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蔡斯昀

國立臺灣戲曲學院
戲曲學報第二十八期
抽印本

Journal of Traditional

Chinese Theater

June 2023

二〇二三年六月出版

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摘要

《天問》作為豫莎劇三部曲的謝幕作，在改編自《李爾王》的戲曲作品中亦屬較新，相比《歧王夢》和《李爾在此》，學界目前對此劇的研究相對缺乏。本文將以《天問》為核心，在將其與原作《李爾王》對照之餘，亦建立框架比較三部《李爾王》的戲曲改編，並回顧相關的當代戲曲研究。而此框架一是討論作中對父母輩的刻畫，包含其之於自身對小女兒的疏遠、同情心之缺乏、或威權式的統治是否帶有悔恨心情等；二是針對作品對不孝子女的塑造與其行為動機的處理，討論原作中的瘋審橋段、私生子生平背景、及三角愛情是否被保留與或如何被改寫，及此些橋段的處理對於反派角色的觀感影響，並由此延伸討論，各部劇本對於傳統孝道的倫理價值，是否提供了觀者在當代將其重新審視的空間。

三部改編中，《天問》還原原作精義的意圖最為堅定，而本文則節選正負的劇評數則，藉以評析《天問》劇作家呈現莎劇深度的意圖之成效，並論述劇中對父女衝突刻劃的深程度，及其在戲曲格律中取捨原作所受之限制。此外，奠基於馮偉、陳芳、彭鏡禧等學者對於當代戲曲革新的研究，本文欲將改編作品中的孝道議題，銜接至對莎劇中非二元性的刻畫、及跨文化戲曲創新議題的討論。

關鍵詞：天問、李爾王、莎戲曲、當代戲曲、跨文化改編、孝道研究

*國立臺灣大學外國語文學系碩士生

Presenting Shakespearean Complexity in Formalist Performances: *Questioning Heaven* and Transcultural *Xiqu* Adaptations

Tsai, Ssu-Yun (Alice Tsai)*

Abstract

Questioning Heaven 天問, the last of the Bangzi Shakespeare trilogy is a relatively new play among the *xiqu* adaptations of *King Lear*. Compared with *King Qi's Dream* 岐王夢 and *Lear is Here* 李爾在此, there has not been much research on this new play in the scholarship. Focusing on the analysis of *Questioning Heaven*, I not only compare it with its source text but build a framework to organize the close readings of the three *Lear* adaptations. This framework will consist of two forms: in the first form, I study how or whether each of the five plays depicts the parents' regrets on the banishment of the good daughter, their lack of sympathy, and their authoritarian rule or mistreatment of the elder daughters. In the second form, I review how or whether each script portrays the causes of the unfilial children's cruel deeds. To compare the different adaptation strategies, I also study how the playwrights adapt the mock trial, Edmund's background story, and the love triangle between Edmund, Goneril, and Regan, as these factors will significantly change the audiences' reception of the antagonists. By specifying the key factors that influence the portrayal of the members of different generations, I seek to offer a clearer vision that facilitates the discussion on how and whether each production opens the space for its audience to reconsider the traditional value of filial piety.

Among the three adaptations, *Questioning Heaven* seeks to present the original *Lear* and demonstrate the key issues in *Lear* in a way more similar to its source text with a motive much more resolute. By selecting a few accessible reviews on the play, I investigate to what extent the playwrights' intention of presenting the depth in Shakespeare is received by the audience, and I argue that while *Questioning Heaven* have portrayed the conflict between the royal protagonist and the two older sisters rather convincingly, the adaptation still faces some limitations as a formalist performance. Further, building on Wei Feng's, Fang Chen's, and Ching-Hsi Perng's arguments on the innovative attempts in contemporary *xiqu* productions, I aim to connect this specific topic on the representation of family issues to the broader ones on the non-dichotomous depiction in Shakespearean works and different attempts on *xiqu* innovation.

Keywords : *Questioning Heaven*, *King Lear*, Shake-*xiqu*, contemporary *xiqu*, filial piety

*M.A. student, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University

Presenting Shakespearean Complexity in Formalist Performances: *Questioning Heaven* and Transcultural *Xiqu* Adaptations

Tsai, Ssu-Yun (Alice Tsai)

As a relatively newly produced transcultural Shakespearean production, *Questioning Heaven* 天問¹, the Taiwanese *Bangzi* opera adaptation of *King Lear*, premiered in 2015 by Taiwan *Bangzi* Opera Company.² Its main plot is generally the same as *King Lear*, though the story is moved from ancient England to ancient China of no particular dynasty, and the protagonist is changed from a king to a queen, Bin Hela. In this essay, I compare *Questioning Heaven* with two other *xiqu* adaptations of *Lear* and review their reception. Focusing on the degree of complexity and convincingness of characterization and narrative presented in each play, I argue that while *Questioning Heaven* has portrayed the conflict between the royal protagonist and the two older sisters rather convincingly, the adaptation still faces some limitations as a formalist performance.

