

# *Shashibiya*

## *Staging Shakespeare in China*

Li Ruru



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The image shows the Chinese characters for '香港大學' (Hong Kong University) written in a highly stylized, square-format calligraphic style. Each character is contained within a square frame, and the overall composition is vertical, reading from top to bottom. The characters are '香', '港', '大', and '學'.

Hong Kong University Press is honoured that Xu Bing, whose art explores the complex themes of language across cultures, has written the Press's name in his Square Word Calligraphy. This signals our commitment to cross-cultural thinking and the distinctive nature of our English-language books published in China.

“At first glance, Square Word Calligraphy appears to be nothing more unusual than Chinese characters, but in fact it is a new way of rendering English words in the format of a square so they resemble Chinese characters. Chinese viewers expect to be able to read Square Word Calligraphy but cannot. Western viewers, however are surprised to find they can read it. Delight erupts when meaning is unexpectedly revealed.”

— Britta Erickson, *The Art of Xu Bing*



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# Introduction

From Three Photographs ...

An early autumn sunset in 1980 in Beijing. The cool breeze was blowing away the day's heat, but the street was still warm with bustling crowds in front of the auditorium of the China Youth Art Theatre. Amid shouts from some asking if anyone had spare tickets and street-corner scalpers dealing in black market tickets, those people lucky enough to have admission were eagerly taking their seats for *The Merchant of Venice*. Shakespeare plays had not been seen on the Beijing stage since 1961. Though it was four years since the Cultural Revolution had ended with the death of Mao, theatre people were still very cautious about what they would attempt on the stage. Their memories were seared by what had happened during the Cultural Revolution to those denounced for staging 'feudal, capitalist and revisionist works.' Hence most theatre productions followed the convention of praising the Communist leaders — the only difference being that the leaders were newly risen to power, and the enemies were now the 'Gang of Four'<sup>1</sup> rather than the old class enemies.

This 1980 production of *The Merchant* was a sign of the revival of

Western masterpieces and the traditional repertoire on the Chinese stage after the Cultural Revolution.<sup>2</sup> It added to people's enjoyment of life in the relative liberty that gradually arose. I remember that people made such comments: 'There is kissing on the stage, and the music and set are beautiful.' 'You could really feel sixteenth-century Italy in the production.' 'Have you heard that the director has had the nerve to keep in all the lines about the ring?' Comments like these spread fast among university students, other young people and older intellectuals in Beijing who were all hungry for a sense of connection to a world beyond Maoist China's borders.

People with traditional Maoist attitudes were unhappy. On 7 September 1980, *The Beijing Evening Post* (*Beijing wanbao*)<sup>3</sup> published a letter from an official who, having declared that 'I don't think I am feudal', bitterly condemned the performance of *The Merchant* for being 'harmful to public morals' because performers embraced and kissed each other in front of such a big audience. This made him 'extremely uncomfortable for weeks after he had seen it' (Fang Ping 1983, 289). His letter was followed by a multitude of comments expressing diverse opinions published in the newspaper. While the majority disagreed with him, there were nonetheless dozens of letters that supported this official's concern about the danger of an affront to public modesty and decorum in Beijing. One letter proclaimed the writer's dismay that some lines in the play 'were too vulgar and dreadful for our ears', citing for example Gratiano's line 'What, are we cuckolds ere we have deserv'd it?' (V i 265).<sup>4</sup> The letter went on: 'We don't understand Shakespeare, yet we should not have to listen to such dialogues' (*The Beijing Evening Post* 13 September 1980). The controversy certainly stimulated interest in the production.

When the red velvet curtains opened, spectators were quickly enraptured by the exotic *mise-en-scène*. Zhang Qihong, the Moscow-educated director, tried her utmost to create a 'romantic and lyrical comedy' (Wu Furong 1981, 1:55) and 'an ode to humanism' (Zhang Qihong 1983, 285) for the Chinese audience. The stage looked like an enchanted world compared to the drab reality of everyday life where men and women all over the country still wore standard blue or grey jackets buttoned up to the neck and baggy trousers.

When Bassanio comes to see Portia in Belmont in act III scene ii, as the photograph (Fig. 1) shows, Portia is wearing a long white dress enhanced by numerous tiny translucent beads to convey her gleaming purity and

wealth. Bassanio's jacket is well cut with splendid cuffs. The gold and red pattern chosen for this garment brings out the brightness and smoothness of the silk and matches the colour of his blonde wig. He also wears a short black velvet cloak embroidered with gold thread. Both characters are heavily made-up: making full use of wigs and prosthetic noses, with strongly painted round-eyes and artificial lashes, which help Chinese performers look like Westerners. Their poses also reinforce the impression of a different type of physical presence. The way that the actress raises her finger and holds her dress, and the actor's hand and leg position are not usual gestures of a Chinese person. The two look at each other, smiling. It is a statement of being in love. Behind them is the Western icon of love, Cupid, above a fountain. At the back of the stage, there are projected shadows of high Gothic buildings.

*The Merchant* has long been China's favourite Shakespeare production. According to available records, it was the very first Shakespeare play to be performed by Chinese students — staged in 1902 at St John's University in Shanghai (Goodrich 1911, 90); and also the first to be performed professionally — staged by the New People's Group in Shanghai in 1913. It is also the one most frequently performed. It has been given a variety of Chinese titles apart from the literal translation of the original, such as *Contract of the Flesh* (*Rouquan*), *A Pound of Flesh* (*Yi bang rou*), *The Female Lawyer* (*Nü lüshi*), *The Debt and Severed Flesh* (*Jiezhai ge rou*) and *The Gentle Woman from Heaven* (*Tian zhi jiaomi*). This play is full of elements to appeal to the Chinese audience: the strange demand for a pound of human flesh, a woman in a man's profession (lawyer), the romance, the unusual way of selecting the future son-in-law demanded by the dead father (choice of the three caskets), the suspense in the court hearing and the disguises.

The 1980 production was a hit, running to more than two hundred performances, touring many cities and being shown many times on television. I saw the live performance in Shanghai in 1986, nearly six years later, at China's first Shakespeare Festival. As we shall see below, this festival brought many different approaches to Shakespeare on the Chinese stage.

The second photograph (Fig. 2) was taken in 1986. It is of *Blood-stained Hands* (*Xie shou ji*) in the style of *kunju*, one of the oldest genres extant on today's stage, mainly performed in the Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang area. *Kunju* has been a major influence on other younger genres including *jingju* (Peking Opera) as we shall see in Chapter 4. There are two figures in the



photograph. Ma Pei, the long-bearded general, wears red armour and a helmet also decorated with red, a colour of blessing and victory. His wife, Tie Shi, Lady Iron, wears a particularly rich head-dress and a long gown with flimsy white sleeves. Their make-up is also in traditional *kunju* style. The *dan* or female role has pink on her cheeks and eyelids, while the *mo* or male role paints his face with more natural colours. Both have their eyes and eyebrows lifted by straps which are hidden inside the head-dresses, and this effect makes their facial expressions more exaggerated. The back-to-back posture comes at the end of a series of movements as, with a soaring voice, the woman has been trying to persuade her husband to assassinate the emperor who is about to visit. This is a Chinese operatic equivalent of *Macbeth* (I v). Together with other *kunju* fans, I was fascinated by the actor's skills, as he used his voice, body, helmet, beard and different types of step — forward, backward, fast and slow — to externalize his conflict of emotions on being asked to kill the emperor.

The third photograph was taken on an unusually cold autumn evening in 1990 in the outskirts of Beijing, just over a year after the June Fourth crackdown on the students' protest in Tiananmen Square. In a small studio in the Beijing Film Academy, not often used for stage productions, a low-budget experimental production of *Hamlet* was being performed.<sup>5</sup> Good connections between the producer and people in the Academy made the rent of the studio very low, and the distance from the centre of the city prevented too much publicity for this rather disturbing work at a very sensitive time. It was the first production staged by the Lin Zhaohua Workshop, a product of the radical economic reforms and the drastic cut in government subsidies for state-run drama companies. The budget problems gave practitioners some freedom to organize their own groups, to seek outside financial assistance, and thereby be able to do some work that interested them. Nonetheless, the widespread enthusiasm for theatre productions ten years earlier had gone completely. One reason, above all, was that virtually every home now had a television. The past ten years witnessed the greatest changes that China had undergone since the Communist Party seized power in 1949. Socialism had almost vanished. The old values and morality made no sense any more. In addition, the events of June Fourth had further divided people. Some became more radical and political, while more tried not to concern themselves with politics at all, but instead concentrated on making money.

Against this background, Lin Zhaohua presented the Chinese audience with a very different Shakespeare, departing radically from the tradition in which *The Merchant* had been created. This is no triumph for Renaissance humanism, but a lonely Hamlet as ‘one of us’ as the director claimed at the interview.<sup>6</sup> The Western wigs, prosthetic noses and the ‘doublet and hose’ costumes are gone. In their place are the urban clothes and the natural faces of 1990 China. Lin’s actors do not pretend to be Westerners or play ‘period’, but bring Shakespeare’s characters into their own world. Gone too is the elaborate set. The only permanent prop in the production is a barber’s chair which symbolizes at different times the throne, a bed or a rock near Ophelia’s grave. The stage is covered by a huge creased floor-cloth, and an obsolete movie projector encumbers the corner as a reminder of the venue and the cinema. Five worn-out ceiling fans, constantly rotating above the centre of the stage, are echoed by an isolated fan set on the right side. In the duel scene, the ceiling fans are lowered and take part in the fight like Don Quixote’s windmill giants. The photograph (Fig. 3) shows Hamlet and Claudius gripping each other with mutual hatred over the metal framework supporting the ceiling fans. Gertrude is lying on the stage in a red dress.

The most controversial device in this production was the switching of key character parts among a number of actors. At certain points, for example, the two actors who predominantly played Hamlet and Claudius interchanged roles. At another moment, the actor playing Polonius became Hamlet. The soliloquy ‘To be, or not to be ...’ was shared by all three actors. The actor playing Horatio, the true friend, was also Rosencrantz, the betrayer of friendship. This doubling provoked reflection about good, evil, honesty and falsity, as it blurred the moral opposites in apparently opposed character roles.

The reaction towards this performance was mixed. Though audiences who travelled out to see it were young and middle-aged intellectuals, most of them lost their way in the plot, because they were unfamiliar with *Hamlet* and unaccustomed to avant-garde theatre. I must admit that I had to see it several times on video before I finally grasped the director’s ideas.

I have selected these three photographs as the prologue to an exploration of how changes in Chinese society have affected the way Shakespeare is presented in China. As the daughter of a Chinese theatre family, I was sent away from home to the countryside for about ten years during the Cultural Revolution and was later educated and worked in drama in both China and Britain. I find that the three photographs crystallize many questions,

not only about where Shakespeare belongs in China, but also about where Chinese culture has been going in the last century.

Shakespeare is the most popular Western playwright in China. All his works have been translated — indeed, there are eleven different Chinese versions of *Hamlet*, for example. *The New Translation of the Complete Works of Shakespeare (Xin Shashibiya quanji)*, edited by Fang Ping, has recently been published (Fang Ping 2000 and 2001), and another translation project is taking place in Beijing. There were two Shakespeare festivals, held in 1986 and 1994, where around forty productions were staged in both modern and traditional theatre styles.

