with your colleagues and students here today. Unfortunately, the actors from the play have other commitments today and so they are not going to be able to attend this symposium. If they had have been here I believe that the professors and I would have had a lot of questions and thoughts to share with them.

So, let's begin by inviting Professor Li Ruru to give us a brief introduction about the origins of *The Sun is Not for Us*.

**Li Ruru:** Thank you all for joining us at today's symposium.

Today, we are joined by teachers from the Shanghai Theatre Academy and professionals from the National Association of Dramatists. Both David Jiang and myself, along with Susan Daniels who has been collaborating with me on a drama research project are here as representatives of the University of Leeds (UK). Actually, *The Sun is Not for Us* is just one part of a larger project that we are working on, called 'Performing China on the Global Stage'. Susan is working together with me and she has a new Chinese name: Dai Shulian. We also have four PhD students here and some of them have been awarded bursaries to help participate in this project. The bursary provided £800 which was just enough to cover the cost of a

return flight leaving them to cover the remaining expenses themselves. The general aim of this project was to make Chinese drama better known around the world.

Let me give a brief introduction of how this work has come about. It first emerged out of Cao Yu's Centennial celebrations in 2010. As you know, Cao Yu is my stepfather. In some of the materials you have already seen, I use the term 'bridge' by which I mean gaining an understanding of China through the works of Cao Yu.

This centennial has moved me deeply and has reinvigorated my thinking because I realize that I have an opportunity to tell people who are not familiar with Chinese drama that there is actually an outstanding playwright from China and that the Chinese government and the Chinese people have made huge efforts to publicly celebrate his great plays. I was also encouraged to think that we could make our own kind of contribution.

This was the underlying reason for creating this play. Another reason was that we have both lived overseas for over twenty years now. In that time we have both attended lots of international academic events where we regularly find that few people have any understanding of Chinese drama. After giving academic papers or talks, we hardly ever get any feedback or questions from other attendees because they don't even know what to ask. We have felt pretty disgruntled because we have seen how Japanese dramas are much better known to the general public than any Chinese dramas. So we felt compelled to do something on behalf of Chinese drama. As Cao Yu's own stepdaughter, I have access to many photos of Cao Yu himself and of various performances of his works by Beijing People's Art Theatre.

Fortunately all of the photos that I needed to use were provided to me free of charge. It would have been quite impossible to launch a project of this scale without the support of friends. Take for example Mrs. Wang who is present at today's seminar. She is a producer at the Tian Qinxin Theatre Studio. She was commissioned by the studio to assist us with our advertising and in gaining media publicity.

To be honest, we have struggled to find funding, and so we have had to rely on the help of friends to achieve our goal. The reason why we chose to commemorate Cao Yu is that he has created so many well-known and outstanding plays.

We asked our students to research Cao Yu's drama and read a number of his play scripts as part of our project. They did and so our stage production team members and the actors read a total of five scripts. After doing that, I gave them a topic and told them that what we needed to focus on was the issue of Chinese women in 1920s and 1930s. I then told them to go back to the scripts and find which scenes and bits in the script could best reflect issues Chinese women were facing.

Our Director David Jiang will give you a more in depth overview of how this drama was created. Our purpose was never to simply produce a play

but was also to give those people who knew nothing about Chinese culture a simple understanding of Chinese culture through the stories and characters in Cao Yu's works. These characters can serve as a bridge to help people from across the world to better understand Chinese culture whilst also piquing their interest in China. We have put on three performances so far and will also go on to Cao Yu's hometown, Qianjiang City in Hubei Province. The Qianjiang government has treated us incredibly well and has paid for five return air tickets for us.

We will then go from Qianjiang to Chengdu rather than going back to Shanghai and from there we will fly back to the UK. The British Council has given us a lot of support and our project has become part of the UK Now festival, the biggest ever celebration of arts and creative industries from the UK which is being held this year. Our performance in Shanghai and Chengdu are part of the UK Now event.

In short, I truly hope that more people outside China can begin to understand Chinese drama. There are some colleagues from the West who say to me 'Does China have any plays like our drama? I thought there was only Beijing Opera. I have never heard about other kinds of drama.' Of course, we are limited in what we can do and this particular play has a limited audience. We are also holding a photography exhibition on Cao Yu as a part of the project. We are putting on two exhibitions one in the UK and the other in America which are aimed at communicating Chinese theatre to the outside world. I am always saying that it is worth working hard on this project no matter how much of a struggle it may be. That is all I want to say.

**Sun Huizhu:** Let us now welcome Professor David Jiang.

**David Jiang:** From my perspective, the aim of this symposium was to draw on the expertise of the distinguished guests and professionals present here today and to ask them for their comments and advice. As staff working on this production we should not be the ones who do all the talking. I simply want to say one thing. The arrangement of the script and planning of the performance itself was entirely put together by our actors on their own, after having read the scripts and having shared their insights and opinions on it. As such this play is, to a very large extent, our students' own creation.

The actors came up with some of the special features in the scenes themselves and as director it was my job to link those various scenes together. It became a shared communication process.

Of course they didn't know much about Chinese culture or much about the specific context and so I needed to give them that kind of background information, but I felt that if I were to impose my own particular way of thinking on their ideas then their own original creativity would become somewhat stifled.

So I tried to give them enough space to create their own piece of work. Frankly, you may feel that certain scenes could not be done this way, or you may feel it was not Chinese any more. On the whole I accepted their creative input apart from those parts which really deviated away too far from the original Cao Yu's stories.

That was how I led them in quite a natural way to begin to engage in the creative process. It was a two-way process which enabled us to learn from one another. In my opinion, this is what makes this production a reflection of each of those individual actors. In a way it is quite different from any works I have ever produced before and it is very different again from the convention of rehearsing a play in China.

**Li Ruru:** Now, let's welcome Susan Daniels and ask her to give us a brief introduction to rest of *The Sun is Not for Us* team. I will be her interpreter.

**Susan Daniels:** The actors we choose for this drama were all students who believe that drama is a powerful and engaging force and who were keen to join the project due to their interest in Chinese culture. It was our hope that the project would also be beneficial to the University of Leeds. Our purpose was to select students from different majors as opposed to selecting them from one single major.

Our production was entirely done as an extra-curricular activity and did not give the students any additional credits to go towards their academic studies. This meant the actors needed to spend their free time on the drama both in terms of the time spent on the actual acting and also time spent learning about Chinese culture and reading the various scripts. We made this point very clear right at the start. The students needed to be available for the production not only during term time but also during the holidays. They had to return to Leeds over the summer holidays even though their homes were not in Leeds. This means they had to cover any additional living costs themselves.

