

SHAKESPEARE STUDIES IN CHINA

By

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Abstract:

Different from Germany, Japan and India, China has its own unique relation with Shakespeare. Since Shakespeare's works were first introduced into China in 1904, Shakespeare in China has witnessed several phases of developments. In each phase, the characteristic of Shakespeare studies in China is closely associated with the political and cultural situation of the time. This thesis chronicles and analyzes noteworthy scholarship of Shakespeare studies in China, especially since the 1990s, in terms of translation, literary criticism, and performances, and forecasts new territory for future studies of Shakespeare in China.

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Shakespeare Studies in China

It is an increasingly acknowledged truth that the entire world has become Shakespeare's stage. Poonam Trivedi writes, "the diverse incursions of Shakespeare's work into virtually every culture are as much a part of his essence as is the English Shakespeare of Stratford."¹ There is Shakespeare's global ascendancy in adaptations and appropriations in countries around the world, and the subject matter involved is inimitably varied. Investigating these Shakespearean inroads in world cultures is to fill out and elucidate the dimensions of the phenomenon of "Shakespeare." Following this trend, Shakespeare studies in China are contributing in their own ways to the global study of Shakespeare.

In recent years, China, following the globalization trend, has experienced a transformation of its geopolitical role and has asserted a stronger influence in the cultural arena. Shakespeare studies in China have accompanied this trend of rising nationalism and robust cultural exchange. In contrast, the general lack of published material on Chinese Shakespeare studies in the West has created difficulties for the Western scholar who seeks to understand the reception of Shakespeare in a country that boasts five thousand years of non-Western civilization and one-point-three billion non-English speaking people. This scholarship survey will explore the subject in general to clarify the nature of Shakespeare studies in modern China. It is believed that, up to 2011, only two surveys had been conducted. One is by He Qinxin (1986) and the other by Sun Yanna (2008) in their doctoral dissertations. He closely examines the influence of Marxist literary criticism upon the study of Shakespeare in China, but his study covers only the

¹ Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz, *India's Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation, and Performance* (India: Dorling Kingdersley Pvt. Ltd., 2005) 13.

scholarship before the 1990s. Comparatively, Sun explores a wider range of topics. Specifically, she compares Shakespeare theatre and traditional Chinese theatre and analyzes three productions of Shakespeare's plays. But Sun's dissertation lacks a thorough discussion of the literary criticism of Shakespeare in China.

With this assumption in mind, this thesis intends to investigate some key issues concerning Shakespeare scholarship in China, such as translation, comparative study and critical interpretation of Shakespeare's plays. This thesis consists of three sections. Section one establishes the foundation of the study by surveying the existing translations of Shakespeare's plays in China. With regard to literary forms in rendering three types – fiction, prose and verse – have been adopted in the history of Chinese translation of Shakespeare. Moreover, four translators have made great contributions to the translation of *The Complete Plays of Shakespeare*, namely Cao Weifeng, Liang Shiqiu, Zhu Shenghao and Fang Ping. Section two investigates Chinese criticism of Shakespeare in terms of comparative studies, emphasizing cross-cultural interpretation, translation studies of Shakespeare's plays, and stage adaptation and production of Shakespeare's plays. Section three focuses on the future of Shakespeare studies in China.

Section 1: Oriental and Localized Shakespeare: Translation of Shakespeare's Plays in China

The Shakespeare we confront today has been globalized beyond the confines of any single language or territory: Shakespeare's Globe has indeed gone global. The complete works of Shakespeare now appear in over thirty languages and individual texts in over eighty.² Dennis Kennedy notes that it is France that first led the way in the awareness of Shakespeare outside the Anglophone nations, with the first foreign-language complete edition (a twenty-volume prose edition by Pierre Letourneur) appearing between 1776 and 1783.³ But French neoclassical Shakespeare was soon countered by the German Romantics who produced their own canonical translation (1762-6, revised as the first foreign complete works in 1775-7).⁴ Kennedy maintains that Germany established the model of foreign desire for Shakespeare. He describes that with strong nationalistic purposes, German writers, scholars and theatre managers "claimed the Bard as a compatriot, inspiring later political uses of Shakespeare in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe."⁵ A second noticeable model for the translation and reception of Shakespeare is the "imported cultural baggage of the British Empire in colonial India," where the reception of Shakespeare was undoubtedly preceded by English models of

² Anston Bosman, "Shakespeare and Globalization," *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010) 286.

³ Dennis Kennedy, "Shakespeare Worldwide," *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 2001) 253.

⁴ I take this as the more accurate information, as is shown in Anston Bosman's article "Shakespeare and Globalization" in the *New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare* (2010). In contrast, Dennis Kennedy pointed out in his article "Shakespeare Worldwide" in the *Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare* (2004) that the first foreign-language complete edition was published between 1776 and 1783 by Pierre Letourneur in France.

⁵ Bosman 286.

culture and behavior.⁶ Shakespeare came to India with colonialism: Shakespeare's plays are known to have been first performed, in English for the diversion of European traders in Calcutta and Bombay around 1775. Due to India's long colonial history, the Shakespearean presence in India is "older and more complex than in any other countries outside the West."⁷ In Japan, yet another model presents itself: regarding the "entire fabulistic, mythical, and religious backdrop of Shakespeare is irrelevant in the Japanese case,"⁸ thus a more intercultural and less politicized picture was found there.⁹ In this section, I will look at still another unique model: the strictly politicized and localized model of China.

Similarly, as various countries enthusiastically began "mapping Shakespeare's Globe in a Global World,"¹⁰ the works of Shakespeare became known for the first time in China with the popular 1904 adaptation of Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), by the prolific Chinese translator and rewriter Lin Shu. The translated work was entitled Ying-guo shi-ren Yinbian yanyu [Chitchat of an English poet or 英国诗人吟边燕语 in Chinese], which contains all 20 tales from the Lambs' work. Lin Shu was, as Wang Zuoliang comments, "one of those curious literary figures who made translation history without fulfilling the first requirement for any translator, for he knew not a word of English."¹¹ His collaborator, Wei Yi, interpreted the stories first;

⁶ Kennedy 253.

⁷ Internet Shakespeare Edition. Web. 2 Apr. 2012.

<<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/Criticism/shakespearein/india1.html>>.

⁸ Kennedy 261.

⁹ Kennedy 253.

¹⁰ Monica Matei-Chesnoiu, *Shakespeare in the Romanian cultural Memory* (Madison; Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson U. Press, 2006) 19.

¹¹ Zuoliang Wang, *Preliminary Essays on Shakespeare and Shakespeare in China* (Chongqing: Chongqing P, 1991) 207.

then Lin Shu wrote and polished them. By this unusual method he published more than 170 “translations”¹² of European and American novels, most of them still read today.

Lin and Wei titled their chapter on *Hamlet* “Gui Zhao/鬼沼,” or “The Ghost’s Command,” *Macbeth* became “Gu Zheng/蛊征” or “The Ghost’s Enchantment,” and *The Twelfth Night* turned out to be “Hun Gui/婚诡” or “Marriage Stratagem,”¹³ thus clearly connoting what in their view is of primary interest in the story. Lin appealed to his readership by selling the plays as “stories of gods and spirits.” For example, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* were each translated into a title concerning ghosts. Lin was writing at a time when the imperial government of China, having suffered many war losses at the hand of Western powers, was trying to catch up by emulating the West. In fact, Lin and Wei were then employed specifically for the purpose of translating western thought into Chinese.¹⁴ Although Zhang Xiao Yang comments that Shakespeare’s plays at this time to the Chinese audience were rather a kind of narrative literature because the translations gave only a broad outline of the plot, characters, and themes of the chosen plays,¹⁵ Lin’s translation still influenced many modern Chinese writers, and it also served as the stage script for the first Shakespeare productions in China.¹⁶ Nearly all the stories in Lin’s translation were performed by Wenmingxi (Modern Chinese Drama) Troupes. Lin and Wei’s story version of the Lambs’ Tales was done in classical Chinese (the difference

¹² Zuoliang Wang pointed out that Lin Shu succeeded in translation over 180 Western works; refer to *Preliminary Essays on Shakespeare and Shakespeare in China*, 208. I assume some of the translation works were not all published, so there is a number discrepancy.

¹³ Other than stated, all the translations are done by the writer.

¹⁴ Ching-His Perng, “Chinese Hamlets: A Centenary Review,” Shakespeare: Authenticity and Adaptation Conference, De Monfort U., Leicester, UK, 7-9 Sept. 2000, 3.

¹⁵ Xiao Yang Zhang, *Shakespeare in China: A comparative Study of Two Traditions and Cultures* (Newark: U of Delaware P; London: Associated UP, 1996) 103.

¹⁶ Zhang 104.

between classical Chinese and modern Chinese roughly equals that between Middle English and Modern English), which coated the plays with the special charm of Chinese ‘antiquity.’

The titles and the order of the plays in Lin’s text are different from those in the Lambs’ *Tales from Shakespeare*, which begins with *The Tempest*, whereas Lin’s version begins with *The Merchant of Venice*. Coincidentally, *The Merchant of Venice* became the first Shakespeare’s play performed in China. In 1913, Qiufei Zhang directed the play, using the same title that Lin provided— “Rou Quan/肉券” or “a bond of flesh”. Like “Rou Quan,” some other titles Lin had given to the plays appealed to target readers’ love of the outlandish. For example, *The Taming of the Shrew* is given the title “Xun Han/驯悍” or “Taming a Shrew”; *The Comedy of Errors*, “Luan Wu/挛误” or “Twin Errors”; *Romeo and Juliet*, “Zhu Qing/铸情” or “Committing the Crime of Passion,” to name just a few.¹⁷ The Chinese titles straightforwardly indicate the major themes of the stories. Readers could easily tell from the title, for example, that “Zhu Qing/Passion of Love” (*Romeo and Juliet*) is a love story.

The breakthrough in the translation of Shakespeare’s plays did not come until the occurrence of the May 4th New Culture Movement.¹⁸ In 1922, the first Chinese translation

¹⁷ For a complete version, refer to Alexander C. Y. Huang’s *Chinese Shakespeares : Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* (New York: Columbia UP, 2009) 80.

¹⁸ The May Fourth Movement was an anti-imperialist, cultural, and political movement growing out of student demonstrations in Beijing on May 4, 1919 protesting the Chinese government’s weak response to the Treaty of Versailles. These demonstrations sparked national protests and marked the upsurge of Chinese nationalism. The broader use of the term “May Fourth Movement” often refers to the period during 1915-1921 more usually called the New Culture Movement. Web.11 Jan. 2012. <<http://history.cultural-china.com/en/34History7223.html>>.

of Shakespeare's play, that of *Hamlet*,¹⁹ was published by the Chinese Publishing House.²⁰ Tian Han (1898-1968), the famous playwright, composer and poet, was the translator. From 1917-1920, Tian had studied first navigation, then education, in Tokyo. By then, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet* had all be translated and performed in Japan. Tian's translation of *Hamlet* is based on one Japanese edition. Vastly different from Lin's translation of Shakespeare's plays as fiction, Tian's translation is aimed for performance as a play and is written in the complete dramatic form that Shakespeare used. Around the May 4th Movement, a batch of adaptations of Shakespeare's plays appeared, mainly to serve the revolutionary purpose, that is, the advocating of the new cultural genre (vernacular literature/modern drama) in contrast with the old "feudalistic" genre (traditional literature/traditional drama). Perng noted that one of the major issues hotly debated at the time was the writing medium. The revolutionaries advocated that serious literature, hitherto written in classical language, be written in modern vernacular. Tian translated the whole play into modern/spoken Chinese, which was a "very convenient way for [the] Chinese people to read Shakespeare's works and grasp the aesthetic charm of the playwright."²¹ It is arguable to say that Tian's

¹⁹ Other versions of the same play followed, translated respectively by Shao Ting, 1930; Zhou Zhuangping, 1938; Liang Shih-ch'iu, 1938; Zhou Ping, 1940; Cao Wei-feng, 1944; Zhu Shenghao, 1947; Bian Zhilin, 1956 ; Lin Tongji, 1983; Sun Dayu, 1987; and Fang Ping, 2000. Except for Shao's translation, which is written in classical Chinese, all of the above render the play into modern mandarin. Of the ten versions, the most widely used are those by Liang Shih-ch'iu and Zhu Shenghao. Their popularity is founded not so much on the superiority of the translation's quality, however, as on their being part of the "complete translations" of Shakespeare's works. Refer to Perng 7.

²⁰ Contrary to most scholars' opinion, Alexander C. Y. Huang points out that Lin's translation was not the only source for Chinese readers interested in Shakespeare. Historical evidences show that not only had Lin himself published rewritings of other Shakespearean plays as serialized novels and individual books, but other writers and commentators also produced various versions of Shakespeare's plays that were widely circulated. Refer to Huang's *Chinese Shakespeares : Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange*, 27.

²¹ Zhang 104.

translation has successfully presented the aesthetic charm of the play. Tian employs Chinese vernacular to translate *Hamlet*; poetic rhythms give way to plain conversations. Despite this, as one of the pioneering translators, Tian no doubt paves the way for future translators. His translation, unfortunately, would soon fall out of favor.

Following the translations of Tian Han, other translations of seven plays by Shakespeare were published in China in the 1920s, and more translations of Shakespeare's plays were published in the 1930s.²² The translations were much affected by the social background and popular taste of that time. Shakespeare's plays offered the revolutionaries the best opportunities to voice their opinions. From 1916 to 1928, China was divided among military factions and there were many conflicts among Chinese warlords, with each one trying to usurp state power and become a new emperor.²³ Political persecution abounded. Speech censorship prevailed. In this situation, Shakespeare's plays turned out to be a relatively safe medium for the reformers/revolutionaries to exert influence upon the Chinese audience.

In 1915, the performance of *The Usurper of State Power* (Qie guo zei) won wide acclaim with audiences and reformers. Based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, both about stories of dictators usurping the crown, this adapted play was in fact a veiled attack on Yuan Shikai, who had seized power by force and intrigue and attempted to restore the monarchy with himself as Emperor. Li Ruru describes the situation further:

²² According to Zhang Xiao Yang, seven plays published during the 1920s were: Cheng Kou Yi's *The Taming of the Shrew* in 1923, Zeng Guang Xun's *The Merchant of the Venice* and Shao Ting's *Hamlet* in 1924, a translation of *Julius Caesar* by Shao Ting and Xu Shao Shan in 1925, Zhang Cai Zhen's *As You Like It* in 1927, Zheng Yi Zhe's *Romeo and Juliet* in 1928, and Liao Lan Hui's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in 1929. And in 1930s, more tragedies appeared: *Macbeth* (three versions), *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *Julius Caesar* along with comedies.

²³ Zhang 105.