In my 2022/6/23 interview with her, Chen explains that as a scholar of Chinese theater, she has been curious about the canonical status of Shakespeare in the theatrical field. Since 2005, she started to audit Perng's courses on Shakespeare. As a consultant of the Taiwanese *Bangzi* Opera Company (BOC), Chen has for a long time pondered that the company needs to go beyond traditional plays to cater to the taste of the new age. She succeeded in persuading BOC to adapt Shakespeare into *Bangzi* opera. That's how she began collaborating with Perng on the Shakespeare *Bangzi* opera trilogy. Following *Bond* (adapted from *The Merchant of Venice*) in 2009 and *Measure, Measure!* (adapted from *Measure for Measure*) in 2012,

1. Co-scripted by Ching-Hsi Perng 彭鏡禧 and Fang Chen 陳芳.

2. See the appendix for the performance records and box tickets of the play.

Questioning Heaven was the third of a trilogy in the project. By borrowing a plot from the Western canon, *Questioning Heaven* attempts to refresh *Bangzi* opera and the *xiqu* industry in Taiwan. Also, the strategy in all of the trilogy is to present the depth in Shakespeare as much as possible in the adaptations, and such an intention will be further introduced in this essay with a review of other relevant interviews, lectures, and the playwrights' articles.

However, it should be noted that as Bi-Qi Beatrice Lei 雷碧琦 remarks, the “extra-theatrical materials,” such as the productive team’s official messages noted in pre-performance talks, “do not always conform to what takes place on stage.”³ That is, there can be an “enormous disparity” between “the declared purposes” of the productive teams, the “actual performance,” and “what the audience and critics perceive (reception)” (Lei “Straight” 91). Therefore, in this essay, I intend to investigate both positive and negative reviews on *Questioning Heaven* to study to what extent the play has presented the depth in *Lear* and gone beyond the traditional frameworks in *xiqu*. As Wei Feng 馮偉 points out, “audiences’ reception can hardly be generalized” despite the “shared history, culture, politics, social reality” in the audience group.⁴ As “variations in class, age, gender, education, taste, life experience, economic condition, and so on” are inevitably “irreconcilable,” it is “impossible to investigate each spectator’s individual response” (Feng 188). Therefore, with concerns about such limitations, I will select a few accessible reviews in this essay to bring about the discussion, without claiming to conclude for a generalized reception of the play .

Questioning Heaven is not the first *xiqu* adaption of *King Lear*. To analyze the significance of this new adaptation, I will compare it with the relevant works in addition to its source text and review the corresponding scholarship. First, Lei has

3. Lei, Bi-Qi Beatrice. ““I May Be Straight, Though They Themselves Be Bevel,”” in Bi-Qi Beatrice Lei, ed., *Shakespeare’s Asian Journeys: Critical Encounters, Cultural Geographies, and the Politics of Travel* (New York: Routledge, 2017), p.91.

4. Feng, Wei. *Intercultural Aesthetics in Traditional Chinese Theatre: From 1978 to the Present*. (Gewerbestrasse: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p.188.

compared the theme of family relationships in *Lear* and the ethics of filial piety in two *Jingju* (京劇) adaptations, *King Qi's Dream* 歧王夢 and *Lear is Here* 李爾在此.⁵ In addition, in her comparative study, she first introduces *The Pavilion* 清風亭 and *The Wall* 牆頭記, two traditional plays with strong advocacy for traditional filial piety, and *Birthday Greeting* 五女拜壽, a *Yue* opera that premiered in 1982 whose structure resembles that of *Lear*. Feng has also compared *King Qi's Dream* and *Lear is Here* with their source text in his book in the chapter “‘Egotistic’ Adaptations of *King Lear*: Intercultural Playwrights Haunted by Tradition.” Both Lei and Feng criticize *King Qi's Dream* as falling back to the traditional dichotomy in *xiqu* frameworks, making it a simple moral tale. Nevertheless, the two review *Lear is Here* in distinctly different ways. While Lei acclaims *Lear is Here* for its reconsideration of filial piety and innovative narrative, Feng criticizes the play for being overly contextually confined. Further, while Lei has identified the commonly-used techniques in traditional *xiqu* plays that feature the theme of filial piety, Feng, Chen, and Perng have made brilliant arguments on the contemporary innovative attempts of *xiqu* respectively.

Building on Lei's and Feng's studies, I will review their arguments, respond to them with my own thoughts and my close reading on *King Qi's Dream* and *Lear is Here*, and add *Questioning Heaven* to the comparative framework. Additionally, I will seek to reconcile their disagreements on *Lear is Here*. Hence, I build another framework that works to organize the close readings of the three *Lear* adaptations in a more precise way, comparing *King Lear*, *Questioning Heaven*, *Lear is Here*, *King Qi's Dream*, and *Birthday Greeting* to see the differences in their portrayal of characters. From this starting point, I evaluate *Questioning Heaven* from its representation of family issues to its attempt to present non-dichotomous depiction in Shakespearean works in *xiqu* innovation. Therefore, this essay can first be a textual study on *Questioning Heaven* with an analysis of its reception and secondly contex-

5. Lei, Bi-Qi Beatrice. “Vision and Revision of Filial Piety: Analogues and Adaptations of *King Lear* in Chinese Opera.” 戲劇研究 *Journal of Theater Studies* 1 (Jan. 2008): 253-282.

tualize the play among other creative attempts in contemporary *xiqu* innovations.