Auditions were held this time last year and the director selected fifteen students from the numerous applications we had. Some of those who were selected majored in performing arts. They were hoping to become professional actors in the future, but at that time they were still doing their academic studies. Of the fifteen applicants, two students were from the School of English and were their degree programme was English Literature & Drama and two were studying Chinese in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures. Two other students were studying Performance Management and a further two were studying Performance Design.

There was also a Chinese postgraduate student from the University of Leeds who had studied Culture, Creativity and Entrepreneurship in 2011-2012. What all of these students shared was a belief in the power of drama. They also had ultimate faith in their director, trusting that he could guide them all to produce an exceptional play which could be brought to China and performed in Cao Yu's own hometown.

As you can see on the screen, there are lots of quotes taken directly from our performers and stage crew which highlight the way in which our project was part of a learning process. We started our journey together on this project this time last year and started rehearsals back in January. The performance is divided into several periods and the performers were required to write reports during each of those periods. The words on the screen are direct quotes from their reports.

**Sun Huizhu:** Professor Daniels is an old friend of Shanghai Theatre Academy and has visited Shanghai on numerous occasions. She was once the Head of the University of Leeds' School of Performance and Cultural Industries. Now she is the Faculty's International Director.

After listening to those introductions, I just wanted to add something before I turn to the other professors here today for their speeches. I am of course delighted to welcome them to Shanghai Theatre Academy. In fact, what they brought us was not merely a performance, but a new method of making theatre. What they did was to make British students stand on the shoulders of the giant and then walk forward. This approach to theatre is what we should particularly pay attention to.

I have noticed that today we have been joined by a large number of postgraduate students. Specifically, those of you from the Postgraduate School and from the Department of Directing should go back and tell your supervisors what we have been discussing here today. As Susan Daniels has just said, postgraduate students can cross over disciplinary boundaries. It is not just the students majoring in performing arts that can be actors.

Those who are not majoring in performing arts may be somewhat less adept but they bring with them their own strengths. Those majoring in Acting and Directing should pay specific attention to the following issue: for decades in China we emphasized that acting students should start from writing sketches and then acting them. But in reality can acting or directing students, whose entrance exam scores were so low that they were not accepted by other universities, really write high-quality scripts?

Believing what we have been told that acting is trained through improvisation in the West, our drama academies have also followed suit and have adopted the same method to train our own students. Acting training cannot be based on the hearsay. We can see from *The Sun* that it is a devising piece, but we can also see that it is based on reading a large sum of pre-existing works. Famous actors and actresses like Zhang Ziyi and Gong Li are not expected to be able to write plays and dramas. However the Shanghai Theatre Academy and the Central Academy of Drama, both focus their efforts on teaching students how to write plays no matter how low their score in the standard subjects may be. That's why we have little success even though we put a great deal of effort into writing plays.

In China, it seems that we either focus our efforts on performing one solitary play or on writing new plays which have been written from scratch and

what we end up with are performances that are just too awful to watch. These are the two extremes and no one seems to make an effort to find a compromise. In the University of Leeds' production they have successfully managed to combine script writing with research based on existing scripts from great dramas. It seems so simple but no one had previously thought of that way of doing things.

You need to tell your teachers and professors about this idea and I will also make sure that I tell my colleagues. I might even get you to create a new production using this method. You can choose to base it on whatever you want – works by Cao Yu, Lao She or Shakespeare. This method can be applied to the performance of many dramatists' plays and I sincerely hope that those low quality the so called 'creative' plays can be replaced by this new approach. The works created by students from Directing are generally not too bad because their marks in cultural courses are quite a bit higher. But we should not force students in Acting to write plays because it is a painful process for them to produce something and it is equally painful for the audience to watch.

Now let's welcome Professor Cao Shujun who is an authority on the analysis and research of Cao Yu's works.

**Cao Shujun:** I watched a Chinese opera version of *Thunderstorm* performed by the Shaanxi Chinese Opera Theatre just a few days ago and was impressed by a scene of closing windows in which Fanyi, Zhou Ping and Sifeng [translator's note: three main characters in *Thunderstorm*] sang. They sang beautifully and the scene was very imaginative.

**Sun Huizhu:** Was there a window or a wall on the stage?

**Cao Shujun:** There was a window. All three of them sang together which pretty much resembled the Zhidou (*Challenge of Wits*) scene in Shajiang [translator's note: one of model operas]. Since such a scene never actually appeared in any of Cao Yu's scripts, they came up with the idea for the scene drawing on the various mindsets of the characters. Their singing was wonderful. Therefore, just as I said before, excellent plays can be adapted and then performed on stage in very different forms and styles.

*The Sun* was targeted at foreign audiences and so was based on a foreign interpretation of the Chinese classic. This is quite distinctive when compared to the stereotypical way in which Chinese drama is performed for Chinese audiences. So, I think this show is a novel creation since it provides a particular perspective to the acting of a classic Chinese drama.

I also think this performance has broadened the horizon of Chinese audiences because it shows that the classics can be acted in different ways and shouldn't be restricted. For example, I once attended a symposium of Cao Yu's works in which there were heated discussions and arguments over one particular issue. A well-renowned scholar thought that the performance of *The Wilderness* done by the Beijing People's Art Theatre was

sacrilegious in terms of classical drama because the director of the People's Art Theatre had applied expressionism into the show and the scholar chairing that symposium thought that was an outrageous thing to do.

A Japanese scholar, however, said he liked the show for its innovative methods. I think the director had performed Cao Yu's drama earnestly and with care. You just can't say that he was being disrespectful because Cao Yu's works can be performed in a variety of different manners and styles.

I was honoured to attend the sixth International Shakespeare Association World Congress in 1996. At that time, I was impressed by a number of different styles of expression. There was a performance of *Macbeth* during the opening ceremony where just five actors who performed over twenty different characters all without any stage setting. The show drew its inspiration from Chinese opera and was performed well. That is what we should learn from the West. It doesn't matter if we are talking about Cao Yu or Shakespeare any performance can be done in a variety of different ways.

I watched the Royal Shakespeare Company's performance of *Othello* in Shanghai. In that show, Othello held a pistol, something which did not even exist in Shakespeare's day but the audience loved the show. How do they manage to perform Shakespeare in such a unique way? Why can't we incorporate some of these different forms of expression into our own performances of Cao Yu's works? I think that the Shanghai performance of *The Sun is Not for Us* will open the audience's mind and will make the public realize that Cao Yu's plays can also be put on by bringing together several different pieces at one time. This is a really wonderful creation.

Professors Li Ruru and David Jiang have put their heart and soul into this show and they have determined to figure out how to combine different scripts in order to make foreign audiences really understand. Enthusiastic, engaged actors and teachers from the University of Leeds have really delivered in terms of the script.

