

A preliminary exploration of the cross-cultural production, performance and dissemination models of contemporary Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays (1990-2020)

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Abstract: The cross-cultural performance of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays abroad has gone through two stages: the 'introduction' of Shakespeare's plays and the 'going out' of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. The paper aims to analyse the correlation between the two stages. By analysing the process of initiation, dissemination and reception of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays [see Table 1], which have been invited to perform abroad for many times and have attracted a certain level of response from Western society, the paper attempts to build a network model for the performance and dissemination of Chinese cross-cultural theatre works carrying traditional Chinese culture in the West.

1. Introduction

As cultural exchanges between China and the West intensify in the era of globalisation, the role of intercultural theatre as an important bridge between Chinese and Western cultures is gradually becoming more apparent. Foreign classical theatre works have been localised in China and adapted by Chinese theatre practitioners to the world in the form of cross-cultural performances. Among them, the plays of William Shakespeare¹ (hereinafter referred to as Shakespeare) are among the most representative Western classics and have become an important vehicle for cultural exchange between Chinese and Western theatre. Chinese theatre practitioners have recreated Shakespeare's classics on stage through national and pioneering adaptations and promoted the spread of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays to the West.

In recent years, there has been no lack of discussion on performance effects and Chinese-style adaptation strategies for foreign performances of Chinese Shakespeare plays. Since the beginning of the 21st century, more and more Chinese Shakespeare plays have been invited to perform abroad, which has attracted the attention of scholars at home and abroad. However, with more and more diversified ways of spreading Chinese culture abroad, the process of the successful performance of Shakespeare's plays in foreign countries and its

cultural and social significance have not been paid enough attention. Therefore, on the basis of reviewing the domestic artistic production of Chinese Shakespeare plays since the 1980s, it is of epoch-making significance to investigate the mode and influence of Chinese Shakespeare plays in cross-cultural performances abroad since the beginning of the 21st century.

2. Contemporary Chinese Adaptations of Shakespeare's Cross-cultural Performance Background

The period between the introduction of Shakespeare to China from the West and the arrival of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare in the West has gone through five stages: the first appearance of performances faithful to the original Shakespeare in the 1930s, the development in the 1950s and 1960s, the silence during the Cultural Revolution, the rise of local adaptations in the 1980s, and the large-scale invitation to perform abroad from the 1990s to the present. In the process of cultural exchange with Western theatre, they began to try to interpret Shakespeare from a Chinese perspective, and from a multicultural perspective, they tried to explore the contemporary value of Shakespeare beyond the classical value of Shakespeare on the basis of active translation and performance, and at the same time participated in the practice of constructing the contemporary Chinese theatre culture, creating a series of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare with national, contemporary and pioneering characteristics. Since then, Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare have been attracting attention both at home

¹William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was an English Renaissance dramatist, whose masterpieces include Hamlet, King Lear, Othello and Macbeth.

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and abroad. ¹They have gained increasing attention abroad, not only for their Chinese interpretation of Western classics, but also for their cross-cultural presentation of Chinese national cultural history on the international stage. The following performances have been staged.

Until recently, Shakespeare has been one of the main targets of cross-cultural theatre adaptations, and Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare have continued to receive widespread attention from the international community, and the process of performance and dissemination of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare abroad, as well as their cultural and social significance, are worthy of in-depth study. ²This study aims to take a holistic view of the entire process of performing the plays from China to the West and the various action points in the artistic field³. On the basis of reviewing the artistic production of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare in China since the 1980s, this study aims to conduct a preliminary study on the cross-cultural production, dissemination and performance patterns of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare that were successfully staged abroad from 1990 to 2020 and had a certain social influence from a sociological perspective. This is a preliminary exploration of the production, dissemination and performance models of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare that were successfully staged abroad from 1990 to 2020 and had some social impact.

With the increasing communication between different cultures, since the 1990s, on the stage, Chinese theatre directors, who are at the heart of the production, have gradually made attempts to construct the Western classics in the local Chinese context in the process of the cultural clash between the East and the West, interpreting

the contemporary thinking of Shakespeare from a unique local perspective and integrating a large number of elements with Chinese national cultural characteristics into Shakespeare performances, trying to create a new way of interaction between the two distinct cultures. On the other hand, the Chinese adaptation of Shakespeare is a re-creation of Shakespeare in a new cultural context and in a new form, which provides Chinese theatre practitioners with more room for reflection and interpretation in their adaptations of foreign classics. In the process of the dialogue between Chinese culture and world civilization in this way, not only the participation of dramatic texts is crucial, but also many non-textual factors play an indispensable role.