1. Filial piety in traditional *xiqu*

Before discussing the adaptations, I seek to review relevant research on filial piety in traditional *xiqu*. With such discussion, the significance of the new plays that goes beyond the good-evil dichotomy and challenges filial piety as an unbreakable code can be shown more clearly. According to Feng, in the Ming dynasty, theater “naturally became a mouthpiece for the state and the literati to preach their ideologies” (53). Also, while theater has been seen as lowbrow for long, when “some literati became playwrights around the twelfth century,” these literati sought to justify theater with “the orthodox Confucian moral teaching” (Feng 53). As Feng indicates, “three primary traditions intersected in *xiqu*: the didactic, the lyrical, and the ritualistic,” and the didactic plays “often conveyed morals” from the Confucian codes: loyalty, filial piety, chastity, and righteousness 忠孝節義, the codes “advocated by most ruling classes and the Confucian literati” (53). In addition, according to Lei, in traditional Chinese theater, “poetic justice not only serves the purposes of popular edification and political control but is also a crucial constituent of Chinese aesthetics—violation of it can be considered bad taste” (“Vision”253). That is, in the minds of the playwrights and audiences, those who transgress against the Confucian codes have to be punished in the play to make the story acceptable.

As Lei observes, while there is an “enormous repertoire of plays featuring filial children,” such as *Maudgalyayana’s Rescue of Mother from Hades* 目蓮救母, *The Lotus Lantern* 寶蓮燈, *The Injustice to Dou E* 竇娥冤, *The Story of the Pipa* 琵琶記, and *Mulan Joins the Army* 木蘭從軍, only a few counterexamples of the stories featuring unfilial children like *King Lear* exist (Lei “Vision” 255). Lei thus discusses *The Pavilion* 清風亭, *The Wall* 牆頭記, and *Birthday Greeting* 五女拜壽, and compares them with *King Lear* in her essay, identifying four techniques in

the traditional plays used to “mitigate the shock of unfilial children” : “(A) providential retaliation, (B) comedy and farce, (C) scapegoating, and (D) the ‘grand reunion’ (“Vision” 278). That is, in *The Pavilion*, the unfilial son who ignores his father and leads to his suicide is killed by heavenly-sent thunder, and such an ending is lauded and commented as a design “to stimulate horror and fear in the audience” 以悚懼觀 by the Confucian Jiao Xun 焦循 in Ching Dynasty.⁶ On the other hand, unlike the comedy in *King Lear* that even makes the pathos redoubled, in both *The Pavilion* and *The Wall*, with usages of “comic exaggeration, physical comedy, caricature, word-play and parody,” the offenders of filial piety “generate more laughter and contempt than dread” (Lei “Vision” 258, 260). As for scapegoating, in *Birthday Greeting*, the real evil is “located outside the family” and ascribed to Yan Song 嚴嵩 (1480-1566), a notorious politician (Lei “Vision” 262). In the play, Yan is the real cause that ruins the fortune of the family, and though the unfilial daughter refuses to help her parents when they are under Yan’s prosecution, she still seems less cruel than Goneril and Regan, who leave *Lear* in the storm and cause his madness. Also, the end of *Birthday Greeting* is the traditional grand reunion 大團圓—the righteous are rewarded, and the unfilial are punished. According to Lei, as the play “employs a scapegoat to reduce its psychological impact” and “the final grand reunion further heals the wound,” the “unfilial transgression” in the play is lightened (“Vision” 264). In short, since in the traditional society, filial piety is seen as an unbreakable code, when the offense against it is shown in a play, techniques to reduce the shock are nearly inevitably applied. Such usages thus risk becoming clichés and leading the theatrical depiction of family issues away from the common social reality.

From the point of view of the contemporary society that values individualism much more than before, the traditional values of filial piety are gradually challenged. For many audiences, the techniques in traditional plays to mollify the

6. [清]焦循：《花部農譚》，臺北：中國學典館復館籌備處，1974年，《歷代詩史長編二輯》第8冊，頁228。

shock of unfilial transgression also seem to be less necessary. A more realist depiction of family issues may be thus preferred over ideological stories that praises the filial and warns against the unfilial. To which degree is filial piety as an ethical code relevant to our society? To what extent should one obey one's parents? Or, what is the proper way for parents and children to treat each other? While there may be no simple answer to these questions, the discussion may have to go back to what the essence of filial piety is.

According to Kuang-Hui Yeh and Olwen Bedford, traditional filial piety often contains two different parts: "reciprocal filial piety" and "authoritarian filial piety".⁷ As Yeh and Bedford explain, "reciprocal filial piety encompasses emotionally and spiritually attending to one's parents out of gratitude for their efforts in having raised one, and physical and financial care for one's parents as they age and when they die," and this aspect of filial piety is generally positive (216). On the other hand, "authoritarian filial piety entails suppressing one's own wishes and complying with one's parents' wishes because of their seniority in physical, financial or social terms, as well as continuing the family lineage and maintaining one's parents' reputation because of the force of role requirements," and this aspect of filial piety "accentuates hierarchy and submission," reflecting "the generally negative findings on filial piety" (Yeh and Bedford 216). Nonetheless, traditional plays seldom treat filial piety as the complex theme it is. While the didactic code of filial piety includes both the reciprocal and the authoritarian, the negative aspects of authoritarian filial piety are barely questioned and often simply ignored.

2. Breaking the dichotomy between black and white

7. Yeh, Kuang-Hui and Olwen Bedford. "A Test of the Dual Filial Piety Model." *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 6 (2003): p.216.

