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The Opening of Shanghai International Contemporary Theatre Festival 2012
British Performers' Interpretation of Cao Yu's Classics
Daily News, Tuesday 6 November 2012
(Translation of extracts)



The most eye-catching drama is a cross-cultural production: *The Sun is Not for Us*. Through the innovation of young British performers, the language of the Chinese master playwright is combined with modern acting, physical movement and dance. They present the emotions of the drama from their perspective, reflecting the hardship of a destructive Chinese society. Through eighteen years of imprisonment in a marriage, how a woman develops a love affair with her stepson; how a once innocent female student turns out to be a social butterfly who circles around wealthy men after leaving school; how primitive desire in a woman from a rural area encourages her to rebel and pursue a new life; why death is the only way to escape when disadvantaged women lose their love and dignity...

This creatively adapted play travels between Cao Yu's *The Family*, *Wilderness*, *Thunderstorm* and *Sunrise*. The variety of colour and the relaxed and poetic style, along with deep and yet explosive displays of emotion, gives the audiences a glimpse of the painful journeys of Chinese women at the beginning of the 20th Century.

Chinese Female Characters in the Eyes of Young British People
China Business News, Wednesday 7 November 2012
(Translation of extracts)



“The Sun rises, leaving darkness behind, but The Sun is Not for Us ...” behind the dim light, Chen Bailu murmurs walking slowly up to the stage. With her mysterious smile, she jumps and falls.

Chen Bailu is a self-destructive social butterfly in Cao Yu’s *Sunrise*. However, in *The Sun is Not for Us*, she is a blonde British girl wearing a white dress. She says the lines in English, and joining her are seven other female characters that are recombined, adapted and developed from Cao Yu’s works. This play has a modern concept and style. Four heart-breaking stories show Chinese women’s love, hatred, fear, struggle and pain in the thirties and forties in the twentieth century.

In March this year, this avant-garde production by Britain’s “stage@leedstouring” opened first in its locality, and then in the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in August. From November 6th to 8th, it was presented as the opening production for the Shanghai International Contemporary Drama Festival.

The Sun is Not for Us comes from Chen Bailu’s bleak monologue before her death. It is a well-known line, and the essence of this female-focused play. The most attractive female characters in Cao Yu’s writings are all found in this play, and are performed by fifteen “post-90s generation” young British people.

On the one hand are Cao Yu's classic plays; on the other hand are the young British people who do know not much about Chinese culture. Director David Jiang Weiguo knew before he visualised the script that this was a challenge both in terms of time period and cultural barriers. "This is a collective creation and production. We listened to their understanding of the characters, and then discussed which characters we should include." Jiang says that the young performers were not clear about China's transformation from the May Fourth time period, and did not understand that an era so destructive to humanity existed. However they largely praised Chinese women's courage to pursue their freedom, to face their destiny and to realise their desires.

"Working on this play, we all have been learning." Jiang says that he sees the liberty of improvisation and genuine acting in British performers. British performers are gradually becoming familiar with Chinese people's lives, emotions and thinking in the thirties and forties in the last century. "If the Chinese perform Mingfeng in *The Family*, it would definitely be the performance of a maid, being subdued in front of the master. However, British young people are open to express themselves. They feel that even between master and maid, kissing and hugging is normal because that is what people do when they fall in love."

David Jiang gave freedom to performers to present rebelliousness, wildness and craziness in women. He thinks that this is British people's understanding of Cao Yu's characters. In this play the performers dance, sing, kiss and hug in an improvised way. It reveals the true heart of women.

"Different elements, a relaxed style, with deeply imbedded emotions that could explode at any time." This is a comment from the critics at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, praising the young British people for guiding Western audiences to look at the tragic lives of women at the beginning of the last century. "They set out from their own understanding, expressing their emotions and reflecting the darkness of Chinese society at that time with their successful performance."

In the play, a symbol was created running from the beginning to the end – a ribbon. In the beginning, the ribbon tightly wraps the female character's feet; after that this ribbon appears many times to hold the hands of the women. In the end, eight female characters walk together onto the dark and simple stage, holding the ribbon, and slowly tighten the ribbon around their necks. "The ribbon is a symbol of control. At that time all women wanted to escape, but they were trapped in the end." Jiang says that this symbol goes well with what Chen Bailu says: "The sun is not for us."