Given the long history and rich legacy of theatre in China, it is worth asking why the Chinese should concern themselves with Shakespeare. In the following chapters we will see that although the first professional Shakespeare performance took place in 1913, Shakespeare only really caught on in China during the 1980s. What does this history tell us? The majority of Shakespeare performances in China are in the mode of *huaju*, or spoken drama, as borrowed from the Western dramatic tradition in which Shakespeare wrote and which he has so greatly influenced. But there are also traditional operatic adaptations of Shakespeare. Is this merely novelty-seeking or is there any more serious intention behind the creative process? Many theorists, among them Pavis, Fischer-Lichte, Brandon and Bharucha have attempted to impose various rules on intercultural productions. As Rustom Bharucha points out, ‘intercultural’ is a concept based on ‘a particular kind of Euro-American theatrical practice involving interactions and borrowings across cultures’ (2000, 3). These intercultural theories thus focus on how to preserve indigenous cultures from the cultures of colonialism,<sup>7</sup> and the idea ‘that artists in other societies might be using elements of Western cultures for their own reasons is rarely entertained’ (Latrell 2000, 4:45). An exploration of the Chinese staging of Shakespeare through the twentieth century may help us understand why practitioners in non-European countries are so keen on using Western cultures (in this case Shakespeare), and what the motivation is behind such an intriguing practice.

Unlike most communist countries in Eastern Europe where ‘Shakespeare’s plays have recently been appropriated for political interpretations’ (Stříbrný 2000, 1), many Chinese spoken drama productions of Shakespeare seem to avoid current national issues and strive to present a foreign world evocative of the story. The Renaissance as ‘a time which

called for giants and produced giants — giants in power of thought, passion, and character, in universality and learning’ (Engels 1960, 2–3) is often quoted. One wonders whether this is simply following Marxist dogma or is perhaps a passive rejection of the ‘theatre of propaganda’. Behind the affirmation of the Renaissance and Shakespeare, do Chinese directors convey their own understanding of the Chinese reality in putting on these plays?

When a Shakespeare play is put on the Chinese stage, it has to go through several levels of the ‘filter’ process (Pavis 1992): translator, adapter, director and other stage team, and performers. Some things are filtered out, some kept and some introduced. How are their decisions affected by: the political and social context; cultural standards and practices; their indigenous theatre tradition; or their own personal experience? How have patrons, who in China are arts administrators and high-ranking officials, interfered with Shakespeare performance in China? Several foreign Shakespeare films have been shown in China,<sup>8</sup> and some British productions have visited China, too. What is their influence on Chinese practice in Shakespeare?

How do people understand Shakespeare? This can involve questions such as the relation between Anti-Semitism and Christianity, or the relative guilt of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, or the controversy caused by *The Merchant of Venice* (1980) as discussed earlier. But performers can also react to trivial matters as, for example, the bawdy comments made by the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* — in 1980s China such words were not supposed to be uttered on stage by a good character.

Above all, why are Chinese people so worried about authenticity and being true to the original works? To Western eyes, the 1980 *Merchant* with Chinese pretending to be foreigners can easily look comical. But in China this is generally regarded as the most legitimate approach to Shakespeare, and most productions aim at being Western and ‘period’. Why is this? What problems do performers face when they act foreigners, and what are their problems when they do not, as in the 1990 *Hamlet*?

When Shakespeare is adapted into a traditional operatic form, if the characters and story are kept Western, the question is how to incorporate the indigenous music, stage techniques and conventions. Conversely, if the characters and stories are sinified, the adapters then have to cope with Western customs, as well as the foreignness of the original characterization. Beatrice, for example, is certainly not a traditional Chinese female character. What problems do traditional performers have when they perform an opera

based on Shakespeare? In *Blood-stained Hands*, Ma Pei is played by an actor trained in the *mo* role where his particular strength is in singing, but he is now required to master more martial skills and extend the range of the *mo* role type that he has studied since he was thirteen. After all, is sinified Shakespeare still Shakespeare?

At the other extreme, when traditional Chinese theatrical methods are used by Westerners to perform a Shakespeare play, how does a Chinese director negotiate between an English text, Western performers and Chinese methods? Localizing and making collages of a masterpiece are normal practice in the post-modern theatre, but what are the preconditions for this to work in an intercultural context?

Ultimately, the performance is for the spectators. What are the audiences' reactions towards all these different Shakespeares, and why do most Chinese audiences like the Westernized productions more? When they come to see a Shakespeare adaptation in the traditional operatic style, do they approach it as Shakespeare or as a traditional opera, and why are they interested in such intercultural productions?

From his Indian background and his own personal experience, Rustom Bharucha passionately argues that intercultural performance is a 'dead end' (1993, 2), whereas my engagement with the Chinese staging of Shakespeare would support the proposition that it is a two-way street. When Shakespeare is performed by Chinese theatre, the latter is certainly affected, but Chinese theatre also contributes to Shakespeare performance and scholarship. Philip Brockbank, having seen the dozen plays at China's first Shakespeare Festival in 1986, claimed that they were 'a revelatory discovery of what were for me new truths about Shakespeare's art' (1988, 39:195). The Chinese experience of Shakespeare provides a means of testing the post-modern models of 'global', 'foreign' and 'intercultural' Shakespeare, which have succeeded Kott's paradigm of 'Shakespeare our contemporary'. Though indeed, might not Kott's Shakespeare be the Shakespeare of the 1990 Beijing *Hamlet*? Perhaps the difference that may be observed between the Indian and Chinese experiences with intercultural theatre indicates the difficulty of constructing any general theory of intercultural practice. This is due to the crucial role of the specific social, historical, political and economic conditions operating within the cultures involved, and the practitioners' own personalities, backgrounds and motivations. Thus research in this area demands what Clifford Geertz calls 'thick description' (2000, 6) in order

to supply readers with a convincing scene in which the intricate cultural exchanges take place.

In accord with Geertz's methodology of interpretation of culture, the strategy of this work is not to offer readers a linear narrative of the history of Shakespeare performance in China, but to examine how essential meanings may metamorphose when the Western canon is brought onto the Chinese stage. Chapter 1 gives a general review of the decades from China's first awareness of Shakespeare until the Cultural Revolution. The chapters following are organized generically to look at spoken drama (*huaaju*) or at traditional music theatre (*xiqu*) productions of Shakespeare's plays staged since Mao's death. Chapter 6, by contrast, investigates two productions that were not purely 'mainland Chinese'. The contemporary British and Taiwanese contributions made 'the others' in these two cases more prominent. They give another dimension to the reading of intercultural performance in this volume.

As both an insider and outsider of Chinese theatre enjoying the privilege of seeing the productions, working with some of them, and interviewing many of the practitioners, I have drawn on my own experiences and memories. I have also tried to give readers a sense of the atmosphere in which these productions were staged. The issues raised above will, I hope, be addressed in this exploration of Chinese practitioners' interpretations and appropriations of Shakespeare's plays, and their dilemmas in dealing with the intercultural problems during periods of great political and social change. I leave it to readers to compare the Chinese uses of Shakespeare with their experience of Shakespeare in other cultures. At the same time, the diversity of meanings attributed to Shakespeare at different times and by different Chinese people offers a significant way of understanding China in a century of perhaps the greatest upheavals in its history.



## Conclusion

### Old Man Sha: Dead or Sleeping?

It has been about a hundred years since Shakespeare was first staged in China. In the intercultural transformation illustrated by the diagram in Chapter 4, a translator or adapter has first of all to formulate a Chinese version of a Shakespeare play, and then the script is interpreted, and in turn re-interpreted, by directors, stage designers and performers. Finally it is presented in front of a Chinese audience. All involved bring their own personal and societal history as well as a shared cultural legacy to the particular work. Shakespeare in China is therefore as much a story about China as it is about Shakespeare.

As discussed in previous chapters, in China Shakespeare has often been called into service in the attempts to create new theatrical forms, or to extend existing genres and explore new artistic methods. Most Chinese Shakespeare productions have been innovative in some way. In a country where drama has been under strict ideological control, Shakespeare has sometimes been adopted as a haven for Chinese artists to escape from the theatre of official propaganda. Yet several recent Shakespeare productions have served as

vehicles for the courageous presentation of challenging views on social and political issues. At the same time, Shakespeare has started to be used for the artistic expression of individuality by a few directors who have dared to manipulate or distort Shakespeare's work. This was something that Chinese theatre practitioners had not done before. While humanism has always been the theme that Chinese productions claimed to pursue, the more subjective approaches marked the first real attempt to connect Shakespeare's philosophy to the particularities of Chinese people's experiences.

Where does Shakespeare stand in China and what is the current situation of Chinese Shakespeare performance? I went to China in the summer of 2001 to find out what the prospects are for Old Man Sha today. I interviewed four directors, a producer, an arts administrator and critic, a Shakespearean scholar and translator, and a choreographer specializing in modern dance. The picture they drew for me was confused and confusing.

'More Shakespeare?' I asked. Everyone said: 'Yes, of course, Old Man Sha's plays are great!' When I tried to elicit more specific information about what Shakespeare plays had been done recently, whether any Shakespeare performance was planned and when the next production would be, people became evasive. Zhu Dakun,<sup>1</sup> the producer of the Shanghai Spoken Drama Artistic Centre (Huaju Yishu Zhongxin) assured me: 'I'll certainly put on a Shakespeare play if there is a Shakespeare festival. I'm sure our centre will enthusiastically take part in such an activity.' I pressed further to ask if he would include Shakespeare in the centre's normal programme rather than for a special occasion. He hesitated for a while, and then gave a negative answer.

The same tone could be heard in Chen Mingzheng's comments.<sup>2</sup> A well-known director who presented the 1984 *Hamlet* (Fig. 6, *cf* Chapter 3), he has continued to be actively involved in directing stage works for both spoken drama and traditional theatre since he retired from the STA a few years ago. Chen stated straightforwardly: 'People won't do Shakespeare. There is simply no money for him.' Regarding my question about what Shakespeare play he would choose had he a chance to put on his work, he simply answered that he had never thought about this because it was not a possibility.

Everybody I interviewed seemed to be haunted by funding issues and the obsession with money. Zhu Dakun claimed that as a producer he needed to seek sponsorships and to look after the box office. 'I even dream marketing!' Zhu sighed deeply. Such financial pressures were felt even by



Fang Ping,<sup>3</sup> the Chairman of the Shakespeare Society of China, and the editor as well as the main translator of the new Chinese version of Shakespeare's *Complete Works* (Fang Ping 2000 and 2001). Through lack of financial support, the only Chinese journal in Shakespeare Studies stopped printing in 1994. 'A few years ago, some actors wanted to organize a company which would attempt to present at least two Shakespeare plays a year,' Fang went on. 'They came to ask me to serve as a dramaturge. There has been enthusiasm for Shakespeare among actors and scholars. But none of us can do anything if there are no resources available.'

Is it universally true that there is no money for the arts in China? Both Chen Mingzheng and Hu Jialu (a modern dance choreographer) commented in interviews<sup>4</sup> that there are in fact quite plentiful government funds available for the performing arts. But they are only for doing work on the 'main theme'. In a country where the Party retains control over every aspect of life, money is also linked with ideology.