While Chen argues that Chinese adaptations of *Lear* inevitably “strictly criticize unfilial deeds” and *Questioning Heaven* is no exception, she also points out that the “social traditions” on family rules have “gradually become fossilized” over history.⁸ In my interview with Chen, she mentions her dislike for the authoritarian aspect of filial piety. Chen further argues that under traditional didacticism, human nature is often twisted and one’s subjectivity is usually suppressed. For example, the traditional idea that not having any children is the most unfilial deed of all 不孝有三無後為大 is totally nonsense from Chen’s point of view. As Chen also shared in her lecture on transcultural theater on 2022/5/23, contemporary Taiwanese filial piety still often emphasizes the authoritarian aspect, and she sincerely hopes this can be changed. She mentioned then that a relative even said that as to the term 孝順 *xiaoshun*, a child only needs to be 順 *shun* [obedient] without the need to perform 孝 *xiao* [filial piety]. Thinking of her personal experiences, she believes that parents should think about reciprocity more, and she aims to follow this spirit starting from herself as a mother. Therefore, she also advocates contemporary society reevaluating the idea of filial piety and cultivating empathy and mutual understanding between different parties. As Chen shares, with such reevaluation, one may learn to treat oneself and others in a better way.

In Pei-Chen Chung’s interview with Chen and Perng on *Measure, Measure!*, the other *Bangzi* opera adaptation of Shakespeare they wrote, the two playwrights both mention their aim to present the “depth” 深度 of “existential discussions of the meaning of life” 探討生命的意義或價值 in their plays.⁹ Also, Perng argues that to write a play is to present certain messages, and most plays he has written in recent years are relevant to the theme of “forgiveness and empathy” 寬恕、諒解, including *Questioning Heaven* (Chung 107). For Perng, forgiveness and empathy are among

8. 陳芳：《抒情·表演·跨文化：當代莎戲曲研究》（臺北：臺灣師大出版中心，2018年），頁177-78。

9. 鍾佩真：《一劇兩吃：從《量·度》談跨文化改編》（臺北：臺灣師範大學翻譯研究所碩士論文，賴慈芸先生指導，2015年），頁111。

the most important values that “contemporary Taiwan needs,” and he thus feels a moral mission to present these ideas (Chung 107). It can be thus inferred that the idea of facilitating forgiveness and empathy between different generations is likely to be on Perng’s mind when he adapts *Lear*, and such facilitation would definitely require a reevaluation of filial piety. In a way, Taiwan is re-interpreting Confucian values for contemporary society, and for Perng, the use of Shakespeare perfectly represents the admixture of Western and foreign ideals that comprise that 21st century society.

The complexity in Shakespeare’s portrayal in *Lear* can hence offer insights for people in the society with different stances to gain better empathy and understanding towards each other. Unlike Shakespeare, just as Lei observes, in traditional *xiqu*, unfilial deeds are assumed to be frightening to the audiences, and other techniques such as comedy, scapegoating, or a grand reunion type of ending have to be used to soothe such shock. Therefore, the introduction of Shakespearean plays provides *xiqu* an opportunity to go beyond its traditional framework and acquire a new vision. As Perng explains it, the “depth” of Shakespeare’s portrayal of human nature, interpersonal relationships, and the characters’ reflections of themselves can offer new dramatic material not likely to be found in traditional plays, without discarding the values of traditional plays (Chung 112). By translating *Lear* before writing his adaptation, Perng gained a better understanding of the source text, so he can adapt the details at a level different from using others’ translations (Chung 112).

In my understanding, what Perng means by “depth of Shakespeare” has several layers of implications. First, Shakespearean characters are usually multi-dimensional with complex motivations. That is, good characters also have some flaws, and even villains can be relatable. Different from morality plays or traditional *xiqu*, Shakespearean characters mostly seem more like real humans rather than symbols of good or evil. Therefore, his plays can offer some space for the audience to reflect on real life. In his tragedies, there are usually convoluted reasons joining together to form a tragic result. Hence, the issues presented in his plays can usually be discussed from

different angles.

3. *King Lear* in three *xiqu* adaptations

According to Feng, “*xiqu* in mainland China and Taiwan has faced common problems since the late 1970s: how to modernize the tradition and how to balance *xiqu*’s historical legacy and the diverse modern artistic forms” (22). Despite this same background, there are still many contextual differences between the mainland and Taiwan. As Feng observes, “*xiqu* on the mainland was never at the margin,” yet in Taiwan, except for the local Taiwanese opera, traditional *xiqu* has been sidelined from the political and artistic center since the 1990s (22). However, Feng comments that “such marginalization” might actually be a “blessing in disguise” : that is, “while the practitioners in the mainland have a huge burden of tradition and censorship that sometimes impedes innovation,” the Taiwanese counterparts have “fewer artistic restrictions on the other and can thus innovate more boldly and freely” despite the “limited governmental funds” (22). In this section, I first discuss *King Qi’s Dream*, the *Jingju* version of *Lear*, produced in 1995 by Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company 上海京劇院 and scripted by Wang Lian 王煉 and Wang Yong-Shi 王涌石. Later, I will discuss the two Taiwanese productions, *Lear is Here* and *Questioning Heaven*, and compare their aims and adaptation strategies. I do not aim to rank these plays; rather, I seek to argue for their different significance as adaptations with different techniques in contemporary Sinophone society.