The performance of this play and of other plays attacking Yuan Shikai gave rise to a notable event in the history of spoken drama: Gu Wuwei, a popular actor at that time who was involved in the productions, was arrested, imprisoned, and sentenced to death by the authorities on the charge of using drama to incite local disorder. He was not released from prison until Yuan Shikai was overthrown.²⁴

When first introduced to China, Shakespeare was set on the way of being politicized and localized. One reason for that might be the perceived universality, humanism and the modernity of the themes in Shakespearean plays. They could so conveniently and efficiently absorb and reflect contemporary circumstance and “seemed in tune with the modern spirit, unlike the rigid and feudalistic Chinese operas.”²⁵ Although many traditional Chinese operas are artistically refined and culturally rich, such themes as overt rebellion are rare. Chinese scholars, actors, and the general audience started to show an increasing interest in Shakespeare’s plays. Soon his completed works were beginning to be translated.

In the century-long history of Chinese Shakespearean translations, there are four noteworthy translators, who attempted to render the complete plays into Chinese, namely Cao Weifeng, Liang Shiqiu, Zhu Shenghao, and Fang Ping.

Strictly speaking, Cao Wei Feng (1911-1963), the famous translator and poet, was the first who set out to translate the entire corpus, but managed to finish translating only eleven plays because of the hard living and working conditions then prevalent.²⁶ Cao was studying in Great Britain during the mid-1930s, when he visited Stratford-upon-Avon and collected the most widely acclaimed edition of Shakespeare’s plays, later used for his translation. Eventually in 1946, the eleven plays were published by Guiyang Publishing

²⁴ Ruru Li, *Shashibiya: Staging Shakespeare in China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2003) 21.

²⁵ Chunfang Fei and Sun Huizhu, “Shakespeare and Beijing Opera,” *Shakespeare in Asia: contemporary performance*, ed. Dennis Kennedy and Li Lan Yong (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010) 59.

²⁶ Zhang 105.

House under the title of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. As far as literary form is concerned, Cao Weifeng adopted verse form, as Bian Zhilin (1900-2000) also did.²⁷ Cao Wei Feng and Bian Zhilin are the representatives of those Chinese poets who had translated individual Shakespeare plays.²⁸ Their most significant contribution was that they wanted to see verse translated as verse. Wang Zuoliang notes that “Shakespearean blank verse was not just any sort of verse, though, and it took some time before a suitable Chinese meter was found which approximated in effects to the English iambic pentameter.”²⁹ There is a general consensus among critics that the translator who has strived longest and achieved highest is the poet Bian Zhilin.

But unlike Bian, who followed Shakespeare in translating at every step from the original form to its rhythm and meter, Cao thought that observing the original form either of verse or prose was of primary importance, and there was no need to preserve anything else due to the differences between the Chinese and English languages in terms of rhyme and meter.³⁰ Sun Dayu once seriously questioned Cao Weifeng’s translation, commenting that Cao’s translation did not preserve Shakespeare’s poetic beauty and the later translators who rendered the plays into prose were even worse.³¹ Today, the translations by Sun Dayu and those by Cao Weifeng are seldom read. Although the verse form in their translation is innovative and special, some parts of their translations still need

²⁷ Bian Zhilin had started his poetic career as a modernist writing in the manner of Eliot and Auden. But the then highly politicized literary atmosphere did not favor his writing. He then took to translation, Shakespeare’s plays above all.

²⁸ Zuoliang Wang, *Preliminary Essays on Shakespeare and Shakespeare in China [Shashibiya Xulun]* (Chongqing: Chongqing Publishing House, 1991) 211.

²⁹ Wang 211.

³⁰ Tak-Hung Leo Chan. *Twentieth Century Chinese Translation Theory : Modes, Issues and Debates* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004) 17

³¹ Sun Da Yu, “Are Shakespearean Plays Huaju or Shiju?” *Journal of Shanghai Foreign Languages University* 2(1987): 5.

polishing. Compared with the unprecedented beauty of poetry in the Tang and Song Dynasty, their translations appear to be dull. The most widely read version is, no doubt, Zhu Shenghao's translation. Zhu translates Shakespeare's plays as prose, but his language is rhythmic and beautiful.

The question of how to translate Shakespeare's blank verse into Chinese fascinated the Yale-educated poet and translator Sun Dayu (1905-1997).³² Since the mid-1920s, Sun had been seeking a new style of Chinese poetry written in the vernacular. His ideal form would "consist of rhythm and must have rhythm, but it neither should rely on rhymes nor should it follow the strict prosodic rule of exact numbers of character in each line."³³ He was one of the first to propose the concept of yinzu (音组), or "sound-unit." Pergn explains that in Classical Chinese, a character usually constitutes a word, while in modern vernacular, often two or three characters form a word. In modern poetry, a poetic line may then be divided into any number of sound units, each of which consists of two or three or (rarely, four) Chinese characters and contains one stress. In this way, it is possible to approximate the five beats of the blank verse.

This new system was quite practical and soon won popularity among Chinese translators of English poetry and Shakespeare's plays. Sun himself considered the 'sound unit' "germane to the versification of vernacular Chinese," and Bian Zhilin also acknowledged in the "Explanatory Notes on the Translation" the inspiration of Sun's

³² Though both Sun Dayu and Cao Weifeng contributed a lot to the translation of Shakespearean plays, they were once 'enemies' since they took different political routes, a spectrum from left wing to right wing. Sun Dayu was designated as one representative of the right assaults or threats by Chairman Mao and sentenced to prison for six years in 1958. It was of course one of the thousands 'wrongs' done at the crazy political period of turmoil.

³³ Ruru Li, "Hamlet in China: Translation, Interpretation and Performance," *Global Shakespeares: Video and Performance Archives* – Open Access.

concept of “sound unit.”³⁴ “Sound unit” has since become a norm in most translations of Shakespeare’s blank verse, as is witnessed in Lu Chien-chung’s translation of *Macbeth* (1999) or *The New Complete Works of Shakespeare*, translated and edited by Fang Ping (2000). What Sun Dayu created is significant even today, since “the search for— and eventual establishment of— a new Chinese poetic ‘meter’ to accommodate the English blank verse ensures the translation of poetry into poetry.”³⁵ From then on, there had not been any more successful inventions of new form of poetry translation until Fang Ping’s new complete works of Shakespeare was published in 2000.

In the meantime, a more influential and grand project was underway. In 1930, Hu Shi, the chair of the translation committee of the China Foundation for the Promotion of Education and Culture, invited five national renowned poets and scholars – Liang Shiqiu (1903-1987), Wen Yiduo (1899-1946), Xu Zhimo (1897-1931), Ye Gongchao (1904-1981), and Chen Xiyong (1896-1970) – to undertake the ambitious project to translate all of Shakespeare’s works and produce a “definitive edition” (*dingben*).³⁶ Huang describes that “detailed plans were made by Hu, including style (“we shall experiment with verse and prose before deciding on the best approach to translate the text”) and compensation (“the highest possible stipend will be offered, because this collection will sell”).³⁷ Other than the decision to use written vernacular as the ‘standard language’ to translate and to annotate the translated texts wherever necessary, another consensus parameter is to transliterate all proper names into Chinese characters “following standard Mandarin

³⁴ Pergn 9.

³⁵ Pergn 9.

³⁶ Alexander Huang, “‘A Tender Heir’ to ‘Bear His Memory’: Shakespeare’s Sonnets in Taiwan,” *William Shakespeare’s Sonnets, for the First Time Globally Represented, a Quatercentenary 1609-2009*. Ed. Manfred Pfister and Jürgen Gutsch. Dozwil, Switzerland: Edition SIGNATHUR, 2009, 126.

³⁷ Huang 126.

pronunciations (Shakespeare as Shashibiya) rather than translated semantically (Mistress Overdone as Gan Guotou [Trying Too Hard]).”³⁸ The drawback of this method, as Huang explains, is that Anglo-European personal names can become “long and unwieldy” in Chinese, because Chinese names are usually only two to three characters (syllables) in length. Since Chinese is a monosyllabic language, a name of eight syllables (first and last names) will require at least eight characters. Some names require more characters, such as Julius Caesar, which was often translated as 尤利乌斯·凯撒 (you li wu si, kai sa). The last “s,” though not a syllable, was still given a word to represent its sound. And because most of the foreign names to Chinese readers are not only exotic, but too long to remember at the first sight, a dot was introduced to connect the given name with its surname to facilitate reading and understanding.

As it turned out, because of ongoing wars, Liang was the sole person in the group to work with Hu and eventually complete the project. Liang Shi-qiu was widely regarded as a leader in the English translation industry, especially in Taiwan. Liang took 37 years, from 1930 till to 1967, to single-handedly finish the translation of the complete works, which were published by the Far East Publishing Company in Taiwan in 1967.³⁹ Unfortunately, because of the political and cultural separation of Taiwan from mainland China for forty years, the people of the mainland could not have access to Professor Liang’s translation until recently.⁴⁰

³⁸ Huang 126.

³⁹ Zhang Xiaoyang mentions in his book that “...task took almost thirty years...,” but according to Liang Shiqiu, it is much longer than that, almost 37 years in total.

⁴⁰ Liang’s Complete Works of Shakespeare were respectively published by Neimenggu Wenhua Press and Radio and Broadcasting Press of China in the same year of 1995.

In his translation, Liang used prose to render Shakespeare's blank verse. Liang's forty-volume Shakespeare (thirty-seven of the plays and three of the poems) contains about three million Chinese characters, and is a richly annotated prose version. Liang explained that his rationale for choosing prose over poetry for his translation was because there is no 'blank verse' form in Chinese poetry. What's more, he argued, when plays are performed the actors do not recite or chant the verse and therefore the poetry sounds like prose on the stage.⁴¹ Liang rejects the innovative form of verse translation and the method of the "sound-unit" is not used in his translation, which may partially explain why some scholars comment that Liang's translation are rigid and less poetic.

On the whole, there are generally two methods of translating the plays: literal translation or straightforward translation (zhiyi/直译) and free translation or sense-translation (yiyi/意译). Many translators tried both methods in rendering the dramatist's work; Bian Zhilin who adopted literal translation and Zhu Shenghao, free translation, offers good examples.⁴² One refers to those who translate blank verse in the form of prose, the other to those in the form of verse. It has always been a controversial issue whether poetic form is better than prose or the other way round. According to Li Ruru, "eighty percent of the translations of Shakespeare into Chinese are in vernacular prose style."⁴³ Although she does not mention how she calculated this percentage, the revealing number can present itself as a proof of the dominating trend of Chinese translation of Shakespeare's plays.

⁴¹ Murray J. Levith, *Shakespeare in China* (London; New York: Continuum, 2004) 8-9.

⁴² Sun 10.

⁴³ Li 47.

There are many reasons why prose translations are more popular than verse. One main reason might be that, there is an unavoidable fact that traditional Chinese poetry has no corresponding form of blank verse and Chinese poetry pays much attention to rhymes, as is pointed out by Lan Renzhe. He comments that after the May Fourth movement, attempts have been made to explore new poetic forms, but with no significant breakthrough. The use of “dun” (an alternative name of the “sound unit”) to duplicate the iambic foot might be a way to achieve verse-to-verse translation, but it needs time to develop itself. To most Chinese readers, the iambic pentameter is unknown and its charm and beauty are not easily perceivable. Thus, the use of “dun” or “sound unit” might not be very helpful for common readers who do not know English to appreciate the appeal and glamour of the iambic pentameter through “dun” or “sound unit.”

Liang’s *Shakespeare* is not universally admired, especially in Mainland China. Cao Weifeng, for example, criticized these translations early on; he saw them as “merely a narration of the stories word by word without giving any attention to the marvelous artistic accomplishment of the original texts.”⁴⁴ But a more serious critic of Liang, and not specifically for his Shakespeare, was Mao Zedong himself. He attacked the professor on ideological grounds for his belief that literature often contains universal themes. Mao writes, “People like Liang Shiqiu... may talk about art and literature as transcending the classes, but in fact they all uphold bourgeois art and literature in opposition to proletarian art and literature.”⁴⁵ Mao’s comments are biased for political reasons. Another case that is driven by political reasons is the famous “war of words” between Lu Xun and Liang

⁴⁴ Xianqiang Meng, *A Historical Survey of Shakespeare in China*, trans. Mason Y. H. Wang and Murray J. Levith (Changchun: Shakespeare Research Centre of Northeast Normal University, 1996) 12.

⁴⁵ Zedong Mao, “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Art and Literature,” *Selected Works Vol. 4 (1941-1945)* (New York: International Publishers, 1956) 71.

Shiqiu. Lu was regarded everywhere as China's leading leftist or "proletarian" writer and thus was extolled as "the soul of the nation." Liang, on the other hand, was the "capitalist" writer, favored by the Guomindang regime (the opposition party that Mao had been fighting against) and thus was demonized because of partisanship. In contrast, Zhu Sheng Hao was not involved or affected by such ridiculous battles and has been enjoying fame and popularity in both Mao's and present-day China.

Zhu Sheng Hao (1912-1944), the iconoclastic Chinese poet also undertook the translation of the complete works of Shakespeare. In 1935, two years after his graduation from the Department of English Literature at Zhijiang University in Hang Zhou (China), Zhu started work on *The Tempest*, and over the next nine years he translated a further thirty of Shakespeare's plays. He, together with his brilliant, headstrong lover/wife, Song Qingru, had endured poverty, obscurity and terrifying violence to accomplish the near-impossible task of translating Shakespeare's plays into Chinese. Zhu did it with a mission. In one of his letters to Song Qingru, Zhu even anticipated himself to be a national hero after successfully translating the whole works of Shakespeare. Thus, his effort to translate Shakespeare's complete works was intertwined with nationalism.⁴⁶ Other than poverty and sickness, the biggest obstacle was the Japanese invasion of and war against China. All Zhu's translations were done between 1935 and 1944 when life in China was profoundly disrupted by the Japanese occupation. His manuscripts were destroyed twice during the war and much of the work had to be re-done. Li Ruru notes that "Zhu did not relinquish his project until he was very ill, bedridden and unable to hold a pen."⁴⁷ A few

⁴⁶ Mei Sun and Ann-Marie Hsiung, "The Greatest English Dramatist in the Largest Asian Country: A Complex Cross-Cultural Encounter," *Chang Gung Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2.1 (2009): 107.

⁴⁷ Li 48.

days before he died, he said to his wife: “Had I known that I would die so young, I would have devoted my whole life to the translation of Shakespeare.”⁴⁸ Zhu, for a long time, was pictured by Chinese scholars and readers as a national martyr for the translation of Shakespeare’s plays. Of the unimaginable difficulties, Zhu writes in the preface to the first edition of his translation of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*:

I have always loved Shakespeare’s plays and in some cases I even went over whole plays a dozen times...the next year [1936] war broke out and all my book,... different Shakespeare editions... were completely destroyed by fire in a bombing raid...I was only able to rescue the complete edition published by the Oxford University Press ... I was compelled to move from place to place and hunt around for a living...I never stopped translating...Ten years is not a long time for a task as arduous as translating Shakespeare... I have put my whole life’s effort into it.⁴⁹

Of all the translators of Shakespeare, Zhu’s translation is by far the most influential and most widely acclaimed. In the 1950s when the new People’s Republic was allied with Russia, Shakespeare, as the favorite playwright of Marx and Engels, was welcomed in Maoist China. It is no exaggeration that “citations from Marx and Engels on the Renaissance and Shakespeare, and Shakespeare as “a realistic playwright” as well as a “Renaissance giant” were hammered into the heads of Chinese scholars and practitioners.”⁵⁰ Therefore, in 1954, the Writer’s Publishing House published, in twelve volumes, thirty-one of Shakespeares’s plays translated by Zhu Shenghao. This edition was reprinted three times from 1958 to 1962 with some revisions by a group of Chinese Shakespearean scholars, and the total number of sets ran to about 300,000.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Li 48.

