# Re-routing Intercultural Theatre in Europe? A Chinese Perspective on Royal Shakespeare Company's *The Orphan of Zhao*[1]

Feng Wei, Shandong University, China

**Abstract**: The Royal Shakespeare Company's 2012 adaptation of Ji Junxiang's *Orphan of Zhao* was a negotiation of Chinese and Western theatrical tradition. As opposed to Western theatre's formalistic appropriation of the East in the 20th century and Asian theatre's import of Western texts, RSC's adaptation revealed a new paradigm in intercultural theatre in Europe. With reference to Erika Fischer-Lichte's concept of 'interweaving performance cultures', this paper analyses its adaptation strategy by situating this rendition within the larger context of contemporary theatrical interculturalism. It argues that, despite its pursuit and claim of authenticity, RSC unwittingly altered the socio-cultural and aesthetic characteristics of the original according to Western mind-set and theatrical tradition, which led to both positive and negative results. This highlights the influence of the adaptor's personal agency on the fruit of intercultural adaptation, which necessitates more attention than it usually receives.

**Keywords**: Interweaving performance cultures, misunderstanding, self-sacrifice tragic hero, lyricism, unity of plot

## I

## Overview of intercultural theatre since the 20th century

Defined by Patrice Pavis (1996, p. 8) in his seminal *The Intercultural Performance Reader* as 'hybrid forms drawing upon a more or less conscious and voluntary mixing of performance traditions traceable to distinct cultural areas,' intercultural theatre since the twentieth century is perceivably dominated by two trends represented by the West and East as summarised by Eugenio Barba (2005, p. 102): 'We in the West have often envied the Asians their theatrical knowledge, which transmits the actor's living work of art from one generation to another. They have envied our theatre's capacity for confronting new themes and the way in which it keeps up with the times.'

W. B. Yeats, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud in the first half of the 20th century, as well as Jerzy Grotowski, Richard Schechner, Ariane Mnouchkine, Peter Brook, and Eugenio Barba in the second half drew tremendously on rituals and traditional theatres in China, Japan, India, Korea, and Bali to build their own theatres. More often than not, they were more interested in Eastern theatres' stylised performing forms than textual legacies, probably for the reason that Westerners boast a vast reservoir of plays from ancient Greece to Shakespeare to Ibsen. A general critique of their formalistic pursuit is that they were merely plundering the East for exoticism and inspiration without concern for their

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quintessence, as observed by Brian Singleton (2010, p. 41), 'Asian theatres, for all of these practitioners, were treated as the crucible of formalism, and their performative vocabularies were used as the templates for the search for a new form of theatre.' Chief among their critics is Indian scholar Rustom Bharucha (1993, p. 14) who identifies those 'borrowing, stealing and exchanging from other cultures' as 'a continuation of colonialism.' Further critiques are evident in *Interculturalism and Performance: Writings from* PAJ (1991) edited by Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta, a collection of articles written predominantly to problematise the intercultural practices. The problem with formalism is that they are usually misleading and incorrect due to lack of sufficient knowledge: 'art fanciers admired the outside but did not see the power and meaning inherent in them; anthropologists have analyzed them purely as symbols' (Turner 1991, p.178). Another problem with formalism, as represented by Robert Wilson, is postmodern playfulness which abuses parody and pastiche by manipulating cultural differences, 'where [no] cultural exchange can effectively occur and new hybrid identities can emerge' (Knowles 2010, p. 4).[i] There were rare, if not none, adaptations trying to appropriate Eastern texts. Brecht's rewriting of *The Chalk Circle* and Brook's disputed staging of *The Mahabharata*. Brecht as a claimed thief of different authors did not represent the Chinese culture in the play; he rather localised it and changed its moral. Brook's adaptation is controversial because of his unserious attitude to the Hindu holy text, which, according to Erika Fischer-Lichte (2014, p. 8), should not bear transcultural reshaping. The contrast of overemphasis of formalism and ignorance of the text seems to demonstrate that Europe which boasts Greek plays, Shakespeare, Molière has no need for Eastern plays, particularly under the circumstances of insufficient translation and speakers of non-European languages.

Asian traditions were employed as no more than an instrument to inspire and justify Western practitioners' innovation, to amaze the audiences with exotic mysteriousness, and further to solve their own specific problems without outlook for exchange. At the same time, non-Western traditional theatres were adapting Western classics (William Shakespeare, Henrik Ibsen, Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, etc.) for their own purposes: for importing Western ideology, reinvigoration of ancient forms, a ticket to international festivals, and appeal to young audiences.[ii] Practitioners from Chinese opera, kabuki, noh, kathakali represented by Taiwan's Contemporary Legend Theatre, Japan's Yukio Ninagawa, Singapore's Ong Keng Sen, tended to appropriate Western classical texts as a ticket to international markets and festivals. While some of them, noticeably Shakespeare's avatars, are accused by Western scholars of simplifying classic texts because of insufficient exploration[iii], many do open up possibilities for reinterpretations of Shakespeare and for destabilising existing normalities in the local. Therefore, despite likely misinterpretation and distortion, adaptation of foreign texts contributes to both the source and the target culture.

In the above cases one perceives a centrality of Western texts as means of communication, while non-Western texts are hardly touched: the seemingly two-way intercultural exchange is problematic. Daphne P. Lei's concept Hegemonic intercultural theatre (HIT) is useful here. According to her (2011, p. 571), the

dominant form of intercultural theatre in contemporary world is still confined by HIT, 'a specific artistic genre and state of mind that combines First World capital and brainpower with Third World raw material and labor, and Western classical texts with Eastern performance traditions.' The biggest problem in this phenomenon is that 'HIT limits and interrupts cultural flow from the East' (ibid., p. 573), which consolidates Western discourse. Even when Western texts such as Shakespeare are deconstructed by the local to serve indigenous purposes, the reliance on the West is manifest. The power of Western classic texts and the cultural discourse embedded obstructs an effective flow of Asian discourse to the West. What if an Asian text is represented in the West? With this question in mind, I was delighted to see The Royal Shakespeare Company's 2012 adaptation of a classical Chinese play: *Zhaoshi Gu'er* [*The Orphan of Zhao*] [iv].