As the director of *King Qi’s Dream*, Ouyang Ming 歐陽明 explains, the purpose of the team is to “transfigure Shakespeare’s drama into Chinese opera as much as possible” 使莎士比亞戲劇儘量地中國化、戲曲化 so that “those who do not know Shakespeare—the majority of Chinese folks—will take it to be a story from ancient China” (Lei “Vision” 264). It can be inferred that it is with this aim, *King Qi’s Dream* is written in a way rather similar to a traditional *xiqu* story with moral didactics and

a clear division of black from white. The three villains based on Edmund, Goneril, and Regan seem to perform their cruel deeds only out of ambition without any other reasons. As Lei also observes, the role of Edmund in this adaptation is “sizably expanded” but also “markedly flattened” (“Vision” 265). In *Lear*, Edmund’s motive is primarily due to his bastard origin, and the two daughters treat their father worse and worse after enduring him for a period of time or being upset with his hurtful words. Yet, in *King Qi’s Dream*, the bastard story is never mentioned and the Gloucester subplot is totally removed, and the two daughters abuse their father for barely any reason.¹⁰ For Lei, by removing the family background of villain and making him a pure outsider, he thus becomes a “scapegoat for the unfilial children” outside of the royal family, repeating the technique that is used in traditional ethical plays to mitigate the shock of unfiliality (“Vision” 265). Moreover, while in *Lear*, the two sisters only start to hate each other for Edmund’s love later in the play, in *King Qi’s Dream*, they conspire for the land owned by one another from the very beginning. Edmund is adapted into a more evil character as well: while in *Lear*, he seems to love both sisters, in *King Qi’s Dream*, he only pretends to love them and even actively seeks their death to acquire full power. In short, the three villains are further dehumanized in this adaptation.

On the other hand, the mock trial that only appears in the Quarto version is adapted in *King Qi’s Dream* with a distinct tone. While *Lear* hallucinates the trial of his two daughters in the original play, the surrounding characters lament his mental state, and such lament is the focus that defines the atmosphere of this scene. Nevertheless, in *King Qi’s Dream*, Qi’s fool follows his fantasy to try the two sisters. When the youngest daughter speaks that the two do not deserve death, the fool even argues that to exonerate the bad is to hurt the good (您要是寬恕了壞人，不就等於坑害了好人嗎?) (Wang and Wang 759), and Qi thus sentences them to death. As

10. 王煉、王涌石：《歧王夢》，1995年，上海京劇院藝術創作部《新時期上海京劇院創作劇本選》（上海：上海文化出版社，2005年）。

Feng observes, this scene is adapted in a way similar to the traditional *Gonganxi* 公案戲 (courtroom drama), “a type of play in which a fair judge restores justice to the virtuous and punishes the vicious” (65). As Issei Tanaka notes, the nature of judges in courtroom dramas is “close to god”;¹¹ therefore, Feng argues that in *King Qi’s Dream*, with the association of the king to the judge in a traditional sense, “audiences’ recognition of [Qi’s] weakness might be undermined because they are prone to take his words seriously” (65). As Feng concludes, while Shakespeare’s plays “question and highlight the ambiguities of morality” based on his “observation of contemporary reality,” and it is hard to assert that any of the characters is his ideal mouthpiece, in *King Qi’s Dream*, “the adaptors intervene by offering their judgements through the morally problematic *Lear*” (66). Hence, “such an imposition of the adaptors’ simplified conclusions deprives the audience of an independent agency to reflect,” and *Lear*’s trial thus becomes “a moral lesson to warn audiences of the consequences of impiety” (Feng 66). To summarize, while the audiences may identify with Edgar and Kent and mourn for *Lear*’s madness in *King Lear*, in *King Qi’s Dream*, Qi becomes a more godlike figure, and his strong hatred for his two daughters is more likely to represent the moral judgment of the adaptation authors against the unfilial children.

While *King Qi’s Dream* strives more to localize *Lear* and is orientated toward local audiences, *Questioning Heaven* and *Lear is Here* are orientated towards international audiences while aiming to refresh and innovate the *xiqu* industry. *Lear is Here*, produced by the Contemporary Legend Theatre (CLP) as a monodrama directed and performed by Wu Hsing-Kuo 吳興國, premiered in 2001. Different from *Questioning Heaven* and *King Qi’s Dream* that present linear narratives, *Lear is Here* is an experimental collage of fragmental narratives from the perspectives of *Lear*’s ten different characters, all of which performed by Wu alone. As the official website of CLP introduces, from its establishment in 1986, the group has been considering “how to integrate this traditional performance form with modern

11. 田仲一成：《中國的宗族與戲劇》，（上海：上海古籍出版社，1992年），頁133。

theatre.”¹² As Ruru Li points out, with the “growing mood in Taiwan to assert a separate identity and formally declare independence from the mainland,” the status and funding of *Jingju* have “become less assured,” and this social background indirectly caused the financial crisis and the once disbandment of CLP for two years.¹³

In the playbill of *Lear is Here*, the team also mentions the issue that “the old audiences are missing, and the new audiences lack interest in traditional theater” (52). As discussed before, the need in Taiwan for *xiqu* practitioners to innovate the genre, connect their plays to contemporary society, and attract new audiences is far more desperate than their Chinese counterparts. According to Wang An-Chi 王安祈, the reason that CLP draws from the Western canon for the materials of their new plays is to increase the philosophical depth that traditional *xiqu* usually lacks and to refresh the current *xiqu* performative system (100).¹⁴ Such motivation is very similar to Peng and Chen’s in their trilogy of *Bangzi Shake-xiqu*. In addition, the two adaptations also share the theme of the reevaluation of traditional filial piety.