A review of the artistic production and dissemination paths and the image of the works in the different periods of domestic adaptations of Shakespeare is beneficial. At present, the domestic research results of Chinese adapted Shakespeare's plays are still mainly based on the acceptance of Shakespeare's plays in China, and some of them are enlightening, which can provide a basis for the investigation of the artistic production characteristics of Chinese adapted Shakespeare's plays in China. However, under the current background, in the process of cultural exchange, Chinese culture needs to "go out" in addition to "introduce".

3.A Preliminary Study on the Cross-cultural Performance and Communication Process of the Contemporary Chinese Adaptation of Shakespeare's Plays

In this exhibition, we explore the journey of Chinese theatre practitioners in constructing their own cultural identity in the changing context of globalisation.

In terms of the dissemination of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays performed abroad, the main project initiators are: Chinese producers, Chinese producers, Western producers and Western producers. A sociological analysis of the cross-cultural dissemination and performance patterns of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays abroad

The cross-cultural performance of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays abroad has gone through two stages: the 'introduction' of Shakespeare's plays and the 'going out' of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. Many non-textual elements also play an essential role. Bourdieu sees 'field' as a 'social space with independent rules of operation'⁴, in which different fields are relatively independent of each other; 'habitus' refers to the habits of thought formed by individuals during their socialisation, and is a kind of 'habitus'. 'Habitus' refers to the habits of mind that individuals develop during their socialisation, a "socialised subjectivity"⁵ in which actors with habitus

¹In 1986, the first Shakespeare Festival was held in China; in 1990, Lin Zhaohua's Hamlet 1990 was staged at the Beijing People's Art Theatre, generating a warm response in China, and in the same year, Wu Xingguo's Kingdom of Desire was first performed in the UK to great acclaim; in 1994, the Shanghai International Shakespeare Festival was held successfully one after another, bringing together theatre practitioners from all over the world to perform. In 1994, the Shanghai International Shakespeare Festival was held successfully, bringing together theatre practitioners from all over the world to perform Shakespeare's classic plays, among which the adaptations of Shakespeare's plays incorporating Chinese elements provoked enthusiastic responses at home and abroad.

²From Pierre Bourdieu's (1930-2002) theory of the artistic field. The central concepts are "field", "habitus" and "capital". The existence of a field presupposes the existence of actors who, with their own habits, occupy different positions in the field and form a competition for access to capital, which has an important influence on the production process of artworks.

³From the actor network theory of Bruno Latour (Bruno Latour , 1947 - 2022). The core concepts of Latour's actor network theory are 'actor', 'translation' and 'network', in which actors recruit other actors in a translational way, building a dynamic and traceable relationship with different actors through four key stages: problematization, interest, recruitment and mobilization. The four key stages of problematisation, interest, recruitment and mobilisation create a dynamic and traceable network with different actors and facilitate its operation.

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Field of Cultural Production* [M].Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993:162.

⁵Pierre Bourdieu. & Wacquant, L. J. D. *An Invitation of Reflexive Sociology* [M] .Chicago: University of Chicago,

interact and compete within a given field; "capital" forms the basis of social life and is not limited to material and economic forms. Actors with habits and various kinds of capital interact in the artistic field, forming an intercultural theatre practice. The domestic artistic production of Chinese Shakespeare plays is mainly influenced by three factors: the relationship between local and global, the relationship between art and society, and the appeal of the actors of cross-cultural drama in China and the West. The process of initiation, production, dissemination and performance of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays involves not only the artists, but also the various forces surrounding them, such as producers, critics and book reviewers. Among them, the role of the "cultural intermediary" is crucial. "The concept of the 'cultural intermediary' was introduced by Bourdieu in his commentary on the new petty bourgeoisie and is used to explore 'all kinds of professions concerned with presentation and reproduction'.¹ This concept has inspired researchers to focus more on the actions and meanings of intermediaries in cultural production and consumption when examining different industries and commodity chains. This concept has inspired researchers to focus more on the actions and meanings of intermediaries in cultural production and consumption when examining different industries and commodity chains. Bourdieu sees cultural intermediaries as 'merchants of demand'², which are the Chinese tableaux directors who have to deal with audiences of different cultural backgrounds as well as social needs in the various stages of the creation and performance of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays.

