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Staging China Symposium March 26/27 2013

Report of the meeting of the contributors to the Chinese language book *The Orphan of Zhao*

The Relation between the Critics & the Practitioners of Theatre Chen Ying (PhD student, Shanghai Theatre Academy)

I was honored to be invited to participate in the symposium of "Performing China on the Global Stage: People, Society and Culture" hosted by the University of Leeds in March 2012, and to be assigned to make notes observing the discussion about the book

“Chinese Image: A Cross-Cultural Study of *The Orphan of Zhao*”.

In the first part of the meeting, the critics presented their views of *The Orphan*. Most of them regarded it as a literary text, and discussed how to understand the meaning of Zhao’s Orphan in terms of Western Philosophy, Chinese Philosophy, and of different epochs. In the second part of the meeting there was a heated debate between the practitioners and the critics. To me, it was very interesting to see critics and theater practitioners gathered in the same room, and arguing about the same play. It revealed a very important point that both the critics and the practitioners need to recognize who their companions are. The critics should not act as arrogant scholars, addicted to their own deep theories. They should consider what kind of criticisms would be of benefit to the practitioners. The practitioners should know that their plays will have some very intelligent audience members, whose criticisms might be valuable in the development of the plays. Both of the groups should accept the existence of each other, and they should fully understand each other so that a positive interaction of practitioners and critics can be formed to benefit the contemporary theater in China.

I was struck by the words of the famous playwright Yu Qingfeng. He said if the symposium had been held earlier, his own version of the *Orphan of Zhao* would have been better. The discussions about Zhao’s Orphan crossed many fields and they helped to expand his horizons. This is a very good example of the potential for a beneficial relation between the critics and the practitioners. But still some of practitioners could not understand the meaning of the criticisms and there were some misunderstandings. Due to the Chinese education system, it is true that some of the practitioners are not used to discussions on literary or philosophical qualities of drama. Since they are the pioneers of the Chinese theater, the depth of the plays depends on them being engaged in this type of thinking.

On the other hand, a play is not a novel or any other kind of literature. It is a comprehensive artistic work which combines actors, directors, designers, scenographers, investors, venues etc. The critics need to have more methods about analyzing the theater in different ways from analyzing text (a novel, etc.), which unfortunately is the main approach of the theater critics in China nowadays. The critics should build a sense of stage and space; they should know the possibilities and limitations of a performance.

So I hope both the critics and the practitioners can remove the arrogance and the ignorance they show towards each other. They should understand the work of each other and benefit from each other’s work. They should know they are companions who share the same task to build a creative environment for Chinese contemporary theater.

Knowing this is a great gift I get from the symposium of “Performing China on the Global Stage: People, Society and Culture”, since I

myself am a candidate to be both a critic and a practitioner.

Staging China Symposium March 26/27 2013

Review of *Energy: Essence of the Chinese Theatre* Drama Workshop led by Tian Qinxin & her direction of *The Orphan of Zhao*.

Sun Yunfeng (PhD candidate, Shanghai Theatre Academy)

Workshop

Dramas by Chinese avant-garde modern drama director Tian Qinxin always impress the audience with body language of enormous tension. The comparison between *The Orphan of Zhao* directed by Lin Zhaohua and that by Tian Qinxin easily reveals the prominent distinction in that Tian intensifies the body language of actors. Tian directed a workshop, named *Energy: Essence of the Chinese Theatre*, for students in the University of Leeds in the afternoon of 26th March, 2013. This workshop may enable us to draw close to Tian Qinxin's dramatic approach.

The workshop consisted of two sections: firstly, training for the eyes; secondly, training in body language. In the first section, participants were arranged in two lines, and told to stare straight ahead and describe what they saw to others. Subsequently, the students in each line turned to stand parallel to each other. The students were required to stare into the eyes of the student immediately in front of them and suppose that the person was an apple. Then they told everyone what kind of apple they perceived the other student to be. They could be an angry red apple, or perhaps a smiling green apple. The director intended to train the actors in accordance with her belief that actors need to see what is in their heart, and so be able to penetrate all the abstracts and see an image. When an actor is performing, their eyes as well as their body language and dialogue, are able to communicate with audiences and transmit information, such as the character's emotion, personality and even highlight the development of the story of

the drama. In drama directed by Tian Qinxin, the expression in actors' eyes turns into a covert but profound method of narration.