RSC's 2012 adaptation of *The Orphan of Zhao*, a classical Chinese play written by Ji Junxiang (unknown birth and death) in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), stood distinctively in contemporary intercultural adaptations.[v] Before the 21st century, the West's appropriation of Chinese theatrical tradition mostly focused on theatrical form, among which the most famous case was Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* [alienation effect] allegedly inspired by Beijing opera master Mei Lanfang, while classical Chinese plays were less valorised. Even if adapted, they were either distanced from the source or considerably and deliberately reshaped, as manifest in several early modern European adaptations of this play.[vi] RSC's *Orphan of Zhao*, however, exhibited a different look from the above two trends. Firstly, it avoided appropriating Chinese opera's performing vocabularies, as Director Gregory Doran (2012) wrote in RSC's blog after seeing Beijing opera's actor training in Shanghai: 'We cannot possibly learn the styles and the craftsmanship of the opera that these actors have spent years perfecting. And it would be insulting to imagine that we could do so.' His words differentiate him from Barba, Brecht, etc. who misread classical Chinese theatre's forms and principles. Secondly, it managed to preserve the entire plot of this story—or rather, it made serious studies on its different versions. Instead of stealing as did by Brecht in his *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, it attempted to represent the Chinese style with detailed facial semblance to Chinese culture; it also differs from Brook in the nature of this play, a secular text rather than a holy one. It thus offered audiences and scholars a new lens to investigate intercultural encounters initiated by Westerners within the context of globalisation. The significance of this adaptation lies in its re-routing of intercultural adaptations in Europe, which also contains my contribution to the field: to bring revelation against stereotyped Western formalism which normally ends in accusation and inaccuracy that Chinese plays are also provocative, and to see how Chinese texts are handled by Shakespeare's posterity who are more capable of writing stories than creating theatrical forms.

**The role of the adaptor in interweaving performance cultures**

To theorise theatrical interplays between cultures, theatre historian Erika Fischer-Lichte (2009, p. 393) coined a term: 'interweaving performance cultures.' According to her perception, in intercultural encounters, performing elements which

resemble strands from different cultural origins constantly interweave based on what has already been interwoven. Her term not only addresses cultural exchanges that have taken place in history, but also highlights the unending process which constantly generates 'new difference and diversities' (Fischer-Lichte 2008, p. 108). Her paradigm, though, does not have sufficient reflection on the subjects of interweaving, as cultures are interwoven, rather than interweave. Departing from her argument that the 'process of weaving is not necessarily smooth and straightforward' (Fischer-Lichte 2014, p. 11), I emphasise the role of adaptor in the result of intercultural adaptation. During weaving, the adaptor chooses and handles the material in his own way. As an individual from certain historical background, he has a criterion for what is normal and acceptable, which to strangers might be completely novel and unacceptable. The habit and value of target audiences will also influence the adaptor's choice. The influence of collective cultural legacy can hardly be dispensed with for another reason: the adaptor's projection of his idea on the foreign in spite of himself. Misunderstanding is almost inevitable on some occasions, for as argued by Gershon Shaked (1989, p. 8), 'it implied cultural transmission from someone else's realm to our own,' but he also emphasises that '[c]ultural awareness … implies a dialogue in which one acknowledges what is different and struggles over what is familiar' so that one can 'compare his world with others, enriching it with a constant process of analogy and metaphorization between himself and his fellow man outside himself' (ibid., p. 14). Therefore in the weaving process the adaptor's knowledge in foreign strands is required. Or else, misunderstanding and incorrect handling of materials will occur to mar the quality of the product. There must be a criterion to judge whether an adaptation is effective and contributive: authenticity as a right of discourse in itself is problematic for, as Linda Hutcheon (2006, p. xiii) contends in her *Theory of Adaptation*, 'there are many and varied motives behind adaptation and few involve faithfulness,' let alone that authenticity is a myth. The criterion is that a reflective interweaving of different cultural strands based on recognition rather than negligence of each strand's connotations and complexities, with a consistent inner logic. Reflection and consistency during interweaving guarantee a unified and dialogic intercultural encounter, leading to, as Catherine Diamond (1999, p.145) observes, 'an interpretation of the text that allows for a true confrontation with difference, an act primarily intellectual, while at the same time creating bonds of familiarity which may stimulate emotional empathy.' To further investigate the adaptor's role, this paper is going to approach RSC's endeavour in light of its strategies to deal with the source play's socio-cultural and aesthetic elements. The methodology is performance and textual analysis based on a comparative approach. Setting against previous intercultural encounter between Asia and Europe, it tries to answer the following questions: What was new about this adaptation? Was socio-cultural difference a barrier to effective acculturation? How did the adaptor negotiate aesthetics of Chinese opera and Western theatre? Did any new aesthetic paradigm emerge for both RSC and Chinese opera? Firstly I will address the subtle shift of socio-cultural values in RSC's adaptation to see how it manages, although unconsciously, to Westernise a Chinese story and its outcome, then I will

study the aesthetic blending of classical Chinese play and Shakespeare evidenced in dramaturgy, and reveals the result of insufficient study of the source culture in intercultural adaptation.