Latour builds on Bourdieu by including both human and non-human actors in the category of actors, who are fluid and circulating and need to be traced in action in order to understand the connections between actors³. The dissemination of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays at home and abroad involves both human actor nodes such as playwrights, theatre directors, critics, media professionals, producers, producers, audiences, domestic and international scholars, and non-human actor nodes such as the social environment, national policies, communication media, theatres, media, websites, theatre festivals and performance companies. The artistic production of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in China and their performance and dissemination abroad cannot be achieved without the combined action of human and non-human actors at home and abroad. This provides a new perspective on the process of cross-cultural performance and dissemination of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays abroad, and the study of its adaptation and performance has thus

moved from the level of theatre proper to that of social culture. Based on Bourdieu's "artistic field theory", "cultural intermediary theory" and Latour's "actor network theory", the cross-cultural performance of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays abroad can be regarded as a combination of symbolic capital, cultural capital and economic capital. The interaction between the local adaptation and performance process of Chinese Shakespeare and the changing political, economic and artistic cultural environment is the result of the joint action of the artistic, economic and political fields in Bourdieu's "artistic field theory". The process of cross-cultural performance of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays abroad is in fact a complete network of communication involving many human and non-human nodes of action, including theatrical ontology and social factors.

Construction and operation of domestic distribution networks for Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. The cross-cultural performance of the Chinese adaptation of Shakespeare's play consists of three stages: domestic production, domestic rehearsal and foreign performance.

According to Bourdieu's 'Artistic Field Theory', 'Cultural Intermediary Theory' and Latour's 'Actor Network Theory', intercultural theatre products are objective expressions of cultural capital. In addition to its own cultural value, it also has the properties of symbolic and economic capital. An intercultural theatre product can be a performance in the traditional sense, or a recorded performance video and a related theatre culture venue. In China, when books, reviews and media reports referring to Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays appear in physical or online bookstores, in paper or online media, readers become consumers who may be interested in purchasing tickets, usually based on two basic buying habits, namely impulse buying or planning to buy tickets. Consumers with impulse buying habits are likely to be attracted by the poster cover, the content of the review and the novelty of the adaptation, and may then choose to buy tickets for the performance, while those who plan to buy tickets make purchases based on their experience of reading the original Shakespeare, their long-standing interest in the content and their trust in the book and play reviewers, and eventually become audience members of the performance. In this way, producers, producers, critics, reviewers and audiences should be included in the scope of the study. These are the human actors who shape and disseminate the Chinese adaptation of Shakespeare as a cross-cultural theatre product through their actions in the artistic field. The process of spreading the Chinese adaptation of Shakespeare abroad involves schools and theatre festivals in addition to the aforementioned sites of action, and the range of actors is accordingly extended to professionals, scholars and students in the theatre field. In addition, the artistic field is also influenced by non-human actors such as the social environment, national policies and communication media. In this process, Chinese table directors are both the liaison between the work and the audience in the artistic field and the bridge between Chinese and Western theatre culture through adaptation activities. Ultimately, with the joint participation of

1992:123-126.

¹ Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* [M]. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984:359.

² Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* [M]. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984:365.

³ Bruno Latour. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-network Theory*[M]. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005:217.

human and non-human actors at home and abroad, a complete network of actors is formed for Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare's plays to be invited for cross-cultural performances abroad, through the entire process of domestic production, domestic and international dissemination and foreign performances. Based on the investigation of the communication process and effect of the Chinese adaptation of Shakespeare's plays in foreign countries, this paper attempts to explore the mode of cross-cultural performance of foreign classic plays adapted from China, as well as the possibility of cross-cultural drama communication and dialogue in the future under the all-media era.

4. Conclusions

Although Shakespeare has been in the eyes of the Chinese people for nearly 200 years, the artistic life of his plays has been constantly renewed. From the introduction of translations to the staging of Shakespeare's plays, from the staging of civilized plays to the performance of plays loyal to the original works, the vitality of Shakespeare's plays has been continued on the Chinese stage in different periods through different ways of interpretation. However, with the gradual enhancement of communication between different cultures, the attitude of Chinese theater workers towards Western culture is not only limited to simple acceptance, cultural resources should be two-way rather than one-way circulation, therefore, the cross-cultural adaptation, performance and communication of Chinese adaptation of Shakespeare's plays is a systematic project that depends on the network operation.

Since entering the era of globalization, with the continuous deepening of cultural exchanges between China and the West, the Chinese theater circle has been actively adapting and performing Shakespeare's plays to try to deepen the communication between traditional Chinese culture and Western artistic classics. The Chinese adapted version of Shakespeare's plays has attracted the attention of the Western academic circle in this process. The history of Chinese theatre practitioners' adaptation of Shakespeare and the process of performance, dissemination and acceptance of Chinese adaptation of Shakespeare abroad can reflect the development trend of China's traditional culture gradually shifting from passive reception to active export. The local adaptation of Western classics represented by Shakespeare and the cross-cultural performance of theatre to bring Chinese culture to the world not only opens up new paths for Chinese culture to go global, but also is an effective way to improve its international communication capacity.

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