'Main theme' or *zhu xuanlü* in Chinese (literally meaning 'main tune', a new ideological term borrowed from music) refers to any artistic work which deals with the predominant theme of the day in Communist Party propaganda. On 1 July 2001, the eightieth anniversary of the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party, the authorities peremptorily requested theatre companies to put on productions based on the 'main theme' as 'a gift presented on the eightieth anniversary'.<sup>5</sup> Zhu Dakun was very pleased that he had shown the political acumen to stage *Good-bye, Mother (Zaijianle, mama)* (written by Shen Liang, directed by Zhao Wu, stage design by Hu Zuo). This is a production about Huang Donghua, a fireman who died on duty. The play was a direct response to the instruction given by Hu Jintao, Member of the Standing Committee of the Central Political Bureau of the CCP, Vice Chairman of the PRC and Vice Chairman of the Central Military Committee,<sup>6</sup> that 'We must use the artistic form that is welcomed by the youth to promote Comrade Huang Donghua's heroic activities'.<sup>7</sup> This play won Zhu and the Shanghai Spoken Drama Artistic Centre both political credit and financial profits. It ran for a hundred performances which helped the centre fulfil the government's quota of performances for 2001. A theatre company cannot receive any governmental funding unless it meets its annual performance quota. All the tickets had been issued through work units because audiences were organized to come for political education, and the centre earned 750,000 RMB (more than US\$90,000) from the box

office. This was pure profit since the costs of this production had been met by the local government and various enterprises of Chongming, where the fireman Huang Donghua lived. 'The small island of Chongming suddenly became famous all over China. The locals were so proud that a martyr had come from their area that they were willing to do anything for us,' Zhu commented in the interview.

To a certain extent, however, 'main theme' also illustrates the milder political climate in China, as it recognizes that there are other themes. During the Cultural Revolution, for a whole decade, the eight model productions and a few of those following in their wake had been the only entertainment allowed on stage, in the cinema and on the broadcast media. The present situation permitted a small number of 'non-main-theme' plays to be performed, and Dario Fo's *An Ordinary Day* was an example.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, this freedom is limited. Before July 2001, any work not linked to the celebration of the CCP's anniversary was not allowed to have media publicity. The opening for *An Ordinary Day* was postponed for one week in order to make room for the revival of a 'main theme' play on that stage.

Although Shakespeare was extolled by Marx and Engels, he seemingly has nothing to do with today's 'main theme'. But Rong Guangrun, the Director of the STA and a theatre critic who organized the 1994 Shanghai International Shakespeare Festival, has a different view: 'We will certainly do Shakespeare. The Shanghai International Festival (an organization under both the Ministry of Culture and the Shanghai municipal government) has approached me about a proposal for organizing an international Shakespeare festival in two or three years' time. We will invite state companies all over the world to perform Shakespeare on the Shanghai stage.'<sup>9</sup> When I mentioned a few good British companies who have done very interesting Shakespeare productions like Northern Broadsides's 2001 staging of *King John* and *Merry Wives of Windsor*, Rong shook his head and said: 'The participants must be top-rate at state level, like the Royal Shakespeare Company or the Royal National Theatre in Britain. This will be on the largest scale of all the international Shakespeare festivals that people have ever had.'

As an arts administrator and critic, Rong straddles both areas of politics and drama, and his words threw light onto this intricate Chinese Shakespeare situation. Shakespeare can be made to link up with the 'main theme' if the authorities want that to happen. What attracts Chinese officials in Shakespeare are neither the rich images in his poetry, nor his deep

understanding of the human condition, nor even his intriguing stories. Their touchstone is his canonical status in the Western culture. An unprecedentedly grand festival participated in by state-level theatre companies from all over the world would be an excellent showcase to demonstrate the prestige of newly prosperous China. This may also be associated with the arts festival at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. From the highest level in government, everyone is ambitious for great achievements and grand occasions, and when this happens, the 'no money' situation will be reversed as state funds will be made available for local theatres to participate (as seen previously). However, such a grand occasion will not provide encouragement for any experimental and bold productions.

Rong's comments also reflect what the majority of Chinese practitioners think of Shakespeare and how they believe he should be staged. A typical example was a year 2000 proposal to present a spectacular show of *Antony and Cleopatra* in Shanghai's Grand Theatre<sup>10</sup> with ten real horses on the stage.<sup>11</sup> To these artists, Old Man Sha has absolutely no connection with modernity, or Chinese reality, or experiments or small-scale productions. This Chinese 'Shakespeare complex' is a tangled web of the Soviet experts' influence, traditional Chinese ethics of respecting authority, lack of contact with the outside world and the currently stagnant situation of *huaju* which is the 'legitimate' theatrical form for Shakespeare.

In the interview, Zhu Dakun expressed his negative impression of the Royal National Theatre's touring *Othello* in 1998. In particular, he objected to the director's idea of putting it in a modern context. By contrast, Zhu praised highly the 1961 *Much Ado* (cf Chapter 2) on which he had worked as an assistant to the stage manager. 'Even today after forty years, I can still recite some of the lines of this brilliant production,' Zhu said proudly. His strong sentiments about the two productions again reflect the profound influence of the Russian experts' work in the 1950s on Chinese Shakespeare performance.

In general, Shakespeare's canonical position is unchallengeable. This can also be observed in the vocabulary people use when they write about their stage work on Shakespeare. Words like 'intimidated', 'difficult', 'intricate' or 'elementary exploration' are often found in article titles. At the same time, such a status ironically makes Old Man Sha outdated because most practitioners would not dare, or would at least hesitate, to use any unorthodox format to present his works. Most people in the interviews commented that

even if they could find some external financial support for doing an experimental production, they would not opt for Shakespeare. The reasons were first of all, 'everyone in China knows of him', and secondly, 'he cannot be done any old way you like. For Old Man Sha, we need to be careful'. Furthermore, people still doubt the justification for staging Shakespeare in the traditional Chinese genres. Fang Ping sighed sadly that some traditional theatre artists were using Shakespeare for their own purposes rather than from any real interest in the playwright or in his works themselves.

The extraordinary claim by Xiao Yang Zhang that 'Shakespeare has replaced traditional Chinese drama to become the most important and authoritative dramatic form in Chinese cultural circles today' (1996, 129) had always seemed to me overstated and too subjective. Notwithstanding, I never imagined that the comments on the current situation of Shakespeare would be so pessimistic. I could not help assuming that Shakespeare is effectively dead in China. But this conclusion was rejected by all eight people whom I interviewed. Lin Zhaohua, who staged the 1989 *Hamlet* in which three actors shared the roles of Hamlet, Claudius, and Polonius (*cf* Chapter 3), gave me the strongest reaction: 'Nonsense! Who dares say so? I did *Richard III* recently.'<sup>12</sup> This was the latest show from the Lin Zhaohua Workshop. Centred on Richard III's regime of cruelty, the theme of this production was that 'those who lack vigilance against murderous schemes are the conspirator's accomplices, though they can also find themselves among the victims' (Zhang Xiangyang 2001, 27). Through many 'cruel games' and exercises in rehearsals, Lin restructured the plot and character relationships in the play. Lin admitted that the choice of this work was influenced by the prospect of taking it to the Berlin Asia Pacific Cultural Festival in September 2001, an exchange programme between the two governments. However, he suffered a heavy financial loss on *Richard III*, since the seventeen performances in Beijing made almost nothing at the box office, so it would not be re-staged after touring abroad. When I asked him if he would do another Shakespeare play or if the Beijing People's Art Theatre (where he is the resident director) would plan to put on Shakespeare, the answer was a blunt 'no'.<sup>13</sup>

Lin Zhaohua's story points to another component of theatrical activity which is the box office and the audience. From previous chapters we can see that as early as the 1980s both modern and traditional theatres were struggling to win back their audiences. Today's situation is more complicated. Under Deng Xiaoping's famous slogan 'socialism with Chinese

characteristics', the whole country is run on a dual-track system which attempts to maintain the communist ideology while operating a capitalist economy. The government now advocates the 'main theme' and puts strict controls on any Western culture that might challenge that. Yet it happily encourages commercially-oriented foreign culture to flood in. The best example is the Chinese copy of the *Moulin Rouge* in Beijing. Li Yanjiao, in the article 'Moulin Rouge in Paris, Big Iron Pagoda in Beijing (*Bali Hongmofang, Beijing Datieta*)' (2001, 34–5), boasts of the 'dream-like' French atmosphere in the Big Iron Pagoda theatre, the delicious French wine and food, the excellent service from waiters in tailcoats, the high-tech quality of the facilities on the stage and in the auditorium, and the beautifully-trained dancers and singers from professional schools and companies. The article is illustrated by six photographs in which all girl dancers are in bikinis and the male singers wear black suits and top hats. Hu Jialu commented sarcastically that the *Moulin Rouge* represents modern dance in many Chinese people's minds.

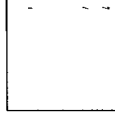
Against such a background, there would now seem to be no room left for Shakespeare, or for any other exemplars of high culture. Alfred Hickling commented on the RSC's recent tour in Beijing: 'the neon jungle and eight-lane freeways that encircle the theatre suggest that few Beijing developers have time for Shakespeare's spiritual message' (2002, 16). When we look back over Shakespeare's experience in China during the last century, it is in the aftermath of internal socio-political crises that Chinese people have been most hungry for culture and eager to gain knowledge, and in such periods they have turned to Shakespeare. One time was at the beginning of the twentieth century, when radical reformers called on patriots to ponder over the various defeats the country had experienced and to learn from the advanced West. The other time was after the Cultural Revolution, the ten years of cultural desert in which the Chinese people had wandered. Productions like Hu Dao's *Much Ado About Nothing* (1979), Zhang Qihong's *The Merchant of Venice* (1980), Xu Xiaozhong's *Macbeth* (1980), Ma Yong'an's *jingju Othello* (1983) and Lin Zhaohua's *Hamlet* (1989) were not staged for any special occasions. The motivation for these productions stemmed from a genuine Chinese interest in Shakespeare.

What is the situation today and what are Chinese people's concerns? At the beginning of 2001, *The New Citizen Weekly* published the results of a survey on the 'Ten Biggest Concerns' (*Zhongguoren zui guanxin de shi da*

*redian*) of China's urban population. At the top of the list was layoffs and re-employment, a worry for 45 percent of those polled. Second at 27 percent was how to raise living standards. Of least concern, mentioned by only 9 percent, was 'improving education and cultural level' (Xiao Gu 2001, 53). If it is true that Chinese people's concerns are not with education or culture, Old Man Sha may have to sleep for a while.

In this generally pessimistic outlook, there is however one bright spot. Drama academies and schools have kept a tradition of staging Shakespeare in the teaching programme. In June 2001, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (directed by Chen Jialin) was staged by one of the Shanghai theatre schools which runs a one-year acting course.<sup>14</sup> Gu Yian,<sup>15</sup> an assistant professor in the Acting Department at the STA planned to ask his third year acting students to read Shakespeare plays and choose extracts from them to perform. He said he would also select a Shakespeare play for the finalists' performance in 2003. Performances presented by a younger generation may help the Chinese theatre rediscover Shakespeare. In 2001, at the China Arts Festival and the Chuanju Festival, three operatic Shakespeare adaptations were staged. The 2002 visit of the RSC to Beijing and Shanghai also reminded Chinese audiences of Old Man Sha. Tian Chaoxu, a postgraduate in Anhui province, travelled a thousand miles to Beijing to see *The Merchant of Venice* (directed by Loveday Ingram, with Ian Bartholomew as Shylock and Hermione Gulliford as Portia). In his eyes, this play is relevant to today's China, because it is 'developing so fast that 90% of the population want to make money. ... The *Merchant of Venice* is a play that shows what happens to a society which places too great an emphasis on money. People should take notice of what Shakespeare has to say' (Hickling 2002, 16).

