

The Different Focuses of Shakespeare's Works in Different Social Stages of Adaptation in China

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ABSTRACT

Different from the general idea of the public, Shakespeare's works have entered China and appeared on the stage as early as the early 20th century. From the early era to the 1950s, the adaptation of Shakespeare's plays tended to be secularized and popularized. In the period of the cultural revolution, Shakespeare's plays were more used as a tool for political criticism. After the 1980s, the adaptation of Shakespeare's plays entered a new era in China, with more integration and breakthroughs in content, form and means of expression. In this paper, it will be starting from the historical background and existing adapted works, which will analyze the development regular pattern of Shakespeare's adaptation in China and explore the future development methods. After a hundred years of development, Chinese Dramatists and film and television workers carry out more remake and reconstruction of the adaptation of Shakespeare's works, which is reflected in the combination of Shakespeare's dramas and Chinese historical allusions in content and the combination of Western dramas and Chinese traditional operas in form. In different historical stages, the focus of the adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in China is different. Behind this series of adaptations are the rise of China's economy, the development of local cultural consciousness, and the embodiment of "harmony but difference" in Chinese culture, and mainly is the developments needs of Chinese society in different periods.

Keywords: *Shakespeare, Adaptation, Social development needs*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since Shakespeare's works has been created for nearly 400 years, his works have been constantly put on the stage in various forms. With the development of globalization, Shakespeare's plays are no longer centered on English speaking countries. Shakespeare's works were introduced into China as early as the Qing Dynasty. China has adapted Shakespeare's works for more than 100 years[1]. Chinese and foreign scholars have made quite rich research on the development of Shakespeare's works in China, such as China's Shakespeare by Qi-Xin He, Shakespeare in China by Murray J.Levith, and Hamlet and World Cinema by Mark Thornton Burnett. Shakespeare's plays on the Chinese stage is not only related to the way of stage presentation and guiding the thought of performance, but also related to the translation of Shakespeare's plays, the cognition of Shakespeare's Classics. However, most studies focus on the development history of Shakespeare in China, while there are few studies on Shakespeare's

plays in the context of Chinese culture. This paper will start with the existing works of scholars and the adapted works of Shakespeare in China, discuss the acceptance and adaptation characteristics of Shakespeare's works in the context of Chinese culture, and explore the development path of the adaptation of Shakespeare's plays in China and other countries in the world. The significance of this essay is to find the regularity of adaptations of Shakespeare's works in China and the embodiment of the intrinsic value, so as to know the adaptation of Shakespeare's works in reverse, so that the Shakespearean plays and Chinese values of the times can be combined to create more and better adaptations of Shakespeare.

2. THE EARLY HISTORY OF SHAKESPEARE IN CHINA

The first people who came into contact with Shakespeare's works were the upper class in the Qing Dynasty. Some of them were appointed envoys to

Britain by the Qing government, and some received education in English-speaking countries. Between 1847 to 1877, Rong Hong (graduated from Yale in 1854) and Gu Hongming read and studied many Shakespeare's working during their studying in the UK and the USA[1]. Of course, these people are only rare exceptions and historical accidental events. China did not train English literary readers in the 19th century. According to records, the first Shakespeare play in China was performed in English by the graduating class of the Foreign Language Department of St. John's College in Shanghai in 1902. This also shows that at that time, Shakespeare's works were still in an extremely minority state in China[2].

In 1903, some of Shakespeare's works were published in China under the name of Charles and Mary Lamb's Tales. Ten of these children's stories were anonymously rendered into wenyan wen style (classical Chinese) in a volume whose title translates Strange Tales From Abroad (Xiewai qitan). One year later, Lin Shu, he rearranged and adapted the works again as a comprehensive version of Tales From Shakespeare appeared with the title The Mystery Fiction of the English Poet. Lin Shu gave the stories' new titles, for example, Fated Love for Romeo and Juliet, Flesh Bond for The Merchant of Venice, and A Ghost's Summons for Hamlet. Like the name, some stories have been rewritten by Lin. In Lin's Hamlet, for instance, the prince is married to Ophelia, blames himself for killing his father-in-law Polonius[2]. These adaptations are to cater to the tastes of Chinese readers, but basically to make Shakespeare's works conform to Chinese traditional Confucianism, to emphasized the important relationship between the king and citizens, father and children, brother and brothers, husband and wife.

In 1913, the adaptations from Lamb's was showed on the stages. Due to the lack of the original script, the adaptations and shows of Shakespeare's plays in this period were complicated. Yao Feng New Drama Agency hosted by Zheng Zhengqiu adapted Macbeth into National Thief, and Usurping The Throne and Stealing Sister-in-law (also known as "disorderly country and treacherous hero") in Qiankun Grand Theater to sarcastic attack on Yuan Shikai's restoration[2].