The producer of this play, Dr. Li Ruru, who is also the stepdaughter of Cao Yu, has been promoting Cao Yu's centennial both in China and overseas. Regarding the unique style in this play, she says: "China has been transforming and developing since the late 19th century. The pains of humanity through the process of transformation are very touching. Cao Yu's writings are thoughts and presentations of such pains. Today we are still made to tremble by the characters. Through Cao Yu and his plays, Western performers and audiences are gradually entering China."

The Sun is Not for Us Opened Yesterday in Shanghai
Youth Daily, Wednesday 7 November 2012
 (Translation of extracts)



Director David Jiang Weiguo, along with students from University of Leeds, reconstructs the characters and plots in Cao Yu’s four most well known plays. It combines the language of the Chinese playwright with modern acting, physical gestures and dancing, to create this cross-cultural production. The producer of this play, Li Ruru, who is also the stepdaughter of Cao Yu, told journalists that this production was mainly for Cao Yu’s centenary (the year 2010), and to offer an opportunity for foreign audiences to get to know Cao Yu and Chinese drama.

“Cao Yu is widely known in China, and he holds an irreplaceable position in the field of Chinese drama. Overseas, however, people rarely know who he is. When it comes to Chinese song-dance theatres, they only know Beijing Opera, and have no idea that China also has a tradition of spoken drama. After opening the production of *The Sun is Not for Us* in Leeds, we participated in the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, where it was well received.” Li Ruru said.

As to why they chose these four pieces of Cao Yu’s work for adaptation, Li Ruru replies frankly that there is no single work of Cao Yu that can represent him, and among the four pieces they all share one common feature, which is the reflection of women’s problems in the old Chinese society. “Other than that, when we mention Cao Yu’s work, the first characters that come to our minds are tragic female characters such as Sifeng and Jinzi.”

**Fanyi, Chen Bailu and Jinzi come together in the stage production
The Sun is Not for Us
 British Performers Re-interpret Cao Yu's Classics
Shanghai Evening Post, 7 November 2012
 (Translation of extracts)**



Western Culture in Dialogue with Cao Yu

It all began with a group of young British performers reading Cao Yu's works. From there they recreated and reconstructed some of the scenes, explored Cao Yu's four plays in turn and then re-combined them together. The result is they have constructed a modern play with Western insights. 'I encouraged them to start from a human perspective, to express how they would feel, or react or act if they were to be placed the same position as those characters.' Jiang Weiguo is excited that those young students withstood the challenge despite their completely different cultural background. 'They are glad to have been given entry to a new world, and now they feel that they are a part of it.'

Reflection of Traditional Women in the Modern Era

In 2010, Cao Yu's centenary was celebrated in China and overseas. In January 2011, a photography exhibition *Cao Yu: Pioneer in Modern Chinese Drama* opened in London. The exhibition then toured various cities around UK over the following two years. Dr. Li Ruru, producer of *The Sun is Not For Us*, is Senior Lecturer in Chinese Studies at University of Leeds and stepdaughter of Cao Yu. She has been excited and touched by the attention Cao Yu has received both in China and overseas. Admitting that foreign audiences are rarely familiar with Chinese theatre, she feels that Cao Yu can act as a bridge connecting western drama with Chinese life. 'He allowed Western drama to take root in China, to blossom and bear fruit. They have become some of the best-known and most loved dramas with Chinese audiences.'

**Britain's Leeds University showcases *The Sun is Not for Us* in Qinjiang
2012-11-12 10:36:23**

Source:

<http://www.cnqjw.com/2012/1112/4MMDAwMDEwMDg4MA.html>

Qianjiang News Online (Reporter – Yang Hong)

On the 11th of November, 2012, *The Sun Is Not For Us*, showcased on the stage of Jiangnan Vocational College of Arts in Qinjiang, Hubei Province, the ancestral home of the great playwright Cao Yu, the master of modern Chinese drama. The play is created from elements of four masterpieces by Cao Yu - *Family*, *The Wilderness*, *Thunderstorm* and *Sunrise*

Gong Dingrong , Deputy Mayor of Qinjiang Municipal Government, and Chen Hongsi, the Standing Committee Member of Qinjiang Municipal Committee and Director of the Propaganda Department attended the performance and took photos with the crew afterwards.