Shakespeare, then, is not dead. But he is in a fitful slumber. Currently, Shakespeare productions do not enjoy consistent financial support, nor is the cultural atmosphere very receptive to him. The complex picture drawn in all the interviews illustrates the confusion that the whole nation feels in this particular transitional period as the state attempts to combine a communist ideology with a capitalist economy. These economic and social variables are expected to change but nobody can predict how long this will take. Nonetheless when it comes, a younger generation of practitioners will have been trained and will be ready to resume the tradition, so that a newly roused and refreshed Shakespeare can tread the boards of Chinese theatre once again.



# Notes

## INTRODUCTION

- 1 Coined after Mao's death, this term refers to a political alliance between Jiang Qing (Mao's wife), Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan and Wang Hongwen. The official position is that the 'gang' effectively dominated China in the closing years of the Cultural Revolution. They were arrested in October 1976.
- 2 It was not until the third plenum of the Central Committee of the Eleventh National Congress of the Communist Party in December 1978 and its formal criticism of Mao for initiating the Cultural Revolution that people gained more confidence in staging the traditional repertoire together with some Western plays. Arthur Miller gives a vivid account of the atmosphere during this period in his *Salesman in Beijing* (1984).
- 3 *Putonghua* romanization spelling system is used throughout this book, unless otherwise noted. All the Chinese into English translation is mine, unless otherwise noted.
- 4 All Shakespeare quotations are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, edited by Gwynne Blakemore Evans (1968).

- 5 It was premiered in the rehearsal room in the Beijing People's Art Theatre in 1989, and ran for just three performances.
- 6 Lin Zhaohua, the director, gave me an interview about this production on 11 April 1997.
- 7 See their arguments in the following books and articles: Patrice Pavis: *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* and *The Intercultural Performance Reader*; Rustom Bharucha: *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture* and *The Politics of Cultural Practice: Thinking Through Theatre in an Age of Globalization*; James R. Brandon: 'Shakespeare in Kabuki' and 'Some Shakespeare(s) in Some Asia(s)' and E. Fischer-Lichte: 'Interculturalism in Contemporary Theatre'.
- 8 Video tapes of some films are kept in the archives of theatre academies, as they have no real commercial market. Newly produced films like Kenneth Branagh's *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Hamlet* are in VCD or DVD form.

## CHAPTER 1

- 1 A native of Fujian province, Lin Shu passed his imperial examination and acquired a 'juren' ranking in the Qing dynasty. Lin contributed significantly to the early introduction of foreign literature to the Chinese readership. Although he had no knowledge of foreign languages, with the help of a team of language specialists he rendered into Chinese more than 170 novels and plays from English, French, Spanish, German and Japanese.
- 2 Each title contains eight syllables (eight Chinese characters), describing the plot of the play, as is the fashion in Chinese story telling.
- 3 In the early 1920s, Tian Han (the pen name of Tian Shouchang) was a student in Japan. Being exceedingly fond of drama, he gave up his original intention of becoming a politician and turned to the theatre instead. Tian Han wrote more than eighty plays for both spoken drama and the traditional theatre, and more than eight hundred poems. He was also the author of the lyrics of the national anthem of the PRC. Tian Han died in prison during the Cultural Revolution.
- 4 There is no actual proof for this assumption, because following Chinese conventions no attribution was given in his translation. However, his knowledge of English did not seem sufficient to translate a Shakespeare play from the original, and he translated *Hamlet* while he was a student in Japan.
- 5 Cao Yu, described as 'the founding father of China's modern drama' by the *People's Daily* (16 December 1996), wrote *Thunderstorm* (1933) when he was an undergraduate at the age of twenty-three. It was followed by a series of plays, such as *Sunrise*, *The Wilderness*, and *Peking Man*. They were to form part of the classical spoken drama repertoire for the next sixty years. Being his step-



daughter, I had the privilege to talk to him about his own experience and his comments on drama and theatre.

- 6 The first person to bring Shakespeare to China's notice was the British missionary William Muirhead (Chinese name Mu Weilian) who, in 1856, with the help of a Chinese native assistant, published in Shanghai a modified translation of Thomas Milner's *The History of England: From the Invasions of Julius Caesar to the Year A.D. 1852*. Milner's brief reference to Shakespeare (transliterated by Muirhead as Shekesibi), in a discussion of Elizabethan England, was the first time that the playwright's name had come to the notice of the Chinese reading public.
- 7 This is a fascinating topic for future research. Before and after the professional performance of Shakespeare appeared in China, students in missionary schools often performed Shakespeare in English to celebrate special occasions and to improve their English-language skills.
- 8 In the autumn of 1907, Wang Zhongsheng (c.1874–1911), a radical figure at the time, set up a theatre company called the Spring Sun Group (Chunyang She) and staged a production at the Lyceum. This is recognized as being the first time a spoken drama in Chinese was performed in China. The play concerned was *Negro Slaves' Appeal to Heaven* (*Heinu yu tian lu*), which was based on Lin Shu's adaptation of Mrs H. B. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It was inspired by the highly successful production of the same play in Tokyo by a Chinese student theatre company, the Spring Willow Group (Chunliu She), which attracted favourable comments from Japanese theatre critics and which caught the imagination of the large number of highly politicized young Chinese studying in the Japanese capital at the time.
- 9 For example, in 1866 a Western amateur group, The Amateur Dramatic Club of Shanghai was founded and its members constructed a new theatre for performing Western drama, the Lyceum. The Lyceum was subsequently destroyed by fire, and a new theatre was built with modern stage lighting and equipment. It survives to this day, and was used to capacity mainly by spoken drama companies until the late 1980s, though the original colonial name was replaced by one more in keeping with Communist ideology: the Shanghai People's Art Theatre. However, after forty years, nostalgia for the prosperous old Shanghai has returned and the newly renamed Lyceum (now Lanxin), has been used for putting on *jingju* or *kunju* traditional repertoire to attract foreign audiences. Its central location among posh hotels and its colonial style of architecture make it a tourist attraction.

The Amateur Dramatic Club of Shanghai was somewhat exclusive; but nonetheless, a number of Chinese intellectuals gained their first knowledge of Western drama through watching its performances. Xu Banmei in his *Memoir* gave a vivid description: "There were performances every two or three months

- at the Lyceum produced by the Amateur Dramatic Club of Shanghai. I always went and managed to buy a third class ticket, enjoying the plays hidden in the upper balcony' (1957, 5).
- 10 Minxing She was the only new drama company that employed both actors and actresses. But the female roles in their productions were played by actors and vice versa. It is generally thought that their purpose was to provide a cheap attraction.
  - 11 I went into this matter at some length. In a letter to me, Cao Shujun, one of the authors of *Shakespeare on the Chinese Stage* (*Shashibiya zai Zhongguo wutai shang*) (Cao Shujun & Sun Fuliang 1989), said that there were two civilized drama adaptations taken respectively from *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, but both were entitled *The Usurper of State Power*.
  - 12 On 27 April 2000 I interviewed Gu Wuwei's son Gu Yixuan about his father. Gu Yixuan is a former *jingju* actor, now living in Los Angeles. The following information is from the interview as well as from Gu Yixuan's manuscript of his autobiography that he kindly gave to me. Gu Wuwei was a famous activist promoting civilized drama and later spoken drama. Newspapers in Hong Kong and Taiwan called him a 'revolutionary artist'. Apart from his involvement in anti-Yuan Shikai activity, he was also associated with the assassination of two Japanese officers during the Sino-Japanese war. They were killed in the Nanjing Big World Amusement Park (Nanjing Dashijie Youyi Chang) owned and run by him. He left the Mainland for Hong Kong in 1948 and later died there. His visit to his son Gu Yixuan in Shanghai in March 1961 caused Gu Yixuan decades of persecution. After his visit (regarded as counter-revolutionary by the authorities), Gu was not allowed to play main roles, could not appear on any important occasions, and during the Cultural Revolution, he was first kept isolated in the Shanghai Jingju Theatre, and was then put in prison for eight years. He left Shanghai for the US in 1980 to visit his relatives-in-law and has lived there since.
  - 13 From 'to avenge his father's death ...' is a translation of the gist of the advertisement, because the original was written in bad and ungrammatical Chinese.
  - 14 What I have observed in the early performance of Shakespeare plays in China echoes the argument Pavis puts forward: 'These majority cultures are sometimes so powerful that they are capable of appropriating — in the negative sense this time — foreign cultures, and transforming them according to their own majority interests. We are so much caught in the network of our national cultural modelizations, Eurocentric in this case, that we find it difficult to conceive of the study of performance or of a theatrical genre within a perspective other than that of our acquaintance with the European practice of theatre' (1992, 11).

- 15 This period of Shakespeare performance has been ignored by some Chinese Shakespeareans. Qi-Xin He's 'China's Shakespeare' (1986, 37:149–59) is an example.
- 16 This important historical event started from a demonstration on 4 May 1919 against the Peking Government, which had complied with the decision of the Western powers at Versailles to cede part of Shandong province to Japan. More than the opening attack on domestic weakness and foreign imperialism, the May Fourth Movement stimulated a cultural movement, which had been growing in force and influence since the late nineteenth century, and which aimed to get rid of the Confucian tradition and to absorb Western culture. It culminated in a literary flowering in the 1920s and 1930s.
- 17 Hong Shen (1894–1955), who studied drama at Harvard University with Professor George Pierce Baker and returned to China in 1922, was one of those who conducted a campaign against the 'male performer system'. This was a tough task, because, firstly, China was then still a society in which the prevailing view was that women should not appear on the stage. Secondly, some actors who had made their careers playing female roles were unwilling to give up their privileges. Hong cleverly arranged two plays in one evening show: the first being performed by actors and actresses, and the second by male performers alone. The audience laughed heartily at the unnatural style of the second one. 'Though the laughter on that day embarrassed the actors a great deal, the system that "female roles should be played by males" was finally abolished amidst the laughter' (Hong Shen 1985, 109).
- 18 Many Chinese scholars claim that the first full-length Shakespeare translation was published in 1921. This is wrong. In 1921 only the first three scenes of *Hamlet* were published in the journal *The Young China* (*Shaonian Zhongguo*), Vol. 2, Issue 12. One year later, the whole translation was published in a book form in the *Young China Series* (*Shaonian Zhongguo congshu*).
- 19 It was first published in *Southern Country Monthly* (*Nanguo yuekan*), a literary journal edited by Tian Han himself.
- 20 The earliest printed material that can be traced is 'Changes in Staging Shakespeare' (*Shashibiya ju yanchu zhi bianqian*), also translated by Tian Han, from a work by a Japanese author Nakamura (Tian Han 1929, 3. 419–47).
- 21 Again we observe the cultural difference between the West and the East: 'Old' in Chinese is expressive of wisdom and respect.
- 22 Student performances of Shakespeare in English can be traced as early as 1902 at St. John's University, Shanghai (Goodrich 1911, 90).
- 23 Marco Polo Bridge (Lugou Qiao) is located in Fengtai, a county about 10 miles south-west of Beijing. On 7 July 1937, the Japanese army attacked the Marco Polo Bridge where Chinese soldiers fought back, and the battle lasted for a few days. This incident marked the onset of the full-scale Japanese invasion of China.