The second section was the training in body language. Again, the students were required to stand in two parallel lines. Maintaining a distance, one student acted aggressively towards the other, such as punching, kicking or bumping. In response, the other student reacted as if the force was real. For example, if the force was aimed at the stomach, the recipient acted as if it had been hit. Reactions to force reflected the imagined impact. After this training, the students were given scenarios and asked to react. The first circumstance provided by director Tian was that a dog was in front of them. The second circumstance was that the person had quarreled with their father but he was suddenly taken ill. This section aimed to train the actors' ability to respond. The last section was more training in body language. The students were divided into groups of four-six people. Their subject was "China in your mind", which might mean the transportation, or restaurants or architecture of China, and so on. It took the participants about ten minutes to express the impression of China through body language, during which some of the students acted as Chinese noodles and some portrayed a crowded Chinese bus. Their performance was vivid and interesting. In the training in body language, Tian simply provided students with a proposition so that they could extend their imagination and stretch their body to explore their body language. Chinese modern drama attaches great importance to the dialogue and script, because they are taken as the most significant narrative method. However, Tian's drama has a unique feature believing that body language and body shape can also be a special and effective method of narration.

All the participants in the workshop said they had benefited a lot, as personal experience on the stage was the most direct way to appreciate Chinese drama. The traditional Beijing Opera has always attached importance to the training of actors' eyes, in that eyes make a bridge between actors and audiences, and convey the delicate emotion of actors. The notion of exerting power from a distance is seen in Chinese artistic culture for example in the traditional swordsmen originating from Chinese Qigong and a system of deep breathing exercises. The integration of the two methods by director Tian conserves the most traditional and typical Chinese culture in the creation of new drama.

The Orphan of Zhao

The vitality highlighted in the workshop of director Tian is also revealed in her directing work in *The Orphan of Zhao*. The drama starts with the orphan, Zhao Wu, being besieged by soldiers with spears in their hands. With no spoken lines, Zhao Wu is circled by

the soldiers in the centre of the stage and then thrown by spears from one side of the stage to the other side, and killed. Whilst this series of ceremonial actions have no dialogue, the exaggeration and rhythm of action provides audiences with audio and visual stimulation, provoking their imagination. *The Orphan of Zhao* forsakes a simple, straightforward narrative method and adopts a nonlinear narrative way, in which present intermingles with the past. This kind of flexible narration forces the audience to take part in creating the story.

A multitude of motivation details in *The Orphan of Zhao* are drawn from Chinese opera, such as the measured steps of Zhao Wu on the stage. Tian Qinxin does not simply combine modern drama and the tableau from Chinese opera, she instills rhythm and vitality into the actions on the stage, Thus Chinese culture is portrayed as both traditional and modern, and so this could be one feature of a national Chinese modern drama.

In terms of stage artistic design, *The Orphan of Zhao* directed by Tian Qinxin utilizes two large blocks of color, red and black, and the combination between the virtual and the real. These give the audience both a demonstration of the traditional impressionistic style and a taste of modern western art from the stage design.

When making her adaptation of *The Orphan of Zhao* in the era of Zaju of Yuan Dynasty, Tian Qinxin maintains a distinguished perspective of her own. This perspective is demonstrated for example in the last scene. Looking at his blood father Cheng Ying, and his adoptive father Tu Angu, Zhao Wu says “I had two fathers, but I am an orphan from now on!” In the production by Tian Qinxin, the orphan defines the circumstances, although in this historical period such intimacy toward another individual was impossible. So in Tian Qinxin’s direction Zhao Wu labels himself an orphan, because he has to rely on himself to choose the right path of his life.

The reason why Tian Qinxin became a famous Chinese avant-garde director is that she both retains traditional Chinese cultural factors, and instills western drama elements into her productions. In 2003, when Tian directed *The Orphan of Zhao*, she said,

Returning to China after studying abroad, Luo Jiangtao, our artistic designer, discussed with us whether we could give a show less reality, and borrow big color lump or use drastic color to accompany a grave dramatic subject. Therefore, we came up with a few plans and the stage art highlighted with red and black came into being. In the process of choosing a picture, we pondered on the choice of using a picture both with style of traditional Chinese pictures and of Western

pictures, and eventually we selected the picture painted by Zhao Wuji in France.

All in all, the energy of the hand of Tian Qinxin is a power which deeply moves audiences and makes her drama absolutely special in directing style.

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Staging China Symposium 27 March 2013
Review of Presentations by Theatre Professionals and Researchers
Wei Feng (PhD candidate, Trinity College Dublin)

On the 27th March 2013 at the University of Leeds, trailers for eight different adaptations of *The Orphan of Zhao* were displayed to Chinese and non-Chinese audiences. The dazzling show presented four traditional Chinese opera productions (*xiqu*): Beijing Opera (*jingju*), Cantonese Opera (*yueju*), Hubei Opera (*huaguxi*), and Henan Opera (*yuju*); three Chinese spoken drama productions, by Lin Zhaohua, Tian Qinxin, and students from Zhejiang University; one Western-style operatic adaptation by the National Theatre of China; and one western spoken production by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC). Of the significant issues surrounding these productions, I was particularly impressed by the cultural implications in the strategies used to rewrite the same story.