It was not until the 1930s that the first productions true to a Shakespeare text occurred on the Chinese stage. The the Second World War Two(Anti-Japanese War) was out-broken in China, and drama became the propaganda for patriotism and resistance against Japan. Hamlet's performance in Chongqing was intended to publicize the message of unity and resistance to the Japanese invaders to the audience[2]. However, the most of the audiences showed it was confused to understand the production, since to traditional Chinese dramatic conventions, heroes are not rude to their

mothers and don't die in the end. Similarly, an obedient daughter in a play is not 'punished' by going mad and committing suicide.

In the face of the fall of the Qing dynasty, the unrest of The Government of Republic of China and the invasion of Japan, the original contents and spiritual cores of Shakespeare's works became less important. Chinese dramatists needed to use Shakespeare's plays as a tool to export anti-imperialism, anti-feudalism and anti-invasion ideas to the people.

3. THE SLOWING ERA OF SHAKESPEARE IN CHINA

After October 1th 1949, for all Chinese people, it was the staring point of a new, bright future,the studying of Shakespeare moved to a new stage.

Compared with China, Russia came into contact with Shakespeare earlier. Catherine the great of the 18th century was a supporter of Shakespeare's works. In Soviet Russia, Shakespeare plays were almost a daily affair. In the 30 years since 1949, China's study and evaluation of Shakespeare's plays have almost come down in one continuous line from the Soviet Union. Its most basic feature is to analyze Shakespeare's works with Marxist thought. The artistic value of Shakespeare's works was ignored. It emphasized Shakespeare's own ideological status, as well as the historical, social-economic and class problems in his works, as well as the criticism of feudal system, capitalism and religion. Even though China and Soviet Russia's relationship have been broken in the 1960s, the research direction of Shakespeare remained unchanged[2].

Although ideology and Mao's leadership dominated during this period, Shakespeare's works still developed in China. During the period from the founding of the PRC to roughly 1964, more than a half-million Shakespeare translations were printed in China. Zhu Shenghao's Collected Plays of Shakespeare has a total of 12 volumes, and 8 other scholars have compiled his unfinished parts again. [3] Most of the stage productions in this period were concentrated in Beijing and Shanghai, which is also the most populous and economically developed place. With the help of Soviet experts Kurinev, students of the Central Academy of Drama rehearsed Shakespeare's works Romeo and Juliet. In Shanghai, films adapted from Shakespeare made in the Soviet Union was released[2].

During the Cultural Revolution, only model operas in all of China could be rehearsed and released. (There was over 20 model operas, not 8.) The study of Shakespeare was completely suspended.

This period was the exploration period of new China, and the research on Shakespeare was also in the

exploration stage. The original contents of Shakespeare's works was preserved, but an aspect of thought and spirits would be amplified according to the needs of society. At this time, China was in a period of rejuvenation and everything was practical, so the artistry of Shakespeare's works was neglected at this stage.

4. THE REVITALIZATION OF SHAKESPEARE STUDY

After more than ten years of Cultural Revolution, China has entered a new era. For the Chinese people, reform and opening up is not only political and economic reform and development, but also people's ideological and cultural liberation.

The most significant event for the revitalization of Shakespeare activity after the Cultural Revolution was the long-delayed 1978 publication of Zhu Shenghao's translation of Shakespeare, as supplemented and edited by various scholars to yield a Complete Works of Shakespeare. As before the Cultural Revolution, Beijing and Shanghai once again became the main exhibition places for Shakespeare's works staging. In 1979, *Much Ado About Nothing* was staged in Shanghai Youth Theatre. Also in 1979, both in Shanghai and Beijing, Derek Jacobi and the Old Vic gave nine performances of *Hamlet* in English (with earphone translation available to audiences). More than four Shakespeare plays were staged in 1980, including *The Merchant of Venice*. This is the first time that new China has performed on the stage with businessmen as the protagonists. According to Li Ruru, this production marked 'a revival of literature and art in China after the Cultural Revolution'. Between 1980 to 1982, *The Merchant of Venice* was performed more than 200 times in many cities. Shakespeare's influence has further expanded in China. In 1981, the first Tibetan students graduated from the Shanghai Academy of drama. They performed *Romeo and Juliet* in both Chinese mandarin and Tibetan and toured in Beijing and Shanghai. The next year, they brought *Romeo and Juliet* to Lhasa[3].