In addition, foreign students can learn about Cao Yu's classics through the planning and performance of this script. They are bound to improve and develop themselves in the process.

Next, by way of suggestions for our two directors, I would like to talk about some of the ways in which this show could be improved from the audience's perspective. There is a scene in the part of *Thunderstorm* which Zhou Ping forced Fan Yi to take the medicine. To be honest, I found it really hard to accept this as it deviates so much from the character Zhou Ping in the original script. In Cao Yu's *Thunderstorm*, Zhou is a cowardly man who would never force his stepmother to take medicine even if he was enraged with her. I guess this may be more acceptable to foreign audiences, and so there was a big shock at the end. This is what I felt after watching.



**Sun Huizhu:** I guess the reason is more because the actors are all foreigners rather than it being designed for the needs of a Western audience. In the same way when we say that 'one thousand different people might have one thousand different interpretations of Shakespeare', they may have their own view of who Zhou Ping is and their idea is based on their own understanding.

**Cao Shujun:** Right, this particular characterization of Zhou Ping has been totally redesigned by the directors.

**Sun Huizhu:** But it is the actors who have given a new interpretation to Zhou.

**Cao Shujun:** But I think this Zhou Ping is totally different from the one in the original script.

**Sun Huizhu:** Our directors did not come up with the idea of redesigning Zhou Ping as something of their own making. If the show had been done by a Chinese director, he would have probably forced the actor to perform Zhou Ping in the way you suggested.

**Li Ruru:** If I may interject at this point and talk a little bit about this particular issue. After the first night's performance there was a talk. One member of the audience said, 'The character of Zhou Ping in your show is totally different from the one that I am familiar with – your version of Zhou seems to be hyperactive.' Since our actors were all sitting on the stage, I turned to them and gave them the chance to respond. The boy who plays Zhou Ping was rather clever in his response and he said, 'Because the character Zhou Puyuan isn't there, I can be a stronger character in this scene.'

**Cao Shujun:** As for the scene in *The Wilderness* in which Madam Jiao removes the flower, I think you need to be much more careful about the details. In most performances of this play in China, Madam Jiao tramples the flower to pieces as a way of showing her hatred for Jinzi. However, the way this is expressed in your version is much less emotionally powerful than the encounter in the original version. In your show, there was blood on the screen after Jiao Daxing was killed by Qiu Hu. Personally, I think this is a form of impressionism and I liked it. But I didn't quite understand the ending in which Qiu Hu was shot by several guns. Some directors from the People's Art Theatre also adapted this scene in a similar way to yours. To be honest, I have come to my own understanding on this point. In Cao Yu's *Wilderness*, Qiu Hu is such a man who would rather die standing than chose to live by kneeling down, so he is not killed by others but by his own actions. Your adaptation does not quite fit with this characterization of Qiu Hu.

Your acting also needs to be more detailed in some areas. Take the farewell scene of Mingfeng and Juehui as an example. I would have preferred this bit of the play to be acted in less of a straightforward manner. In the original script, before Mingfeng drowned herself, she went to say goodbye

to her beloved Juehui. The expressionism of traditional Chinese opera is particularly adopted in this scene. Mingfeng went to look at her beloved, called him 'Young Master'. Juehui was busy writing his articles, Mingfeng called him again and only then she jumped in the lake. In this way, the character's emotions can be clearly conveyed to the audience. I am wondering whether you can learn from this and let Cao Yu's play be more expressive?

Finally, I notice that there is a photography display and a series of lectures accompanying *The Sun is Not for Us* production which is quite distinct from the production itself. This is a unique way of presenting Cao Yu's works. Yesterday, I saw the exhibition. The brief introduction to the master is concise and fascinating.

In short, your show provides both Chinese and foreign audiences with a chance to re-interpret Cao Yu's work from a new vantage point. It is exceptional and fabulous. Thank you!

**Sun Huizhu:** Professor Zou, would you like to add anything?

**Zou Ping:** I have been to see a number of plays recently and went to see this show on 6<sup>th</sup> of this month. When I first heard that this show combined four of Cao Yu's scripts, was acted by a troupe of foreign actors and was directed by David Jiang, I was determined to go and see it.

It was really good. I think that Cao Yu's creation and his scripts have real cross-cultural value. He learned drama from the West then told stories about China using Western forms of expressionism. Now, we go back to a Western culture, to Britain, and have British students presenting us with a new story. After watching, I began to think that this show was not so much telling us a Chinese story, but rather was telling us a British one, a Western story.

I am not going to talk too much about the details. As for the scene about Chen Bailu in *Sunrise*, I felt that this was not Chen Bailu but was instead a Western prostitute. The production made me think of the archetypal literary theory. The tiny feet of Chinese women in pre-Liberation China were displayed on the screen and were followed by the appearance of a foot bandage, which was the symbol of restraint.

Your original stated purpose was to discuss the issue of Chinese women in the 1920s and 1930s through four of Cao Yu's dramas. Actually British students cannot possibly understand Chinese culture especially not an in-depth understanding of the situation of Chinese women in the 1920s and 1930s simply through preparations for this production. But there is something which unites us all. Women have been controlled by men across time, nations and social class. I think this is what the show should be expressing. In this way it is a prototype – the first of its kind.

For example, you can make obvious generalizations and classifications in the show. The combination of a man and a woman can express their ideas while the parallel montage is a sort of classification. As for the characters Shiping and Zhou Ping or Juehui and Mingfeng, all of them are servant girls. They are examples. No matter which story or family they come from, the story will inevitably be a tragedy if the male character is the master and the female character is just a servant.

Young Westerners fully understand this concept because this phenomenon is the same in the West where love triangles involving one man and two women or one woman and two men also exist. I won't talk too much about what it really needs to deliver because I think our British actors present their own interpretation according to their own cultural background. So, stories from Cao Yu's dramas all of which have a Chinese cultural background may actually be easier for British students to understand and to perform. They can combine their personal experiences with these stories for further interpretations. Moreover, stories from Cao Yu's dramas have a worldwide meaning which is really worth paying attention to.

I'd like to also talk about how to interpret Cao Yu's dramas. In my opinion, we have restricted ourselves when it comes to commemorating Cao Yu by simply performing his plays in a somewhat conservative way. Directors have the ability to make some changes but the playwright has no such opportunity. Actually it has been quite common both in China and overseas for pieces of classic literature to have sequels. This was especially the case in ancient China. It didn't seem to matter if what was written was a low-quality sequel. This wasn't seen as being disrespectful to those earlier literary masters but was seen instead to be a sign of respect by showing that we were willing to learn from them.