## II

While RSC's predecessors had a limited access to play from an incomplete translation which inevitably gave rise to misunderstanding and misrepresentation, RSC had accesses to various sources ready in either English translations or videos. They were prepared in terms of raw material. Additionally, there are more English studies on Chinese theatre than centuries ago, which are ready references to understand Chinese opera's 'strangeness'. Doran explained his motivation to adapt this play at a conference held in University of Leeds on March 27th, 2013: RSC initiated a programme called 'A World Elsewhere' to stage foreign classics; since *The Orphan of Zhao* was one of China's most famous plays with a revenge motif similar to *Hamlet*, RSC chose it. This choice seemed not politically implicated, but artistically if also commercially oriented. To make their production more Chinese, the designer and director did one week fieldwork in China[vii], and the whole team conducted researches on the play and Chinese history, with support from Chinese scholars in UK. The intention to preserve Chineseness was manifest. In an interview published on RSC's website, James Fenton (Royal Shakespeare Company 2012b), playwright of this play, claimed that despite cultural differences, he managed to preserve the poetic style and cultural ambiguities in the play for an original flavour. In total, the 'Chineseness' in RSC's mind was firstly, visual verisimilitude including rituals, rites, costumes, weapons, stationery, furniture, and herbal medicines which stroke a spectator immediately as part of ancient Chinese, and secondly, ancient Chinese politics and philosophy, namely, how and why a group of people would sacrifice their lives for a baby, which was rooted in socio-cultural specificities elusive to RSC. In the following part, I am going to demonstrate that despite visual semblance, socio-cultural divergences from China were no less prominent than white actors' and actresses' fair skin, blond hairs and British accent. Differences are common in intercultural adaptation, yet it is more important to uncover the mechanism underneath.

### White skin, yellow masks: the shift of socio-cultural background

Traditionally allegorical, Chinese opera highlighted a play's moral, paying less attention to fidelity to reality, whether reality as it was or as it should be. Normally the playwright employed 'typical and symbolic' (Tan and Lu 2005, p. 167) representations, e.g. conventional characters, plot, and images for didactic purposes. One of its manifestations, namely, overarching value above dichotomised positive and negative characters as embodiments of certain moralised concepts rather than as sophisticated subjects, was entirely preserved in *The Orphan of Zhao*.

Despite the fact that there existed discrepancies and even contradictions between historical records of this story, Ji Junxiang's deliberate alteration of history was eminent. Historically, the Zhao's family was not entirely decent and Tu'an Gu was not necessarily vicious; the struggle between the two clans which encompassed decades

was condensed into several days; Gongsun Chujiu was not a minister but a client in the house of Zhao; the baby killed was not Cheng Ying's son but someone stolen; the Orphan was not raised up in Tu'an Gu's bosom but in the mountain. The list was long. The playwright (and people who revised his play script centuries later) allegorically moralised rivalling cliques with the good-evil dichotomy. According to Fan Xiheng (2010), the playwright's distortion of history had political motivation and implication: when the play was written, China was ruled by the invading Mongols, who massacred innumerable infants, plebeians and rebels so that the Chinese people were bitterly desperate to regain lost sovereignty. An implicit surging discontent to the Mongolian regime was a defining feature of Yuan *zaju* [variety plays], as observed by William Dolby (1983, p. 42), '[a] number of the plays dealt with the enemies of orderly society: the oppressors within, such as the tyrant noble or bullying bureaucrat.' Ji Junxiang's political and ethnical resentment towards the oppressive Mongolian authority was expressed by way of 'pointing to re-establishing the SONG Dynasty (960-1279) with Cheng Ying's preservation of the Orphan of ZHAO' (Fan 2010, p. 28) because Zhao was the family name of the previous ruler, the Song Dynasty. Namely, the resurrection of the Zhao's clan in this play implied a yearning to expel the Mongols by reclaiming the previous royal blood[viii]. Equally important was this story's patriarchal-feudal social context. Cheng Ying was designated as a 'honoured guest' (Chi 1972, p. 52) in the house of Zhao, Han Jue a beneficiary of Zhao Dun's generosity, and Gongsun Chujiu a friend to Zhao Dun. Back to the period of the story, such people were obliged or encouraged to sacrifice their life for their masters, benefactors, patrons, friends, to repay their kindness and friendship. With such ideas in mind, their suffering and self-sacrifice was minimised in the play.

Such background partly explained why there existed a distinct good/evil dichotomy represented by the Zhao's people and Tu'an Gu, as well as an unswerving determination on the part of Han Jue and Gongsun Chujiu to sacrifice their life for the Orphan of the loyal and respectable family of Zhao. All people on the side of the Zhao were in effect flat embodiments of loyalty and integrity and the playwright's ideal of dutiful and courageous Chinese people who fought together against the alien and demonic regime, rather than round human beings with subjectivities and flaws, while Tu'an Gu was a thoroughly wicked and crafty antagonist. Regarding the characterisation of Tu'an Gu, William Hatchett (1741, p. vi-vii), one adaptor of his story, was quick to notice that

> [T]he Fable is political: Indeed, it exhibits an amazing Series of Male-administration, which the Chinese Author has wrought up to the highest Pitch of Abhorrence…. It's certain, he has exaggerated Nature, and introduced rather a Monster than a Man; but perhaps it is a Maxim with the Chinese Poets to represent Prime Ministers as so many Devils, to deter honest People from being deluded by them.

His perception of the flattening of characters was widely endorsed by contemporary Chinese artists. Therefore in several contemporary versions of this story, e.g. spoken

drama versions directed by Lin Zhaohua and Tian Qinxin, Shaoxing opera version adapted by Yu Qingfeng, and film version directed by Chen Kaige, the original story by Ji was reshaped by complicating the plot and characterisation. It is thus understandable that Fenton and Doran, English men temporarily and spatially distanced from ancient China, would also make changes, consciously or unconsciously.