The Sun Is Not For Us is the first stage play adapted from Cao Yu's classical works by a British company. It was created under the direction of David Jiang Weiguo, who was the Dean of School of Drama, the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts. Dr. Li Ruru, the stepdaughter of Cao Yu and a seasoned scholar of drama, is the producer.

“*The Sun is Not For Us*” is one of the lines spoken by the heroine Chen Bailu in *Sunrise*. This English version, full of modern concepts and paradigms and with a focus on the feminine characters, has been developed through interpretation, and recombination by the young British performers. This novel way of stage crafting ensures that the narrative moves freely between the four pieces, bringing a colorful, relaxing and poetic style. At the same time it arouses deep emotional feelings in the audience, guiding them to reflect on the miserable life of Chinese women in the early 20th century. Metaphorically, the play resonates with those women as the generation of lost hopes and who spent life in the shadows.



University of Leeds Visiting Qianjiang: Cultural Exchange
Deputy Party Secretary Gong Dingrong giving a speech at the banquet
Qianjiang Daily, 12 November 2013
(Translation of extracts)



Mr Gong declared that the visit by the delegation from the University of Leeds, led by Dr Li Ruru and her husband Director Jiang Weiguo and including the performers from their play *The Sun is Not for Us*, an adaptation of some of Cao Yu's classic works had created a cultural bridge between Cao Yu's and Shakespeare's hometowns. He added that it had made a great contribution to the cultural activities of the city in addition to supporting the long term aim of making Qianjiang China's city of drama.

Li Ruru expressed her sincere gratitude for the invitation she and her team had received. She said that all of the team had been very excited to bring *The Sun is Not for Us* to Cao Yu's hometown adding that such a visit had been a highlight of their visit to China. She said that they were proud of being able to build a bridge between Qianjiang and the city of Leeds through Cao Yu's works and hoped that their visit to China would be fruitful. Susan Daniels, lecturer in the Faculty of Performance, Visual Arts and Communications, director of the China working group of University of Leeds and producer of *The Sun is Not for Us* thanked the city of behalf of the Vice Chancellor of the University of Leeds and presented gifts on his behalf.

A collaborative workshop from Britain's Leeds University's *The Sun is Not For Us* theatre group and Jiangnan Vocational College of Arts

13/11/1012 09:09:04

Source: <http://www.cnqjw.com/2012/1113/5NMDAwMDEwMDg5Ng.html>

Qianjiang News Agency (Reporter - Yuan Jiajuan)

On November 12th Britain's Leeds University's *The Sun is Not For Us* theatre group and Jiangnan Vocational College of Arts produced a collaborative workshop, which thoroughly exchanged and explored the culture of the performing arts and of theatre. Cao Yu's stepdaughter, Leeds University's Senior Lecturer Dr. Li Ruru directed the workshop. The workshop involved the two groups of students discussing stories, demonstrating performances to each other and performing stories including *The Jungle Book* and *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*. The humour of the students' performances meant that the space was filled with laughter and clapping throughout.

A fourth year Leeds University student Ling Lin (Chinese name of Lara Owen) told a reporter during interview, "We thought today was a lot of fun because this is the first time we've been to Qianjiang and people have been very warm and welcoming. I'm really thankful that they liked our activities."

The City Huaguxi Research Institute also gave a performance exhibiting different regional styles of Huaguxi (Literally "Flower Drum theatre" – a style of the regional song-dance theatre), so as to satisfy the British students curiosity for Chinese traditional culture. Once the performances were over, the two sides held a discussion about the different styles of opera. During the activities, fourth year Leeds university student Xin Fei (Chinese name of Freddie Simmons), with uncontained enthusiasm told a reporter "Qianjiang is a really nice place. I'm sure that after this, my classmates will definitely want to return and perform once more."

By the time the activities were over, the two country's students and the staff had formed a deep friendship and took photos together.