At this stage, there are two representative Shakespeare adaptations, one is British actress Tsai Chin (also known as Zhou Caiqin) directed *The Tempest* and *Othello* which directed by Shao Hongchao. Both works were attempts to adapt Shakespeare's works in China[2]. The adaptation of the two works has been highly praised in China. In terms of theme thought and emotion, the adaptation of these two works is in line with the traditional Chinese culture and thought. For example, in *The Tempest*, their views on love and marriage are the same as those of the Chinese people: purity, chastity, and parental consent with celestial blessing. The Chinese audience could also easily understand with this story of calamity, injustice, and revenge. Moreover, the idea of forgiveness also calm the people's wounded hearts after the Culture

Revolution. In the form of expression, it draws lessons from the form of Beijing Opera and simplifies the stage design and customs.[4] The content of the script was also deleted. In *Othello*, the original twelve acts were deleted from seven acts, including fragments of racial discrimination, because the Chinese people were not interested in or even difficult to understand the topic of racial discrimination at that time.

Unlike domestic reviews, the adaptations were generally poorly received in Western countries, the main discussion of which was that some Western critics believed that these adaptations were much different from traditional Western Shakespeare performance[5]. A series of serious problems appeared in front of Shakespearean: what is the real Shakespeare at all? Is Shakespeare a source or inspiration rather than a interpretation? How far can an adaptation go before it no longer has a legitimate connection with a given Shakespeare play? These questions not only occurred in these two adaptations, but also appeared continuously in the last three decades of the 20th century.

These 30 years have also witnessed the most vigorous development of Shakespeare study and performance in China.

Festivals, conferences and research institutions on Shakespeare were constantly established. Among them, the famous ones are The 1986 Shakespeare Festival, 1994 Shakespeare Festival, Shakespeare Institute of Northeast Normal University[2].

At this stage, Shakespeare study developed vigorously in China, and Chinese Shakespearean also had positive interaction and learning with foreign countries. Although the Western critics did not think highly of these adaptations from China, China has not changed its style of Shakespeare adaptation. Facts have proved that it is correct to adhere to this road. After entering the 21st century, Chinese films adapted from Shakespeare have been a great success in China and abroad.

5. THE SHAKESPEARE ADAPTATION IN THE 21TH CENTURY

The study and research of Shakespeare has entered a stage of popularization and refinement. *Hamlet*, as the representative of Shakespeare, has become a must for primary and middle school students. Films and stage plays adapted from *Hamlet* have also been developed at home and abroad.

Director Feng Xiaogang's film *The Banquet* in 2006 was adapted from *Hamlet*. He set the story in the period of five generations and ten countries in the war. The story is in the same line with *Hamlet* of the prince's revenge. However, different from the original work, the film adds more elements of power and conspiracy.

Uncle(Claudius), Queen(Gertrude) and minister(Polonius) have evil intentions and hope to become a new emperor. Generally, people think that Hamlet symbolizes the struggle between the emerging bourgeois humanists and the reactionary representatives of feudal kingship. In *The Banquet*, the theme rises to greed and endless desire in human nature, as well as the rise of female consciousness[6]. The film also implicitly expresses the anxiety and Reflection on the great changes in Chinese society from the 1980s to the new century. During this period of 20 years, Chinese society has developed at an almost incredible speed, and under this rapid development, some social problems are bound to appear. From the Ming Dynasty until the end of the Cultural Revolution, China had a history of against foreign countries for more than 400 years. After 1980, it suddenly opened its door, followed by a strong economic and cultural impact and the rapid loss of Chinese traditions. With the rapid development of economy, the people's moral has gradually declined. Through the succession of the throne and the competition for power, the film discusses the orthodox inheritance of Chinese culture and the formation and judgment of people's moral in economic society. This thesis is still at a general and superficial stage in its discussion of the dissemination and development of Shakespeare's works in China, and in the future I hope to refine the analysis so that it can better serve the adaptation of Shakespeare's works.

6. CONCLUSION

Although Shakespeare lived more than 400 years ago, and there are great differences between the era background and cultural background of Shakespeare's creation and modern China, it still cannot stop the Chinese audience's love for Shakespeare's works and the continuous research on Shakespeares from generation to generation. It can be seen from the adaptation of Shakespeare's works in China pays attention to the educational role of the Chinese audience at that time, whether in the poor and backward Qing Dynasty, in the war period, or in the early days of the founding of new China, until the present era. The focus of the adaptation was on combining Shakespeare's story with the mainstream Chinese thought direction at the time. In the Qing Dynasty, the idea was a support for feudal ethics. In times of war, it was mainly consistent with patriotism. During a long time in the PRC, scholars use Marxism to explain Shakespeare's ideas. After 1980s, Shakespeare's adaptation entered the integration of Central and Western aspects from thought to art. We can also foresee that Shakespeare's development in China will be more diversified. But what remains unchanged is that Chinese and foreign Shakespeares are trying to enrich Shakespeare's research and explore more possibilities of Shakespeare's plays.

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