- 24 There has been a long dispute between Chinese Communist propaganda and the historical records over a sign placed in Shanghai Huangpu Park (located in the International Settlement) that allegedly read: ‘Chinese and Dogs Not Admitted.’ Robert A Bickers and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom jointly wrote an article about this legendary sign. Using solid historical documents, the article compares different versions of the regulations and sets the record straight. Local Chinese (apart from the servants working for the foreigners) were barred from the parks administered by the foreign-controlled Shanghai Municipal Council of the International Settlement. Dogs, ball games, cycling and picking of flowers were also forbidden, but the alleged juxtaposition of the bans on dogs and Chinese did not exist. (‘Shanghai’s “Dogs and Chinese Not Admitted” Sign: Legend, History and Contemporary Symbol’, *China Quarterly*, No. 142, June 1995.)
- 25 The first Chinese translations of Stanislavski’s works were extracts from *My Life in Art*, translated by Shu Mao, in *Theatre Arts Monthly (Juchang yishu)*, December 1938, and from *An Actor Prepares*, translated by Shi Zhi, in *Juchang yishu*, 1939.
- 26 In the past, Confucian temples were scattered all over China, as Confucianism had been the dominant doctrine in China since the Han dynasty (BC 206 – AD 220). Although the orthodoxy of Confucianism had been challenged as early as the May Fourth Movement in 1919 (*cf.* note 14), it was not until 1949 when the Communist Party took power that Confucianism was replaced by Communism. Many temples were demolished and the one which has been kept as representative of the national heritage is located in Qufu, Confucius’s hometown.
- 27 I was given all of act 2 of my step-father’s translation manuscript as a souvenir. On each page ‘Approved by the Central Censor Committee of Books and Magazines’ is stamped with an oval-shaped chop. The government must have employed a large team to do jobs like this.
- 28 In September 1992 two years before his death, Huang Zuolin gave me an interview about his two productions of *Macbeth*. He showed me some old newspaper cuttings and photographs from his collection. All citations are from this interview unless otherwise indicated.
- 29 According to Cao Shujun, the earliest sinified Shakespeare production was *Kills the Elder Brother and Snatches the Sister-in-law (Sha xiong duo sao)* in the style of Sichuan local opera. It was an adaptation of *Hamlet*, performed in the early 1910s (Cao Shujun 1999, 209–16).
- 30 During his service from 1931–35 as the principal of the School for Traditional Chinese Theatre (Zhonghua Xiqu Zhuanke Xuexiao) (founded in 1931 with the financial support of the Boxer Indemnity Fund), Jiao championed a new training curriculum, in opposition to the harsh traditional pedagogical methods depicted in the film *Farewell My Concubine*. He advocated the idea of having

female roles played by women. For the first time, boys and girls were admitted together and trained together. He made ‘cultural classes’ including Chinese, arithmetic, and English or French, as compulsory courses. To some extent Jiao retained traditional methods in relation to basic training skills and stage practice. This was the first *jingju* school to be run under the ‘new teaching ideas’ in which stage techniques benefited from the compulsory study of *kunju*. However, Jiao broke the traditional nexus whereby a single student was assigned to a single tutor, and admitted girls to training. He also fixed the term of training at eight years (setting the precedent for the current seven year period in *jingju* and *kunju* schools). My mother, Li Yuru, from the age of nine until seventeen, was a student in his drama school, studying the female role of *jingju*.

- 31 Interviews were held in April 2000 and December 2000.
- 32 Both young male and female role-types wear traditional make-up: tapered sideburns that can cleverly change the shape of the performers’ faces; eyes and eyebrows lifted, pulled back by straps in the head-dresses; and white make-up covering the face, with pink colour accentuating the cheeks and eyelids. Refer to the make-up of Lady Macbeth in Figure 2, as both *jingju* and *kunju* share the same feature.
- 33 Wang Jinlu’s letter dated 12 March 1990.
- 34 Many theatre artists, particularly those from local theatres who had been treated as the lowest of the low in society, were grateful to the Party and the government after 1949.
- 35 Established in April 1950, the Central Academy of Drama was based on three drama and art colleges: Yan’an Lu Xun Arts College (Yan’an Lu Xun Yishu Xueyuan), Arts and Literature College of Huabei University (Huabei Daxue Wenxue Yishu Xueyuan) (each under the leadership of the Communist Party), and Nanjing National Drama School (Nanjing Guoli Xiju Zhuanke Xuexiao) (founded under the Republic). In 1952, a college of the Central Academy was formed in Shanghai from the Shanghai Experimental Drama School (Shanghai Shiyan Juxiao) which then became the Eastern-China College of the Central Academy of Drama. A few years later, this was granted independence as the Shanghai Theatre Academy. The Beijing Film Academy was founded in 1956, based on the Acting Research Institute (Biaoyan Yishu Yanjiusuo).
- 36 Following the Russian model, there have traditionally been four departments in each drama academy: Acting, Directing, Stage Design, and Drama & Literature. Recently new departments and programmes have appeared: Television Arts, Television Play-writing, Musical Studies, and Decorative Arts. Apart from well-equipped workshop spaces and sophisticated theatres, each academy has its own academic journal. Students are trained to B.A. level in the first instance. There are also advanced courses to M.A. and Ph.D. levels. The majority of B.A. students come direct from middle schools. Entry is highly

competitive (students having to sit national Higher Education Entry examinations, and survive three rounds of the academies' own professional auditions). Some B.A. candidates are trainees or young performers from various theatre companies, seeking to advance their education. The academies also run short courses for professionals to enable them to gain further training.

- 37 The majority of tutors complement their teaching with theatre work: writing, directing, acting, stage design, lighting, costuming, or make-up. Teaching and professional theatre are thus closely linked through the academy system. Some problems arise from this closely-knit centralized network. Audiences tend to complain that all the performers in a given production have the same way of speaking. It is also difficult for new methods to be assimilated into a system consolidated from generation to generation. Not only *huaju* theatre practitioners, but also upper-level traditional theatre artists tend to be trained in the academies (with the exception of performers of the music theatre who have their own specialized traditional training regimes).
- 38 As from the year 2000, the three academies were separated from the Ministry of Culture, and are now under the regional State Education Committee.
- 39 Most top-level people actively involved in teaching and in professional theatre after the Cultural Revolution had been trained under the Russians during the 1950s.
- 40 There is virtually no record surviving of the 1959 production of *Hamlet* by Jiao Juyin (the director of the 1942 *Hamlet*) who had already become China's number one director. Given the status of Jiao, the staging is suspiciously under-discussed.
- 41 His close adherence to the Party line did not save him from a tragic fate during the Cultural Revolution. Unjustly labelled as a reactionary on the basis of totally false accusations, he eventually took his own life.
- 42 What happened here in China could also be observed in the former USSR, since both areas were very sensitive to any implicit commentary on the totalitarianism of the regime. Spencer Golub notes in his article 'Between the Curtain and Grave: the Taganka in the Hamlet Gulag', that, 'Significantly, Soviet productions of *Hamlet* in the 1930s were not updated but were set in the Renaissance, thereby discouraging audiences from drawing parallels with contemporary figures and situations' (in Kennedy 1993, 165).
- 43 In the 'Introduction' to *Dialectics of Nature* Engels wrote:
- It was the greatest progressive revolution that mankind has so far experienced, a time which called for giants and produced giants — giants in power of thought, passion, and character, in universality and learning. The men who founded the modern rule of the bourgeoisie had anything but bourgeois limitations. On the contrary, the adventurous character of the time inspired them to a greater or less degree. There was hardly any man of importance then living who had not travelled extensively, who

did not command four or five languages, who did not shine in a number of fields ... The heroes of that time had not yet come under the servitude of the division of labour, the restricting effects of which, with its production of one-sidedness, we so often notice in their successors. But what is especially characteristic of them is that they almost all pursue their lives and activities in the midst of the contemporary movements, in the practical struggle; they take sides and join in the fight, one by speaking and writing, another with the sword, many with both. Hence the fullness and force of character that makes them complete men. Men of the study are the exception — either persons of second or third rank or cautious philistines who do not want to burn their fingers. (1960, 2–3)

- 44 Important essays published in the 1950s and 1960s include: ‘Translating Shakespeare’ (*Guanyu Shashibiya de fanyi*) (Zhu Wenzhen & Sun Dayu 1951); ‘On *Hamlet*’ (*Shashibiya de beiju Hamuleite*) (Bian Zhilin 1956a); ‘On *Othello*’ (*Shashibiya de beiju ‘Aosailuo’*) (Bian Zhilin 1956b); ‘Shakespeare’s Political Views Reflected in His Historical Plays’ (*Shashibiya zai ‘lishiju’ zhong suo liulu de zhengzhi jianjie*) (Chen Jia 1956); ‘Two New Characters: Beatrice and Benedick’ (*Liangge xinxing renwu — Peitelisi yu Bainidi*) (Fang Ping 1957); ‘The Development of Shakespeare’s Ideas on Ethics and Morality’ (*Lun Shashibiya de lunli daode sixiang jiqi fazhan*) (Zhao Li and Meng Weizai 1963); ‘English Poetic Drama and Shakespeare’ (*Yingguo shiju yu Shashibiya*) (Wang Zuoliang 1964).
- 45 It later changed its name to the People’s Literature Publishing House (Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe).
- 46 *Macbeth* was translated respectively by Dai Wangshu and Zhang Wenliang; *The Merchant of Venice* by Gu Zhongyi; *Twelfth Night* by Peng Zhaoliang; *Julius Caesar* respectively by Yuan Guowei and Cao Weifeng; *The Tempest* by Yu Nanqiu and Wang Shuying. (Sources: Ge Baoquan 1983, 337; Kuang Yinghui 1984 and Meng Xianqiang 1994, 111–37.)
- 47 *The New Translation of the Complete Works of Shakespeare* (*Xin Shashibiya quan ji*) has been published by both the Hebei Educational Publishing House in Shijiazhuang, and the Taipei Owl Publishing House. In Beijing, another Shakespeare translation project has been in progress, edited by Chen Guohua.
- 48 Ma Yongan gave me an interview about this production on 19 December 2000.
- 49 In order to reproduce the Western style, the first few days of rehearsal were usually spent watching Shakespeare films. When the 1986 *yueju* production of *Twelfth Night* started its rehearsal, the first important gathering of the group was to go and see the Soviet-made film of the play. Malvolio, Sir Andrew, Sir Toby and the clown, the comic parts in the *yueju* version, all clearly learned their gestures, steps and facial expressions directly from the film.
- 50 This slogan was first raised by Ke Qingshi, the Party Secretary of Shanghai, at the beginning of 1963.