In my opinion, we have become too conservative in certain respects and have a tendency now to just copy the West. Directors make certain innovations simply because these adaptations have proved popular in the west.

Likewise, we won't accept things that the west doesn't accept. So in that way I think your show is really significant. This tour in China to Shanghai, Qianjiang and Chengdu will spread Chinese drama culture to the West and to the rest of the world through Cao Yu's works. Your show will also give us a new vantage point to share with our colleagues in the field of drama, a viewpoint which says that the development of drama can be diversified.

Finally, I personally want to thank you for bringing us such an extraordinary show in which the initiatives of British students have been fully tapped into. This is what our institutes of higher education need to learn. Thank you!

**Sun Huizhu:** Professor Ding, would you like to say something?

**Ding Luonan:** I have been deeply moved by your show. With great efforts made by both of you and the University of Leeds, Cao Yu's plays – the

plays of a dramatist of great distinction in China - have been redesigned in a unique way which can serve as a bridge for cross-cultural engagement. I truly respect your efforts. Nowadays, communications have been increased between people in China and abroad, but I think that more still needs to be done. As Chinese intellectuals, we have a responsibility to introduce our brilliant and splendid culture to the rest of the world.

This show is unique. We have combined works from Shakespeare, Chekhov and even Lu Xun to produce a drama called 'Old Days in Lu Town'. It seems, however, that Cao Yu's work has not previously been blended together. I think we should try.

There were lots of difficulties during the planning. For example, the actress playing Mingfeng immediately rushed to the young master and hugged and kissed him as soon as she saw him.

**Sun Huizhu:** I think that girl might not have understood why she couldn't act that way.

**Ding Luonan:** Exactly, she was very confused why she couldn't act that way. She thought that because it was night time no one would see them. Even though she was a servant felt she could still kiss her beloved young master. But she obviously did not quite understand the real meaning from the original script.

**Sun Huizhu:** Ha! Maybe she just thought that this was the natural way that lovers would express things?

**Ding Luonan:** Right. This point was discussed for quite a long time. It is really difficult to plan this scene by re-enacting the original bit in the script. Therefore, what you have to do in the planning process is to extract the essence of Cao Yu's drama so that the spirit of his work can be captured even if the performance is not quite like stories which take place in China. The most important thing about your production is that it represents the bare essence of Cao Yu's drama. I think you have successfully grasped this point which is the characterization of females during that era.

Actually, Cao Yu's dramas don't just focus on feminism and he is not preoccupied with fighting against a male-dominated society through his works. In my opinion, it was the living conditions of Chinese people at that time which is the universal theme that we share in common. This situation which saw people being tortured and controlled can be best reflected through the lens of Chinese women. From the foot binding to the spiritual world of the characters, Cao Yu's plays focus on the individual's spirit rather than their physical body. He does not write about material deprivation or about the human body. As we can see from the example of Fanyi in *Thunderstorm*, she is not poor; nor does she worry about food or clothes. The same can be said for Chen Bailu. They committed suicide because of mental anguish.

Foot binding becomes a symbol of destroying one's spiritual life. I have fully grasped the meaning of your show which moves from the opening

foot-binding scene to the use of a foot bandage and finally to the rope which is used for hanging. You have caught hold of the most salient point in his work. As such it doesn't matter if some parts of the play deviate away from the original meaning or are totally westernized or take on a British slant. But I do think your show is somewhat contradictory as far as the acting is concerned. You have only selected certain bits from Cao Yu's dramas and the question remains whether your show adopts a realist approach or a more impressionistic style? After watching the production, I found some scenes very realistic while others were not. Thus the performance lacked a natural flow.

Cao Yu once said that novels could be finished but that a play can never be completed. That is the fascination of drama. Playwrights provide us with their scripts, but the life of that drama goes on beyond that. It continues on forever. The greater the dramatist is, as in the case of Cao Yu, the more abundant the treasures within the drama which can be explored. His continues to live through every performance of his work, and so we can say that we have done a meaningful job in adding to the life of Cao Yu's dramas.

**Host:** Professor Li Wei.

**Li Wei:** Many thanks to Prof. Jiang and Prof. Li, who have brought us such a good show. About two years ago I found out that they were working on this project. Having been expecting this show for such a long time, I finally got to see it. I saw the beauty of art in this piece, and it was also an excellent opportunity for me to study. The piece is creative, and is both a reinterpretation and a reinvention of Mr Cao Yu's work; both a commemoration to Mr Cao Yu himself and a promotion of his work.

There are two aspects of the production that I would like to emphasize. One which is very important is the theme, which focuses on women. The other is the form, which is very poetic. So through both theme and form, this piece of work fully expresses the global vision of the company, showing their ability to connect Western and Chinese cultures.

Speaking of the theme, three major discussions in today's world are class, race, and gender. Mr Cao Yu's work touches on at least two of them. Prof. Jiang and Prof. Li have brought up the topic of gender and class, and then fully expressed Mr Cao Yu's concerns. This is also the proper angle from which to introduce Cao Yu's work to the West and initiate an international dialogue. What is specifically valuable to our Theatre Academy is that this project combines modern techniques from both the West and from China, creating a poetic and imaginative piece of art.

Regarding the theme, i.e. the first aspect to which I referred, I think they created a double-effect of alienation. Firstly, they used British actors to play Chinese people. Secondly, this drama is divided into different segments and then reconstructed. As Professor Sun Huizhu pointed out earlier, we are no longer moved nowadays when we see *Thunderstorm* or *Sunrise*, This British play is different; it brings us completely new feelings.

Not long ago, I heard a French scholar talking about intertextuality and I think *The Sun is Not for Us* is a good example of this. Audiences need to have a good knowledge and understanding of Cao Yu's plays in order to have a dialogue with the playwright and the director. The director is not repeating Cao Yu, but rather discovering him. I would say that it is like writing a research paper on the topic of 'Women in Cao Yu's drama', in the form of performing art, a way of presenting research which we have not seen before.

The second aspect is the ingenious combination of different techniques, which includes realistic acting and modern expressions.

Just now Prof. Ding mentioned that there are places that are not harmonious. I personally think that the whole production very harmonious, and I enjoyed it very much. Also, the three dimensions of the front and back stage can stimulate our imagination. The performing space, without setting up a realistic stage, was liberal and lively. It was most successful. As for the colour, it was mostly white, with a small amount of red. The foot-binding cloth was grey, and I think the use of colour here is imaginative. The foot-binding cloth is symbolic, though I won't repeat what the professors have already mentioned.. I think, from an aesthetic perspective, the stage produced a poetic space for the play.