⁴⁹ Shenghao Zhu, *Shashibiya quan ji [The Complete works of Shakespeare]* (Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1947) 2.

⁵⁰ Li 46.

⁵¹ Li 47.

At that time, the political currents were seriously challenging the evaluations of Shakespeare translation in many different ways. For examples, Murray J. Levith points out that in the case of two translators of Shakespeare's complete works, Liang Shiqiu and Zhu Shenghao, "the former, attacked by Lu Xun and Mao Zedong himself, was until quite recently reviled, while the latter, who died young was portrayed as something of a culture hero."⁵² This typical "hero and villain" mentality so prevalent in Mao's regime has had its effect on the reputations of Liang Shiqiu and Zhu Shenghao. Zhu's life and work have been sentimentalized into a 'model comrade' story (a propaganda campaign prevalent in Mao's China; some people was selected and portrayed as a model citizen, and the masses were encouraged to emulate his or her "selflessness," "modesty," or "devotion to Mao"), among quite a few others, such as "Iron man" Wang Jinxi and "Serve the People" Lei Feng. Zhu Shenghao is held up as an example of selfless devotion to the revolution for his Shakespeare translation, which perfectly suited the political atmosphere and people's unusual fervor for heroes. Despite the inaccuracies and in some cases the existence of better translations, Zhu's has been habitually acclaimed as a tremendous achievement, though he no longer enjoys a politically colored reputation of a national martyr. Still there are many articles published recently to reconfirm his great contribution, and a conference was held in Shanghai in 1992 to honor his exceptional achievement.⁵³ Also, a film, *How I Became a Shadow*, directed by Joseph Graves, about Zhu's life and works, is scheduled for release in Mainland China in the fall of 2012, the hundredth anniversary of Zhu Shenghao's birth.⁵⁴

⁵² Levith 130.

⁵³ Levith 130.

⁵⁴ Personal Website. Web.13 Dec. 2011.

<<http://www.beijingrep.com/news0001.html?iframe=true&width=400&height=300>>.

In recent years, Zhu and Liang have become synonymous with Shakespeare in China. A lot of work has been done to compare the two translations. Bai Liping has recently conducted an eye-opening analysis. She selected passages respectively from Shakespeare's original text and Liang and Zhu's translations of the same passages. In one passage, Bai pays special attention to the meaning of the word "nature." The original text is: ... was and is to hold, as it 'twere, the mirror up to *nature*... (*Hamlet*, II.iii.21-22). Liang's translation is: 把一面镜子举起来照人性 (Ba yi mian jing zi ju qi lai zhao *ren xing*/Uphold a mirror to reflect human nature)⁵⁵; Zhu's translation is: 它的目的始终是反映自然 (ta de mu di shi zhong shi fan ying *zi ran*/Its purpose is to reflect the natural world).⁵⁶ Zhu Shenghao translated "nature" as "zi ran"(nature or the natural world), but Liang translated it as "ren xing"(human nature).

Bai argues that this example reflects a famous cultural battle between Liang Shiqiu and the then dominant Marxist cultural orthodoxy represented by Lu Xun. Contrary to the Marxist practice of viewing and evaluating literature through the lens of class consciousness, Liang stressed that the best literature, including Shakespeare's, faithfully reflects the enduring realities of human nature.⁵⁷ He asserted that "class nature is only a superficial phenomenon" and that "the essence of literature is the expressing of human nature." Liang did not think that Shakespeare was either a bourgeois or a proletarian writer. Liang concluded, "what Shakespeare satirized was the weakness of

⁵⁵ Shiqiu Liang, trans., Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Taipei: Far East Book Co., Ltd., 1974) 99.

⁵⁶ Liping Bai, "Babbitt's Impact in China: The Case of Liang Shiqiu," *Humanitas* 17 (2004): 55.

⁵⁷ Bai 56.

human nature and the unfairness of society” without regard to class differences.⁵⁸ Liang could not accept Marxism or communism.

In contemporary China, Marxist literary ideology no longer exerts a strong hold on scholars. But the debate over which version is better continues to attract scholars’ attention. Obviously, the on-going debate was hardly known to the Anglo-American world, though some acute observations did occasionally appear, as is shown in an English journalist’s report about Premier Wen Jiabao’s visit to William Shakespeare’s home in Stratford-upon-Avon during a state visit to the U.K. on June 26, 2011. He observes:

Liang’s Shakespeare translations were more confident than Zhu’s. His witches in the opening scene of *Macbeth* speak in regular lines of seven syllables, not in rhyme, but with the cadence of poetry, whilst Zhu’s witches speak in prose. On the other hand, Zhu’s translation of Hamlet’s ‘To be or not to be’ soliloquy retains the balance and repetition of the verb whilst Liang’s rendering is complex: “To live or to destroy, this is a question which merits thought.” Both have their partisans.⁵⁹

But an understandable mistake was made in his report. The reporter writes:

It is likely that Wen read Liang’s version of the Complete Works since, despite Liang’s defection to Taiwan, they were published in a good new edition in Beijing in 1954 when the future premier [Wen Jiabao⁶⁰] was 14.⁶¹

It is known that Liang’s translation was not available in Mainland China until the mid-1990s, so it is impossible for Premier Wen, as a teenager, to have read and better appreciated Liang’s version over Zhu’s version. From this mistake, we can see that still more work needs to be done to introduce Shakespeare studies in China to the world. The

⁵⁸ Bai 57.

⁵⁹ Guardian. Web. 5 Jan. 2012. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jun/28/china-shakespeare-wen-jiabao-visit>>.

⁶⁰ Wen Jiabao is the sixth and current Premier and Party secretary of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, serving as China’s head of government and leading its cabinet. He was appointed to a second five-year term as China’s premier on 16 March 2008.

⁶¹ Guardian. Web. 5 Jan. 2012. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jun/28/china-shakespeare-wen-jiabao-visit>>.

ban of Liang's works in mainland China for his political ally is well-known there, while foreign journalists simply cannot perceive it because of the lack of information.

Not overshadowed by the giant figures of Liang and Zhu, Fang Ping (1921-2008), the latest most talented translator and scholar, has devoted his entire life to the translation and study of Shakespeare's works. Unlike most other Shakespearean translators, he had not majored in literature or had been educated overseas. He was to a large extent self-taught, but achieved unprecedented success in translating Shakespeare's plays in verse form. Including Fang Ping's twenty-one plays, one poem and three plays in cooperation, *The New Complete Plays of Shakespeare* is the "first Chinese version in preserving the author's original form, that is to say, Shakespearean prose, blank verse, rhymed couplet, and rhymed verse reappear in corresponding prose, unrhymed verse, rhymed couplet, and rhymed verse in the Chinese translation."⁶²

Unlike the editions of Liang Shiqiu and Zhu Shenghao, Fang would command a comprehensive Shakespeare using the "sound unit" Chinese character groupings to suggest English poetic rhythms to honor the poet's verse. Fang himself did most of the translations, as well as the introductions, and also monitored the translations he did not do. Much more fortunate than Zhu, whose painstakingly acquired English versions of Shakespeare's plays, were lost to the war, Fang Ping could carefully select the best English versions of Shakespeare's works, and finally he chose Bevington's *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (1992) and *The Riverside Shakespeare* (1974, a fully scholarly edition with G. Blakemore Evans as the general editor) for his translations. Fang Ping presented his readers the verse translation of Shakespeare. Although there are some dissenting voices, the influence of Fang's new version on Chinese readers of Shakespeare

⁶² Sun 86.

will be felt for a long time. It seems that the new translation has two objectives: scientific accuracy and theatrical treatment. For the theatrical treatment, Fang points out that one of the main principles in his translation is to treat Shakespeare's plays first and foremost as plays to be performed. So far, there are not many influential theatre productions based on Fang's translations. Whether or not Fang's translation has achieved the two goals remains to be seen.

Section 2: Interpretation and Decoding: Contemporary Chinese Shakespeare

Criticism

Shakespeare has long crossed the borders of theatrical London and set a sailing journey around the world. Monica Matei-Chesnoiu points out that the first published translation into Spanish of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was by Ramon de la Cruz in 1772, and Shakespeare's first visit to the Danish stage began as early as Shakespeare's lifetime, while Northern Europe started to know Shakespeare in the early nineteenth century. In many other European countries, the translations abounded in this period.⁶³ Shakespeare's works became known in Korea around 1919 through the translation of Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales From Shakespeare*.⁶⁴ The first translation of Shakespeare in Brazil was launched in the nineteenth century right before independence, which happened in 1822, and at that time "Shakespeare's theatre was produced in Brazil in Portuguese."⁶⁵ No matter how foreign the land seems to be, Shakespeare's plays adapt well and the popularity and positive reception in vastly different countries prove to be widespread. Shakespeare, "the head of the English literary pantheon" has long become a cultural icon for scholars and common readers, and even "to admit to disliking him was to admit to having no taste."⁶⁶

Similarly as various countries enthusiastically began to pursue Shakespeare, Shakespeare's name was first heard in Shanghai, in institutions established by English

⁶³ Matei-Chesnoiu 40-41.

⁶⁴ Dong-Wook Kim, "Shakespeare Studies and *Hamlet* in Korea," *Shakespeare's World/World Shakespeares*, ed. Richard Fotheringham, Christa Jansohn, and R. S. White (Newark: U. of Delaware Press, 2008) 261.

⁶⁵ Bernice W. Kliman and Rick J. Santos, *Latin American Shakespeare* (Madison; Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson U. Press, 2005) 26.

⁶⁶ Jack Lynch, *Becoming Shakespeare: The Unlikely Afterlife That Turned a Provincial Playwright into the Bard* (New York: Walker & Company, 2007) 171.

Christian Commissioners after the Opium Wars (the First Opium War from 1839 to 1842; the Second Opium War from 1856 to 1860). Shakespeare was restricted to a few metropolitan areas, such as Shanghai and Tianjin, where Commission institutions taught affluent Chinese children the bard's language and culture. The translation of Shakespeare's plays and Shakespearean criticism did not appear until after May Fourth New Culture Movement (1919), which witnessed a large quantity of Western and Russian works translated and introduced to Chinese readers. Basically, Chinese studies of Shakespeare from 1903 to 1949 consisted of individual efforts, mainly in the form of translation, and remained within academic circles.⁶⁷

The first notable Chinese scholarship on Shakespeare is no doubt Dong Run's series of four articles, published between 1917 and 1918. In his articles, Dong reviews details of Shakespeare's life and compares the dramatist with the poet laureate of Tang Dynasty (China's "golden age" of poetry), Li Bai (701CE-762 CE). Dong notices an interesting difference: "Li Bai portrayed himself in all his poems, but Shakespeare made pictures of dramatis personae in his plays."⁶⁸ Li's poems are filled with meditations of the past, a practice extolled by Confucianism. Dong also writes that Shakespeare's techniques of stagecraft and devices, such as cross-dressing,⁶⁹ though cross-dressing was also a common practice in Chinese operas when all actors were male.

When Shakespeare was first introduced to China, his plays were retold as tales. Thus, Shakespeare's works were to be read rather than to be staged. It is no wonder that Yuan Chang Zhang's 1933 article compares Shakespeare to the famous eighteenth-century novel, *A Dream of Red Mansions* [*Hongloumeng*] by Cao Xueqin, considered one

⁶⁷ Qixin He, "China's Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37. 2 (1986):149.

⁶⁸ Sun 96.

⁶⁹ Levith 20.

of the four great classic novels in China. Xiaoyang Zhang later also picks the same pair to compare. Zhang argues that the sadness shown in Chinese classic literature is largely gentle and well-controlled; the violence shown in some of Shakespeare's plays is rarely seen in Chinese tragedies. He further points out that it might partially explain why Chinese writers (playwrights), such as Cao Xueqin, tend to use women as tragic protagonists.⁷⁰ In traditional Chinese culture, one important merit for women is to control their feelings. For 2,500 years, Confucian teachings have been educating women on self-discipline, etiquette, unselfish loyal and self-sacrificing willingness to do anything to help their husbands and family. Accordingly, even the tragedy of women in literature is imagined as contrite and contrived.

Another pioneering work brings us an even more creative comparison—John C. H. Wu simply names Shakespeare as a Taoist. He interprets Shakespeare by way of ancient Chinese philosophy.⁷¹ In his article, Wu explains why he regards Shakespeare as a Taoist:

The fundamental of Taoism is the subtle idea of the permeation or interpenetration of opposites, life's mingled, yin, . . . This is exactly the vision that Shakespeare saw. . . Shakespeare is so inebriated with this thoroughly Taoist notion that he applies it to every situation in life, with the result that underneath the infinite variety of his lore, there lurks a simplicity that is primordial. . . I almost think that the works of Shakespeare can be used as a casebook of Taoism.⁷²

Wu's interpretation sounds to me a bit exaggerated, but it helps Chinese or Western readers to build up cultural connections. The iconic "Supreme Ultimate," as is shown in Taiji, is the most telling symbol of Taoism. The "Supreme Ultimate" creates Yin and Yang, and Yin and Yang generate all things. I could not perceive how Shakespeare can

⁷⁰ Zhang 42.

⁷¹ See also Chu Pingyi, "Taoist Ideas in the Works of Shakespeare," *Studies in English Literature and Linguistics* 4 (1980): 87-109; Frank Vulpi, "A Taoist Reading of King Lear," *Chinese Culture* 33.2 (1992): 45-51. Refer to *Shakespeare in China* by Murray J. Levith, 114.

⁷² John C. H. Wu, "Shakespeare as a Taoist," *T'ien Hsia Monthly* 3 (1936): 16-36.

be used as a casebook to Taoism. It is hard for me to derive from Shakespeare's plays interpretations of mythical Yin and Yang.

It seems that a large percentage of pioneering work has been done through comparing Shakespeare to some Chinese poet, philosopher or writer. These comparative studies later prove to be the most productive field concerning Shakespeare studies in China, though the focus of comparison later shifts to the comparison of theatre productions, especially the adaptation of Shakespeare's plays into *Huaju* (modern Chinese drama) or Chinese opera. According to a recent survey, Chinese opera continues to exist in 368 different forms throughout the country, with the differences in their tunes, rhythms and phonetics, with the best known forms being Beijing Opera, Kunqu, Shanxi Opera, etc.⁷³

The first few decades of the twentieth century witnessed the growing influence of Shakespeare in China, but soon the growth was checked by political changes China experienced, especially after 1930s. Thus, the mainstream in Chinese interpretation of Shakespeare started to reflect a strong political and ideological agenda. He Qixin contends that:

Yet everything in China is subject to political changes. Chinese criticism of Shakespeare in the last thirty-seven years mirrors various political movements: the emphasis, the tone, and even the terms of the criticism alter in accordance with the way the political wind blows. In this constantly changing world, Shakespearian scholarship, like almost everything else in China, has its ups and downs.⁷⁴

⁷³ Liu Li, "Domestication and Foreignization of Shakespeare's Drama in Chinese Traditional Opera – Two Adapted Versions of Hamlet in Peking Opera and Shaoxing Opera," diss., Shanghai Foreign Studies U., 2008, 27.