## CHAPTER 2

- 1 The other play was *Break (Razlom)* written in 1927 by Boris Andreevich Lavrenev.
- 2 This was the famous ‘free airing of views’ and Big Poster period before the Anti-Rightist Campaign.
- 3 Concerning this production, I interviewed Hu Dao, an assistant to Y. K. Lipkovskaya and later the director of the revivals in 1961 and 1979. The two interviews were held in September 1998 and January 2001. Information and quotations are from these two interviews, unless otherwise stated. Hu Dao also wrote to me three times to answer my questions.
- 4 Various symposia and meetings with intellectuals and businessmen were held at different levels to encourage them to voice their criticisms of the Party and the governmental system. Most intellectuals at first hesitated, due to their memories of earlier political campaigns. But Mao urged them to overcome their fears and reproached Party officials who were unhappy with the policy of moderation. However, when people began attacking the Party and its role in fundamental ways, Mao could tolerate no more. On 25 May, Mao Zedong wrote an article ‘The Situation Is Changing’ (Mao Zedong 1977, 5:423–29), which was first issued among Party officials, indicating the change of policy. Then on 8 June, Mao wrote another article for the Party Central Committee to be issued as Party Instructions: ‘Organizing Forces to Fight Back the Savage Attack Launched by the Rightists’. On the same day, *The People’s Daily* published an editorial ‘Why Is This?’. The political climate radically changed overnight. A campaign was launched nationwide, and over 500,000 intellectuals were ostracized from society. The Anti-Rightist Campaign did not end until the summer of 1958.
- 5 This information about the Anti-Rightist campaign at the STA is mainly from *Yuanbao* (The academy’s journal), Issues 1–24, 1956–57.
- 6 This quotation is from one of the popular rhymes of the time. As children, we learned these rhymes by heart at school.
- 7 Hu Dao’s letter dated 22 September 1998.
- 8 Arrested in 1976 after Mao’s death, Jiang Qing (Mao’s wife), Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan and Wang Hongwen were tried in 1980–81. On 23 January 1981, Jiang Qing and Zhang Chunqiao received the death sentence, suspended for two years; Wang was sentenced to life imprisonment and Yao to twenty-years of imprisonment. They were charged with the persecution of more than 700,000 people. Of these, some 35,000 had died either from gross ill-treatment or had been driven to suicide. Many more were physically or mentally disabled. People from the arts were prominent among the victims. Other victims included scientists, Party officials and ordinary people.



- 9 In his article *Landscape*, Engels comments on the scenery in England: ‘Oh, there is rich poetry in the counties of Britain! It often seems as if one were still in the golden days of merry England and might see Shakespeare with his fowling-piece moving stealthily behind a hedge on a deer-poaching expedition, or you might wonder why not one of his divine comedies actually takes place on this green meadow’ (Engels 1975, 100). This quotation is always used in China whenever a Shakespeare comedy is staged.
- 10 Mao Zedong argues in his famous article *Talks at the Yan’an Forum* of 1942: ‘Literary and artistic works have always laid equal stress on the bright and the dark, half and half.’ This statement contains many muddled ideas. It is not true that literature and art have always done this. Many petit bourgeois writers have never discovered the bright side. Their works only expose the dark side and are known as the ‘literature of exposure’. Some of their works simply specialize in preaching pessimism and world-weariness. On the other hand, Soviet literature in the period of socialist construction portrays mainly the bright side. It, too, describes shortcomings in works and portrays negative characters, but this only serves as a contrast to bring out the brightness of the whole picture and is not on a so-called half-and-half basis. ... Only truly revolutionary writers and artists can correctly solve the problem of whether to extol or to expose. All the dark forces harming the masses of the people must be exposed and all the revolutionary struggles of the masses of the people must be extolled; this is the fundamental task of revolutionary writers and artists. (Mao Zedong 1964, 873)
- 11 Nonetheless, both drama academies used some of the physical exercises of the traditional theatre in their movements classes.
- 12 Superobjective is one of the fundamental ideas in the Stanislavski System. This is the character’s final goal and shaping influence, the aim that runs through the play and dictates the manner in which the role as a whole is to be played (Benedetti, 1989).
- 13 In the Chinese translation published in *Yuanbao* (The academy’s journal), the term used is *douzheng*, meaning both fight and struggle.
- 14 William Archer’s *Play-making: A Manual of Craftsmanship* was first translated and published in China in 1964 and reprinted in 1979. No specific translator is indicated.
- 15 I studied playwriting from 1978 to 1982 at the Shanghai Theatre Academy, and these terms were hammered into our minds.
- 16 The altered acts and scenes in Lipkovskaya’s re-organized *Much Ado* are as follows:  
*Act one contains five scenes.* The complete original I i, ii and iii, plus II i, which is divided into two scenes to become scenes four and five of act one in the production.

*Act two consists of three scenes.* Scene one comprises the original II iii and III i. Thus the two garden scenes in which Benedick and Beatrice happily fall into the trap now form one unit. Scene two is the original II ii, and scene three is the original III ii, so there is now continuity between these scenes. After making up his mind how he is going to ruin the happiness of Claudio and Hero, Don John puts his scheme into practice straightaway.

*Act three consists of four scenes.* Scenes one, two and three are the original III iii, iv and v. Scene four is the original IV i, the wedding scene.

*Act four comprises the original scenes in act V.*

- 17 Following are some examples: ‘The USSR is the real home for Shakespeare’ (Dong Youdao 1957). ‘All the participants [who attended the symposium organized by the Shanghai Association of Dramatists] hold the opinion that the Soviet expert’s directing work of *Much Ado* is significant in our drama teaching, especially today when we do not know how to stage a Shakespeare play. The rehearsal and performance of *Much Ado* not only illustrate the necessity of carrying forward and learning from classical repertoire, but also set up an excellent model for us to follow’ (Wei, 1957).
- 18 Lipkovskaya lived and worked at the STA for two years. As an expert sent by the ‘Soviet Big Brother’ she brought in all the necessary knowledge for developing *huaju* and was idolized by her students and Chinese colleagues. Based at the STA and the CAD, she and other Soviet experts ran advanced courses on acting, directing and stage-design. The majority of students taking these courses were top professionals sent to Beijing and Shanghai by provincial companies and key members of the teaching staff at the two academies.
- 19 Hu Dao’s letter dated 20 December 2000.
- 20 Hu Dao directed in the *huaju* form *Much Ado* (1961/1979) and *Merry Wives of Windsor* (1986), as well as the *jingju* version of *Macbeth* (1987) and *sixianxi* version of *King Lear* (1994).
- 21 There are two volumes. Volume I published in 1979 covers Shakespeare criticism in the period from Ben Jonson to Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi (1904). Volume II published in 1981 runs from Andrew Cecil Bradley to A. West (1964).
- 22 I interviewed Barrie Rutter about the Old Vic’s 1979 visit to China on 11 April 2001.
- 23 This production is included in the CD-ROM project *Performing Shakespeare in China 1980–1990* (Authors: Ruru Li and John Gillies. Multimedia concept and discursive structure: John Gillies. Multimedia development: Russell Bywater. Unpublished.)
- 24 Though the matter was halted by Hu Yaobang, then the General Secretary of the Communist Party, it indicates how tense the situation was.
- 25 Xu said in his article ‘Elementary Explorations: My Rehearsals and Teaching

in *Macbeth*' (1996) that the image of blundering about came from the following description of Louis Napoleon in Marx's 'A Historical Parallel':

He may recoil before the storm he has raised, and again receive the benedictions of the Pope and the caresses of the British Queen; but neither will be more than lip-service. They know him now, what the people knew him long since — a reckless gambler, a desperate adventurer, who would as soon dice with royal bones as any other if the game promised to leave him a winner. They know him as one who, having, like Macbeth, waded to a crown through human gore, finds it easier to go forward than to return to peace and innocence. (Marx 1980, 273)

- 26 I interviewed Xu Xiaozhong about this production on 9 April 1997.
- 27 This was a song (Chinese title: *Dongfang hong*) sung in 1942 by a peasant-singer Li Youyuan (1903–55) in the Yan'an area where the Communist Party was located during the Sino-Japanese War. It used *xintianyou*, a local folk melody in the Shaanxi region, and has been regarded as a sample of ordinary people's respect and love for the great leader. The song became widespread after the Communist Party seized power in 1949 and during the Cultural Revolution. For a time it replaced the national anthem. The first stanza reads as follows: 'The east is red, the sun is rising. Mao Zedong appears in China. He works for the happiness of the people. *Huerhaiyo*, he is the great saviour of the people' (*Cihai* 1979, 48).
- 28 In the 1950s and 1960s, the government held complete control over overseas study. The GITIS Institute was one of the small number of drama institutes in Eastern Europe with which the government had a formal link in the 1950s. Directors like Chen Yong, Xu Xiaozhong and Zhang Qihong, who had gone through strict selection procedures, studied the directing course there. The situation today is much freer. Drama students may go abroad to study either with scholarships offered by the government or by the institutions concerned, or funding arranged by themselves.
- 29 As was seen in Chapter 1, *huaju* originated as a type of Chinese imitation of the Western theatre at the dawn of the twentieth century. Therefore, '*huaju minzuhua*' or *huaju* with Chinese national awareness has been an ideological and aesthetic objective pursued by many theatre artists. This became even more pronounced after 1949.
- 30 Some felt that there is little difference between, for example, Hamlet dropping Yorick's skull because the director wishes to suggest the brittleness of life, and Hamlet dropping Yorick's skull because it happened to slip from his hand. In both cases, the spectators will tend to seek a rationale and assign a meaning for the action, inside the larger narrative under construction on the stage and in their minds (Kennedy 1996, 14).
- 31 This is a translation of the slogan '*san tuchu*', which could also be translated as 'three prominences'.