I would like to ask the two professors a question. This drama, it seems to me, revealed the confusion, struggle and many other emotions of Chinese women in the past. It is a good description of the past, and also meaningful to our times now. I don't think you used any characters from *Peking Man*, did you? I think if we want to express Cao Yu's perception of female consciousness, then *Peking Man* is the turning point of such perception, even in the past from the only...

**Sun Huizhu:** Li Wei, please allow me to interrupt a little bit, and I will let the other two to add to this. Jiang and Li have mentioned that the British students have read all 5 scripts. *Peking Man* is the most difficult one I suppose, and it is not easy for the British students to understand it. Jiang and Li can verify my point.

**David Jiang:** Professor Sun is right. In fact the students have read all 5 scripts, including *Peking Man*. We asked them to choose the ones that they were moved by, the ones they had feelings for. They did try some scenes of *Peking Man*, but we left it out in our final selection. The reason was that the subtlety the play expresses and the elegance it produces too complicated to be included in this style of production. *Peking Man* is profound, and more Chinese.

**Li Ruru:** Also it was because each of our actresses plays one female role, and we didn't have any extra energy to add one more section. Adding one or two more roles meant adding two more actresses, and we didn't have the energy or money for that. Many professors mentioned foot binding. In fact it is really from our students' own reading and digestion of their reading of *The Family*. Having read the foot-binding, students asked if this was painful. Indeed, very very painful. The feeling of pain touched them. This is not only the pain in the feet.

**Sun Huizhu:** It is the pain in the soul.

**Li Ruru:** Yes it is the pain in the soul. The pain is gradually expanded, so I think it is interesting. The definition of 'director' here is different from what we see in China. We need to respect students' understanding, and then to guide them. It is difficult.

**Sun Huizhu:** Li Wei I think you asked the right question as to why there is no *Peking Man*.

**Li Wei:** Yes. I think these four plays show the consistency in Cao Yu's views on women. In his later work, *Peking Man*, he himself was experiencing some changes in the perception for women. He admired Sufang, who is different from previous female characters. So I would like to say that I enjoyed this play very much and would like to raise questions to the two professors here. Thank you.

**Host:** Prof. Zhou Xishan.

**Zhou Xishan:** when I arrived at the theatre the day before yesterday and saw the title of this play, I realised that it has captured what Cao Yu was trying to say. Most people don't pay attention to this sentence, and a line is just a line. You two, however, picked it out. It is fantastic, and it marks the soul of Mr Cao Yu's plays.

In addition, we can translate this Chinese sentence into English in many ways, but you use the natural and simple one and I think it is brilliant. The structure of the sentence in the original play consists of the syntax of English. We can all feel the illumination of the sun. You catch the lively soul of Cao Yu's script in this way. You break the plays and reconnect one to another, so if you do it wrong then there is this risk that we call, 'A square peg that doesn't fit into a round hole'. So this sentence represents the tragedy of women living in a traditional society, and shows the feelings of the disadvantaged — *The Sun is NOT for US*. The sun is free, it shines on all of us, however, the women in your play say: 'it is not ours.' How cruel and heart-breaking it is.

Secondly, in English novels we see many tragic stories between the maid and the master. I think Cao Yu inherited Chinese traditions but also studied the West. He was an English literature student at Tsinghua University, and he wrote of the love between the maid and the master. So for him, to come up with new endings to his stories was not easy. He broke the formula of the master betraying the maid; in *Thunderstorm* there is no betrayal within the two couples. Even Zhou Puyuan, in his soul he does not betray his love; he is forced to give it up, so it is painful to him. You catch the patterns of tragic women: Chen Bailu can't take her love; Mingfeng and Sifeng are treated faithfully, but even faithful couples are forced to break up. It is even more painful than betrayal. You capture the point, and I think this is fantastic.

As for the acting, although it is not professional, the voices are light and natural. So we can imagine the joys and sorrows in training them. The discussion here is unlimited, and we don't have to touch on every aspect. So I see a new style that you two bring to us, and you catch it incredibly accurately. I learned a lot, and this play has broadened my horizons. Thank you very much.

**Host:** Prof. Yu Zhong.

**Yu Zhong:** After seeing this play I started to think about many issues. I saw the second performance and started to think about it both from the perspective of teaching and of text. After seeing this play I realised it is the way that we can do the acting and perform Cao Yu. We've explored the possibility of adaptation before, for example, we adapted *Hamlet*. I am an actor, rather than a researcher on Cao Yu or on theories. However, I felt the tension of the play right from the start – the bound feet, the cracks on them – then I started to guess how old the feet were. The foot-binding cloths, also the group of actors and actresses who were intertwined with the cloths, were very meaningful. Some professors have talked about it from the perspective of acting. I think using bare feet, neutral clothing, and representative figures that wear bibs and vests is a good interpretation of Cao Yu. I feel that it is closer to Cao Yu. Cao Yu himself endured many things. Things were tough, but he endured. In many ways Cao Yu 'died' after 1949, though his life carried one. I think to interpret Cao Yu in a neutral way is accurate and meaningful. The acting is not strong, but we do not need a histrionic outburst. The 'taking medicine' is different.

The most striking action on the stage the running of the female characters.. It is full of tension, yet not too over-the-top.

Also, when Sifeng rushes to Fanyi and Zhou Ping, there is a big turning back from Zhou Ping, and I think it is brilliant. Expressing it in this way is easier to accept, especially to foreign students. It is just like when we perform Shakespeare's plays, we use Chinese actors to play foreigners, and the actors all wear wigs pretending to be Westerners. It seems that we have to perform in this way. I think the neutral way that your production adopted is better. The two professors are building a bridge, and realising Mr Cao Yu's long-cherished dream.

In fact during the Expo, there was the play *Dance of The Swans* in the UK Pavilion. So the British ballet company used three Chinese middle school students as well. The combination was interesting. I think this idea is the same as what the one the two professors used in this play. The fusion of Western and Chinese cultures surpasses Cao Yu's play, and we don't need to clearly distinguish the actors' origins, since we are in the era of globalization. We can use this style in the future. As to this play, in terms of acting, I prefer to work with amateurs, and I hope the Shanghai Amateurs' Drama Club will have a promising future. What we call 'professional' today is artificial, and lacks simplicity. There are some places, for example, the ending of some sections that are not perfect. For example, one character turned his/her head, here we needed a longer pause and then you could enter the next scene. That is my suggestion.



**Host:** We have many graduate students here, and now they have the floor.

**He Man:** Hello all, I am He Man, and my English name is Amanda. I previously graduated from The People's University of China, and I am currently studying at Ohio State University in the U.S.

My doctorate degree is interdisciplinary, in Asian Studies, Drama and Acting Studies.