⁷⁴ He 12.

Since He's comments were made in the mid-1980s, they can no longer accurately reflect the current trend of Shakespeare's studies. Although the political and ideological agenda is still strong in China, it is far less decisive now than it was two decades ago.

In China, political changes in the first half of the twentieth century are varied and violent: from the Revolution of 1911, a revolution that overthrew China's last imperial dynasty, the Qing (1644–1912), to the establishment of the Republic of China; from the periods of warlords to the rise of communism; from anti-Japanese war (1937-1945) to Chinese Civil War (1927-1949). Chinese people were torn by wars. Towards the end of the 1930s, many theatre artists opted for topical presentations to avoid unnecessary political involvement or persecution. As a result, the Shakespeare canon became an obvious choice to avoid censorship. In wartime China, some plays by Shakespeare have to so sinocized ("sino" refers to China) so as to realize the theatre's potential for propaganda or social education.⁷⁵ For example, the French-trained Jiao Juyin (1905-1975) directed *Hamlet* in Chongqing in 1942. The production was staged on the balcony in front of the shrine of Confucius in a Confucian temple, with members of the audience seated in the courtyard looking up to the balcony at the end of a stone staircase:

The stage design took advantage of the pre-existing structure of the temple, covering the red pillars with black cloth. Jiao also added a few more pillars. The depth of the stage was some 60 meters. Four 24-foot curtains on each side, hanging down between the pillars, decorated the stage. The large variety of curtain action, concealing or revealing a combination of pillars and scene depth, was well received, as the twists and turns and haunted atmosphere represented 'the sinful and perilous Danish court.'⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Alexander C. Y. Huang, "Site-Specific *Hamlet* and Reconfigured Localities: Jiang'an, Singapore, Elsinore," *Shakespeare International Yearbook*, eds., Graham Bradshaw, T. G. Bishop, and Tetsuo Kishi, Vol. 7 (Aldershot, England; Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007) 27.

⁷⁶ Bradshaw 31.

Most importantly, Hamlet's question, 'to be or not to be' (3.1.55), acquired personal and political urgency for wartime Chinese audiences, which had to dash to air-raid shelters on a daily basis, dodging Japanese aerial attacks. Still, the play was staged in Sichuan Province to which the Chinese government had retreated in the face of Japanese attack. A hint was made through the play that "nicety and delay" of the Chinese government could be fatal in face of danger and invasion from Japan. Thus, the remote world of Denmark and the Hamletian ontological question traversed the vast historical and cultural distance to inspire a patriotic play. As Li Ruru observed, the performance in Jiang'an (a county in Chongqing) "linked Hamlet and his situation in Denmark with Chinese intellectuals and their environment."⁷⁷ Li's comments accurately reflect what had happened in war-time China: Shakespeare functioned both as political propaganda and spiritual inspiration.

The wartime chaos was finally brought to an end when the new China was founded in 1949 and Shakespeare studies in China also found a new direction. After the People's Republic of China was established, Communist China developed close ties with the Soviet Union. Russian theory and practice in education was imitated wholesale in Chinese schools, and similarly literary criticism in China then was imported almost wholly from Russia. Under extremely unusual historical circumstances before and after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Chinese and Soviet artists worked closely with each other and staged Shakespearean productions. One of the most intriguing questions at that time was why certain plays were chosen and others were not. Other than *The Merchant of Venice*, very few comedies by Shakespeare were staged in China before the 1950s. However, in the period 1956-1979, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Twelfth Night* were two

⁷⁷ Bradshaw 31.

of the most frequently staged non-Chinese plays.⁷⁸ One reason for their popularity might be that both of the two plays depict the gender conflicts and some Chinese scholars willingly interpret the two plays as the best examples of the liberation of women. After the founding of new China, the women's emancipation movement was launched, resulting in the historic liberation of Chinese women. This movement was unprecedentedly successful, especially when we take into consideration the fact that there had existed several millennia of oppression and devastation on Chinese women, imposed by the feudal patriarchal system.

Alexander C. Y. Huang explains that in this particular historical period, when Marxist-Maoism controlled all aspects of public cultural life, *Much Ado About Nothing* emerged as a text that was safe for the actors and appropriate for the masses because it was perceived to be a romantic comedy of love, friendship, and everyday matters. Most importantly, it was "apolitical." At a time of a mass purge ('persecution'), a safe text was essential for directors and actors. Another factor that added to its popularity was the audience's need to escape to a fantasy world removed from contemporary politics. During the 1950s, theater companies were given the mission to propagandize the Party ideology, to promote "progressive" ideas among the people, and to fight "class enemies." The monotonous practice of staging plays with the same theme ran down actors' enthusiasm for the stage. *Much Ado About Nothing*, therefore, provided a rare, state-approved opportunity for the actors to try something different.⁷⁹ The theme of the play helps make it a safe text, but the play might not be so safe as it appears to be. In *Much*

⁷⁸ Alexander C. Y. Huang, "The Politics of an 'Apolitical' Shakespeare: A Soviet-Chinese Joint Venture, 1950-1979," *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* 1.2 (2005). Available online: <http://www.borrowers.uga.edu/>.

⁷⁹ Huang, available online: <http://www.borrowers.uga.edu/>.

Ado About Nothing, the plenty use of deception and mistaken identity might have been employed to satirize political deceptions in Mao's China.

The unbalanced choice of plays, though, did not discourage the development of Shakespeare studies in China. In the years during which the USSR acted as China's main ally, interest in Shakespeare skyrocketed. China imported a great deal of translated Russian literature, including standard examples of Marxist literary criticism. To serve as models for Chinese critics during the first few years of Chinese criticism on Shakespeare, a select number of critical essays on Shakespeare by Russian critics were translated from Russian into Chinese, among which were two influential essays by Mikhail M. Morozov and Alexander Anikst. Both of them focus on realism in Shakespeare's plays.⁸⁰

Following their Russian counterparts, Chinese critics tended to analyze Shakespeare's plays in terms of the history that produced them. Several essays began with an account of England in the last decade of the sixteenth century and the first decade of the seventeenth century, analyzing the social classes and the emerging bourgeoisie, emphasizing a Marxist-dialectical understanding of that historical period; that is, the class struggle between the ruling class and the people. Shakespeare was interpreted as a warrior against the feudalist suppression. The class struggle became a leading issue to be considered in the analysis of Shakespeare's plays.

Unfortunately, the boom in Shakespeare studies in China in the 1950s did not last. Starting in 1960, China and the Soviet Union experienced the Sino-Soviet split (1960-1989) when the political and ideological relations between the People's Republic of China and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics worsened. China and the USSR had split on Marxist ideology, which greatly disturbed the social life of the Chinese people

⁸⁰ He 13.

and the direction of political trends in the country. The study of foreign literature fell prey to the impact of political instability, as a result of which foreign literature was excluded from the curriculum of most foreign language institutions. The political climate became increasingly unfavorable to the presence of Shakespeare in China in the late 1950s and the ideas and principles of Mao Zedong (Maoism) came to be taken as political and cultural guidelines for all Chinese. Mao's literary theory stated that all literary and artistic activities should first serve the revolution and comply with the political principles of the party. He defined culture as the reflection of economics and politics. In his theory of art and literature, he called for the reflection of the revolutionary class struggle and for the revolutionary workers, peasants and soldiers to take their place as heroes. All this seriously affected the practice of literary criticism and Shakespeare studies, and in the end opposed all Western culture during the disastrous Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976.⁸¹ He Qixin describes the situation as follows:

Nearly drowned in the political surge, Shakespeare suffered a dramatic fall from grace during the Cultural Revolution. The new culture secretary, Jiang Qing (Madame Mao) had no time for Stratford's 'bourgeois counterrevolutionary'. She promptly banned the Bard, a prohibition that remained in force for ten years. Chinese translations of Shakespeare's plays were removed from libraries and bookstores, translated film and stage versions were banned. There was virtually no Shakespearean scholarship in China. During this political unrest, even Shakespeare's name "vanished from the lips of a population of nine hundred million people."⁸²

Thus ends the first stage of Shakespeare studies in China: the embryonic period from 1903 to 1978, a period full of ups and downs, which is no less dramatic compared with the first seventy years of Shakespeare criticism in England when Ben Jonson objected Shakespeare for his glibly mixture of kings and clowns, lofty verse with vulgarity, and

⁸¹ Zhang 239-240.

⁸² He 155.

other writers lauded Shakespeare for his achievement. Shakespeare studies in China also evolved into two promising stages: the developing period from 1978 to 1990,⁸³ and the diversified and internationalized period from 1990 to present, which witnessed a critical transition in ideology as China redefined its system of socialism and cautiously embraced capitalism's free market and free enterprise.

The removal of the Shakespeare ban in May 1977 was one of the signs that the Cultural Revolution had ended. It is rumored that within hours of the death of Mao, queues formed in the streets for copies of Shakespeare's most popular play in China, *The Merchant of Venice*.⁸⁴ Shakespeare was once again officially feted as a "renaissance giant" and the plays are now more popular than ever. In the 1980s, the Chinese basically were able to "approach Shakespeare in any way they liked,"⁸⁵ breaking away from the previous dogmatic interpretation of Shakespeare's works.

Despite this, the philosophical Marxist method yet continued to influence the Chinese appreciation of Shakespeare. The lasting influence of Marxism was largely due to the impact of a strong political climate that had prevailed in China for decades. A Marxist approach was still widely used before any new analytical method was accepted by Chinese scholars. In the early 1980s, postcolonialism, feminism, postmodernism were

⁸³ Beijing and Shanghai jointly held the first Shakespeare festival between 10-23 April 1986, with the staging of 25 versions of 15 Shakespeare's plays. More than 400 critical essays were published between 1978 to 1986, which fell into two categories, namely, Shakespeare studies under rubric of Marxist literary criticism, and the main stream of study and Shakespeare studies in other forms, such as, translation, staging, and adaptation.

⁸⁴ Brockbank 197.

⁸⁵ Zhang 240.

largely unheard of. Marxist historical materialism seemed to be one of the only few authoritative methods available for Shakespeare studies.⁸⁶

At the same time, some critical essays on Shakespeare's plays were published in many resumed and newly started journals. However, in the late 1970s, Chinese Shakespearean critics were not able to avoid the influence of the Cultural Revolution's class struggle and analysis, for "there was no official denouncement of this political upheaval and a number of political and ideological issues remained unresolved."⁸⁷ They still adhered to Mao Zedong's political criteria for literary criticism, claiming that there was no literature that could transcend social class, and accordingly every author wrote for a particular class.⁸⁸ In line with this, Shakespeare was interpreted as a voice for the common people against the bourgeoisie. This may sound naive now, but in that specific period, political reasons weigh far more than literature itself.

Despite the limitation in the availability of literary theories, there has been a renewed interest in Shakespeare among the general public of China since 1978 when Deng Xiaoping (the president after Mao Zedong) launched a campaign to reform China's declining economic system and open China up to the outside world. The new policy brought many different changes to Shakespeare studies. The most obvious one is the production of Shakespeare plays, which was rarely successful during the first few decades after Shakespeare was introduced in China.

⁸⁶ Though May Fourth Movement of 1919 introduces some western thoughts to China, literary criticism theories were known to Chinese scholars in a much later time. As an intellectual revolution and sociopolitical reform movement (1917-1921), May Fourth Movement was also a part of New Culture Movement, in which the iconoclastic intellectual revolutionary Chen Duxiu and the American-educated scholar Hu Shi proposed a new naturalistic vernacular writing style, replacing the difficult 2000-year-old classical style. They also attacked traditional Confucian ideas and exalted Western ideas.

⁸⁷ He 35.

⁸⁸ Yanna Sun, "Shakespeare Reception in China," *Journal of English and Literature* 3.1 (2012): 6.

In 1980 and 1981, *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Merchant of Venice* were presented by two dramatic troupes in Shanghai, and *The Merchant of Venice* was staged by the China Youth Art Theatre in Beijing; in 1981, the Beijing People's Art Theatre performed *Measure for Measure*, translated and directed by Ying Ruocheng, with Toby Robertson as visiting director; in the fall of 1982, the London Shakespeare Group toured several cities in China and staged *Twelfth Night*; and some film versions of Shakespeare's plays were brought back to movie theatres and TV screens to satisfy the film-hungry public.

At the same time, efforts have been made to broaden the horizon of the staging of Shakespeare in China. Two results of this endeavor have been the performance of *Romeo and Juliet* in the Tibetan language by a group of Tibetan students at the Shanghai Drama Institute in 1981, and the Peking Opera's adaptation of *Othello*, staged in Beijing in May 1983. Burgeoning interest in Shakespeare was highlighted by the publication of the first issue of *Shashibiya Yanjiu* (Shakespeare Studies), the first Mainland journal dedicated to a non-Chinese writer, in March 1983. In early December 1984, the inaugural conference of the Shakespeare Society of China was held in Shanghai.⁸⁹ The Shakespeare Society of China was founded and gained membership in the International Shakespeare Association. In 1986, *Shakespeare Quarterly* published an article from a Chinese writer (He Qixin) for the first time. Since then, two more articles have been published there, respectively by Zha Peide and Tian Jia in 1988, and Li Ruru in 1999.

To culminate, the International Shakespeare Festival (1986) was held simultaneously at Shanghai and Beijing. The thirteen-day festival hosted over twenty-four performances of sixteen Shakespeare plays, some of which were nationally televised

⁸⁹ He 155.

to a reported audience of 100,000. The list of entries included a handful of revivals, six adaptations, four Chinese premieres, and one puppet play, but only two productions were in English— *Merchant of Venice* and *Timon of Athens*.⁹⁰ A second festival had been planned for 1990, but after the Tiananmen Square Protests of 1989, it was postponed until 19-26 September 1994 and only in Shanghai. It had over thirty-five theater productions, six of which were chosen for the festival's nine productions.⁹¹ Of the nine plays presented, two came from the United Kingdom, one from Germany, and one from Taiwan, which were all performed in English, an important complement to the other performances that were unanimously in Chinese.