**British students provide
A British style performance of Cao Yu's works in Qianjiang**
Hubei Daily, 13 November 2013
 Reported by Ma Yalin and Yu Yecheng
 (Translation of extracts)



At the invitation of the Qianjiang municipal government, a delegation from the University of Leeds came to the city of Qianjiang for a cultural tour from 10-12 November. During the visit students from the University of Leeds performed their new drama *The Sun is Not for Us* at Jiangnan Vocational College of Arts. The delegation formally called on Cao Yu's mausoleum in addition to visiting his ancestral home and museum. They also held a seminar with students from Jiangnan Vocational College of Arts, gave a lecture on the study of theatre as well as giving a speech. They also made contact with Hubei Flower-drum Theatre Institute of Drama.

Approaching China through Cao Yu

An interview with Dr Li Ruru

Producer of *The Sun is Not for Us* and stepdaughter of Mr Cao Yu

Qianjiang Daily City Life, 14 November 2012 by Li Shuwen

(Translation of extracts)



Cao Yu's drama takes you to China: An interview with Dr Ruru Li, step-daughter of Cao Yu. Dr Li is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Leeds and is the producer of *The Sun is Not for Us*.

On 11 November the No.2 Lecture theatre of Jiangnan Vocational College of Arts was filled with around 300 students and teachers who attentively listened to a lecture by Dr Ruru Li and her colleague the researcher Susan Daniels. The lecture theme was how Cao Yu's works have been introduced to a global audience and how the world is getting to understand China through these works.

University of Leeds visits Qianjiang for a cultural exchange. Gong Dingrong attends the welcome dinner and gives a welcome speech.

Re-interpreting Cao Yu's dramas through the British stage: Sidelights of the stage production *The Sun is Not for Us*
Qianjiang Daily City Life 13 November 2012 (1049th edition)
(Translation of extracts)



On the evening of 11th November, a special performance was held in the Assembly Hall of Jiangnan Vocational College of Arts. Using an English script, an abstract stage setting, modern music and flowing and skilled dance, a group of students from University of Leeds readapted four of Cao Yu's classic plays: *Family*, *The Wilderness*, *Thunderstorm* and *Sunrise*. Previously performed at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, *The Sun is Not for Us* was different from Cao Yu's original plays since it was the first live theatrical production produced by a British team and was an adaptation of Cao Yu's classic works.

In one part of the show, four characters from *Thunderstorm* and *Family* came on stage at the same time and performed in turn. Through the staging of two fights, the actors were able to highlight the intense contradictions and themes inherent in the original scripts. The performance got rapturous applause.

'This new work was very successful at re-interpreting Cao Yu's works and then performing them', said Liu Lijie, a third year student from Jiangnan Vocational College of Arts, School of Education. She added that she had previously seen Pu Cunxin and Pan Hong's performance of *Thunderstorm*. In her opinion, today's show by the British students presented a completely fresh approach in its use of a number of new ideas and costumes, whilst also remaining faithful to Cao Yu's original concept and his critique of society. She thought it was superb.

Huangpu Yishuo, a second year student also from the School of Education, said that the drama produced by the University of Leeds reflected the performers' understanding of Chinese culture. Through this show she could see that Chinese drama and culture were well received overseas. She hoped that other such activities would be held in their college.

Live Theatre Show *The Sun is Not for Us*
Produced by the University of Leeds
Shown in Qianjiang: Gong Dingrong watched the show
Qianjiang Daily Tuesday 13 November 2012
(Translation of extracts)



The Sun is Not for Us is the first live theatre show adapted from Cao Yu's classics by a British team. It is directed by David Jiang Weiguo who was once the Dean of the School of Drama at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, and produced by Dr. Li Ruru who is a senior scholar in drama from the University of Leeds.

It is known that the name of this show is actually taken from the lines of Chen Bailu, the heroine of the play *Sunshine*. The English version of *The Sun is Not for Us* is filled with modern features and focuses on Cao Yu's women characters. It is reorganized, combined and developed by young British actors and actresses according to their own understanding of Chinese works. This new show, adapted with fresh ideas, involves several of Cao Yu's plays. Audiences are influenced by its various colors, casual style, poetic feeling and deep emotions, allowing them to glimpse the long and painful experiences of Chinese women in the first part of the 20th Century.