I came up with some ideas when I was seeing this play, specifically on the foot-binding cloths. No one can avoid this issue. I discussed it with the director and actors after seeing the play. I look at it from a student production's perspective. Students only have limited resources, so when we are working on a play, it has to be simple—simple to the extent that our students can control it. Also it has to be effective. Foot-binding cloths are there, the picture is there, and the tension is there as well. So we can impress the audiences. Foot-binding cloths are also helpful in costume design. Girls wear different colours of cloths, and their ribbons are different. They tie them up in different places as well—some around their breasts, some around their waists. These symbols show their identities to the audience. The audience, whether familiar with Cao Yu's work or not, can see the construction of the characters directly, and connect the female actresses together. This is important. To Western students the important thing is how men tie up those women. In addition, although those women face different destinies, they are sisters, and are oppressed.

Secondly, using 'Marriage' to oppress women. For example the wedding scene, Chen Bailu's interaction with other people, all these are purely about money, and pure materialism. Also I find it interesting in the sex dance between Jinzi and Qiu Hu. Does this dance say that women are the oppressed sex, or that sex oppresses women? In the end, we see that marriage, sex and money all oppress women, and I think that is how British students understand the oppression of Chinese women.

Talking about director's work, after the first rehearsal day the director said: 'today, the play showed that firstly, we can play Cao Yu's drama this way; secondly, that British actors can play Cao Yu's works. ' Other scholars have also mentioned this. So I think we should not talk about cultural standards here; that is not what we need. We need to initiate a dynamic dialogue between China and the world, it is that which is important. Whether this play is the starting point for the recognition of Cao Yu's works in the UK or in the world, and the way in which Cao Yu's works are perceived in foreign countries—those are the directions that academia and those who work in performing arts can move towards.

Finally, we need to study this new acting style. Prof. Li Ruru said: 'It is difficult to produce drama in foreign countries, very difficult!' I agree. I understand it very well. It is not about academia, but responsibility. We need to take that responsibility.

**Pu Bo:** I have been looking forward to this play for two years. I participated in the actors' audition and rehearsal process in the first version in 2011.

I also did some preliminary preparations. I am very content with this play. I would like to discuss it from the perspective of posture aesthetics.

*The Sun is Not for Us* is a reflective piece of modern drama. It uses revelation and different scenes to put together the history of the female predicament. Of course, as we see in the play, the troubles and the fate of the women, no unlike men, stem from the interpretation of gender relations. This premise produces drama from the themes of 'desire', 'morality', 'body', 'ethics', and has an intricate poetic value. Segments highlight expression, so, aesthetically, the *Sun is Not for Us* is a generalization and also it is abstract. It detaches from a specific and linear original script, and then becomes a theatrical expression with subjectivity and new characteristics. This is not a copy of a Cao Yu play, and not simply a deconstruction, but a new work with contemporary thinking from both directors and the whole company. It is rich in post-modern style.

At its core is the physical structure of the piece, presented through the following characteristics: First, the juxtaposition of drama, a lot of juxtaposition:

1. The plot and set, four pieces of the drama on the stage are intertwined and knotted together, producing a new sense of drama;
2. The juxtaposition of dialogue and dance;
3. The use of performers backstage creating silhouettes, that is another juxtaposition;
4. The juxtaposition of still pictures and dynamic pictures and so on.

Secondly, the use of ceremony. For example, when Fanyi takes the medicine, there is a new meaning here, and it is already close to a sublime and metaphoric stage language. Through the silent body, assisted by the rhythm, lighting, physical movement, rather than the language or dramatic conflict, the performance gains new significance.

The significance can also be seen from the angle of posture - the body is expressing desire and craving, even when it is silent. I also noticed that in the drama we always see the construction and repetition in the sense of sculpture. Sometimes it is a repetition of one pose—eight female characters holding the foot-binding strips, then imitating the pose of hanging oneself. Between commemorating and revisiting, between visual and actual feelings, the sense of ceremony and religion is established. To me, those moments as well as the freeze-frames on stage complete a sculptural ceremony. In the end, the sculpture is finished, and the theme emerges from the surface of water.

The third one is the use of highly self-conscious fragments. For example, 'Two dimensional images are combined with three dimensional tubes in different shapes'; and stillness is combined with movement.

However, the staging here is not a simple binary opposition. For example, the element of time in this drama, along with the two-dimensional video and the action on the stage created a space and a time that is bizarre and yet full of tension. Time and space here are chaotic and ambiguous, which means that a three-dimensional element is inserted into the two-dimensional element, something that resembles what Edward Soja calls

the 'third space'. So the multimedia elements that are randomly inserted need not to be described in a rational way, for they are a way of constructing emotion, a flowing role. Because of that, the use of fragments is obviously highly self-conscious. For the above-mentioned reasons, I believe that this play is poetic and successful. The play also surpasses reality, which renders it even more tragic.

Thank you.

**Wu Qiong:** Hello everyone, my name is Wu Qiong, and I am from Manchester University. My research is on adaptations of Shakespeare. I learnt about this play after I met Prof. Li Ruru last year, and I had been looking forward to it. Now I finally saw it.

I feel that I am a very traditional Chinese person, and I think I can represent some Chinese women. I have seen this play twice, and the first time I saw it I cried three times. Many plays can bring you different sensations or impressions, but there are very few that can truly touch you.. I understand that the play might not be perfect because it is a student production, but partly because it is not completely perfect, I can feel its sincerity. The eruption of simplicity is very touching.

When I heard that you would combine the four plays together, I started to wonder what I would do if I were in your position. How would I alter the four pieces? I think it is difficult, and I admire you all. I think the alteration is ingenious in this play. For example I like how the ending corresponds to the beginning. In the beginning the body movements reveal the relationship among those figures, and people might not understand such movements. However in the end we saw the repeat of the beginning in the form of dance with dynamic music. At this time the power of the stage exploded.

The effect of this play is strong and effective, and I like it. Within such time limits however, one and half hours, we need to delete the historical background and keep the segments in order to condense the whole story. I think Cao Yu's plays, more often than not, reveal not only the relationships among people, but also the time period. However when you work on this play you need to cut the historical background, and one result is the lack of historical feelings, or I would say the lack of logic. On the other hand, it does produce the feeling of allegory, of little stories. Little stories can be told in every country.

In comparison, those are my favourite adaptations: *The Family* and *Sunrise*. I can't help comparing the adaptation with the original. Characters are bound to be different, but why should the work be faithful to the original anyway?

The spirit of the original is hard to grasp. We talk a lot about cross-cultural drama, but many argue that 'cross-cultural drama' is a pseudo-proposition, for we have no idea what cross-cultural actually is. Now people say that with the current understanding of the environment, things should develop in the world following ecological principles. Different forms of drama appear, and I don't think it is necessary to be faithful to

the original. We choose one prototype from the original, and develop it in a way that is suitable for our feelings and for our time, we place some emotion in it so that it can move people, and that is the contribution of the play.