RSC's first major change was its social context. By relocating the temporal period from the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BCE) to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE) when Shakespeare lived, RSC blurred its historical specificity and thus diminished the original play's essential patriarchal-feudal background and political implication against the Mongols, as Fenton (2012b) observed, the story in itself 'has resonances throughout the world.' This move led to a thematic shift: the emphasis of universal humanity rather than specific individuals' behaviour in a specific socio-cultural context. The dissociation of Zhao from Cheng Ying, Han Jue and Gongsun Chujiu made their choice out of their own free will, which is a defining feature of Hegelian heroes. Based on Hegel's tragic theory, Mark William Roche (1998, p. 51) divided Hegelian tragic heroes into four types, one of which was the self-sacrifice tragic hero, who 'does the good knowing that she will suffer for it' in a 'a collision of good and evil', but if she 'experiences no fear of death' (ibid. p. 55) or neglects suffering by emphasising personal worth, she becomes a martyr, rather than a tragic hero. With the entrenched patriarchal-feudal belief, the sacrifice of Cheng Ying and the death of Han Jue and Gongsun Chujiu in the original seemed reasonable. If those characters in the Chinese version were martyrs, then those in RSC's adaptation were self-sacrifice tragic heroes. The definition of this term was fully realised in the protagonists, Cheng Ying and the Orphan.

Cheng Ying was initially an outsider of the political confrontation, and did not anticipate what would follow when promising to smuggle out the Orphan. In order to save innocent babies in the state, what Cheng Ying sacrificed was not his life, but the life of his son who was completely forgotten in all Chinese adaptations. The son's status externalised Cheng Ying's suffering. Patriarchal-feudal norms determined that it was conceivable for a father to sacrifice his own child for a greater cause, for instance, to protect his noble master's only descendent, as Cheng Ying confessed to Gongsun Chujiu: 'I do this for two reasons: to repay the Emperor's son-in-law for his kindness to me, and to save the lives of the rest of the children of Tsin' (Chi 1972, p. 59). In RSC's version, Cheng Ying handed over his son for different reasons: to save other innocent babies and to honour his commitment to the princess, both out of his own free will rather than imposition, for there existed no enmity between him and Tu'an Gu. The archetype used for the RSC's rendition can be traced back to the Abraham-Isaac story in *Genesis*. From a Christian perspective, only God, or those acting in the name of God, are entitled to request self-sacrifice from others. This was reflected in the RSC's concluding scene when Cheng Ying begged his son for forgiveness, and the dead son questioned: 'Why did you hate me? Why did you love the Orphan of Zhao' (Fenton 2012a, p. 69)? To prove his love for the son, Cheng Ying killed himself, rather than live as a hero thereafter as he did in the original. Cheng

Ying's suffering grew in the changing priority from patriarchal-feudal loyalty to ethical integrity. RSC's new scene was not only an emphasis of the right of the dead son, but also an externalisation of Cheng Ying's guilt and sorrow suppressed for many years. Doran acknowledged in his demonstration at University of Leeds that it was difficult to understand why Cheng Ying sacrificed his son, so they added the last scene. This was the most significant move initiated by RSC to address cultural difference between ancient China and contemporary UK by situating the other in the ideological map of self.

Doing little justice to the title, the character of the Orphan in the original came across as somewhat futile. He was meant to be an instrument to bring the play to a happy closure. The spontaneity of his hasty determination to avenge was problematic here. To make the Orphan a sound and rational man, RSC gave him more detailed description. Firstly, the playwright wrote a self-introductory soliloquy for the Orphan to reveal his equal love for both fathers. In order to motivate him to avenge, Fenton put him in the suffering mass to witness permeated social corruption, poverty and indignation at the ruler's atrocity under the *de facto* rule of his beloved adoptive father, which foreshadowed the Orphan's final break with Tu'an Gu. Then, after knowing the truth of his family's destruction, he was also made to meet his mother, again to confirm his suspicion of Tu'an Gu and to consolidate his ethical and familial obligation to kill the ruthless politician loved by no one but himself. His final decision stemmed from his free will and rational judgment, and he chose to sacrifice his love for a father for the suffering people's welfare. He gave Tu'an Gu three options to commit suicide rather than kill him in person because of his love. He had no heroic feeling when finished his mission, but hided himself in his mother's arms to cure his psychological torment externalised by the subsequent ballad sung by the ballad singer. Within the Orphan's words and behaviour one perceived an interior conflict between ethical obligation, predestination, and personal love. The Orphan's hesitation echoed Hamlet who hesitated until everything heard or suspected was confirmed. Compared with the somewhat reckless and emotional murderer who was content to witness Tu'an Gu's flesh scraped, belly ripped, head cut off and entire clan exterminated in the source play, RSC's orphan was a cautious and rational young scholar. The whole process of rationalising the Orphan's behaviours reflects a Hegelian principle: characters' motivation drives the plot.

Cheng Ying and the Orphan were ordinary tragic heroes forced to make sacrifice: both shuddered to see the suffering innocent babies/people in danger in the nation, yet to prevent it they had to sacrifice the life of their beloved son/adoptive father, even though it would bring catastrophe to their life in return. Both believed that 'it [was] better to suffer than to do wrong' (Roche 1998, p. 51). Fenton said in an interview:

> Then there are certain things in the original that we could see would be very difficult for a western audience. I began to see that the right thing to do was not to tone down the original, but to make that problem a feature of the play. For instance, the life of one child is sacrificed to save the life of another, and it is very hard to convince a western audience of that argument. So you have

> to leave the ambiguity and difficulty there in the play. (Royal Shakespeare Company 2012b)

Despite Fenton's intention to display feudal Chineseness to audiences, his relocation of historical background and Western mind-set subtly shifted the play's theme from ideological and nationalistic propaganda to exploration of human beings' subjectivity when confronted by evil. The shift from martyrs to tragic heroes also universalised characters by eulogising self-sacrifice for the majority on special occasions. In this sense, RSC's characters were indeed white-skinned Westerners wearing yellow Chinese masks, to borrow Franz Fanon's book title. Even when Fenton chose to evade the difficulties in diverging social-cultural values, his ignorance of the play's socio-political contexts caused a thematic shift. As argued before, it is no easy task to approach another culture. Despite inauthenticity, what was plausible of Fenton's adaptation was the humanistic light that he projected on the story: man's right of life and free choice which had long been absent in (feudal) China.