Good stories are retold time and again. The original story of *The Orphan of Zhao* dates back more than two thousand years and is no less foreign to the RSC than it is to Chinese practitioners in terms of ideological and historical context. By considering the versions of the tale by William Hatchett, Voltaire and Arthur Murphy in Europe, and Ji Junxiang and Xu Yuan in ancient China, we

can see how different methodologies can create varied transformations of the same story. This is reflected in those productions displayed at the University of Leeds, which exemplify Erika Fischer-Lichte's concept of 'interweaving cultures in performance' (2009, 393). Cultural materials in both the past and the present tense, and from diverse cultural backgrounds have been combined to form new aesthetic paradigms, challenging the concept of cultural purity or authenticity. Due to the assimilation of Western ideas into modern China, and RSC's allusion to Chineseness, all of the plays shown can be said to interweave Chinese and Western cultural elements.

Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) playwright Ji Junxiang's adaptation is the most influential historical production of *The Orphan of Zhao* and became a prototype for those that followed. Contemporary Chinese productions unanimously downplay his ending in which the characters Zhao Dun, Gongsun Chujiu, Han Jue, and Cheng Ying are rehabilitated by the new King, and Tu'an Gu's entire house is exterminated. According to Wang Xiaoying, director of the *yueju* version, the uniqueness of his own production lies in 'its traditional source and modern conscious and humanism' (2006), which can also be said of the other versions. When Ji Junxiang wrote this play, political resentment towards the oppressive Mongolian authority was inferred by 'pointing to re-establishing the Song Dynasty with Cheng Ying's preservation of the Orphan of Zhao' (Fan Xiheng 2010, 28). It was these feudal patriarchal norms that determined that it was conceivable for a father to sacrifice his own child for a greater cause, for instance, to protect his noble master's only descendent. These entrenched ethics meant that Cheng Ying's bitterness and psychology was neglected in both Ji Junxiang's Yuan *zaju* version, and in Xu Yuan's *chuanqi* version. In fact, the characters in Ji Junxiang and Xu Yuan's plays do tend in general to be flat embodiments of ethical ideas, rather than rounded human beings. Enlightened by Western humanism, contemporary Chinese productions depoliticise the content by placing value on the personal virtues of their characters. We can see this in Ma Lianliang's *jingju* production, which diverges little from Ji Junxiang's plot but fully explores, and elaborates on, Cheng Ying's psychological struggle and hardship. This renders the story more emotionally appealing and rationally acceptable.

In the original version, the character of the orphan also comes across as somewhat futile, doing little justice to the title. To contemporary audiences less informed by feudal patriarchy, it is suspiciously inhumane that the orphan should without hesitation kill his adoptive father Tu'an Gu simply because of a predestined mission. This accounts for why most of the contemporary productions shown at Leeds University have rewritten the story such that the orphan chooses not to kill Tu'an Gu, but rather to either let him commit suicide (RSC, *yuju*), let him go (*yueju*), or to give up (Lin). The sense of moral obligation is interspersed with disruptive and self-reflective personal choices. Even the stereotyped happy ending becomes tragic in almost all of the Chinese Opera *xiqu* productions.

In spite of a sense of modern consciousness, the defining didactic function of *xiju* still persists in the productions shown and

some of the producers claim that they have adapted *The Orphan of Zhao* to appeal to the absence of justice, faith, and mutual trust in contemporary Chinese society. Experience shows us that in order to teach through theatre, one has to appeal to the audience's emotions. Scenes in which Cheng Ying is denounced, wronged, and afflicted are the most heartbreaking episodes of the story. The more miserable the character looks, the nobler he becomes, and the greater the emotional impact on the audience. Yet, it would seem that while this strategy is affective for Chinese audiences, the same cannot be said for Western audiences. Instead of emotional appeal, Western theatre relies on reason, insisting that characters' actions be logical and coherent. Fenton's production with the RSC bridges some gaps in the logic by offering an explanation for the character Wei Jiang's sudden return, or the orphan's motivation to kill or not to kill Tu'an Gu. This functions to make the characters actions seem more plausible - a 'problem' not addressed in many Chinese adaptations. Nevertheless, Fenton's emphasis on logical actions in part two of the production (replacing Cheng Ying's bitter narrative with several dramaturgically conflict-less scenes about The Orphan) renders it far less intense and dramatic than part one, which basically follows the same plot as the *jingju* version. While part two is indeed coherent and logical, it is neither touching nor gripping. Furthermore, despite Fenton's efforts, there are other problems he fails to notice. Of the scene in the RSC version in which the torture of the Princess's maid is replicated, a critic complained that her actions 'have zero impact on what happens next' (Theatrical Geographies 2013). One does not know whether this is an intentional strategy or an error on the part of the playwright. Here we can see that Fenton's hybrid dramaturgy mars the stylistic consistency of the production.