Take the story of Chen Bailu for example, it is altered a lot from the original. In the original there are many background introductions, but they have disappeared in this newly created piece.

In this play, Chen Bailu is vain and money-driven. She plays with men, and presents herself as a social butterfly. However when she speaks, I was moved, and I felt that she was another woman who represented many other women of our time. Those women are vain and chase after material goods because they do not know what they want. They probably dislike this type of life but have no power to fight back. So it turns this figure into a modern one, and that is why I love her and is touched by her.

I have thought a lot about the scene of being forced to take medicine in *Thunderstorm*. The image of Zhou Ping is quite different from the original one, but on the other hand, why can't we present him in this way? Why not a playboy, a superficial one? Zhou Puyuan is not in this play, and only Zhou Ping keeps blaming Fanyi and saying that she is crazy. In fact Fanyi's madness is caused by both the father Zhou Puyuan and the son Zhou Ping. However in this single role two generations are incorporated. Why not? It provides some originality. .

On the other hand, I think Fanyi is a bit plain. It seems in this play Fanyi is too young, and she is quite emotional. Her tragic power is less than expected.

I am not so content with *The Wilderness*. I think there is a lack of tension within the action. Although I like the use of multimedia, I don't really like the part when music is added to the dancing, and the fire after the male's breathing. In fact when I watched this part I thought the dancing was enough; I could understand it. Dancing expresses the language in the original work very well, and I really like it. Adding images and music is too much.

### **He Man**

Fire is not too much, and it is associated with the understanding of their sexual relationship. What I understood was that students at Leeds would regard their relationship as an oppression of Jinzi's personality rather than liberation.

In the relationship, Jinzi is oppressed and sacrificed, a victim, and that is why we need fire. We need the sound of male breathing here, so that the image of the woman can be lowered. This is one issue. Another is Zhou Ping's hyperactivity.

We all know that Zhou Ping is weak, but how should that weakness be expressed? The weakness here is the feminization of the male; how do we

express it? Normally we present Zhou Ping as a decent, hesitant and unmotivated man. However this British actor is anxious himself, and both in the UK and in the West anxiety is regarded as a big weakness. The anxiety is expressed through body language. I think that British students express this new type of weakness from this perspective. How to be weak? It is interesting. Crazy and gentleness are easy, but weakness is something quiet, that needs to be expressed with movement. I think it is quite interesting.

**Wu Qiong:** I think there is one line in *The Family*: 'If there were an after life, I would still choose you, but I don't know if you would choose me or not.'

I don't know if that is added by you or not, but I was touched by it. Later when she was talking to Cousin Mei, she said: 'I thought you understood that I truly loved him. At that time I believed in it, truly.' For the three roles I think you managed very well. The very long parts in the original piece are expressed through several segments. I was really touched. Thank you.

**Host:** Our next speaker please.

**Lee Meng-Chian:** Hello everyone, I am Lee Meng-chian and I am from the University of Leeds.

I am very lucky, for I have been able to see this play in Edinburgh, Leeds, Shanghai and other places in China. Cao Yu's work means a lot to me. I grew up in Taiwan, and for a long time Cao Yu's works were not allowed to be performed in Taiwan. When I was in middle school, I saw one of Cao Yu's plays for the first time, and it was *Thunderstorm*. Later I entered the National Taiwan University of Art and studied Theatre. I had the opportunity to learn how these plays were created and to go to see real productions. For me, Cao Yu's work is my first impression of mainland China.

Just now many teachers made interesting suggestions. I am doing research on cross-culture studies. Although the opinions of experts and scholars vary, and it is difficult to reach one clear agreement, in my view, they are based on a common standard. That standard is that cross-cultural understanding is the fusion of different cultures as well as traditions in performance.

I think the performers in *The Sun is Not for Us* are amazing. The play precisely combines different cultures with different forms of acting, which differs from traditional acting. Also it is an exchange and a discussion between Chinese culture and British culture. In my view, I do not think that it is a group of British students playing Chinese drama, for a play like this belongs to the whole world, and it is universal. Some elements in human beings are universal, and that includes the pressure of living, social emotions, class, and human desire. Those are the universal elements and therefore the essence of culture. This human essence assists the British actors to understand the script and build their characters. I think it is crucial. Regarding the adapted parts, I am not so familiar with Cao Yu's work, so I cannot talk that much about roles and lines, but I just wanted to

share with you some of my thoughts on the performance in general.

I think what impresses me most is the connection between the original and the adaptation. I have been doing research on cross-cultural studies and have seen many adapted works, new interpretations and directors. They are critical towards the original, or approach the original in a subversive way because they want to go beyond the original and make something new. Therefore, to some extent, they artistically destroyed the original.

I think Professor Sun made a good point, which is to 'stand upon the shoulders of the giants, and walk forward'. I don't know much about the situation in Shanghai, but to take Taiwan as an example, the quality of the drama scripts cannot keep up with the demand for performances. There are many cross-cultural performances in Taiwan, and I think this is good. We have classical works, which are of existing artistic value, to help us discover something new. This will improve the audiences' knowledge of drama, and to perfect our dramatic performances.

There is another point that I also would like to share. When I was seeing the performance yesterday, a reporter asked me how I felt about this play. He asked me that as a Chinese person, I would like to see Chinese actors or foreign actors performing Chinese drama. I replied: Chinese. Of course, the best performance in Chinese drama comes from Chinese actors, even though the British students take this play very seriously. From understanding and choosing the script, to the discussions and performance, they've learnt more about China through the process of production, despite the fact that they are not perfect. So I said to the reporter, other than art, cultural exchange is more important. Through such activities young British students can understand more about Chinese culture. International audiences have this opportunity to appreciate Chinese culture, and then to know that China has so many excellent plays. I think those are the results that come from the efforts made by the two teachers, and I deeply admire them.

**Sun Yunfeng:** Experts and professors, hello. I am Sun Yunfeng, and I am a first year doctoral student at the Shanghai Academy of Drama. I study modern and contemporary Chinese drama. I am also among the very few women today to raise my opinions here.

I would like to talk about the play and my feelings for it. First I need to state that I am not a feminist, no. Just now He Man and Wu Qiong touched upon this topic, but did not go into it. Now I would like to discuss whether you want to highlight the female images, unconsciously, when you are interpreting and working on this play.

First, let us look at *The Family*. I feel especially moved by this play, and shed tears when I read it, all in one sitting. I have never had such an experience before, and up till now never for other plays. I wonder why I behaved like that. I started to try to find the reasons, and later I realised that it was perhaps because of the relationship among the characters in *The Family*. The figures feel real and close to me. *The Family* is a

scenario that everyone can enter. I think I entered it deeply, and the way it feels so real is what touches me the most.