The English Version of Cao Yu's play
The Sun is Not for Us performed at Shanghai International Contemporary Theatre Festival
Li Ruru: Our Play Is More Like a Bowl of Wild Vegetable Soup
Time Weekly 30 November 2012 – 6 December 2012
 (Translation of extracts)



'This is a new interpretation of Cao Yu's work as devised by a group of young British students. It focuses on love, hatred, desire, incest, hope, frustration and the struggle of a group of women' explained Li Ruru in an interview with Time Weekly on her return to the UK. '*The Sun is Not for Us* is a cross-cultural production. Created by young British actors, we have combined together the language of a great Chinese playwright with modern acting, physical movement and dancing. The British actors used their emotions to reflect life in China, and an old form of society from a bygone era which destroyed humanity.'

One Cao Yu and Fifteen Foreign Students

'We are not simply trying to create a piece of theatre but more importantly are trying to spread the culture of Chinese drama to young people abroad. This time nineteen of us were at the festival, fifteen of whom are students. Out of those fifteen students twelve of them have never previously experienced Chinese culture' explains Li Ruru.

Overseas drama students are 'pioneers'

'Chinese drama is not particularly influential overseas. The idea of making *The Sun is Not for Us* originally came out of Cao Yu's centennial celebrations last year. It also provided me the chance to vent my frustrations!' Li Ruru who travels considerably in the course of doing her academic research has found that the majority of Europeans and Americans have 'absolutely no knowledge' about Chinese drama.

Luckily this play, which has enabled Li Ruru to 'vent her frustrations', has also received high critical acclaim at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. They have received reviews and comments as following:

This play reminds me of the Spanish playwright Garca Lorca's works, with its focus on women in rural areas. It is moving. It is a fantastic play. The use of music intensifies the meaning of the play and makes the audience connect with the play. It made me feel that repression of this kind really did take place at a point in time which was not that far away.

Four heart-breaking stories are intertwined with one another. *The Sun is Not For Us* is a tragedy, but it is also an artistic treasure to be enjoyed. The performance is elegant, graceful and very touching

The Sun is Not for Us is courageous. It is a brave and admirable endeavour.

The Sun Rises in the Field of Chinese Drama

'For those who are used to see big theatrical productions, ours is more like a low-budget bowl of wild vegetable soup.' Li Ruru uses 'a bowl of wild vegetable soup' as a somewhat self-deprecating metaphor to describe the production. However, Li Ruru does not get it that this play, which has blonde haired, blue eyed British actors in its lead roles, is not seen any differently by its Chinese audience than those 'big foreign productions' it was playing alongside at the Shanghai International Contemporary Theatre Festival.

Li Ruru: Pioneer

Spotlight on the English version *The Sun is Not for Us*

Writer's Digest Wednesday, 11 December 2012

(Translation of extracts)



Li Ruru, stepdaughter of the master playwright Cao Yu, drama scholar at the University of Leeds, is deeply surprised. In the Shanghai International Contemporary Drama Festival, she saw nearly ninety percent of the audiences staying after the performance, raising high quality questions to the directors. In Qianjiang, Cao Yu's ancestral town, the theatre that accommodates nearly a thousand spectators was even filled with people in the aisles.

Having been settled in the UK for many years, Li Ruru's academic interest mainly focuses on Shakespeare's drama. Also, with her mother Li Yuru's mastery in Beijing Opera and her stepfather Cao Yu's reputation in drama, she dedicates her research to cross-culture studies.

This time, she is back in China with her husband David Jiang Weiguo for their co-produced English version of Cao Yu's drama, *The Sun Is Not for Us*.

At the Shanghai International Drama Festival, with the theme of "multi-dimensional innovation", this play, which is developed from Cao Yu's classic pieces *Thunderstorm*, *Sunrise*, *Family*, and *The Wilderness*, is presented as the opening show to meet audiences.

At the same time, Li Ruru sighs with emotion, stating that it is difficult to produce and promote Chinese drama in the English world— with difficulty in material collection, in financing, and in insufficient attention from academia. "I think overseas drama scholars like us are just like pioneers," Li Ruru said.