The festival not only promoted Chinese opera creation and theatrical art, it also attracted some international attention. Audrey Stanley, one of the founders of the Santa Cruz Shakespeare Festival (founded in 1981), wrote an article recounting her experience as a participant in this festival. In her article, Stanley describes her surprising findings

⁹⁰ All other plays were performed in Chinese: In Beijing, *Othello* performed by China Railways Drama Troupe; *King Lear* by Tianjing People's Art Theatre; *Twelfth Night* by North China Dance Society of Beijing Normal University; *King Li'ya* by Central Drama Academy of Beijing; *Beijing Opera Othello* by Experimental Beijing Opera Troupe; *Merry Wives of Windsor* by The Central Experimental Theatre; *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by China Coal Miners' Drama Troupe; *Merchant of Venice* by China Youth Art Theatre; *Richard III*, China Children's Art Theatre. In Shanghai, SPOKEN DRAMA (*Huaju*): *The Merchant of Venice*, China Youth Art Theatre; *King Lear*, Liao Ning People's Art Theatre; *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shanghai People's Art Theatre; *Othello*, Mongolia Class of Shanghai Drama Institute; *Hamlet*, Teachers of Shanghai Drama Institute; *Titus Andronicus*, Research Office of Shanghai Drama Institute; *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Wu Han Spoken Drama Troupe; *All's Well That Ends Well*, Xi An Spoken Drama Troupe; *Richard III*, Shan Dong Spoken Drama Troupe; *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shan Xi People's Art Theatre; *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shanghai Youth Spoken Drama Troupe. OPERA: *Othello* (two acts), Shanghai Opera House, Symphony Troupe and Chorus Troupe. CHINESE LOCAL DRAMA: *Much Ado About Nothing*, An Hui Wuangmeixi Troupe; *Macbeth*, Shanghai Kuen Qu Troupe; *Twelfth Night*, Shanghai Shao Xing Opera Troupe; and *The Winter's Tale*, Zhe Jiang Shao Xing Opera Troupe. Refer to J. Philip Brockbank, "Shakespeare Renaissance in China," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39.2 (1988): 204-205.

⁹¹ Audrey Stanley, "The 1994 Shanghai International Shakespeare Festival," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47.1 (1996): 72.

that the Chinese cut and adapted Shakespeare's plays quite vigorously. She comments that this could be partially due to the shorter length of Chinese operas, which are normally performed without intermissions. For example, Stanley points out that *Othello* began with Act 2 and *Hamlet* was performed without Marcellus, Barnardo, Cornelius, Voltmand, Rosencrantz, Guidenstern, Reynaldo, Osric, the gravediggers, and Fortinbras.⁹² Despite this, Stanley seems to have formed a positive view of the Chinese productions: the performances "consistently emphasized the visibly dramatic in lighting and costumes, in the romanticized treatment of the plots, in the combination of music and dance with a reshaping of the drama."⁹³

Likewise Phillip Brockbank, a distinguished guest of the Shakespeare Association of China, expresses passionately his response to the performances in the festival:

I...had not anticipated what was for me a revelatory discovery of new truths about Shakespeare's art. I enjoyed what I have come to think of as a Shakespeare Renaissance in China, remarkable for its scale, plenitude, and variety, distinctively Chinese and yet lucidly in touch with the England of Elizabeth and James...the plays themselves are clarified by the energies and styles of an exotic, simultaneously courtly and popular tradition. It seemed no accident that the theatre in the Summer Palace near Beijing is close in design to the London Fortune, with its yard, high canopied platform, privileged sheltered arcade, musicians' galleries, and, confronting the stage at the Palace, a throne for the Empress as sovereign spectator...⁹⁴

With appreciating eyes, Brockbank explains why he found the Chinese performance of Shakespeare's plays appealing: in the traditions of Chinese theatre, it is usual to distinguish four skills (lyric, rhetoric, histrionics, and kinetics) and five means (mouth, eyes, torso, hair, and footsteps). Their interactive operation constantly brought to mind the connection between "movement" and "emotion." The different styles of facial make-

⁹² Stanley 72.

⁹³ Stanley 80.

⁹⁴ J. Philip Brockbank, "Shakespeare Renaissance in China," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39.2 (1988): 195.

up, the highlight of the Beijing opera, symbolize a character's personality, role, and fate. This technique can help the foreign audience break through the language barrier of Mandarin Chinese and make sense of the play. Generally, a red face represents loyalty and bravery; a black face, valor; yellow and white faces, duplicity; and golden and silver faces, mystery. Besides color, lines also function as symbols. For example, a figure can be painted either all white on his face, or just around the nose. The larger the white area painted, the more viperous the role. Therefore, audiences who are familiar with Shakespeare's plays and Chinese styles of facial make-up can follow the story at ease.

Along with the sensational international festivals, there have been quite a few national and local festivals. Among others, the National Chinese Universities Shakespeare Festival is currently the most popular one among college students. The National Chinese Universities Shakespeare Festival, so far has entered its 7th year (2011).⁹⁵ The Festival culminates each year with 12 Chinese Universities being given all-expenses-paid trips to Hong Kong for an eight-day festival in which each invited university performs an abbreviated version of one of Shakespeare's plays for Hong Kong audiences. The team from the university selected as having achieved the most outstanding performance at the festival is given a ten-day, all-expenses-paid trip to London and Stratford, where students interact with actors and directors from the RSC, as well as see a number of plays, and visit many historical sites of Shakespearean import.

Shakespeare festivals contribute in a special way to the study of Shakespeare in China. In the last decade or so, many productions have gotten bolder and more daring as the political atmosphere has relaxed. Some directors practice self-censorship and remove

⁹⁵ The Sixth Chinese Universities Shakespeare Festival was held from May 31 to June 2. On the previous five occasions, the Chinese Universities Shakespeare Festival has proved to be an ideal platform for experiencing the drama and imagination of the finest English poet who ever lived.

questionable content before performances, but others push the envelope and depict dictators like *Richard III* as cruelly manipulating the populace to satirize Chinese dictating government, particularly in the period of the Cultural Revolution. Since the old ideologies and values, such as Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, are no longer suited to China's changing society, the institution of new ones is desperately needed. Thus came about the most productive period of Shakespeare studies in China.

Since the early 1990s, Shakespeare studies in China have developed conspicuously in terms of quality and quantity. During this period, the major characteristics of Shakespeare studies in China can be summarized as falling into the following categories: (1) Comparative studies emphasizing cross-cultural interpretation; (2) translation studies of Shakespeare's plays; (3) traditional Chinese and western approaches to the study of Shakespeare's plays; and (4) renewed interest in stage adaptation and production.

Comparative literary studies of Shakespeare and Chinese authors have achieved an impressive success, as opposed to the comparative studies of other foreign authors and Chinese writers. Shakespeare has been the most popular subject which has inspired the most productive research. In the past three decades, for the study of the relationship between Shakespeare and Chinese Literature, over 100 articles were published in academic journals, among which we can find the synchronic study of Shakespeare and his works and Chinese writers and their works, such as *Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu*, *Shakespeare and Guan Hanqing*,⁹⁶ *Shakespeare and Li Yu*,⁹⁷ and *Shakespeare and Caoxueqin*. Of all the topics, the most widely popular one is the comparison between

⁹⁶ Founder of Zaju (Yuan Opera) and one of the four great Yuan playwrights.

⁹⁷ Famous Chinese writer in the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu, a Chinese contemporary of Shakespeare and the most famous dramatist in the Ming Dynasty. He was and has been honored as the “Chinese Shakespeare.”

In 1930, Aoki Masaru, a Japanese scholar, in his book, *Shina kinsei gikuoku shi* (A History of Modern Chinese Drama), first put forward the analogy between Tang’s and Shakespeare’s styles and status within their respective dramatic traditions. And it was echoed by scholars like Zhao Jingshen in 1946, Xu Shuofang in 1983 and Sun Haixi in 2004. Tang’s romance drama, *The Peony Pavilion* (Mudan ting), is frequently referred to as a Chinese equivalent of *Romeo and Juliet*. Tian Han, the first Chinese who completed a full translation of *Hamlet* (1921), visited Tang Xianzu’s hometown, Linchuan in Jiangxi Province, in 1959. Moved by the important literary heritage of the site, he composed a poem that passionately compared Tang’s characters with those of Shakespeare: “Du Liniang [*The Peony Pavilion*] is like Juliet [*Romeo and Juliet*]/Her love is deeply woven into the root of the plum tree...”⁹⁸

Peony Pavilion was written in 1598, nearly contemporaneous with Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Tang’s fifty-five-scene play is a story of a young couple (Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei)’s struggle to realize a future together. Interestingly, the heroines of both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Peony Pavilion* ultimately commit suicide rather than remain alone in the world. While Juliet’s death brings an end to Shakespeare’s tragic drama, the death of Du Liniang in Scene 20 serves only to free the heroine to pursue her dream of love, first in ghostly form, then in human (after death, Du was brought back to life again through the help of the “president” of the underworld), and finally in a union with her lover Liu Mengmei in *Peony Pavilion*.

⁹⁸ Huang 62.

Li Ruru has detailed analyses of Tang Xianzu's dramatic aesthetics: Tang Xianzu (1550-1616) wrote all his plays, including the celebrated Peony Pavilion, in *Kunqu* (Kun Opera). *Kunqu* is the earliest living tradition of Chinese opera, in which singers are accompanied by melodic instruments, such as flute, three-stringed lute, and gongs. The actors are dressed in artistic and stylized costumes chiefly made of silk. As in all traditional Chinese theatre, *Kunqu* uses a minimum of props and scenery, which permits the performers to more easily express their stage movements in the form of dance. There is no curtain, and few props (sometimes a table and a chair). The performers appeal to the audience's imagination and conjure up a scene or a setting with gestures, words and music. Most extant scripts of *chuanqi* (plays of romance and legend) from the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1616-1911) dynasties are in the *Kun* style and contribute significantly to the legacy of Chinese classics. In the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries, the style was so popular that, according to one Qing scholar, "a five-year-old child could sing it."⁹⁹

It is worthwhile to compare productions of Shakespeare's plays in the west with those in China since there are some significant differences. By comparison, the Chinese tradition presents highly stylized symbolism. For example, waving a tasseled whip indicates riding a horse, and letting it hang straight down from the finger-tips shows that the rider has dismounted. Therefore, there is no need to bring a live animal on stage to convey the idea of a horse. Centuries of practice have produced a convenient shorthand style. The bare stage offers the actors the imaginative flexibility they need to suggest

⁹⁹ Ruru Li, *The Soul of Beijing Opera: Theatrical Creativity and Continuity in the Changing World* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2010) 14.

what is happening.¹⁰⁰ Today's Shakespearean stages, if recent big productions by major companies are the criteria, are too often obliterated in sheer celebration, and thus devoid of close contact with the play. In contrast, the minimalist style focuses more on the actors, languages and emotions. Similarly like the Chinese tradition of using symbolism, the minimalist style of actors from the London stage with few props, no real sets/costumes, thrives with the potentiality to spring to life for an audience at any time in almost any corner.

So far more than forty articles have been published to compare Shakespeare with Tang Xianzu, a majority of which compare *the Peony Pavilion* with *Romeo and Juliet*, while some others compare *the Peony Pavilion* with *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*. In 2006, Zhang Ling wrote a dissertation in Chinese under the title *Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare's Perspective on Woman and Gender Issues*. This comparative study places Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare's humanist ideas within the theoretical frame of feminist literary criticism and gender poetics.¹⁰¹

Besides this popular synchronic comparison, diachronic studies of Shakespeare's influence and impact upon China have also attracted equal attention. We can identify three categories involved in this study: the comparative study between Shakespeare's plays and Chinese traditional plays; the comparative study between Shakespeare and Chinese modern literature and Shakespeare's influence upon Chinese modern writers; the

¹⁰⁰ Wnag-Ngai Sui, *Chinese Opera: Images and Stories* (Vancouver: UBC P.; Seattle: U of Washington P, 1997) 3.

¹⁰¹ Zhang Ling, "Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare's perspective of woman and gender issues," diss., Suzhou University, 2006.

adoption and presentation of Shakespeare by Chinese drama and opera, and assimilation of Shakespeare into Chinese culture.¹⁰²

The amazing number of studies indeed distinguishes this period from the previous stages, but undeniably there are still many research opportunities. For example, there are very few articles dealing with “Confucianism and Shakespeare,” an approach which seems natural for Chinese scholars to pursue, as Confucianism is intertwined with the fabric of Chinese life and culture, so much a part of a national and cultural identity. “In fact,” Wang Shuhua points out, “Shakespeare and Confucius have often been mentioned together as ‘sage’.”¹⁰³ Although some pioneer work has been done, such as that by Frank Vulpi,¹⁰⁴ who made an attempt to interpret Shakespeare through ancient Chinese philosophy,¹⁰⁵ so far, unfortunately, there is no new work coming out discussing this topic.

Similar to comparative studies, translation studies are another unique aspect of the sinicization of Shakespeare. If a western Shakespeare scholar knows Chinese and reads the Chinese version of *Hamlet*, he will find a different Hamlet, a “Chinese-spoken” Hamlet or maybe even a “Chinese-way-of-thinking” Hamlet, since no matter how faithful a translation can be, it is still a reinvention. Of the four main translations mentioned in Section One, I have to say that there is not any version that can boast of having successfully preserved all of Shakespeare’s techniques and styles. In terms of the target language (Chinese), however, Zhu’s translation is superb. Examining the current situation

¹⁰²Li Weimin, “Shakespeare Studies from the Perspective of the Comparative Literature,” *Journal of South-Central U. for Nationalities (Humanities and Social Sciences)* 26.5 (2006): 170.

¹⁰³Wang 76.

¹⁰⁴Frank Vulpi, “A Taoist Reading of *King Lear*,” *Chinese Culture* 33.2 (1992): 45-51.

¹⁰⁵See also Chu Pingyi, “Taoistic Ideas in the Works of Shakespeare,” *Studies in English Literature and linguistics* 4(1980): 87-109.

of Shakespeare studies and translation, Dirk Delabastita comments that translation has been belittled as the “Cinderella of Shakespeare studies.”¹⁰⁶ In spite of that, translation studies remain popular among students and scholars in various countries whose language is not English. In China, translation studies paved the way for all other studies concerning Shakespeare. Especially for those students who are pursuing degrees in translation, translation of Shakespeare has surpassed the translation of other foreign writers and become the most popular research topic.

In contrast with the popularity and fast development of translation studies, translation itself has not enjoyed significant development after the 1990s. Take *Romeo and Juliet* for example: among its 38 editions from 1990 to 2009 published by 35 different presses,¹⁰⁷ 17 editions are still based on the edition of Zhu Shenghao, the most famous translator of Shakespeare’s complete works into the Chinese language, first published in 1947. Most of the rest are either adaptation or reprinting of older versions by other translators of the first half of 20th century, such as Tian Han (1924), Deng Yizhe (1928), Xu Zhimo (1932) [not finished], Xingyun Feng (1940), Cao Weifeng (1943), and Cao Yu (1944). Among all the translations, there are only 5 newly translated versions (not revisions of any pre-existing editions), such as Zeng Chongming, Ma Weidong, and Xing Yanqiu, whose names are overshadowed by the “old generation.”

The reason why there is only limited number of new translations might be that most of the earlier translators had either overseas experience in the early twentieth century or had received a systematic English education in international schools at

¹⁰⁶ Dirk Delabastita, “More Alternative Shakespeares,” *Four Hundred Years of Shakespeare in Europe*, eds. Luis Pujante and Ton Hoenselaars (Newark: U. of Delaware Press; London, Cranbury: Associated U. Presses, 2003) 126.

¹⁰⁷ All the data are collected from the Database of the National Library of China and National Digital Library of China.

Shanghai or Beijing, and thus had a very good command of English, while after the founding of communist China, for three decades from 1949 to 1979, the door to the outside world was closed and western civilization was condemned as a concept.