I noticed that *The Sun Is Not for Us* focuses mainly on the relationship between men and women. However I think the tragedies of those women characters are not purely because of their relationships, the motivation of their lover, or the purpose and demands of a relationship. I question whether there is a women's mentality or the sense of feminism in this play, for it emphasizes the issue of relationships. I understand this as taking a 'micro-feminist perspective' as a starting point, because 'feminism' is violent and extreme. Feminism has been mentioned a lot in art works, and the term used in all of them is the same. I think mini-blogs, mini-message, mini-film nowadays all include the sense of 'a little bit' of feminist perspective in them. Thus I feel if we use 'feminism', it would be too much, a little bit is okay – this is what I meant by 'micro-feminist perspective'.

I think that in all of Cao Yu's plays female characters have a single formula in their destinies. He puts those women in difficulty, in hardship, and then tries to let them escape. Therefore they have to depend on men. Take Chen Bailu for example, her motivation is that she has to pay the bills because Pan Yueting bankrupted.

Hua Jinzi, on the other hand, relies on Qiu Hu. She wants to go to 'the other world' with him. However Qiu Hu collapses and is destroyed, so she turns herself into a tragedy. Some later works follow the same formula, which is the dependence on men. Since men are weak, the women must suffer failure and destruction. So here I feel Mr Cao Yu is positive in depicting women's struggles. Meanwhile these tragic characters prove what Engels once said: 'Only when family disappears can women be liberated from chores, and be truly liberated.' This means there is a dilemma here. So I think this play is inspiring today in how to balance the value of women and a happy family.

Other than that, in terms of the form of expression, I really like the layered space that you created. When I entered the theatre I did not know that there was a backstage. Then the projector was on, and so was the light, then I started to realise that perhaps that was a place for performing. Also we have talked a lot about foot-binding. I saw the picture; there is a fly on the bound feet and it is symbolic. The bound feet in this picture are ugly, no sense of beauty. However, in old days and under the aesthetic perspective of men, women had to sacrifice their body and soul in a distorted way and to be painful to satisfy men. It is sensational to me, despite the fact that the picture is really ugly. That is what I want to say, just to make sure whether I can interpret this way, and whether my interpretation is a little bit extreme.

**Li Ruru:** No, not at all. I need to say to you all, that Professor Gong made a lot of efforts so that we can hold the meeting today. Gong arranged Sun Yunfeng for helping us. It is Sun Yunfeng who managed it between Shanghai Academy of Drama and The Association of Drama in Shanghai. So here I would like to say 'great many thanks' to Yunfeng. As a first year doctoral student, it is not an easy job both as a speaker just now and as a programme manager. The Shanghai Academy of Drama really got talents.

**Host:** We are almost finished, and anyone wants to give a one-minute talk?

**Zou Ping:** Can we change the order in this play just as playing poker?

**Li Ruru:** In fact we had a 2011 version with different actors. Now it is the 2012 version. These two versions are different, and this replies to Mr Zou's question. Ours is a group work, and the production varies based on actors. What really good this time is that stage crew members read the script with the actors. We worked day and night. I don't think many people here can do that, and I treasure it.

**Host:** I have something to say in one-minute. Two questions, and they need not to be answered right now, otherwise it will exceed one minute. The first question is for Sun Yunfeng. If I say that I am a feminist does that mean that I am more entitled than you to talk about the subject?

**Sun Yunfeng:** Are you?

**Host:** You don't have to answer it now. The second question is to director David Jiang. I have asked him privately just now. Is every line in this play from the translated copy? He said no, they translated some parts creatively. My question is, if you leave them more space, is it possible that the actress who plays Chen Bailu would say: 'why are you so stupid that you went bankrupt. I can bring your company back to life if I settle you down' after asking 'how much money do you have'? Is it possible that there is this impulse here because they need to use their personalities to adapt? We can discuss it later.

**David Jiang:** Many are not written by Cao Yu. Many lines and even part of a scene is not Cao Yu's work. So I said to the students: 'Cao Yu and all of you are the playwrights of this performance.'

I would also like to add some of our thoughts in this production. I am a director, and as a director I need to work with the materialistic consideration. Directing and performing are laboured professions. I may describe myself as a scholar-director in our profession, but we cannot solely focus on the literary aspect. As a director, the materialistic and concrete matters take priority.

The first consideration is that among our twelve actors, eleven are not Chinese faces. I think, well, they are not Chinese anyway so don't force them to pretend to be Chinese. Also, as to why it is not Zhou Puyuan who forced Fanyi to take medicines, it is because we don't have Zhou Puyuan. The reason for that is simple. In last year's version, we had Zhou Puyuan. Our last year's cast members had strong feelings about the relationship between Zhou Puyuan and Fanyi, and thus in the drinking medicine scene, we had the father, the son and the stepmother. This year the actors do not have much feeling about it so we just scrapped the scene along with the character. Also we combined the father and son of the



Zhou family, and Zhou Ping is the one who forces Fanyi to take the medicine. Many scenes you saw are actually based on the feelings and therefore the choices of crew and the cast members.

This is what I learned the most this time. I tried to set out completely from the performers' point of view, to inspire them to try their best to express their genuine feelings in acting rather than force them to do anything. This is what I learned. We often say that this is a learning process, and I think the learning is bilateral, I am learning too.

Many thanks today for your participation and good suggestions. Some are what we have not thought of before. So thank you very much to all of you who bring you views and share your thoughts with us. We represent stage@leedstouring as a group as well as ourselves—although we also belong to the Shanghai Theatre Academy. I am now the Honorary Professor at STA, and although it seems that I am a guest here, I still need to say this: Thank you, sincerely, for your valuable thoughts. Thank you all.

**Host:** Now let's have Secretary General Jiang to announce the closing of this meeting.

**Jiang Xuezheng:** Professor Sun assigned me this as homework, and as a student I need to complete it. I have a lot to say. The Association of Dramatists organizes cross-cultural activities like this very often. Yesterday I participated in a seminar on *The Hongqi Canal*. The backing of yesterday seminar was strong, including the Ministry of Publicity, the National Association of Chinese Dramatists, and our Shanghai Branch was merely the organizer. At the meeting we fully affirmed the thematic works from different perspectives, however we said differently on mini blogs. In that seminar people dozed off. In contrast, today's seminar is a real and substantial discussion. Finally, I would like to add that a performance never ends – its embers are re-lit through each subsequent performance and seminar. Thank you all.

Now I announce: dismiss. (Applause)