In *Lear is Here*, the single truth held by Lear as the paternal authority is held problematic, and the causes of the conflicts are shared by the authoritarian father instead of the disobedient children alone. After condemning the unfilial children, Wu’s Lear subsequently reflects on his own fault, and such dynamics can be found in at least three scenes in the play. For example, in the first act, Wu sings, “People say paternal care will be repaid in three lives, Yet all my daughters are thankless. Heavens, do open your eyes...Heavens... I’ve only got myself to blame and forgive myself not” 人道鞠勞三世報，偏偏女兒都不肖，蒼天睜眼來觀瞧……蒼天爺呀……這是我自作自受怎自饒。¹⁵ Seeing Wu “torn between self-pity and self-con-

12. Contemporary Legend Theatre: History. <http://www.twclt.com/en/history.aspx>

13. Li, Ruru. “Millennium Shashibiya: Shakespeare in the Chinese-speaking Worlds.” In Dennis Kennedy and Li Lan Yong, ed., *Shakespeare in Asia: Contemporary Performance*. (Cambridge, UK & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.182-183.

14. 王安祈：《傳統戲曲的現代表現》（臺北：里仁，1996年），頁100。

15. 吳興國：《李爾在此》，歐洲巡演劇本。臺灣莎士比亞資料庫，2004年，頁1。

http://shakespeare.digital.ntu.edu.tw/shakespeare/view_record_other_file.php?Language=ch&Type=rf

demnation, transposing the accuser and the accused,” Lei comments while acclaiming the play: “When the parents are at fault, unconditional demands for filial piety are out of the question. By analogy, loyalty is meaningless and the demand for justice is no longer just” (“Vision” 275). Further, with the fool’s voice, Wu jokes about Lear’s pride or his own: “Master Lear has long held that he is the truth. Now that truth is a dog that must to kennel!” 我們家李爾王一直認為自己是唯一的真理，如今，真理都躲在狗洞裡了！(8).¹⁶

In addition to being an adaptation of *King Lear*, *Lear is Here* is also Wu’s semi-autobiography. Besides the decline of the status of *Jingju* in Taiwan and the once disbandment of CLP, another important background of the play is Wu’s relationship with Master Zhou Zhengrong 周正榮. As Li notes, for Wu, “whose father had died just three days after his birth,” after he became a formal disciple of Zhou, their closeness was intensified by the way Wu saw Zhou as a “father figure.”¹⁷ Nonetheless, Wu’s innovative practice of introducing elements from “modern dance, spoken drama, and Western theater” to *Jingju* led Zhou to see him as a betrayer and “a selfish novelty seeker, wantonly attacking traditions that were fundamental to the traditional theater” (Li “Who” 211). Zhou finally expelled Wu from his school and never acknowledged him again, and Zhou passed away during the rehearsal of *Lear is Here*.

For Wu, to perform *Lear is Here* is also to offer himself a place to “speak out” and “release” his “loneliness.”¹⁸ It can be suggested that his loneliness is caused by

&rid=CLT2001LEA049

16. Other instances include the two passages: (a) “A bolt from the blue woke up the dolt! Filial ingratitude kindled the heavens’ rage and men’s spite! ... The bow is bent and drawn; make from the shaft... The arrow falls and invades the region of my heart!” 上天一聲雷，驚醒懵懂人！女兒不孝順，天怒人怨恨！我... 彎弓放一箭... 正中自心靈！(Wu *Lear* 3), and (b) “I used to count on my daughters’ filial gratitude. But their evil nature shows no such gratitude ... What cruel instruments of torture... Have twisted my nature? What bitter hatred... Has drained me of my love!” 實指望女兒孝順知恩圖報 / 卻原來人心險惡忘了鞠勞... 是什麼苦澀的怨恨抽乾了我心中的愛慈 (Wu *Lear* 22-23).

17. Li, Ruru. “Who Is It That Can Tell Me Who I Am?’ / ‘Lear’s Shadow’: A Taiwanese Actor’s Personal Response to ‘King Lear.’” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57/2: (Summer, 2006), p. 212.

18. 吳興國：《李爾在此》首演節目冊。臺灣莎士比亞資料庫，2001年，頁23。http://shakespeare.

both the lost status of *Jingju* in Taiwan and the break with Master Zhou. As Li points out, Wu's adaptation of the Gloucester subplot also symbolizes Wu's reconciliation with both Zhou and *Jingju*. At the end of Act 2 in *Lear is Here*, Wu adapts the end of this subplot with the following comment: "After this encounter [between Gloucester and Edgar], both father and son are reborn. This must be the most tender moment in *King Lear*" 經過這次重逢，父子又得到重生。這是李爾王劇中最溫馨的一刻吧！(*Lear* 21). Such adaptation supposedly serves as a projection for Wu to compensate for the relationship with his late master. Nevertheless, it is also implied that the projection is only a projection, and what is lost in real life can never be regained. After the reunion in the Gloucester subplot, the next line is about Lear's loneliness and madness: "But Lear is still a madman, roaming Here and there with a wreath on his head" 但李爾仍是個瘋子，頭戴枝環，四處遊蕩 (*Wu Lear* 21). Such contrast between Gloucester's reunion and the unrecovered state of Lear is also the contrast between the ideal and the undetermined reality.