Therefore the new generation was not as proficient in the English language. Thanks to the second surge of overseas studies beginning in the 1990s, there might be some surprising growth in the translation of Shakespeare's works in the near future.

In spite of the much repetitive reproduction of previous translations, some ground-breaking works by contemporary scholars have made a significant improvement in the translation of Shakespeare's plays. The most prominent translator, Professor Fang Ping uses more natural but equally expressive language. Quite a few articles have compared the translation of Zhu Shenghao and that of Fang Ping. Even though Zhu's translations have become classics, some critics find fault with his translations as fluctuating between being sometimes too flowery and sometimes too sketchy (the occasional skipping-over of details). Fang Ping's translations, in contrast, are more stage-oriented and have gained much support and applause among theater producers for their plainness and expressiveness. Deng Di elaborates on this topic in his article, "From Zhu Shenghao to Fangping: a Significant Transition for the Translation of Shakespearean Plays,"¹⁰⁸ in which he reviews the translation history of Shakespearean plays in China and compares the techniques employed in the translation and concludes that the translation of Shakespeare has seen a healthy evolution.

¹⁰⁸ Di Deng, "From Zhu Shenghao to Fangping: a Significant Transition for the Translation of Shakespearean Plays," *Luxun Research Monthly* 9 (2008).

Addressing a similar topic, Gong Fen has done some pioneering research.¹⁰⁹ Gong employs Maroc's model as a research framework, and conducts a comparative study of different Chinese versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, one by Zhu Shenghao, and the other by the renowned Chinese dramatist and translator Cao Yu. She focuses on several important aspects: the fidelity to the oral convention of the target language (TL), the expression of the personality of different characters, the translation of the rhetoric devices inherent in the SL (source language) text, the stage effect of the text, and the treatment of cultural elements within the SL play. She also uses Bian Zhilin's version of *Hamlet* for the study of the translation of verse drama. Through comparison and analysis, Gong proposes proper translation techniques for future scholars; that is, to maintain Shakespeare's original flavor as much as possible, while finding ways to retain the beauty of the Chinese language.

Xia Xiaopeng, in *Stylistic Approaches to the Translation of Shakespeare*,¹¹⁰ offers another ground-breaking work in translation studies. He focuses on stylistics. He argues that the most knotty problem in the translation of Shakespeare's plays is the translation of verse. He quotes from Robert Frost that "poetry is what gets lost in translation" and Shelley that "to seek to transfuse from one language into another the creation of a poet...this is the burden of the curse of Babel."¹¹¹ Xia writes that there is no similar poetic form in the Chinese language and therefore, a new Chinese poetic form must be created to bear the same characteristics of blank verse. Sun Dayu figures out a way to replicate "foot" in English poetry with Chinese "pause" (dun/顿) in order to recreate the

¹⁰⁹ Fen Gong, "A Comparative Study of Different Chinese Versions of Plays of Shakespeare," diss. Shanghai International Studies U., 2004, X-Xii.

¹¹⁰ Xiaopeng Xia, "Stylistic Approaches to the Translation of Shakespeare," MA thesis, Tianjin U., 2003.

¹¹¹ Xia 44.

rhythm of English, but Lao Long points out that Sun's pioneering discovery cannot ultimately solve the problem of the translation of blank verse: the foot of English poetry is divided according to the syllable but not meaning whereas Chinese language is not a stress language but a tone language. Pause (dun/顿) in Chinese is not based on syllable but on meaning, and rhythm in Chinese is created according to tone. For example, in Mandarin, *mā má mǎ mà* (妈嘛马骂) mean four different things. Xia suggests that the best practical approach is to translate Shakespeare's plays into prose rather than verse. Therefore, he cites many examples from Zhu Shenghao's translation to support his argument, as for example:

Macbeth: So *foul* and *fair* a day I have seen (Macbeth, I.III)
 麦克白: 我从来没有见过这样阴郁而又这样光明的日子。(translated by Zhu)
 [literally means: I have never seen such days with both darkness and brightness.]

For this alliterative bond, the translator cannot find a set of Chinese characters to convey the English alliteration (Chinese has no alliteration), but Zhu successfully turns them into a pair of opposites (阴郁 and 光明/darkness and brightness) to imply the contradiction in the inner and outer worlds of Macbeth.

Xia also cites the example of a pararhyme:

Lady Macbeth: What thou wouldst *highly*,
 That wouldst thou *holily*; (Macbeth, I.V.)
 麦克白夫人: 你希望用政治的手段, 达到你的崇高的企图。(translated by Zhu)
 [literally means: You want to employ any political means to achieve any of your holy intentions.]
 麦克白夫人: 你想要超凡, 偏又要入圣。(translated by Bian Zhilin)
 [literally means: What you want greatly,/ you want to obtain it holy.]

Xia compares Zhu's translation with that of Bian and concludes that in this case Bian's translation is better because he transfers the end rhyme of the two lines while still conveys the intended meaning. Although Chinese does not have alliteration, it does have

the rhyming. Classic Chinese poems rhyme with both syllables and tones. The “rhyming technique” concerning syllables is known as “yayun/押韵” and the toning technique known as “pingze/平仄” (level/oblique toning technique). Different from English words, a majority of which are multisyllable, most Chinese words can be composed with a single syllable. When it comes to classic Chinese poems, the rhyme can be very regular and formulated. The above example shows that 凡(fan) and 圣(sheng) is both pronounced with nasal sound “n” and the vowels in Chinese *pinyin* are also highly similar. More importantly, the variation in tones perfectly meets the standard of rhyming, that is, the rule of level/oblique toning technique.

Xia also analyzes how to translate malapropism and mispronunciation to achieve humorous effects:

Falstaff: ... ‘Tis time I were choked with a piece of toasted cheese.

Evans: Seese is not goot to give putter. Your pelly is all putter. (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, V.I.)

福斯塔夫:这么说, 我会吃烤过的干酪都会把自己哽住了呢。

埃文斯: 钢酪是熬不出什么扭油来的——你这个大肚子倒是装满了扭油呢。

[literally means: if so, then I would have been choked by the cheese I have eaten]

[literally means: Goeese cannot produce nutter. Your belly is filled with nutter]

Here, Zhu uses “钢酪/goeese” “扭油 nutter” to render “seese” and “putter,”

because “seese” and “putter,” if transliterated into Chinese, would not make any sense.

The solution is rather clever in preserving the humorous and satirical effects, but for most Chinese readers who do not read the original play it might not be easy for them to figure out this witty play on the words. Other than this, Xia also talks about the semantic and syntactic approaches by close analyses of various other examples.

Another work that has received special attention is Yongji Xi’s *Comparative Aesthetics of Translated Works of Shakespeare* (2007). Xi compares various Chinese

translations of Shakespeare's plays from diverse perspectives, such as style, language, image, rhetoric, holistic translation, word-to-word translation, and so forth. Xi aims to figure out the best way to translate Shakespearean works in the Chinese context—he endeavors to be faithful to Shakespeare's plays, using verse to translate verse and prose to translate prose.

Like Xi, Gong Fen agrees that the best translation of Shakespeare's plays should be faithfulness to the original text. In her dissertation, Gong cites Bian Zhilin's translation of *Hamlet* (1956) as the best example of verse-for-verse and prose-for-prose way of translation:¹¹²

To be, or not to be – that is the question: (*Hamlet*, III.I)
 活下去 | 还是 | 不活 | : 这是 | 问题。 (translated by Bian Zhilin)
 [literally means: to live or not to live, that is a question]

As is shown above, the famous iambic pentameter has been translated into five groups of two or three characters (put together) to achieve a good match in form. At the same time, with the regular change of tone within each group, it best presents the rhythmic beauty created by the alternating of the unstressed and stressed syllables.

Gong further analyzes the translation of other forms of verse. Shakespeare sometimes set a play within a play by using a different verse style. For example:

Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone round
 Neptune's salt wash and Tellus' orb'd ground, (*Hamlet*, III.II)
 日轮已经盘绕三十春秋,
 那茫茫海水和滚滚地球。¹¹³
 [literally means: The wheel of sun has gone around for thirty years
 That boundlessness of sea water and vastness of earth]

For the poem, Bian Zhilin translates it into a traditional Chinese poem strictly following the rhyme and feet. Bian's translation reflects the principle of *yibuyiqu*—the translator

¹¹² Gong 92-93.

¹¹³ Gong 101.

should render the original by imitating the author at every step, including the number of lines, rhyme, and feet. Looking at Bian's translation, we can find that he preserves the original mode by "following the distribution of verse and prose in the older version and keeping every variation in the verse."¹¹⁴ Bian further explains his principle in his article, "Illustration to the Translation," "The original prose translated into vernacular Chinese prose and blank verse was in unrhymed poetic form with five-dun within a line. When there is rhyme in the original, correspondingly the translation is in verse as well."¹¹⁵

Another exciting work came out in 2010. Laura Jane Wey conducts an indepth study of Shakespeare's *Cleopatra* in English and Chinese, attempting to bring Chinese and Anglo-American Shakespeare studies into fruitful dialogue with each other in order to have a fuller understanding of Shakespeare's plays. For examples, Wey explains that before one jumps to conclusions about why *Antony and Cleopatra* has not met with as enthusiastic a welcome in China as, say, *Romeo and Juliet* or *The Merchant of Venice*, it is useful to keep in mind that the play had a somewhat problematic reception even in the Anglo-American world: there is no record of any production in the theater after its initial Jacobean stagings until 1759, and no performance met with popular acclaim for another ninety years.¹¹⁶ Wey presents examples to show how the translator's interlinguistic endeavor can add an intriguing vision to *Antony and Cleopatra*. For example, she cites one of the original Chinese translations of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cao Weifeng's 1946 *Andongni ji Kuluopa* 安东尼及枯萎葩 [*Antony and Cleopatra*]. Cao's choice of Chinese

¹¹⁴ Gong 101.

¹¹⁵ Yanna Sun, "Translating Methods of Shakespeare in China," *English Language Teaching* 2.2 (2009):137.

¹¹⁶ Laura Jane Wey, "Found in Translation: Shakespeare's *Cleopatra* in English and Chinese," diss., Harvard U., 2010, 7.

characters to transliterate Cleopatra's name by no means represents the closest possible corresponding sounds in the Chinese language. They, however, are loaded with meaning:

On a phonetic level, "Kulou" (枯萎) is a homonym for skull or deathhead (骷髅), a double entendre not likely to be lost on a Chinese-speaking audience; on a semantic level, "ku" (枯), meaning "wilted," calls to mind the "waned lip" (2.1.21) referred to by Pompey, as well as Antony's furious "You were half blasted ere I knew you" (3.13.105). "Pa" (葩), usually a blossom, has the further metaphorical meaning of "something remarkable" (奇葩). Cao's rendering of the name, then, presents Cleopatra as a life-depriving flower, a wonderful piece of work with a deadly twist.¹¹⁷

Wey argues that Cao conjures up the image of Cleopatra through connotation, which can be achieved in large part because Chinese, as a tonal language, has an abundance of identical or similar sounding characters of widely disparate meanings to select from.¹¹⁸

This dissertation investigates the various cultural and linguistic elements that come to light "when the complex figure of Cleopatra passes through the prism of the Chinese language, and shows how such a process not only illuminates the translations, but offers a new understanding of Shakespeare's original text itself."¹¹⁹

The above-mentioned works show that important progress has been achieved in the translation of Shakespeare's plays, which indeed lays a solid foundation for the development of Shakespeare criticism in China. Among others, Meng Xianqiang, Xiao Yang Zhang, Murray J. Levith, Alexander C. Y. Huang and Li Ruru have made significant contribution to the study of Shakespeare in China.

Meng Xianqiang's *Brief History of Shakespeare in China* (1994) offers a comprehensive survey of Shakespeare's presence in Chinese culture from 1856 to the

¹¹⁷ Wey 15.

¹¹⁸ Wey 15.

¹¹⁹ Wey 16.

early 1990s.¹²⁰ In particular, Meng's survey of Chinese performances gives a comprehensive historical account of Shakespeare in performance. This history traces the impact of Shakespeare on the development of modern Chinese drama, particularly *huaju* (spoken drama), a genre modeled on Western modern drama, especially Ibsen's realistic model.¹²¹ The book also assesses Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare in various forms of *xiqu*, regional dramatic genres that are a blend of song, speech, mime, dance and acrobatics, and heavy, gloriously embroidered costumes. Yet, the way Meng articulates this history, the writing style, and the examples he chooses, to some extent, signify that his book is intended for a Chinese audience.

In contrast, Murray J. Levith's book, *Shakespeare in China* (2004), targets chiefly English language readers with a comprehensive sense of China's past and on-going encounter with Shakespeare. Levith points out that most Chinese Shakespearean criticism seems inwardly directed—that is, addressed to other Chinese scholars or maybe even political leaders who share the same prejudices (a naïve and simplistic idea of “Shakespeare studies with Chinese characteristics,” a clear echo of Deng Xiaoping's slogan “socialism with Chinese characteristics”).¹²² Only after 1978 when China adopted the open-and-reform policy did China begin to reach the outside world again. It might still take some time for Shakespeare studies in China to win more international fame. After the new millennium, however, voices from Chinese scholars are increasingly heard either through their monographs, articles, or performances of Shakespeare's plays. Thus, what Levith describes is only the picture before the new millennium.

¹²⁰ Meng Xianqiang, *Zhongguo shaxue jianshi (A Brief History of Shakespeare in China)* (Changchun: Northeast Normal U P, 1994; a condensed English version, “A Historical Survey of Shakespeare in China,” was printed in 1996).

¹²¹ Yang 84.

¹²² Levith, 132.

Another noteworthy monograph is Xiao Yang Zhang's *Shakespeare in China: A Comparative Study of Two Traditions and Cultures* (1996). Zhang's book discusses the interactions between Shakespeare's plays and Chinese culture. Presented within a New Historicist paradigm, Zhang's book offers an essential list of Shakespeare productions in China, discusses in detail operatic adaptations, and offers remarks on pedagogy, such as how to teach Shakespeare in China, and a national survey of Shakespeare curricula among colleges and universities in China.

Among all these, the most accomplished book, no doubt, is Alexander C. Y. Huang's *Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* (2009). Huang explores the whole notion of what Shakespeare and China mean culturally, ideologically, and socially and considers "what the Shakespeare-China interrelations are, why they have been used to rhetorically construct narratives about difference and universality, and how such narratives have unleashed new interpretive energy."¹²³ As a scholar from Taiwan, though, Huang's book does not cover much about the Shakespeare criticism in mainland China after the 1990s.