**Aesthetic alteration and its discontent**

During his rewriting, Fenton also wove Western dramatic aesthetics with that of Chinese opera. As RSC intentionally eschewed to appropriate Chinese opera's formal performing elements, I choose dramatic structure for analysis because it was impossible to dispense with. Before analysis, it is necessary to elucidate several Chinese opera's dramaturgical features.

In traditional Chinese opera, lyricism was a fundamental aesthetic pursuit. To borrow Hegel's (1975, p. 1193) definition, lyricism is 'a series of different modes of expression by the degree and manner in which the subject-matter is more loosely or more tightly interwoven with the person whose inner life that subject-matter reveals.' Besides other stylised performing means such as dance and acrobatics, an immediately effective means for lyricism was poetic songs with musical accompaniment. Aural enjoyment in Chinese opera, argues Fu Jin (2003, p. 91), 'is superior to other theatrical elements.' The prioritisation of musical lyricism led to the following results. Firstly, in terms of performance, singing accounted for the majority of a play's duration, although the words of narration and dialogue might outnumber that of lyrics. Secondly, in terms of plot, given singing's importance in the allocation of stage time, events with no impact on characters' subjective feelings would not be performed. If necessary, they were communicated either in dialogue or monologue. The plot was more a series of emotions than actions. Even though off the plot, an event could be regarded as necessary as long as it emotionally appealed to audiences. Even when the plot was emphasised by theatre theorists such as Li Yu (1610-1680) and Lü Tiancheng (1580-1618), 'their real concern was not the story itself, but its function as means to arouse intense emotions that playwrights intend to express' (ibid., p. 118). Thirdly, lyricism was always interwoven with Chinese opera's allegorical/didactic function, for in order to teach through theatre, it is easier to appeal to the audience's emotions.

The three features were marked on almost all Chinese opera versions of *The*

*Orphan of Zhao*, especially those that Fenton might have consulted. According to Letwin *et al*. (2008, p. 11), 'The inciting incident of a story creates a far bigger disturbance in the leading character's life than these "thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to." It is the signal event that, through its disruptive power, acts as the catalyst that sets the plot in motion. The constant inciting incidents in the source play were accompanied by poetic lyrics to express immediate feelings. By studying the lyrics in Ji Junxiang's play, one cannot help noticing that Tu'an Gu's primary function in this play was to bring misfortune to people who responded with all kinds of emotions: Zhao Dun's hatred, Han Jue and Gongsun's indignation and determination of self-sacrifice, Cheng Ying's anxiety, sorrow and fury, the Orphan's regret and rage. Fenton (Royal Shakespeare Company 2012b) was quite aware of Chinese opera's lyricism by saying that 'the emotional effect is like a steam roller.' Besides, the musical enjoyment out of good/evil dichotomy was so emotionally strong that logical coherence and reliable characterisation seem less important. This issue was partly covered in the previous part, and more will be exposed.

Shakespeare's influence was marked on the shift of dramatic structure. Besides simple stage and passages of soliloquy, Shakespearean characterisation was no less evident. As Tu'an Gu's only function in the original was being the antagonist, there was no deeper exploration of his psychology and personality but to highlight him as a power-crazing minister. Taking a further move on this character, RSC's adaptation amplified Tu'an Gu's scheme of ascending the throne by corrupting the emperor and eliminating his enemies. This reminded audiences of typical Shakespearean villains: Richard III, Edmund or even Iago. Tu'an Gu's conspiracy and ambition were underlined to unite all other actions in the story, for he was central to all relations in the play. More than setting off the decent people in Zhao's clan, he became Richard III to implement a series of political intrigues. Therefore, much more were devoted to political realities than emotions, and mimesis had the advantage over lyricism.

This change altered the play's structure. In Ji Junxiang's play, the first four parts (one prologue and three acts) were devoted to events before the Orphan's adulthood, and the rest two were about the revenge. The fifth part emphasised the Orphan's rage after discovering the truth and the last one on the death of Tu'an Gu. The whole schemes of Tu'an's usurpation and Zhao's revenge were briefly mentioned because stage time needed to be allocated to lyrical songs. But since in pre-modernist Western theatre, the unity of action was emphasised, as Aristotle (1991, p. 10) proclaimed, 'an imitation of action, must represent one action, a complete whole, with its several incidents so closely connected that the transposition or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole,' scenes had to be coherent and logical. This was in line with his law of probability: 'whenever such-and-such a personage says or does such-and-such a thing, it shall be the necessary or probable outcome of his character' (ibid. 15-6). Different versions of this story exemplified this difference between Chinese and Western aesthetics. For example, a vital factor was missing in all source plays: the Orphan's motivation to kill his adoptive father. Lyrical tradition in Chinese opera determined that after the brutal death of many good characters which aroused intense outrage and sympathy, audiences need a resolution to pacify their emotions. In