In spite of Wu's expectation to reach new audiences, as Li indicates, when she first saw *Lear is Here*, she regarded it "merely as Wu's exercise in personal psychotherapy," and she could in a way "sympathize with spectators who resented being forced to enter into an actor's inner conflicts" ("Who" 215). Likewise, Feng criticizes even more harshly that the play becomes "so contextually confined" that one cannot interpret it "independently as a self-contained work" without referring to Wu's personal life (77). Do Wu's experimental techniques form a dialogue with Shakespeare? Or does he fail to consider the audience without the knowledge of his background story and make his work way too egoistic, as Feng claims it?

Admittedly, some parts of *Lear is Here* may be incomprehensible to the audience without the knowledge of his life struggle: they may be a bit confused by the repetitive overemphasis on the identity of Wu's Lear that links him to Wu

as an actor,¹⁹ his overly excessive loneliness expressed in the end, and the stress on Edgar's choice of not killing his father. In this sense, I agree with Feng to the extent that some parts of the play do make Wu seem a bit too much of an egoist. However, while the lines that merely translate *Lear* may be the parts most faithful to the source, such a modern translation lacks the beauty of classical Chinese language in the traditional theater and thus unfit with Wu's formal performance. However, among all those emotions of different characters from *Lear* that are selected and emphasized in *Lear Is Here*, from my point of view, the most dramatically striking part lies in those scenes that perfectly combine Wu's emotions and those in *Lear* into one. The agony, loneliness, and regret *Lear* feels in the storm and the longing for reunion shared by Gloucester and Edgar all echo Wu's own sense of loss in the theatrical industry and his relationship with Master Zhou, and such a combination doubles the emotional power in his performance. Further, Wu's demonstration of the skills in traditional *xiqu* not only provides aesthetic spectacles but strengthens those emotions in a way more vivid. An audience doesn't have to know Wu's background story or the source text of *Lear* to appreciate his movements. Similarly, one doesn't have to know those backgrounds fully to find the sentiments Wu performs striking or identifiable, as the underlying theme of the reconsideration of filial piety, or more generally, generational conflicts in families, is universal.

Among the three adaptations, *Questioning Heaven* seeks to present the original *Lear* and demonstrate the key issues in *Lear* in a way that is more similar to Shakespeare's source text with a motive that is much more resolute. One of the playwrights, Peng, is himself a professional Shakespeare scholar, and the director Lu earned a BA and Master degree in theater in England. With the background of Shakespeare studies in the creative team, their insistence on producing a play nearer to their understanding of the original *Lear* is also stronger. Hai-Ling Wang 王海玲,

19. For example, in this passage: I am back! I'm still I that was, I that am, and I that shall be! I revert to my nature. This feat is nobler than entering into some monastery! 我回來了！我還是從前的我，現在的我，和以後的我！我回到我的本質，這個突破比出家還高貴！（Wu *Lear is Here* 4-5）

the actress who plays the correspondence of Lear, has as well stated her wish that *Questioning Heaven* could not only lead the audiences that are new to *Bangzi* opera to see the beauty of *xiqu* performance, but also lead the fans of *Bangzi* opera to see “the rich emotional twists in Shakespearean works” 莎士比亞作品中，人物多變的情感轉折。²⁰

In the preface of the script of *Questioning Heaven*, Perng and Chen mention that they see traumatic memories as the reason behind the deeds of the villainous children (ix). While in *Lear is Here*, the focus is mostly on Lear’s self-condemnation, in *Questioning Heaven*, the two bad daughters are offered much space to act out how they are traumatized by their mother. In the first scene, Du Xu (Goneril) looks fearful when she is asked by Bin Hela (Lear) to sit on the chair to answer questions, which implies that she suffers stress under her mother’s rule (8:05-27).²¹ On this arrangement, director Lu explains that the villains’ childhood trauma is what he especially wants the actors to keep in mind when they interpret the characters (3:09:58-10:33). Also, in the faithful adaptation of the quarrels between the daughters and Lear in act 3 and act 4, Du Xu and Du Shao (Regan), acted by Yang-Ling Hsiao 蕭楊玲 and Hsuan-Ting Chang 張瑄庭, both show vividly that they are hurt by Bin Hela (Lear)’s words. When Du Xu reacts to Bin Hela’s curse that damns her offspring to be “cut” 斷子絕孫 (1:00:28-01:19) and when Du Shao speaks this line: “How could you say such things? So will you curse me in your rash mood” 您怎麼這般口不擇言？您發怒時也會如此咒罵我麼？(1:15:28-33), their voices and body gestures both express strong grief, and the meaning would be very different if the actors had reacted to Bin Hela coldly with contempt. As Perng and Chen interpret it, in the original, Lear clearly loves Cordelia more than the two elder daughters,

20. 王海玲：〈繁華落盡 問蒼天訴衷情〉，《天問》節目冊（高雄：國立傳統藝術中心，2015年），頁28。

21. 彭鏡禧、陳芳、呂柏伸：《天問》錄影，2015年。約克莎士比亞藝術節，2021年。<https://web.archive.org/web/20210924121842/http://yorkshakes.co.uk/programme/questioning-heaven/>. During the event, the recorded performance was free to download for a day.

and it is Lear's "paternal authority" and the "frigid system" that "twist" the minds of Goneril and Regan.²²