An interesting phenomenon is that in China, the study of Shakespeare in performance seems to be much less popular than the study of his works. Despite this, Li Ruru has made significant contribution and virtually become a spokesperson for a whole body of Chinese Shakespearean scholars. Her articles have been presented in different anthologies. Her monographs are also well acclaimed. For example, Li's book, *Shashibiya: Staging Shakespeare in China* (2003), offers intriguing studies of performances of Shakespeare's plays in China, analyzing eleven productions/adaptations in Chinese cultural contexts. It is an eye-witness's narrative of Shakespeare's stories on

¹²³ Huang 24.

the Chinese stage. In the major chapters, Li focuses her analyses on technical particulars of four *huaju* (modern drama) productions and five *xiqu* (traditional opera) adaptations. Li also discusses a central question that has preoccupied Chinese scholars of Shakespeare for decades: Shakespeare's appearance in traditional Chinese theatre has posed questions of choice between a complete localization of story and Westernization, between a method based on *huaju* models in design and storytelling and of authenticity. Li argues that there are difficulties in both methods. She cites the *Xie shou ji* (Bloody Hands), an adaptation of *Macbeth*, which provides a successful example of the former approach; it both challenges and offers innovative changes to the *kunqu* form. Similarly, *xiqu* adaptors and directors of other Shakespeare plays – including *yueju* (Shaoxing opera) *Twelfth Night*, *Huangmeixi Much Ado*, *yueju Hamlet*, and the Peking opera's *Othello*—have never found it easy to balance Shakespeare's content with Chinese form. Alexander C.Y. Huang writes that “Shakespeare in Chinese opera as a new form of fusion theater has attracted both local audiences (*xiqu* devotees and the artistically adventurous) and what Kennedy calls global spectators.”¹²⁴ Li's book offers one an opportunity to feast on the performance of Shakespeare's plays in China.

Fortunately, not only *Huaju* or *Xiqu* adaptations of Shakespeare are on the rise, but film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays have also become increasingly popular. Take a recent film—*The Banquet* (Ye Yan, or Legend of the Black Scorpion), directed by Feng Xiaogang in 2006—for example. *The Banquet*, set in the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period in 10th-century China, is a loose adaption of William Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*. As a martial-arts film in Mandarin Chinese that features themes of revenge and fate, it gives Gertrude and Ophelia, traditionally silenced women characters

¹²⁴ Huang, 169.

in *Hamlet*, a strong presence, and remakes them powerfully. Besides, all the actors in the film speak Mandarin Chinese, and there is no obvious overlap in dialogue with the Shakespearean original. One would look in vain for “To be or not to be” speech, since Prince Wu Luan, Hamlet’s counterpart, is much more given to sword-play than to soliloquies.¹²⁵

Other scholars offer a different interpretation of the film. They do not see an intricate connection between *The Banquet* and *Hamlet*. For example, Amy Scott-Douglass argues that this film combines a rather fragmentary reference to Shakespeare:

Indeed, if Shakespeare citations are part of the feast for the viewer in *The Banquet*, then I imagine that the menu might look something like this: *Hamlet*, served on a bed of history and Roman plays, with a side of *King Lear* and *Titus Andronicus*, a dollop of Desdemona for dessert, and the wines of *Macbeth* (bottle of red) and *Romeo and Juliet* (bottle of white) flowing throughout the film.¹²⁶

After viewing the film myself, I cannot say that I had the similar impression. What I only see is the strong and obvious background of *Hamlet*.

Similar to the breakthrough made in film adaptations of Shakespeare, the study of Shakespeare in China, after the turn of the new Millennium, has also attracted much attention worldwide. Articles about Shakespeare in China appear in more anthologies, and the 2010 *Shakespeare Yearbook* was devoted almost entirely to Chinese Shakespeare, although it is entitled “Shakespeare and Asia.” In contrast, Dennis Kennedy’s influential book, *Foreign Shakespeare*, written in 1993, the first English book devoted to non-

¹²⁵ Charles Ross, “The Banquet as Cinematic Romance,” *Asian Shakespeares on Screen: Two Films in Perspective, Special issue*, ed. Alexander C. Y. Huang, *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* 4.2 (2009): 1. Available online: <http://www.borrowers.uga.edu/>.

¹²⁶ Amy Scott-Douglass, “Shakespeare: It’s What’s for Dinner,” *Asian Shakespeares on Screen: Two Films in Perspective, Special issue*, ed. Alexander C. Y. Huang, *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* 4.2 (2009): 1. Available online: <http://www.borrowers.uga.edu/>.

English language productions of Shakespeare, does not mention Shakespeare studies in China at all. Only in the “Afterword” does Kennedy write about the matter as a part of the discussion of Shakespearean orientalism and much of it is a summary of the points presented in He Qixin’s dissertation, *China’s Shakespeare* (1986), the first dissertation written in a western country about Shakespeare studies in China.

Conferences about Shakespeare have also been held in different cities. The most recent one is the Shanghai International Shakespeare Forum, held at Donghua University, Oct. 14-16, 2011. Shakespeare scholars from Great Britain, the United States and Canada came to Shanghai, bringing their cutting-edge research findings: David Bevington talked about “Ophelia Through the Ages,” and Richard Burt focused on “Hamlet’s Hauntographology: Film Philology, Facsimiles, and Textual Fauxrensic Facsimile.” Chinese Shakespeare scholars, such as Nie Zhenzhao, spoke on “Who Is Real Prey in Mouse trap: Claudius or Gertrude,” Li Weiming’s focused on the influential topic “Our Chinese Shakespeare Study: Forming Shakespeare Studies with Chinese Characteristics and Building Shakespearean Theoretical Research System”; Zhang Chong followed his research interest by talking about “Making Shakespeare Related and Relevant”; and Wu Hui focused on staging Shakespeare in China: “Three Hamlets, Two Gentlemen and One Time to Love: Shakespeare on the Chinese Screen.”¹²⁷

Most excitingly, from 2009 to 2011, more than eighty Ph. D. dissertations and MA theses were written by Chinese students on Shakespeare.¹²⁸ These young scholars

¹²⁷ Available online: <http://www3.dhu.edu.cn/english/shisf/files/handbook.pdf>. Retrieved on Feb. 1, 2012.

¹²⁸ In 2011 so far, at least 1 Ph. D. dissertation and 14 Master’s theses were written on Shakespeare. In 2010, 1 Ph. D. dissertation 38 theses were written, and in 2009, more than 20 Master’s theses and Ph.D. dissertations. All data based on CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), the most authoritative, comprehensive, and largest source of China-based

have contributed a lot to the prosperity of Shakespeare studies in China. Based on the National Digital Library of China, ten dissertations emerge as representatives of recent academic trends of Shakespeare studies in China. Among the ten, three are in the field of English Language and Literature, four on Comparative Literature and World Literature, one on Modern Chinese Literature, one on Broadcasting and Television Art, and one on Theatre.¹²⁹

Along with this promising picture, there is also some concern about the study focus of the doctoral and MA theses on Shakespeare produced in the past two decades in the English departments of Chinese universities where English is taught and learned as a foreign language. A brief survey of the dissertations and theses finished between 1990 to 2010 shows that a majority of the studies attempt to explore the issue of appropriating critical theories in Shakespeare studies.¹³⁰ Critical theories employed by these graduate students are listed in descending order of the frequency of application: (1) feminism and gender studies, (2) new historicism, (3) psychoanalytic criticism, (4) post-colonialism, (5) translations and adaptations (Cinema and Stage), and (6) others.

It seems appropriate that Shakespeare scholarship should reflect the general current of intellectual history and literary criticism. But in many cases an indiscriminate

information resources in the world, reflecting the latest developments in Chinese politics, economics, humanity and social science, science and technology.

¹²⁹ They are respectively: Tian Ming, "A Comparative Study of Shakespeare and Modern Drama," diss., Central Academy of Drama, 1990; Zhang Chong, "Dramatic Irony, Shakespeare and Zaju Plays," diss., Nanjing University, 1989; Ye Qian, "The Thematic Study of 'Death' in Shakespeare's Five Tragedies," diss., Shanghai International Studies University, 2006; Huang Bikang, "Ideological Imagery in Shakespeare's History Plays," diss., Peking University, 1998; Wu Hui, "Shakespeare Images," diss., Beijing Broadcasting Institute (Today's Communication University of China), 2003, and Sun Yan, "A Cultural Materialist Reading of Shakespeare," diss., Shanghai International Studies U., 2009.

¹³⁰ Based on two most popular academic databases (Chinese National Knowledge Index and Guojia Tushuguan Boshi Lunwen Wenku), 12 dissertations and 43 theses are studied.

wholesale importation of theories and methodologies failed to add depth to their analyses. In some cases, the authors employ critical terms at will. For some other cases, student authors simply reshape the Shakespearean text to suit their analytical purpose.¹³¹ One possible reason for these problems is that for most graduate students who have been exposed to Shakespeare on the page rather than on the stage, critical theories have assumed supremacy. Also, there has been a craze among Chinese students and scholars for western literary theories since the 1990s.

Other than dissertations and theses, from 2005 to 2011, there were more than 500 articles on Shakespeare by Chinese scholars published in different kinds of academic journals. The study is far reaching and more profound than before, which covers more diversified fields: the post-colonial study of Shakespeare; the cultural interpretation of Shakespeare; the study of Shakespeare from a western perspective; the study from the Chinese perspective; pedagogy and so forth.

These articles show that scholars are paying more attention to the newly-published academic criticism of Shakespeare by global scholars. For example, Zhang Hao has published an article on *Dajia*, introducing Jonathan Gil Harris's new book *Shakespeare and Literary Theory* (2010). The questions Harris proposes are quite eye-opening to Chinese readers: British literary theorist Terry Eagleton can say that "it is difficult to read Shakespeare without feeling that he was almost certainly familiar with the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein and Derrida."¹³² Harris'

¹³¹ Similar problems can also be found in Doctoral and MA theses on Shakespeare by Taiwanese students. Refer to Chin-jung Chiu, "Appropriating Theories in the Name of Shakespeare: The Case of Doctoral and MA Theses on Shakespeare by Taiwanese Students," *Shakespeare Yearbook (Shakespeare and Asia)*, Vol. 17, ed. Douglas A. Brooks (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen P., 2010) 233-251.

¹³² Jonathan Gil Harris, *Shakespeare and Literary Theory* (New York: Oxford UP, 2010) 4.

findings might help Chinese readers who are less familiar with various branches of western literary criticism and theory:

Karl Marx was an avid reader of Shakespeare and used *Timon of Athens* to illustrate aspects of his economic theory; psychoanalytic theorists from Sigmund Freud to Jacques Lacan have explained some of their most axiomatic positions with reference to *Hamlet*; Michel Foucault's early theoretical writing on dreams and madness returns repeatedly to *Macbeth*; Jacques Derrida's deconstructive philosophy is articulated in dialogue with Shakespeare's plays, including *Romeo and Juliet*...¹³³

Obviously, it is not Shakespeare who knew all of them but it is Shakespeare who has formed foundations of their ideas. In this sense, Shakespeare as the literary currency certainly works well.

The study of Shakespeare's tragedies has been the mainstream of Shakespeare studies; it long preceded the study of comedies, romance, and history plays; however, these studies are shifting from the thematic study to linguistics, and performance study. Shakespeare is increasingly viewed as a playwright and poet rather than merely a storyteller.

As Chinese scholars are bringing Western Shakespearean criticism to China, they are also introducing the Chinese Shakespeare to the world, especially by way of successful adaptation of Shakespeare's drama to Chinese traditional opera. Liu Li points out that Chinese traditional opera is a comprehensive performing art, which combines singing, dancing, music, fine arts, dialogue, acrobatics, and pantomime, and it is the fruit of two thousand years' distillation and crystallization of Chinese culture and civilization.¹³⁴ Such stage adaptations have not only earned Chinese scholars international fame and recognition but enhanced Chinese readers' appreciation of Shakespeare's plays.

¹³³ Harris, 3.

¹³⁴ Li 26.

So far, however, no opera version has been translated directly from the original plays. The opera versions are without exception adapted from available translated versions. As Liu puts it, so much more work needs to be done to keep “the soul of Shakespeare” and spread the Shakespeare flavor in the form of traditional Chinese opera.¹³⁵

Despite the disadvantages caused by the language barrier, diversity has been a noticeable feature of Shakespearean productions in the Chinese festival. Mei Sun and Ann-Marie Hsiung points out that comedies (*Love’s Labor’s Lost*), tragi-comedies (*All’s Well That Ends Well*), and tragedies (*King Lear*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*) have all been staged and Shakespeare’s plays have been staged not only as spoken drama but also in various forms of *xiqu* (traditional Chinese opera) from different areas and historical periods.¹³⁶ One reason might be that traditional Chinese drama and modern spoken drama appeal to different groups of audiences. Thus, the availability of different forms of adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays would satisfy the needs of different audiences. Li Ruru’s *Shashibiya: Staging Shakespeare in China* offers an intriguing discussion of the levels of “filtering” that any performance of Shakespeare in China undergoes and a close examination of how those filters reflect the continually-changing political, social and cultural practices. The study traces Chinese performances of Shakespeare over the past hundred years, focusing in detail on eleven productions in mainstream, operatic and experimental forms in the post-Mao era. Her articles have since then appeared in many top journals and anthologies in China and abroad.

¹³⁵ Liu 26.

¹³⁶ Mei Sun and Ann-Marie Hsiung, “The Greatest English Dramatist in the Largest Asian Country: A Complex Cross-Cultural Encounter,” *Chang Gung Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2.1 (2009): 111.

Ching-His Perng, another Chinese scholar (an English professor at National Taiwan University) enjoying international fame, observes that “Shakespeare performances run the gamut from ‘faithful’ literary translations to thinly veiled appropriations that conceal rather than reveal the original. There have been many attempts to produce Shakespeare on the stage of traditional Chinese opera, to the point of this having become fashionable in recent decades.”¹³⁷ Perng quotes Wu Hui’s reports, suggesting that from 1982 to 2007, fourteen plays by Shakespeare were adapted into sixteen different Chinese xiqu (traditional opera) genres in China, totaling thirty-five productions.¹³⁸

On the other hand, there have been some performances that were staged in non-traditional venues (such as Jiao’s *Hamlet*). In some cases, the choice of a non-traditional venue was intentional, with well thought-out dramaturgical plans to incorporate the idiosyncrasies to add authentic local flavors to the Shakespearean play. For example, a Chinese-language *Much Ado About Nothing* with a capitalist twist was staged under the Proletarian Heroes’ Monument in the Huangpu Park, a symbol of triumphant socialism, against the modern skyline of the Bund and the Oriental Pearl Tower, a symbol of rising capitalism, in 1995. In other cases, the choice was accidental, imposed by historical exigencies or material conditions. For example, Jiao Juyin’s 1942 *Hamlet*, staged in a Confucian temple for lack of formal theatrical space in wartime, gained acclaim for

¹³⁷ Ching-His Perng, “A Bangzi Merchant of Venice in Taipei,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 28.1 (2011): 222.

¹³⁸ Hui Wu, and Yingxiang, *Shashibiya – wenxue mingzhu de dianying gaibian* (Shakespeare in Images: Film Adaptations of Great Literature) (Beijing: Communication U of China P, 2001) 207-9. See also Cao’s “Shujun’s Jingcai fencheng de Zhongguo Shaju yanchu” (The Many-Splendored Performances of Chinese Shakespeares) in *The Proceedings of International Conference on Shakespeare in China: Performance and Research* (Shanghai: Shanghai Theatre Academy P., 1999) 212-3.

accidentally adding a Confucian twist to Hamlet's perceived nobleness.¹³⁹ The production was actually an open-air performance, with the great hall of the temple as the setting for a chamber in a king's palace. Wen Xi Ying, who played Hamlet, displayed the manner and spirit of Confucian heroes and politicians, as is shown in his strong sense of political duty and Confucian's doctrine of the golden mean. It is sensational to have a foreign play performed within a Confucian temple, a holy place where Chinese officials in ancient times offered sacrifices to Confucius, the great ideologue, politician and educator. There are quite a few Confucian Temples of various sizes all over China. They also served as school of higher education in ancient times. Nowadays, a lot of them have been turned into museums or culture-related venues.