In terms of content, the RSC inscribes a Western mindset onto the Chinese story, as can be seen in the portrayal of the ghostly Princess who in the Chinese adaptations is not conveyed to be mentally afflicted, as she is by the RSC. But nothing better demonstrates the RSC's emphasis on the humanity of the characters than the confrontation between Cheng Ying and his dead son. Director Gregory Doran acknowledged that it was difficult to understand why Cheng Ying sacrifices his son, so the final scene was added to offer some explanation. The archetype used for the RSC's rendition can be traced back to the Abraham-Isaac story in *Genesis*. From a Christian perspective, it seems that only God, or those acting in the name of God, are entitled to request self-sacrifice from others. This is reflected in the RSC's concluding scene when Cheng Ying begs his son for forgiveness, and the dead son questions, 'Why did you hate me? Why did you love the Orphan of Zhao?' (Fenton 2012, 69) Regarding the use of Cheng Ying's dead son to convey a sense of humanity, the RSC production does have Chinese counterparts. In the *yuju* version, Cheng Ying is constantly reminded of his dead son through the characters of his mother, Han Jue, Gongsun Chujiu, and Cai Feng. Also, in the *yueju* version, after 'returning' their adoptive son to the Princess, Cheng Ying and his wife depart tragically, renewing their previous loss and affliction. Despite the humanity portrayed, the Chinese versions persist in emphasising the importance of the State over the individuals though the silence of Cheng Ying, his wife, and his dead son. Here we see an intertwining of traditional ethics

and modern mentality.

Interestingly, Lin Zhaohua's and Tian Qinxin's spoken drama productions are two completely innovative renditions of *The Orphan of Zhao*. Lin and Tian are both heavily influenced by Western methods and rewrite the story using other historical sources or pure imagination. Both complicate the tale, if not deconstruct it altogether. In Lin's production, most characters have sophisticated personalities working within a complicated political context. Lin's orphan refuses to acknowledge the identity suddenly imposed upon him and will not kill Tu'an Gu, making the ending completely unexpected. In Tian's production, the orphan has an ambivalent but equal respect for both fathers. Furthermore, the character mistakenly kills Cheng Ying, and Tu'an Gu commits suicide, leaving the deprived orphan facing an unpredictable future. The subversion of the original story exhibits Lin and Tian's questioning of the original historical narrative on the one hand, and their comments on social problems on the other. In Lin's version, the orphan's avoidance of revenge is reminiscent of a self-deceptive person who turns a blind eye to history and personal responsibility. Tian adapts the play to reflect her sorrow for 'chaos in society, permeation of desire, breakdown of moral baseline, and loss of manners' (Tian Qinxin 2003, 38). These ideas converge in the orphan's loss of self between the teachings from a benevolent father and a malicious one. Lin and Tian's enlightened approach to *The Orphan of Zhao* offers new interpretations of the well-known tragedy, but also presents a paradigm for interweaving modernity and tradition. By comparing the spoken drama versions with the *xiqu* versions, we have to inquire what causes the divergence of their approaches and subsequently different endings? What restrains and interrupts a bolder assimilation and representation of modern subjectivity? Is it due to *xiqu*'s didactic function and its related ethical context, or an unknown fundamental weakness in the genre of *xiqu*?

As illustrated by the comparison, the ethical and aesthetic distinction between contemporary and ancient China is demonstrated in the productions, as is the distinction between China and the West. Spectacular though the RSC's version may be, the interweaving of Chinese culture with Shakespearean tradition had the potential to have contributed to the emergence of a new aesthetic had the RSC better handled the cultural origins of *The Orphan of Zhao*, or given more thought to Chinese aesthetics. The diversity of endings in the Chinese versions can be attributed to the uneven interweaving of modernity, traditional ethics and aesthetics, social condition, and inevitably, each individual practitioner's subjectivity. As far as they are concerned, '[t]he representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed table of tradition' (Bhabha 2004, 3), which is especially true of the spoken drama versions. Such cultural interweaving will continue in theatre, but only with a deeper comprehension of temporally or spatially distant cultures, rather than a preoccupation with one's own tradition, can such interweaving of cultures in performance be effective and productive.