## CHAPTER 3

- 1 A Chinese expression for one's career.
- 2 This is the Huangpujiang riverside in the old International Settlement area. Its early twentieth century architecture is reminiscent of British civic buildings of that era.
- 3 I interviewed Francis Maguire in London on 30 November 2000.
- 4 Orthodox Chinese Marxists believe that each society is based on the dialectical unity of the economic base and the superstructure: 'The economic base decides the superstructure, while the latter reflects the former' (*Cihai* 1979, 1167).
- 5 The programme for this production lists both Lin Zhaohua and Ren Ming as directors. However, in my interview with him, Lin did not mention his colleague, and most reviews and scholars have referred to Lin alone. I follow the same practice.
- 6 This production is included in my article 'Shakespeare on the Chinese Stage in the 1990s' (1999, 355–67), and in the CD-ROM *Performing Shakespeare in China, 1980–1990* (Li & Gillies 2000). I am indebted to John Gillies for the discussion with me about this production.
- 7 Pu Cunxin gave me an interview for this production on 26 December 2000. All the quotations were from this interview unless otherwise noted.
- 8 Lin's career as a director was assured with his production of *Alarm Signal* (*Juedui xin hao*) in 1983. This was followed by a series of highly controversial productions including *Bus Stop* (*Chezhan*) in 1984 and *Wildman* (*Yeren*) in 1986. All three plays were written by Gao Xingjian. *Bus Stop*, an example of the Chinese version of the Beckettian Theatre of the Absurd, was banned after ten performances, and declared 'seriously flawed' (Yan 1998; xvi). While some praised the play for the modernity it expressed, others criticized it because it 'contained a basic questioning if not a fundamental negation of the organization of contemporary Chinese society, a condescending attitude towards the deluded pitiable multitude, and an elitist and individualistic impulse' (Yan 1998, xvi).
- 9 *Programme Notes for 'Hamlet'* (*Hamuleite yan chu shuomingshu*), Beijing Renmin Yishu Juyuan, 1994.
- 10 The translation is based on a transcript from the recorded performance on VCD.
- 11 I interviewed Cheng Mingzheng about this production in October 1997.
- 12 Interview, April 4, 1995: participants — Norio Deguchi, Ken Yoshizawa, Yasunari Takahashi, Tetsuo Anzai, Kazuko Matsuoka, Tetsuya Motohashi, James Brandon. An abbreviated version of this interview (but not this particular passage) is in: Ryuta Minami, Ian Carruthers and John Gillies, eds., *Performing Shakespeare in Japan*, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

- 13 This production is discussed in my articles: ‘Shakespeare on the Chinese Stage in the 1990s’ and ‘The 1994 Shanghai International Shakespeare Festival: An Update on the Bard in Cathay’, *Asian Theatre Journal* (1997, 93–119).
- 14 The translation is based on the manuscript supplied by Li Rong, the scriptwriter.
- 15 I interviewed Li Rong about this production in September 1994 during the Shanghai International Shakespeare Festival.
- 16 *Programme Notes for ‘Othello’ (Aosailuo yanchu shuomingshu)*, Shanghai Renmin Yishu Juyuan, 1994.
- 17 *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 4

- 1 In the past in China, a woman took her husband’s family name and dropped her own personal name when she married. The pattern of the new name would be: husband’s family name, wife’s maiden name and ‘shi’, which means ‘the person of those two families’. In *Blood-stained Hands*, Tie is Ma Pei’s wife’s maiden name, meaning ‘iron’. It is perhaps interesting for readers to know that the Western media’s nickname for Lady Thatcher, ‘the Iron Lady’, has been widely known in China.
- 2 The translation is based on the script supplied by the Shanghai Kunju Company.
- 3 I do not use ‘composer’ because the person is not really allowed to compose a piece of music. The musical director can do some alterations within the limits of the set music.
- 4 *Jing*, or painted face, has a varied terminology in different theatrical genres.
- 5 An essential concept in the naturalistic theatre. Actors attempt to live in the scene rather than perform in front of an audience.
- 6 Brecht’s comment on the demonstration given by Mei Lanfang, who appeared at a reception wearing his formal suit, proves from another angle my argument that the actor is the real master in the Chinese indigenous theatre:  
 ... But with what art he does this! He only needs a minimum of illusion. What he has to show is worth seeing even for a man in his right mind. What Western actor of the old sort (apart from one or two comedians) could demonstrate the elements of his art like the Chinese actor Mei Lanfang, without special lighting and wearing a dinner jacket in an ordinary room full of specialists? It would be like the magician at the fair giving away his tricks, so that nobody ever wanted to see the act again. (1973, 94)
- 7 Li Yu points out that:  
 [Too] many unnecessary threads [i.e. trivial plots] are the worst thing possible for a play. The reason why *Jingchai ji* (*The Story of the Wooden Hairpin*), Liu Zhiyuan [name of the protagonist], *Bai yue ting* (*The Pavilion*

for *Worshipping the Moon*) and *Sha gou ji* (*The Story of Killing a Dog*) are still so popular nowadays is simply because there is only one plot throughout from beginning to end, without any trivial episodes in them. Even if a small child sees such plays, he can understand them easily and learn how to recite them quickly. (Li Yu 1982, 18)

- 8 Patrice Pavis uses an hourglass to describe the process of intercultural theatre. He says:

It is a strange object, reminiscent of a funnel and a mill. In the upper bowl is the foreign culture, the source culture, which is more or less codified and solidified in diverse anthropological, sociocultural or artistic modelizations. In order to reach us, this culture must pass through a narrow neck. If the grains of culture or their conglomerate are sufficiently fine, they will flow through without any trouble, however slowly, into the lower bowl, that of the target culture, from which point we observe this slow flow. The grains will rearrange themselves in a way which appears random, but which is partly regulated by their passage through some dozen filters put in place by the target culture and the observer. (Pavis 1992, 4)

- 9 'Water-sleeves' are flimsy white sleeves about two feet long. They are the essential means for gestures and dances in Chinese indigenous theatre. They are a variation on the voluminous sleeves that ancient people wore in everyday life.
- 10 I still remember that Professor Yang Zhouhan, one of the most respected Chinese scholars on English literature, once said to me: 'I've spent all my life teaching Shakespeare, writing about him, and I hope to raise him up to the place he deserves. But you, a mere slip of a girl, having just done your M.A., are trying to pull him down!' He sighed deeply and looked sad. He knew I was a supporter for Shakespeare in the traditional music form, and that I was more interested in the popular elements in Shakespeare plays than merely his literary value.
- 11 This production is included in the CD-ROM *Performing Shakespeare in China, 1980–1990* (Li & Gillies). It is also discussed in my article 'Macbeth Becomes Ma Pei, An Odyssey from Scotland to China', (1995, 42–53).
- 12 *Kunju* performance had virtually ceased around the 1920s. Present day *kunju* acting owes its existence to a government-sponsored revival in the 1950s.
- 13 The letters from Bernard Shaw survived the Cultural Revolution fortuitously: they were photographed and are included in Huang's book *My 'Xieyi' Conception of Theatre and I* (1990).
- 14 'Xizi' or player is a pejorative term in Chinese for actors. The performing arts were officially rated as one of the lowest in social status since ancient times. Performers in local theatres have particularly been looked down upon until 1949 when the Communist Party attempted to propagandize its ideology. Many star performers were then made People's Representatives for the Congress or

Representatives for the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. But for ordinary people, the prejudice against acting lasted for decades. Even in 1960, when my husband, David Jiang, was admitted to the Shanghai Theatre Academy where he would study for a B.A. degree, his grandmother cried for days and tried to stop him from entering on an acting career.

- 15 Jin Runzhi made Dan Ni her stage name. This is a sound derived from Saint-Denis in remembrance of the couple's most respected mentor.
- 16 In 1992 when I went to visit him, again we talked about other possible English translations of this word. He thought that it was very much a Chinese idea and very difficult to find an English equivalent. He insisted that one day 'xieyi' would be included in an English dictionary as like 'kungfu' or 'chigong' are.
- 17 Mei Lanfang (1894–1961), the most famous master of the female impersonator in *jingju*, was born in a theatre family. He started his training at eight and acting on the stage when he was eleven. As a reformer of the genre, his contribution to *jingju* and to the traditional theatre in general was tremendous. His tour in the US and East Europe not only showed the outside world the beautiful style of Chinese theatre but also had great impact on some contemporary Western theatre practitioners. Both Stanislavski and Brecht recorded their impressions of seeing Mei's performances (*cf* note 6 in this chapter).
- 18 Huang was deeply and affectionately attached to his wife. Dan Ni stayed at home until the last few days of her life. Huang went to sit with her at least twice a day no matter how busy he was with rehearsals. Any gift he received would always be taken to her so that she could have a look first. Before I went abroad, I went to say goodbye to him. He told me to look for a female figure ornament for his wife which would be an equivalent to the Chinese God of longevity. 'Chinese only think of man, so the symbol of longevity is always male.' Unfortunately I was never able to fulfil this request.
- 19 Quotation taken from my 1992 interview notes with Huang Zuolin.
- 20 What Huang Zuolin felt about the Chinese theatre and Shakespeare and what he intended to pursue in the *kunju Macbeth* echoed the ideal of the romantic school in France in the early nineteenth century. Victor Hugo in his manifesto of the movement *Preface to Cromwell* wrote: 'We have not reached the poetic culmination of modern times. Shakespeare is the drama; and the drama, which with the same breath moulds the grotesque and the sublime, the terrible and the absurd, tragedy and comedy — the drama is the distinguishing characteristic of the third epoch of poetry, of the literature of the present day' (1827).
- 21 Having destroyed his official career by frank criticism of the government in 1590, Tang Xianzu was banished to a remote area and concentrated on writing *chuanqi* plays. As a fine writer of prose and poetry, his plays are full of imagination and his protagonists enjoy the freedom between life and death. His intricate style reflects his view of life and his mastery of the language.

- Among his four great ‘dream’ plays — all having a dream as a central part — *Peony Pavilion* is the most celebrated.
- 22 A Chinese expression symbolizing the kingdom.
  - 23 As an older genre, *kunju* has five basic role types instead of four. *Mo* is hardly seen in any younger theatrical forms since it has been integrated into the *sheng*, the male character type.
  - 24 Traditionally, the colour of apricot and the pattern of the dragon can only be used by the emperor.
  - 25 In Xu Xiaozhong’s *huaju* production, he used an empty chair to avoid the usual naturalistic approach. This is part of his use of ideas from the traditional Chinese theatre.
  - 26 In Chinese superstition, a ghost may attach itself to someone and enter that person so that he or she takes on the personhood of the ghost. In this case Ma Pei thinks each official, when ‘entered’ by the ghost, is in fact Du Ge’s ghost.
  - 27 I held an interview with Ji Zhenhua in July 1994. All the quotations below were from that interview.
  - 28 The Chinese title is: *Zhenxing huaju de shisi dian jianyi*.
  - 29 Roasted water-melon seeds are a type of snack in China. ‘Water-melon Seeds Fool’ was a famous brand of private enterprise, and the owner was regarded as a heroic entrepreneur in the early period of economic reforms.
  - 30 This production is included in the CD-ROM *Performing Shakespeare in China, 1980–1990*, (Li and Gillies).
  - 31 We talked about this production on 20 and 28 February 2001. All citations from Jiang were taken from these two conversations unless otherwise noted.
  - 32 For example, Barthes writes: ‘We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture’ (in Lodge 1988, 170).
  - 33 The translation is based on the script that I collected from the Anhui Huangmeixi Company.
  - 34 Yan and Huang were believed by tradition to be two famous emperors of ancient China, and the ancestors of the Chinese people.
  - 35 I interviewed Huang Xinde about his role as the Chinese Benedick in 1986 at China’s first Shakespeare Festival.
  - 36 ‘One table and two chairs’ (*yi zhuo er yi*) is an expression in the traditional theatre. There may be fewer or more than one table and two chairs on the stage at any time, and they are taken on or off as required. Sometimes they are not everyday items of furniture and can be endowed with a wide range of meanings by the performers, such as a bed, tree, hill, city wall or tall building.



- 37 This production is mentioned in my article ‘The 1994 Shanghai International Shakespeare Festival: An Update on the Bard in Cathay’.
- 38 The translation is based on the manuscript given to me by Xue Yunhuang, the playwright.
- 39 For example, all the actresses of the female role in *jingju* performing Mei Lanfang’s repertoire, and following his way of singing and acting, are regarded as Mei school (Mei *pai*) actresses.
- 40 I held a brief interview with Su Leci and Zhao Zhigang during the 1994 Shanghai International Shakespeare Festival.
- 41 This shows how informal the *yueju* genre is. Its sub-group of role type is not as strict as in other older theatrical forms. In *yueju*, a man can play both young and old male roles, with no vocal or physical distinctions. But for both *jingju* and *kunju*, the young male role uses a falsetto and has his own sets of steps, gestures and body movements.