other words, they expect to see justice restored and the villain punished more than investigate the Orphan's psychology. It was completely another matter why the Orphan would believe Cheng Ying and suddenly change his attitude towards his adoptive father, for rational logic was less valorised than emotion. However, this seemed a big problem to Aristotle's followers. Many scenes were therefore added in RSC's adaptation to justify the Orphan's decision as discussed before. Fenton's adaptation also bridged some other logic gaps in the military and political aspects related to the removal of Tu'an Gu's power by writing scenes about Wei Jiang's secret meeting with the emperor and Wei's deployment of soldiers, etc. This functioned to make the actions more logically plausible—a 'problem' neglected by many Chinese adaptations. Nevertheless, his emphasis on unified actions in part two rendered it far less intense than part one of which he made few changes. Ji Junxiang's play, uncharacteristic of traditional Chinese opera which featured derivations from the main plot, was condensed to a series of inciting incidents; namely, each new scene was marked by some unexpected new incidents, which made this plot extremely gripping. The intensity was however downplayed in Fenton's adaptation. While part two was indeed coherent and logical, it is neither emotionally touching nor gripping. According to Smiley and Bert (2005, p. 75), a plot is predominantly driven forth by a series of suffering, discovery, and reversal[ix], scenes without which should be put off stage. Few of these new scenes revealed interior or exterior conflict, and there was also almost no discovery or reversal since audiences were already informed of the Orphan's identity and Tu'an Gu's atrocity. The new scenes were merely distractive background information unnecessarily staged. William Archer (1912, p. 199) cautioned, 'An audience has an instinctive sense of, and desire for, progress. … it does not like to feel at the end that nothing has really happened.' Had Fenton paid more attention to this caution, he would have put new information in dialogues or soliloquies rather than put them on stage, so that the second part would not risk boring audiences with a series of eventless scenes. The lag damages the tempo and tension for forthcoming ending[x] because it took too long to reach the point of revenge.

Furthermore, despite Fenton's attention to the unity of plot, there were problems that he failed to notice. Of the scene in the RSC version in which the torture of the Princess's maid was replicated, a critic complained that her actions 'have zero impact on what happens next' (Theatrical Geographies 2013). He was judging this scene according to an Aristotelian principle: 'that which makes no perceptible difference by its presence or absence is no real part of the whole' (Aristotle 1991, p. 10). Seen from the lyrical perspective, the torture of the maid aroused audiences' compassion for her and hatred for Tu'an Gu, and didactically it eulogised her loyalty and integrity. But the critic's comment implied that he did not grasp this point. Neither did Fenton. It was aesthetic differences between two cultures that resulted in the problem. On a technical level, Fenton seemed to know little about Chinese dramaturgy and not enough about Western playwriting. He relied more on his artistic intuition than on research, which proved to be misleading, as was the case of Artaud's misreading of Balinese dance and Brecht's of Chinese opera. There were even more examples of his lack of knowledge in Chinese theatre. Having perceived Chinese opera's feature of

directly addressing audiences and constantly introducing self, he failed to see the cause. In Yuan *zaju*, such recurring sentence patterns as 'I am Tu'an Gu' worked to effectively inform new audiences of characters and plot on stage because they constantly dropped in. More importantly, due to shortage of actors, characters were allocated different role types. That is to say, in this play, since Han Jue, Gongsun Chujiu and the Orphan shared a role type, they were performed by the same actor. In order not to confuse audiences, they had to restate their identity whenever getting on stage. But even Du Halde (1736, p. 196), a man in the eighteenth century, perceived the cause: '[t]he same Comedian sometimes acts several different Parts, otherwise the Company would be too numerous.' Fenton argued that the reason he preserved Chinese styles was that they were characteristic of Chinese opera, yet he failed to see its historical specificity and universalised it, and more importantly, he intervened with Western dramaturgy. The hybrid dramaturgy out of his lack of knowledge of Chinese opera rendered this adaptation an inconsistent interweaved piece of occasionally unreflective literal translation and interpretation. Speaking of Hutchett's and Murphy's renditions, Fan Cunzhong (1984, p. 119) observed that 'Yuan *zaju*'s tradition of singing and recitation, structure, and performing strategies were as difficult to understand as to transplant.' His words anticipated Fenton's adaptation. As poet Fenton had no experience of playwriting before *The Orphan of Zhao*, it was possible that he followed what was most conventional in Western theatre (Aristotelian and Hegelian) to guide his writing. The mixture of deep-rooted Western and Chinese aesthetics that was insufficiently informed undermined this adaptation's stylistic coherence and theatricality.

## III

Intercultural encounter, as this adaptation metaphorically demonstrated, is no facile endeavour because of many pitfalls. When accusing *xiqu* adaptation's distortion of Shakespeare, one has to remember that RSC did the same in *The Orphan of Zhao*. The only difference is that, in terms of theme and characterisation, RSC enriches and *xiqu*, more often than not, diminishes. The right of discourse of Chinese culture is almost muffled, unconsciously, by RSC's projection of Western ideas. My response to this is nevertheless not negative for it indeed contributed to the enrichment of this play, which I found very illuminating. Besides, RSC's adaptation is reciprocally significant to Chinese theatre on account of an incident: during the conference held in University of Leeds as introduced before, more than twenty theatre scholars working on this play, and producers, directors, playwrights of different versions of this play joined to discuss it. Almost all of them went to watch RSC's adaptation in Stratford-upon-Avon. Having seen eight Chinese productions, RSC's alteration of the ending astonished many of us. Tian Qinxin, director of two productions (Chinese and Korean), said later in an interview that this play inspired her adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* (Ifeng.com 2014). The accidental encounter of this production and Chinese people was beyond expectation and promising, but also hardly replicable because it was simply coincidence.