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Performing China on the Global Stage: People, Society & Culture

University of Leeds 26-7 March 2013

Comments on the presentation by Michael Walling

Re-Orientations: An Orientalist Gaze from the West

Yang, Zi (Post-doctorate, School of Media and Design, Shanghai Jiaotong University)

At Performing China on the Global Stage: People, Society and Culture, a two day international symposium held at the University of Leeds on 26th - 27th March 2013, Michael Walling, the director of the company Border Crossings, gave a talk about his *Orientations* trilogy to present his perspective on China. I had seen *Re-Orientations*, one part of this trilogy back in October 2010 in Shanghai and was deeply impressed by this multimedia production *Essence from Orient and West*, which was produced by artists from five countries: China, Britain, France, Sweden and India. From the point of view of Chinese drama circles, it was a landmark event. It was the first time a Chinese-produced work had been performed in the reputable SOHO theatre in London's West End with twenty three performances from September 7th - 25th 2010. It also functioned as a pilot for Chinese actors in performing abroad. Yu Rongjun, the producer of the play, a playwright and the deputy general manager of the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center, said in an interview:

This is just the beginning. It is said that Chinese dramas hardly go abroad due to language barriers. But since 2001, Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center has carried out various attempts. Not only have we have made several good plays, but also started contact and cooperation with troupes abroad.... The performance of *Re-Orientations* is our first performance in London's West End and there are bound to be difficulties.... We need to seek common ground and build a "road" for us all to walk forward on,

regardless of our “differences”.¹

The poly-locality of the performance is reflected in the backgrounds of the production crew of *Re-Orientations*. Michael Walling, the director, is from the British theatre company Border Crossing, and of the ten actors, three are Chinese, three British, two Indian and two Swedish. The stage crew, including set and costume designers, lighting designers, choreographer, video designer, dramaturgy and associate director, are from Britain, France, India, China and Sweden respectively. The preparation, rehearsal and performance of the production were carried out in Shanghai and London and the story was adjusted according to the cultural differences of the two cities. The theatrical poly-locality is reflected in various global spaces represented on the stage. The characters taken on by the ten players, and the story itself, represent regions of India, Sweden, Shanghai and rural Northeast China. Poly-locality contributes to a sense of transcending the local. In the performance people of different ethnicities and from different places present their feelings about a new Shanghai they have constructed in their mind’s eye.

Re-Orientations uses a story of a divorced British couple searching for their daughter as the basis for the production. Refreshing multimedia techniques offer a vivid expression of the roles and places of the performance. The production brings together the stories of Marie, a British woman working for an Indian charitable foundation helping local people to rebuild their homes; her ex-husband Julian living in Shanghai; a young Swedish couple Johan and Maja; Wang Caiyou (Sammy), a sex-worker from a village in Northeast China; Cuihua, Wang Caiyou’s sister, who left her hometown for Shanghai after her husband sold their newborn daughter. The characters converge on Shanghai and tell their own stories.

During rehearsals Michael Walling used workshop-style improvisation based on resources from his previous productions *Orientations* and *Dis-Orientations*. As he said in his presentation, “There is no script, no story, just actors and a rough direction. All

¹ Programme of *Re-Orientations*

stories are composed by actors together during open improvisation.” *Re-Orientations* contains fragments of stories that lack an opening, development, change or ending.

When he first went to Shanghai in 2005, Michael Walling was surprised to discover the city is a global metropolis. He said in his editor’s notes,

As a Westerner, I found many aspects of the city oddly familiar: the teeming commercial streets, the designer labels, the mobile phones, Starbucks and McDonalds. But these familiar aspects of globalized culture were made strange and disturbing by being placed alongside things so deeply unfamiliar to me: bucket of live crabs, Taoist temples, intricate calligraphy, Yue opera and tai-chi in the parks. In Shanghai, Starbucks didn’t seem quite the same as it did in London. The great German theatre artist Bertolt Brecht would have understood this and approved: his theatre depended on people seeing things that they had previously accepted in new ways, and so coming to regard them as strange and questioning their assumptions. Theatre is only interesting and useful when it is strange.

Obviously, the hybrid modernity² produced by the combination of West and East that has permeated the urban spaces of Shanghai made Michael feel oddly familiar with the city, while at the same time deeply unfamiliar. He conveyed his own sense of and feeling about Shanghai through his theatre productions.

The families and love presented in *Re-Orientations* are all broken apart: Julian divorced his wife Marie, Cuihua left her family, Alex committed suicide after romantic rejection by Song, Julian made a clean break from Wang Caiyou after their one-night stand, Johan and Maja also separated.

² Michael Walling & Roe Lane, ed, *The Orientations Trilogy*, Border Crossing Ltd,2010,p.4.