## CHAPTER 5

- 1 This production is included in the CD-ROM *Performing Shakespeare in China, 1980–1990* (Li & Gillies).
- 2 Hu Feng (1902–85), a penname for Zhang Mingzhen, was a writer and literary theorist who joined the Communist Party in Japan in 1929. In 1954, he wrote a 300,000–word letter to the Party Central Committee expressing his critical opinions on the Party’s arts policy. One of his points was that there were ‘five theoretical knives’ hanging above artists, indicating that Mao’s *Talks at the Yan’an Forum* taken as the guiding principle to justify arts policy had destroyed creativity. Immediately, Mao launched a campaign in which Hu was accused of leading a conspiracy to attack the Communist Party and to restore the National Party (Guomingdang). Hu was imprisoned and subsequently suffered a mental breakdown. Many intellectuals were persecuted as members of ‘the Hu Feng Counter-revolutionary Clique’.
- 3 Our conversation took place in 1986 during the first Shakespeare Festival in China. Fifteen years later I still remember his words, even his voice clearly, because he felt strongly about this expression.
- 4 It is most regrettable that visual materials and information about the outside world are still scarce in China due to both ideological and economic limitations, although the country has carried out its open-door policy for the last twenty years. I recently visited the libraries at the Central Academy of Drama and the Shanghai Theatre Academy, and was told by the librarians that it was very difficult to keep the limited resources and high demand in balance. They often rely on gifts from international delegations.

- 5 The translation of the libretto is based on the manuscript of the *yueju Twelfth Night*, supplied by the Shanghai Yuejuyuan.
- 6 We can take as an example *The Drunken Imperial Concubine* (*Guifei zuijiu*). Yang Yuhuan, the favourite concubine is told to go to the pavilion to have a drink with the Emperor. The ninety-minute play starts with Yang's departure. She sings and dances to express her happy mood. As soon as she arrives in the garden, she is informed that the Emperor has changed his mind and gone to see another concubine instead. Yang is hurt, but feels more embarrassed in front of her attendants and eunuchs. She tries to hide her anger and feigns indifference by drinking. She becomes more and more drunk. The nuance of her changing mood, her hurt feelings and the effect of the alcohol on her mental and physical state are all conveyed by exquisite dances and songs. The play ends with her going back to her own palace lonely and despondent.
- 7 This is a proverb and the origin goes back to Chinese mythology.
- 8 The English translation is based on the script supplied by the company. However, on the video, some of the lines were recited rather than sung.
- 9 Julia Kristeva wrote: '... any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double' (Kristeva 1986, 37).
- 10 As Dr Patricia Stablein pointed out to me, *amor de lonh* (love at a distance) also plays an important role in French and Middle Eastern romance and lyric poetry. It probably became current in the West through cultural contacts developed via trade, the Crusades and the rich mozarabic artistic and mystical expressions of Spain during the Califate.
- 11 A Chinese actor's name card usually includes the person's artistic ranking, e.g. 'Grade 1 actor' and a list of the organizations the person belongs to, such as the provincial or national association of dramatists. It also includes the home address and home telephone number.
- 12 Jiao Juyin directed the *huaju Hamlet* in 1942 and the *jingju Romeo and Juliet* in 1948 (*cf* Chapter 1).
- 13 This was a widely-used practice in model operas. Through the interview that Ma gave me, I had the impression that the arrangements of the acts in the adaptation, the music and stage blocking were much influenced by model operas in which Ma had been involved. However, when I raised the issue, Ma did not think this was the case.
- 14 The conventional leg movements called *aizi bu*, typically used by a clown. Performers squat and kick their legs to move forward. These steps were used in the *kunju Macbeth* by the witches adopting dwarf-like postures (*cf* Chapter 4).
- 15 The traditional repertoires of many local theatres contain plays based on a

historical figure Wu Zixu. In the play, the protagonist's hair changes its colour overnight because of his anxiety.

- 16 Translation from the transcription that I did based on the video tape.
- 17 Even for a spectator with no knowledge of Chinese language or theatre, Ma's creation of this episode was striking. Philip Brockbank commented: 'The tragedy of the handkerchief was rendered more poignant by Othello momentarily pausing in wonder and delight before breaking down on the line' (1988, 201).
- 18 There were exceptions. As discussed in Chapter 1, Jiao Juyin was the director of the 1948 *jingju* *The Story of Tempering of Love*. This was part of his idea of reforming the traditional Chinese theatre.
- 19 Quotation taken from my interview notes with Ma Yongan on 19 December 2000.
- 20 In the strictest sense, sinified Shakespeare performance may not qualify as 'intercultural theatre' according to Patrice Pavis's definition (Pavis 1996, 8). However, intercultural can be given a broader meaning, and in practice each sinified production is a process of cultural interaction.
- 21 There were only three *huaju* Shakespeare productions which were adapted into a Chinese context: *Hero of the Turmoil* (*Luan shi yingxiong*)/*Macbeth* (1945), *King Lear* (1986) and *All's Well That Ends Well* (1986).

## CHAPTER 6

- 1 Francis Maguire was interviewed on 30 November 2000 (*cf* Chapter 3).
- 2 Jiang directed three Chinese plays with Western performers in Leeds, England and in New York: *The Tree God* (*Dashu shen chuanqi*) by Yao Yiwei; *A Man From Wuling* (*Wuling ren*) by Zhang Xiaofeng and *The Wilderness* (*Yuanye*) by Cao Yu.
- 3 *Zhang Gudong Lends His Wife* (*Zhang Gudong jie qi*) is an anonymous play published in *Sewing The White*, Vol. 11 (*Zhui bai qiu, shiyi ji*). Tang Ying, a playwright of the Qing dynasty, adapted the original into *Debt Arranged by Heaven* (*Tian yuan zhai*), a *chuanqi* or legend and romance play. This play has remained popular since then and there have been other adaptations in various regional operas.
- 4 This short play used to be part of the full-length play *The Famen Temple* (*Famen si*). In the mid-1950s, Li Yuru, inspired by the policy of 'sorting out our tradition and weeding through the old to bring forth the new', used the extract of the original and worked it out as an independent short play which was entitled *Picking Up the Jade Bracelet* (*Shi yu zhuo*). With skilful miming and a light-hearted atmosphere the play has been popular on the stage in China and abroad ever since.

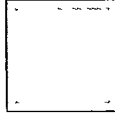
- 5 As in other aspects, like melody, mime or make-up, there are many standard patterns of percussion-playing in different Chinese local operas.
- 6 Quotation taken from a letter by Li Yuru dated 29 October 1998 to the author, discussing the main features of *jingju*.
- 7 This production was discussed in my articles: 'Shakespeare on the Chinese Stage in the 1990s' and 'The 1994 Shanghai International Shakespeare Festival: An Update on the Bard in Cathay'.
- 8 For example, instant noodles on the mainland are called 'noodles of convenience'. Taiwanese people laugh when they hear this term, because 'convenience' has the connotation of a toilet. More profound problems of vocabulary are caused by the two different political and economic systems.
- 9 In some English articles, the name of the company is translated as 'Screen Theatre'. I use 'Ping Feng', the transliteration of the Chinese, because in *Shamlet* the name of the company — Feng Ping Troupe — is also a parody.
- 10 *Programme Notes for 'Shamlet' (Shamuleite shuomingshu)*, Shanghai Xiandairen Jushe and Taiwan Ping Feng Biaoyan Ban, 1994.
- 11 The same idea of parody can be seen in Li Guoxiu's previous work, including his most famous production: *Half Mile of the Great Wall (Banli Changcheng)*.
- 12 A graduate from the Department of Directing at the STA in 1992, he is now a lecturer there.

## CONCLUSION

- 1 The interview was held on 12 July 2001.
- 2 I interviewed Cheng Mingzheng on 22 July 2001.
- 3 I interviewed Fang Ping on 16 July 2001.
- 4 I interviewed Hu Jialu on 19 July 2001.
- 5 There were nine 'main theme' productions put on in Shanghai in July 2001 covering spoken drama, *jingju*, *huju* (the Shanghai local genre, using Shanghai dialect) and *yueju*. The following selected titles may best illustrate the content of the plays: *The Daughter of the Party (Dang de nuer, jingju)*, *Sentinels under the Neon Light (Nihongdeng xia de shaobing, huaju)*, *The People's Republic Will Never Forget (Gongheguo buhui wangji, huaju)*, and *Tiny Sparkling Fire (Xingxing zhi huo, huju)*. The title of *Tiny Sparkling Fire* is from Mao's article 'Tiny Sparkling Fire Can Set Prairie Ablaze'.
- 6 Note the arrangement for Hu Jintao's titles which I have copied from the programme notes for the play. 'Member of the Standing Committee of the Central Political Bureau of the CCP' comes before 'Vice Chairman' of the state, indicating the predominance of the Party over the government. In November 2002 at the Sixteenth National Congress of the Communist Party,

Hu Jintao was made the General Secretary of the Central Committee of Communist Party of China.

- 7 *Programme Notes for 'Good-bye, Mother' (Zaijianle, mama shuomingshu)*, 2001.
- 8 *An Ordinary Day* (premiered on 12 July 2001) was translated and directed by David Jiang (the director of the *huangmeixi Much Ado* and the 1994 Leeds *Macbeth*). Charlotte MacInnis — Chinese name Ai Hua, meaning 'loving China' — played the heroine Julia in both Chinese and English versions.
- 9 I interviewed Rong Guangrun on 17 July 2001.
- 10 The Shanghai Grand Theatre opened in 1998 for the following year's celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the People's Republic of China. The architecture and the interior decoration are modern and luxurious, designed by Jean-Marie Charpentier and Associates. There are altogether three theatres, with capacities respectively of 1,800, 600 and 250 seats. The cheapest ticket in the Grand Theatre is 100 RMB (about US\$12), and the top price can be as high as 3,000 RMB(US\$380). Beijing is going to build its own Grand Theatre.
- 11 Zhu Dakun raised enough money from Hong Kong in 2000 to put on this show, and a director and stage designer from Ukraine were invited. But for various reasons, the proposal fell through.
- 12 Lin gave me a phone interview on 23 July 2001.
- 13 At a recent meeting with Lin in 2002, he was pleased to inform me that the Beijing People's Art Theatre may agree to put on *Coriolanus* in 2004.
- 14 A considerable number of private drama, music and dance schools have emerged in many cities since the late 1980s. They usually run one-year diploma courses, preparing candidates for the fierce competition of the entrance audition to the prestigious drama/film academies, music conservatories and dance schools.
- 15 Gu's experimental production *Shei sha si le guowang* (literal translation — *Who Has Killed the King*; English title: *To Be or Not To Be*) 1999, a collage based on *Hamlet* won him some reputation as a director. He did not regard *To Be or Not To Be* by Cao Lusheng as a Shakespeare performance, but he said he intended to apply a Shakespearean spirit to it. He further elaborated his idea: 'I think the very essence of the Shakespearean spirit lies in his concern about his times and his people. My play was based on extracts from *Hamlet* in which I attempted to convey a contemporary's concern about our age.' I interviewed Gu Yian on 16 July 2001.



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