It seems easier to reflect on another culture's value from own perspective than to

understand it because this requires more devotion. Despite the illumination, it is still a pity that RSC did not delve sufficiently into Chinese theatre, or else there would not be the dramaturgical problems listed above. Aesthetics rather than ideology mattered more to RSC for commercially, exotic spectacle and story are more appealing than ideas. Like Brecht and other theatre practitioners, RSC misunderstood (or failed to see adequately about) Chinese theatre, so that there existed clumsy assimilation of Chinese form without much second thought. Globalisation has shortened the distance between cultures, but it also calls for people's subjectivities to really understand the other culture. It demanded more time, energy and devotion than one week's tour sighting and intuition to appreciate the mechanism and aesthetics of classical Chinese plays than to duplicate costume, hairstyle, weaponry and furniture. In this sense, rather than bringing sufficient revitalising elements into RSC, this adaptation was also suspicious of formal exoticism to attract audiences because 'all questions regarding interculturalism must be complicated by the pervasiveness of a commercialized popular culture' (Chin 1989, p. 167). If so, China was again utilised as a stereotyped selling point, and the essence of Chinese culture was muffled. The endeavour of representing ancient China was marred if seen from a Chinese perspective; it was misleading for foreign audiences if they took it as a genuine representation.

The old route of intercultural adaptation in Europe was changed if not tremendously by RSC's adaptation. A new paradigm is emerging but has not completed. By marrying Shakespeare with Chinese opera, European audiences were exposed to Chinese ideology and aesthetics, only that it was more Shakespearean than Chinese. Spectacular and more humanistic though the RSC's version may be, the interweaving of Chinese culture with Western tradition(s) would have contributed to the emergence of a new aesthetic had RSC better handled the cultural origins of *The Orphan of Zhao*, or given more thought to Chinese aesthetics. Such interweaving activities will continue in theatre. Interweaving performance cultures might be fruitful and constructive with an increase of comprehension and studies of temporally or spatially distanced culture and a decrease of preoccupation with own tradition.

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[i] For cases of misreading regarding Brecht, Barba, see Min Tian's *The poetics of difference and displacement: twentieth-century Chinese-Western intercultural theatre*; Eileen Kato, "W. B. Yeats and the Noh," The Irish Review 42, no. Summer (2010); Winet, E. 1998. Great reckonings in a simulated city: Artaud's misunderstanding of Balinese theatre. *IN* Longman, S. V. (ed.) *Crosscurrents in the Drama: east and west*. Alabama: University Alabama Press, pp. 98-107. Tian, M. 2012. *Mei Lanfang and the twentieth century international stage: Chinese theatre placed and displaced*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 177-213. For cases of postmodern playfulness, see Lei, D. P.-W. 2011. Interruption, Intervention, Interculturalism: Robert Wilson's HIT Productions in Taiwan. *Theatre journ*al. 63 (4), pp. 571-586.

[ii] I refrain from mentioning non-traditional Eastern theatres' intercultural activities that involve the appropriation of both Western form and plays because they are in fact descendants of Western theatre, naturalistic and avant-garde theatres in particular.

[iii] See for instance, Diamond, C. 1994. *Kingdom of desire*: the three faces of *Macbeth*. *Asian Theatre Journal.* 11 (1), pp. 114-133; Schlenker, W. 1999. Is there a "Chinese" Brecht? Problems

of Brecht reception in China. *Modern drama.* 42 (2), pp. 253-268.
W. B. Worthen's *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance*.

[iv] The synopsis of this play goes as follows: In the 6th century BCE, there was a state called Jin (?-607 BCE) in China. Two powerful ministers, Tu'an Gu and Zhao Dun were politically antagonistic. To seize more power, Tu'an Gu persuaded the stupid King into slaughtering the entire house of the Zhao, but a baby boy, namely, the Orphan of Zhao born to his princess mother, was smuggled out by a country doctor called Cheng Ying. Hearing this, Tu'an Gu commanded that all new-born boys in the state be killed if the Orphan was not found. In order to save the Orphan and other innocent babies, Cheng Ying found the retired minister Gongsun Chujiu, and they decided that Cheng Ying passed his son off as the Orphan, and then reported to Tu'an Gu that Gongsun sheltered the Orphan. Deceived and satisfied to kill the baby and Gongsun, the childless Tu'an Gu took Cheng Ying's son, who in fact was the Orphan, as his adopted son. When the Orphan came of age, Cheng Ying told him the truth. By killing Tu'an Gu, the Orphan avenged his family's extermination.

Although playwright James Fenton did not mention the specific sources of his adaptation, from the passages he quoted, one can infer some of his sources: Yu Shuyan's (1890-1943) and Ma Lianliang's (1906-1966) Beijing opera versions, Ji Junxiang's *zaju* version and Xu Yuan's (unknown birth and death) *chuanqi* version, of which Ji Junxiang's version was at the centre.

[v] RSC's significance also lied in the social controversies that it aroused in UK because it employed few Asian characters in this production. There were numerous reports accusing the racial bias (see Gardner, L. 2013. Where are Britain's East Asian actors and playwrights? *The Guardian*. [Online], March 6. Available from: http://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2013/mar/07/developing-britains-east-asian-actors-playwrights. [Accessed 20 January 2014].) and one round table discussion by Royal Holloway, University of London entitled 'Interculturalism, Universality and the Right to Representation in the RSC's *The Orphan of Zhao*.' Asian celebrities such as David Henry Hwang protested against RSC's behaviour. I believe that, first, a foreign nation has to right to represent another culture as long as it engages dialogue and respect, despite infidelity—in the case of RSC, there are, although insufficient—which is a basis for cultural exchange and dissemination; second, even though the whole cast were Asian, it would not make much difference in terms of stage representation because they were not necessarily more informed than the playwright and the director who controlled the rehearsal. It could hardly be compared with Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* because of a fundamental difference: the Hindu epic was and is a holy text to the Indian whereas *The Orphan of Zhao* was not. More importantly, the right of Asian actors was beyond the scope of this performance.