The blending of rural and urban, and the development of a local city into a globalized one, are also dimensions addressed in the performance. In order to keep a foothold in Shanghai, Wang Caiyou, a young man from rural Northeastern China, dresses himself as a bargirl and gives himself the fashionable English name Sammy. He plans to earn a lot of money to send back to his mother in the countryside, and his ridiculous Pidgin English hints at the efforts and optimism of poorly educated Chinese youth striving to assimilate into the global metropolis.

The discrimination against female children in rural China is presented in this stage play from a Western point of view. The selling of Chihua's baby by her husband indicates the tradition of "preferring boys to girls" in the Chinese countryside. The departure of Cuihua from her family then reveals the struggle for self-improvement that Chinese women face in the new era.

During the performance, the character of Marie offers a definition of "home." When Smeeta, an Indian reporter says to Maria, "Charity begins at home. How do you define home?" Marie replies, "Home is where the heart is." This reflects that in this time of global migration movement, "home" is no longer confined geographically, but endowed with a spiritual significance. This conceptual transformation provides rationality for the internal logic behind the character's behaviour. Therefore, by focusing on "where the heart is," Cuihua's departure from her family, Wang Caiyou struggling to integrate into a modern city, Alex's suicide, Marie's family's search for her, and the broken affections between Johan and Maja, can all seem more logical.

The Chinese "homeland" represented in *Re-Orientations* is conveyed from a Western perspective. When Wang Caiyou describes his hometown to Maja at Starbucks, detailed images are shown on the LED screen. The landscape of rural China, the weathered face of Chinese elders full of wrinkles, the working women at factory production lines. Even the women militias from the Cultural Revolution are shown. All of these are symbols of the "hometown of Wang Caiyou," presented in the production as distinguishable from Shanghai, a financial center and globalizing metropolis with IKEA representing the business imprint of Sweden. The cultural identification and urban subjectivity of the people of Shanghai are full of ambiguity. The two differing but mutually

intertwined cultural spaces leave the characters unable to define themselves.

Beijing Opera and the fact of female characters being acted by male actors carry an oriental exoticism in Maja's eyes. Chinese religion and the traditional rural practices are presented through Cuihua's rude behavior and received by Julian as different from his "previous assumption." The prototypes of "China" and "Chinamen" as exotic figments of the Western imagination are deconstructed. Wang Caiyou is far from the traditional image of the ugly, weary, timid, opium-smoking, pigtail-wearing Chinaman as imagined by the Western public. He is shown to exert substantial effort to melt into the city and to change his fate, which transforms him into a modern figure. However, Wang Caiyou's ridiculous Pidgin English and his occupation as a cross-dressing bargirl and sex-worker, still reflect a certain morbidity latent in the idea of the Chinaman.

Michael Walling reiterates his personal objective as being to reproduce "my visits to China" on stage, to converge the Orient and the West, the traditional and the modern, the rural and the urban, in Shanghai. In Michael Walling's production, Shanghai is the feminine "other" - a place of romance, exoticism, unforgettable memory, beautiful scenery and extraordinary experiences, distinguishable from the normal or authentic Orient.

This particular image turns out not to be a universal one but rather the Westerner's traditional perspective of the Orient. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said introduced Gustav Flaubert's ideas of oriental miracles and stated that European spectators look to the Orient with a position of dominance. They maintain their sensibilities but never join in, choosing instead to keep a distance and waiting for new opportunities for bizarre *jouissance*. Said notes that this is, in fact, the Description de l'Égypt through which the Orient becomes a living tableau of queerness.³

As the symbol for the backward nation, the Orient is endowed with an authority to illustrate oriental culture within the framework of Western centralism. This is an important issue discussed by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. In his opinion, orientalism refers to the

³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, London, Penguin Books Ltd..

Orient as it is constructed by the West - the presumed and imagined “other” becomes the mirror image and verification for Western culture. Orientalism imposes a “fabricated orient” upon the non-West, framing it within the Western power structure in terms of systems, cultures and ideologies. This goes further in accomplishing colonization in with respect to culture and linguistics.

In this sense, Michael Walling’s “gaze” on Shanghai fails to avoid Western centralist framework. Therefore, what *Re-Orientations* presents on stage is less the journey of Julian and Marie from the West in search of their family, than it is an orientalist view of Shanghai.

Performing China on the Global Stage: People, Society and Culture

International Symposium Organized by the University of Leeds,

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Report on Sessions about Editing the English Book

Tang Renfang (PhD candidate, Hull University)

This report focuses on the sessions of discussion at the symposium about editing the English book entitled *Spoken Drama Productions in the Millennium: Theatrical Encounter with Politics, Society and Culture*. It was prepared based on the conference transcripts and speaker presentations. I would like to thank the editor Professor Li Ruru and all the other book contributors for allowing me to use the materials in their presentation and the recordings of their discussion in this report.