A Chinese theater scholar, Zhang Anjian points out: "It is indeed a new theatrical exploration to adapt Shakespeare's plays into traditional Chinese drama... As is known to all, Shakespearean drama is a bright pearl of Western culture and traditional Chinese drama is a treasure of Eastern art." He goes on to say, "[i]f we mix them together, it will not only make Shakespeare known to more Chinese audiences but also cause traditional Chinese drama to exert a widespread influence upon the theatrical circles of the world. Thus it is really a matter of great importance."¹⁴⁰ The leading traditional Chinese opera troupes when performing in countries outside of China would often choose to perform Shakespeare's plays because it would help introduce Chinese operas to the world with Shakespeare as the international currency.

Shakespeare's plays on the Chinese stage present a hybrid of the Western and the Chinese styles. They adopt two forms of performance: *Huaju* (spoken drama) and

¹³⁹ Bradshaw 43.

¹⁴⁰ Zhang 134.

traditional Chinese operas. The form of spoken drama, the modern style of theatre, was developed early in the twentieth century on the model of contemporary Western theatre. Despite its short history compared with traditional Chinese operas, the majority of Shakespeare productions in China have been in the *huaju* or spoken drama form. Most spoken drama Shakespeare performances followed the model set up by Soviet experts who had been invited to work in the Chinese theatre academies in the 1950s. The accepted style of performance was characterized by an intricately realistic but cumbersome scenography: grand scenery in the Renaissance style with high pillars and broad arches, artificial make-up including wigs and prosthetic noses, and elaborate costumes.¹⁴¹

Of Shakespeare performances in *huaju*, the most radical experiments have undoubtedly been Lin Zhaohua's staging of *Hamlet* (premiered in 1989) and *Richard III* (2001). Lin's *Hamlet* made no use of Westernized make-up, wigs, prosthetic noses, or "doublet and hose" costumes. In their place there were the urban clothes and natural faces of contemporary China, bringing Shakespeare's characters into the performers' own world. The style of acting was less stylized and more natural than was customary in main-stream productions. Gone too was the elaborate set. The only permanent prop in the production was a barber's chair, which symbolized at different times the throne, a bed or a rock near Ophelia's grave. The "to be or not to be ..." soliloquy was shared by all three actors. The effect of this was to blur the moral opposites in apparently opposed character

¹⁴¹ Internet Shakespeare Editions. Web. 1 Mar. 2012.
 <<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/Criticism/shakespearein/china3.html>>.

roles, suggesting that the characters all shared elements of good and evil, honesty and falsehood.¹⁴²

Yet Shakespeare has also been adapted into traditional Chinese music theatre. Some Chinese performers adapted Shakespeare's plays into various types of traditional drama right from the beginning of the Shakespearean theater in China. In 1914, in Sichuan province, the Ya An Sichuan Opera Troupe played *Hamlet* in the form of Sichuan opera. The play was adapted by Wang Guo Ren with a Chinese-style title: *Murdering His Elder Brother and Marrying His Sister-in-Law*.¹⁴³ In 1942, a production of *Romeo and Juliet* was performed in Shaoxing opera at Shanghai's Da Lai Theater. The title was changed to *Affection and Hatred*. In 1945, *King Lear* was adapted as a Shaoxing opera, again at Shanghai's Long Men Grand Theater, with a title of *The Filial Piety of the Daughter*.¹⁴⁴ The new titles all focus on contents not character names so that audiences who have never heard of Shakespeare's plays would know through each revealing title what specific play is about.

Among the various forms of traditional Chinese operas, Peking opera no doubt has been the most popular and representative type for its beautiful music and rich stage techniques. Shakespeare's plays have been especially popular with Peking opera. Peking opera in particular has seen versions of *Othello*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *King Lear*, among others.

Over the last century, Shakespeare has been accorded a canonical status in Chinese culture. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Shakespeare was an

¹⁴² Internet Shakespeare Editions. Web. 1 Mar. 2012.

<<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/Criticism/shakespearein/china3.html>>.

¹⁴³ Zhang 143.

¹⁴⁴ Zhang 143.

inspiration to the development of *huaju* (spoken drama), the modern Chinese theatre. Furthermore, after the adoption of “open and reform” policy in 1980s, he was also seen as an imported instrument vital to the future of the traditional Chinese operatic genres. It is remarkable to observe the diverse ways in which Shakespeare came to be appropriated by so many Chinese practitioners, and how this intriguing intercultural process was interrelated with the history of political, economic and cultural transformation experienced in modern China.

Section 3: Prospect and Prophecy: Shakespeare Studies in the future

It is encouraging to find that many Chinese scholars and students are devoted to the study of Shakespeare in China. In the past two decades, quite a few scholars and critics from outside Chinese academic and theatrical circles have also shown an interest in and concern with a Chinese Shakespeare in articles on intercultural performances by Chinese artists and Shakespeare's reception in China. For example, John Gillies, James Brandon, and Dennis Kennedy offer passing comments on Chinese adaptations within the larger frame of Shakespeare in Asia. Li Ruru and Alexander N. Y. Huang have made exceptional contributions to the scholarship of Shakespeare. As is shown, many scholars and critics from China and elsewhere attempt to map the circulation of Shakespeare's cultural capital in China.¹⁴⁵

Over the past two decades, Chinese operatic adaptations of Shakespeare have enchanted Western audiences with their stage charms: arresting music, elegant acting styles, fantastic dance and acrobatics, exotic settings and gorgeous costumes. In China, these productions have also successfully engaged audiences formerly uninterested in traditional theatre and also prompted serious intercultural speculations. Of the various traditional Chinese theatres that have imported Shakespearean materials, however, only the major operas—Beijing and *Kunqu* operas—have received due attention. By contrast, the presence of Shakespeare in Taiwanese opera (*gaxi*) and Yue opera (*yueju*) remains largely unexplored.¹⁴⁶ Some scholars, represented by Bi-qi Beatrice Lei, have begun

¹⁴⁵ Lingui Yang, "Shakespeare's Cultural Capital Made in China: From Pre-modern to Post-modern," *Shakespeare Yearbook (Shakespeare and Asia)*, Vol. 17, ed. Douglas A. Brooks (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen P., 2010) 91.

¹⁴⁶ Bi-qi Beatrice Lei, "'Thou Orphans' Father Art': Shakespeare in Taiwanese and Yue Operas," *Shakespeare Yearbook (Shakespeare and Asia)*, Vol. 17, ed. Douglas A. Brooks (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen P., 2010) 199-200.

conducting seminal research concerning how these minor operas have adapted Shakespeare's plays to facilitate their own development.¹⁴⁷ Adapting Shakespeare helps them gain cultural cache. This no doubt will provide a good opportunity for future adaption of Shakespeare's plays in China.

One such attempt has attracted some attention. Wu Hsing-kuo's solo Peking opera adaptation in Mandarin Chinese, titled *Lear Is Here* (2001), is a postmodern pastiche of ten characters (Wu himself is one of them). Wu's adaptation opens with the scene of the mad Lear in the storm, a solo tour-de-force during which he combines modern dance steps, Beijing opera gestures, strides, minced steps, somersaults, and striking movement of his long Beijing opera beard and sleeves to "translate" Lear's interrogation of heaven.¹⁴⁸ In the solo performance, Wu not only plays the wronged father, but also the unruly daughters, a wronged son (Edgar), and the blinded Gloucester. This performance, by some standard, is a radical development in Peking opera performance since Beijing opera actors do not usually cross over to other role types. *Lear Is Here* taps into a rich reservoir of nonverbal signs, via Peking opera and experimental theatre, to translate some of the most powerful emotions in Shakespeare's play.¹⁴⁹

David Tse, the artistic director of London-based Yellow Earth Theatre,¹⁵⁰ conducted another experiment by staging a Mandarin-English bilingual version of *King Lear* in 2006 with his Yellow Earth Theatre in collaboration with Shanghai Dramatic

¹⁴⁷ Lei 228.

¹⁴⁸ Global Shakespeares. Web. 11 Jan. 2012. <<http://globalshakespeares.org/blog/2012/>>.

¹⁴⁹ Global Shakespeares. Web. 11 Jan. 2012. <<http://globalshakespeares.org/blog/2012/>>.

¹⁵⁰ A touring theatre company, established in 1995 by five British East Asian performers to raise the profile of British East Asian theatre. The company tours nationally and internationally, and produces quality ensemble physical work, using performing traditions of east and west and to celebrate the meeting of different cultures. It has become the UK's only revenue-funded British East Asian touring theatre.

Arts Centre. The Buddhist notion of redemption and reincarnation informs some of the design elements and presentational styles. The production opens and closes with video footage, projected onto the three interlaced floor-to-ceiling reflective panels, which hints at both the beginning of a new life and life as endless suffering. Images of the faces of suffering men and women dissolve to show a crying newborn being held upside down and slapped. Each of the characters has a primary language: English or Mandarin. The production capitalizes on the presence of two cultures and the gap between them, thus embodying the “realities of globalization through translation as a metaphor and a plot device.”¹⁵¹ The emerging of such kind of theatre and the efforts made by overseas Chinese directors and actors will help ensure the bright future of Shakespeare studies in China.

Theatre adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays have been presenting exciting innovations. Likewise, some Chinese directors are also showing their creations in film adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays. Recently, following *The Banquet*, there is renewed enthusiasm for film adaptation of Shakespeare’s plays. For example, *A Time to Love*, or “Qing Ren Jie,” a film directed by Huo Jianqi, starring famous actors Zhao Wei and Lu Yi, is based on Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Targeting the audience of lovers (scheduled for release around Valentine’s Day), the film not only makes use of the universal theme of love but also weaves some Shakespearean moments into a modern tragicomedy. Lingui Yang points out that the physical and metaphysical presence of Shakespeare’s classical tragedy can be found in the movie’s structure and themes. Not only do Qu Ran (Juliet) and Hou Jia (Romeo) share a library copy of a translated edition of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, but they also share the tragedy of the dramatic

¹⁵¹ Global Shakespeares. Web. 11 Jan. 2012. <<http://globalshakespeares.org/blog/2012/>>.

characters as well. Set in China's Cultural Revolution, their love suffers from a feud between the two families.¹⁵² This film is only one example among many to show how Shakespeare is finding his way into Chinese pop culture.

One reason why pop culture is beginning to show strong interest in Shakespeare's plays is the rapid growth of a celebrity economy in China, especially after the millennium. A result of economic reform has been the creation of a new class—China's new business elite. The market value of Shakespeare's cultural capital is re-circulated in the popular reception of his image as a sign of high culture, along with the popularity of Hollywood movies, Coca-Cola, and nowadays the craze for Apple products. It is an economy in which people make use of Shakespeare's globally recognized name in order to procure fame and profit. Despite this commodity fetishism, it is believed that Shakespeare has not simply become a spokesman for today's market economy. It is wrong for Yang, in his analysis of Shakespeare's cultural capital made in China, to conclude that "Shakespeare has doffed his poetic robe and donned a business suit, representing the enterprising business culture—the 'upstart crows' cloaking their mercantile heart under hides of high culture."¹⁵³

Although Shakespeare is to some extent appropriated to fit into the pop culture, Chinese scholarship on Shakespeare maintains its hold in academia. For example, two important recent academic conferences have received much attention: The Forum of *Chinese Shakespeare* was held in Hangzhou in 2002 and *Shakespeare and China: Retrospect and Prospect* was held at Fudan University in 2004. Both of these conferences have endeavored to prophesy the future of Shakespeare studies in China: they both

¹⁵² Yang 93.

¹⁵³ Yang 97.

recognize the impressive development of Shakespearean criticism in China and affirm that along with frequent cultural exchange between China and the West, the introduction of western literary and art theories and importation of new productions of Shakespeare's plays will bring to China not only new research approaches, but also a better understanding and appreciation of Shakespeare's plays.

Among Chinese academic institutions, Tsinghua University deserves special mention here because of its long tradition of teaching and research of Shakespeare. Quite a few Chinese Shakespearean scholars have either taught or studied in Tsinghua University.¹⁵⁴ Among the notable ones are Cao Yu, Liang Shiqiu, Li Jianwu, Bian Zhilin, Ying Ruocheng, and so forth. Even President Hu Jintao shows a strong interest in Shakespeare due to his study of Shakespeare at Tsinghua University (1961-1965).

Nowadays, Shakespeare is thriving in China more than before in terms of translation, adaptation and theatre productions. William Shakespeare has a strong grip on Chinese academia.¹⁵⁵ Shakespeare Scholars have been working enthusiastically and devotedly on the study of Shakespeare to bring their research to the world. The translations, cultural adaptations, unique interpretations are all valuable, though the availability of the research resources is insufficient. Resources, such as EEBO, Folger Shakespeare Library, and vast publishing of academic works since 17th century, are sparsely available in China. Now, a large number of Chinese scholars are working enthusiastically and devotedly on Shakespeare studies. It is safe to predict that blending

¹⁵⁴ One of the Top Two universities in China, the other is Peking University.

¹⁵⁵ Among many others scholars, here I list a few of them: Prof. Li Weimin in Sichuan International Studies University; Prof. Suo Tianzhang in Tongji University; Prof. Zhao Li in Renming University of China, Prof. Zhang Siyang in Ji Lin University, Prof. Wang Zuoliang and Prof. He Qixin in Beijing Foreign Studies University, and Prof. Fang Ping in Shanghai Normal University.

Shakespeare and his plays either with the Chinese theatrical traditions or with modern ideas and values in China will be a promising intercultural exchange for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

Coming to the 21st century, China has showed an unprecedented enthusiasm in embracing the cutting edge of new science and technology. In the field of humanities, it has also displayed an unprecedented eagerness to absorb the western civilization. China has developed much closer ties to the world than ever before. Shakespeare as one of the most prominent representatives of the western heritage no doubt meets the very need and trend of this craze. And this new millennium is also a time when nearly all Chinese students are enthusiastically learning English and the younger generation's English literacy will undoubtedly reach record levels. In this context, the reading and study of Shakespeare's plays are predictable. Shakespeare has become a staple in many Chinese colleges and universities. A large number of books about Shakespeare have been published in both Chinese and English. When English learners achieve proficiency, their appreciation for Shakespeare will surely improve in quality and depth, so we believe that Shakespeare craze will again have its new wave in the decades to come. In this case, Shakespeare studies as its product will enter an even more productive era.

Just as present-day China is so vastly different from what it was only ten years ago, the study of Shakespeare in China looks very promising. Making a comment on this phenomenon, Wang notes that "it took the West four-hundred years to develop a magnificent industry of Shakespeare scholarship. It will not take that long in China."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Wang 135-136.

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