[vi] In 1731 Joseph Henri Marie de Prémare (1666-1736), a French Jesuit Father self-educated in Chinese classics, translated Ji Junxiang's play into French, but he omitted its songs which accounted for a substantial proportion of Chinese opera and contained essential information of the plot. His translation was published in Jean-Baptiste Du Halde's (1674-1743) *Description de l'empire de la Chine* [*The General History of China*]. Du Halde was unhappy with this play because of its 'violation' of French Neo-classical principles, as he (1736, p. 195) self-centrically claimed, 'we ought not to be surprised if the Rules of our Drama are unknown to the Chinese, who have always lived as it were in a World by themselves.' Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, Marquis d'Argens (1704-1771) (1741, p. 165), a French philosopher and writer, also complained in his *Lettres Chinoises* [*Chinese Letters*] that this play disregarded Three Unities, put cruel scenes on stage, and the 'odd jumble of Declaration and Singing at one and the same time, [was] offensive to Probability.' There were also people praising this play, for instance, English Bishop Richard Hurd (1720-1808) (1762, pp. 221-232), although there was also misinterpretation. The English came to know this play by way of the translation of Du Halde's books. In 1741 British writer William Hatchett (before 1701- ca. 1768) wrote *The Chinese Orphan: an Historical Tragedy* based on the English translation regarded by him as 'rude and imperfect' (Hatchett 1741, p. vi), intending his play to reflect immediate political reality in Britain. Although it preserved a lot of the plot, the story was more absurd than authentic in that he grabbed many names of Chinese historical figures, e.g. Xiao He (257-193 BCE), Laozi (ca. 570-ca. 470 BCE), and Wu Sangui (1612-1678) from different ages to substitute characters' names in the original play and imposed place names on people. His playful imagination marred historical accuracy. Set within the background of the

conflict between opposing political fractions in Britain in the 1740s, this play displayed his support for the Duke of Argyle who was wronged by the powerful Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole. It was never staged, though. Later in 1753, French philosopher Voltaire (1694-1778) wrote *L'Orphelin de la Chine: la morale de Confucius en cinq actes* [*The Orphan of China: the Morals of Confucius in Five Acts*], and he roughly borrowed the plot of the first four parts of the original and changed other content: historical background, characters and even ending. Voltaire modified the play according to Neo-classicism, because, like his contemporaries, he (1901, p. 178) dismissed it as 'nothing but a heap of incredible stories' 'as in some of the monstrous farces of Shakespeare and Lope de Vega.' In an age of religious corruption and feudalism, Voltaire intended his adaptation a proclamation of his enlightenment ideas, with implanted Confucianism as an ideal, as he (*ibid*. p. 176) openly wrote in the dedication: this play was 'an extraordinary instance of the natural superiority which reason and genius have over blind force and barbarism.' Thus he 'replace[d] the core argument of feudal clan revenge … with his thesis of the triumph of civilization over barbarism' (Tian 2008, p. 20). Given Voltaire's Eurocentricism, he misread not only the source play, but the Yuan Dynasty's realities which he depicted. After seeing Voltaire's adaptation and Richard Hurd's positive comment, Irish playwright Arthur Murphy (1727-1805) rewrote *The Orphan of China* in 1756 to make the good-overcomes-evil archetype a patriotic *agit-prop* because the United Kingdom was then in war with France. As a reflection of reality, UK was put on the side of the good and France evil. Additionally, he changed what he was dissatisfied with in Voltaire's version and made the story more enticing. When staged, the *mise en scène* was expressly orientalising. Because of its political implication, dramaturgy and exotic stage design, this production became a big success. Novelist and playwright Oliver Goldsmith (1730-1774) (1900 cited in Tian 2008, p. 25) praised that 'in proportion as the plot has become more European, it has become more perfect' because it overcame problems in the Chinese version.

As a symptom of *chinoiserie*, this play's experience in early modern Europe was marked by subjective and self-centric misunderstanding and manipulation, although not entirely. Out of not only 'individual temperament and preference, but also the collective consciousness' (Hsia 1988, p. 345), those adaptors' pursuits had nothing to do with the authentic China, but China as a vehicle to convey their political idea on their own reality. In all these adaptations, a fake Chinese story was imposed by Western theatrical conventions perceived to be better than Chinese ones, while Chinese opera's formal characteristics were completely negated.

[vii] According to RSC's blog 'In Search of the Orphan,' in July and August 2012 the director and the designer went to an antique market, visited the Ding Ling Tombs, The Forbidden City, The Valley of the Mings, Shanghai Jingju Company, and a traditional garden and a tea house. See Royal Shakespeare Company 2012. In search of the orphan [Online]. Available from: http://www.rsc.org.uk/explore/blogs/in-search-of-the-orphan/ [Accessed 2 January 2014].

[viii] There were even more political allusions and implications in Ji's alteration of history, see Fan, C. 2008, pp. 19-28.

[ix] Suffering is 'anything that goes on inside a character,' which 'isn't only the basic material for every characterization; it's also the condition of each and the motive for the activities of each' (Smiley and Bert 2005, p. 76). Discovery is 'change from ignorance to knowledge and is a matter of internal action for both characters and the story. Discovery is a major source of action in drama' (ibid.). And a reversal is 'is a violent change within a play from one state of things to a nearly opposite state' (ibid.), which is in fact what Archer calls peripeteia.

[x] After the performance in Stratford-upon-Avon on 28 March 2013, I asked several Chinese directors and theatre scholars who went to the theatre about their impression, and a common complaint was the loosening of dramatic intensity in the second part, especially compared with the suspensive first part.

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