The last decade has marked a significant revival in the popularity of Chinese theatre. The National Theatre of China's *Richard III* in Mandarin was invited to perform at Shakespeare's Globe in April 2012 and fascinated London theatre-goers with its Chinese elements. The RSC's adaptation of the classic Chinese play *The Orphan of Zhao* into English spoken drama, written by James Fenton and directed by Gregory Doran, has provoked heated debates in the academia. Chinese theatre is joining the trend of globalization and playing an increasingly important role on the world stage. In such a context, the international symposium "Performing China on the Global Stage: People, Society and Culture" held in University of Leeds on March 26-27 is a timely and important event.

Of the various sessions of this symposium, I have been most impressed by the discussion about editing a book in English entitled *Spoken Drama Productions in the Millennium: Theatrical Encounter with Politics, Society and Culture*. Since the introduction

of Western-influenced spoken drama to China via Japan in the early 20th century, cultural exchanges between East and West have led to new kinds of experiments and innovations. With Professor Li Ruru of the University of Leeds as the editor, scholars from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Australia, North America, and the UK are going to produce their observations and reflections about the latest development of Chinese spoken drama, the various faces it presents on the Chinese and world stage in the millennium, and its interactions with Chinese politics, society and culture in the context of globalization.

The book will cover a wide range of themes and a diversity of spoken drama productions that have arisen in the last decade in China. Being well-published authors of Chinese theatre, Rossella Ferrari from SOAS, UK and Rosemary Roberts from the University of Queensland, Australia, are going to offer their vision of contemporary Chinese theatre in their Western eyes. Ferrari will make her observation and analysis on “Avant-Garde(s) and the Intermedial Stage: Some Trends in Beijing’s Experimental Theatre at the Start of the Twenty-First Century.” Her chapter outlines some debates and trends in Beijing’s contemporary experimental theatre scene in the context of the growing internationalization and commoditization of the Mainland Chinese cultural field. It addresses the work of Beijing-based avant-garde director and filmmaker Meng Jinghui and of the so-called ‘post-Meng’ generation by making a case study on the production *Flowers in the Mirror, Moon on Water (Jinghua shuiyue)*. In her chapter “Shang Yang and the Performance of Historical Drama in Reform China,” Roberts argues that the play *Shang Yang* is not simply a eulogy for China’s current leadership. The chapter adopts the approach of theatrical semiotics to investigate how various theatrical systems of the play function in the construction of the image of Shang Yang as a heroic yet problematic figure and argues that while elements of eulogy are dominant, aspects of the play can also be read as an allegorical criticism of or warning to the current Communist leadership. Such a perspective is usually not the one that can usually be taken by a Chinese scholar due to the censorship of publication in China. Thus her chapter will add a more open and objective insight to this new book about contemporary Chinese theatre. Among the book

contributors there are two PhD students—Tarryn Chun from Harvard University and Pu Bo from Eastern China Normal University. Tarryn Chun’s “‘Theatre Without Borders’: Penghao Theatre and *The Story of Gong and Drum Lane*” and Pu Bo’s “Transcendence and Subversion of Theatrical Conventions in *The Little Society*: Postmodern Aesthetics in China’s Postdramatic Theatre” take concern about forms of “grassroots theatre” existent in the local communities and university societies in China. I admire the two PhD students, because they have got an opportunity to write a chapter in this up-coming book, which will enable them to test out their ideas and critical thinking about post-modern Chinese theatre. Joining the team for a publication will surely be a sound support for their PhD research. I wish I could do as well as them in my PhD research. Professor Li has also made a considered arrangement for Chinese scholars based in Taiwan, Hong Kong and overseas to talk about the new development of Chinese theatre. Chou Hui-ling’s paper, “Staging a New Venture: Tian Qinxin and the Policy Change on ‘Spoken Drama Industry’ in China,” examines theatre works created by Tian Qinxin, one of the most prominent spoken drama directors in China, and her long-term partner-producer Li Dong, charging their struggle to strike a utopian balance between marketing strategy and artistic ambition. In his “New Millennial Taiwanese Theatre and Its Double: Dislocating Exilic and National Identities in Stan Lai’s *Secret Love in Peach Blossom Land*,” Alexander C.Y. Huang explores the double cultural identities of Taiwan represented in the Taiwanese theatre in the new millennium. He is going to address the following issues: What are the artistic and political significances of post-2006 revivals of Stan Lai’s 1986 play *Anlian Taohuayuan (Secret Love in Peach Blossom Land)*? How does the tragicomedy about diasporic experiences address the disjunction of space and time? Why does Lai return again and again to the devices of theatrical doubling and dual identities of his characters? How might this series of revivals help us gain insights into the China-Taiwan cultural conjunctions? Lin Weiyu from the National University of Tainan, Taiwan thinks that using a foreign play like Ibsen’s *The Master Builder* will best demonstrate the famous Chinese director Lin Zhaohua’s innovation in acting. Therefore, she has chosen to talk about “Lin Zhaohua and His

Experiments—Innovation of *Huaju* Acting in Lin’s *The Master Builder*.” The chapter gives description, explanation and examination of Lin’s concept of acting, including the relationship between actor and character, the Stanislavski system and *xiqu* acting, actor as “puppeteer and puppet,” “narrative acting” and “dual structure acting.” Siyuan Steven Liu from the University of British Columbia, Canada is going to discuss the famous Chinese play *The Wilderness* in his “‘Union in Flesh and Soul’—Wang Yansong’s New Interpretation of *The Wilderness* by Cao Yu.” In his analysis, Liu argues that Wang Yansong’s production has freed Cao Yu from the play’s realistic details by establishing the play’s expressionist/symbolic essence as the imposing theme from the beginning to the end. Gilbert Fong and Shelby Chan from Hang Seng Management College, Hong Kong will collaborate in writing a chapter entitled “Romancing Hong Kong: The Revelation of *Sweet and Sour Hong Kong*.” Their observation about the phenomenon of Hong Kong theatre is that it is multifaceted; though it is hard to decide what is typical or representative, there are some general trends that could be observed. There are three aspects which they think are essential in the discussion on Hong Kong theatre: market, art, and politics. The authors consider *Sweet and Sour Hong Kong* as a modern-day myth. It is a eulogy of Hong Kong virtues of hard work, resilience and optimism. The play is also functional and didactic. As a government-subsidised production, it serves as a kind of propaganda or a charter for social actions—to spread the faith in the city’s resilience that it will stand up again after a disaster such as the SARS epidemic. While their concern is to find out some general rules or new trends of Hong Kong theatre through discussing the production *Sweet and Sour Hong Kong*, it is a pity, in my point of view, that choosing such a production, they could not have a chance to employ their expertise in drama translation since both of them work in the School of Translation at Hang Seng Management College and have more strength in the research of drama translation. It is for sure that the editor and contributors of this book have formed a very strong team, with Professor Li Ruru and Alexander Huang being leading researchers in the field of intercultural theatre and Chinese theatre. Another scholar among the book contributors who has a word to say in this field is Chen

Xiaomei, whose *Occidentalism* has exerted influence on the theorization of cross-cultural appropriation. Chen is going to write an interesting chapter entitled “Commercializing ‘Main Melodies’: Meng Bing and ‘His’ Party, Army and People.” Her chapter draws readers’ attention to the contrast of “Main Melody theatre” (*zhuxuanlu xiju*), which is usually considered a boring propaganda genre promoted by the CCP in order to maintain its rule over the Chinese people, and a “Meng Bing phenomenon,” which boasted the first and only drama festival staging 14 of his plays by prestigious theatre troupes all over the country and enabled the director to receive all the drama awards available in 2010. The chapter explores the reasons why the director has been politically correct, artistically innovating, and commercially successful in the making of Chinese theatre. Besides the above mentioned authors and titles, two other scholars will also make a contribution to the exploration of Chinese spoken drama in the millennium. Yan Haiping’s chapter “Conditional Cosmopolitanism: *Prince of the Himalayas* and Intermedial Turn in Contemporary Chinese Theatre” will give her interpretation about *Prince of the Himalayas*, a *Hamlet* source play in Tibetan language. Ma Haili from the University of Leeds will talk about a Chinese comedy *Lu Ding Ji* in her “Laughing Deer in a Cauldron.” Using Mikhail Mikhailoviet Bakhtin’s carnival theory to make a case study of *Lu Ding Ji*—a Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre production, this article looks at the reasons behind the success of the stage show. It suggests that the popularity of the play lies in its deconstruction of power and order, the creation of a carnival atmosphere and the temporary realisation of a world of equality and individual freedom. Learning that the author herself was a *yueju* actress formerly, I felt it a great pity that she could not have a chance to talk about a *yueju* production since this book aims at a study of spoken drama while *yueju* is a genre of traditional Chinese music theatre.

Based on the above introduction and evaluation, we can confidently draw a conclusion that this is going to be a wide-ranging book exploring in depth various aspects of the latest development of Chinese theatre in the millennium. Led by Professor Li Ruru, the two sessions of discussion for this book on March 26th and 27th at the symposium were fruitful. The book contributors interacted

and worked together, exchanged their research outcomes, and reached their agreement on the methodology, conceptual framework and unification of the content—one of the aims of the symposium has been fulfilled. I wish success of the book's publication and am looking forward to the pleasure of reading it in the near future.