Similarly, for the two playwrights, Edmund's personality is "twisted" just like the sisters due to the unfair treatment he suffers as an illegitimate son (Perng and Chen "Preface" ix). Duanmu Meng (Edmund), played by Chian-Hua Liu 劉建華, speaks, "for I am but a bastard, and nobody would believe me" 他說，孩兒我只是一个雜種，沒有人會相信我。While he seeks to turn his father against his brother with the above line, his aggrieved voice invites the audience to guess that he might be using his true feelings in past experiences to make himself look more reliable (1:07:39-58). While Feng criticizes *King Qi's Dream* for flattening Edmund in the adaptation that "his pretended love [to the sisters] aims directly at the control of their armies" (61), *Questioning Heaven* makes Duanmu Meng seem to love both sisters and hesitate just as Edmund does in *Lear*, and this line "Edmund I was contracted to them both, all three / Now marry in an instant" (5.3.230-31) is also kept in Perng and Chen's adaptation: "by gods' arrangement, we three are married in an instant" 這回蒼天安排咱仨個同時成親了 (82, 68).²³

On the other hand, Perng and Chen also see Lear's revelation of his faults and his relearning of sympathy and pity as crucial points in *Lear*. For the two playwrights, the "core" of the play is Lear's "spiritual growth": while Lear "holds his power for too long" and thus becomes exceedingly "self-willed," he finally relearns patience in suffering and the importance of having "empathy" for others, thus finding the potential for "redemption and rebirth" (vii-viii). Perng and Chen subsequently quote Lear's sigh for the "Poor naked wretches" (3.4.31)²⁴ from the source text in the preface, and they adapt this part into a climax in *Questioning Heaven*:

22. 彭鏡禧、陳芳：《天問》（臺北：臺灣學生書局，2015年），頁ix。

23. 同前註。

24. Shakespeare, William. *King Lear (The RSC Shakespeare)* In Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, ed., (Houndmills: Macmillan Publishers, 2009).

Your ragged clothes do scarce your body hide. Hungry and cold, there's nowhere
you can turn.

Now I myself in awful straits do stand, How I regret my negligence of you!

May rich now shake their superflux to them, And show the heavens more just.

衣衫襤褸不蔽體，飢寒交迫無所依。

老身淪落一至此，愧悔昔日不自知。

寄語顯貴施賑濟，公道昭然本於茲。（49, 40-41）

Feeling the storm in person, Bin Hela (Lear) sings the passage quoted above after she lets the fool go under the shelter first, which shows that she finally starts to care about the feelings and states of others instead of just herself. Bin Hela's six lines in *Questioning Heaven* can be divided into three parts: sympathy for the poor, regret for her past ignorance, and advocacy for all the rich to care for the unlucky ones. Such an adaptation is mostly faithful to its source text except for shifting from a second-person perspective towards the poor to a third-person perspective and making the whole passage more concise to fit the time limit for the performance. Also, Perng and Chen's focus is near to the interpretation of Enid Welsford, an early critic of *Lear*: for Welsford, "fellow-feeling" or "sympathy" is the key that distinguishes the good from the bad in the play, and "the poignant question" about Lear is not "Will he survive?" but rather "What happens to his mind?"²⁵ That is, compared to the tragic end, Welsford puts more focus on Lear's spiritual growth as the key of the play just as Perng and Chen do.

The regretful parents and the unfilial children

Bin Hela's or Lear's regrets are not only towards the poor but also towards the banished daughter and subject. In *Questioning Heaven*, Bin Hela sings to Du Wei (Cordelia), "Recall the day when I the empire split. You have full cause to hate me if you will. Regret and shame have struck me dumb and weak. A muddle-head,

25. Welsford, Enid. 1935. "The Court Fool in Elizabethan Drama." In Kenneth Muir, ed., *King Lear: Critical Essays*. (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1984), pp.107-111.

hopeless case am” (62) 分疆之日堪回首？理應怨對如寇讎。滿腹愧疚難出口，老身懵懂萬事休。(75). Before and during these lines, Bin Hela repetitively avoids her daughter’s gaze, which indicates a great sense of shame. Compared to Lear in the source text, Bin Hela seems clearer in her state and less evasive, as she indicates the day she has banished her faithful child and her shame feelings, while Lear only abstractly says that Cordelia should “have some cause” not to love him and that if she has “poison” for him, he “will drink it” (4.6.76-79).

In all adaptations of *Lear* discussed above and *Birthday Greeting*, the *xiqu* work that shares a similar structure and is thus worth comparing in the essay, the parents’ regrets about mistreatments towards faithful children are all depicted with great length. However, there are other reasons for the regrets of the parents, as shown in the left side of the following form:

	<i>King Lear</i>	<i>Questioning Heaven</i>	<i>Lear is Here</i>	<i>King Qi’s Dream</i>	<i>Birthday Greetings</i>
Good daughter banished	V				
Lack of sympathy	V (but on the poor)		X		
Authoritarian rule or mistreatment of the elder daughters	X		Ambivalent	Only on the lack of “proper education” for them	

Among all adaptations, only *Questioning Heaven* has included the part on Lear’s sympathy for the poor people. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that while Perng and Chen blame Lear for his authoritarian rule for gradually twisting the minds of the two elder daughters, neither in *Lear* nor in *Questioning Heaven* has the protagonist reflected on this part. In the two plays, Lear and Bin Hela regret being fooled by flatteries of love, but they do not seem to ponder on why his daughters do not love him as he wishes. In *Lear is Here*, Wu’s Lear reflects generally on the mistreatment of his children, but it remains unclear whether the two older daughters are also

relevant to such regrets, as it is possible that he only means that he regrets the choice to banish Cordelia. However, the signs of a corrupted authority in the three plays are clear enough for the audience to notice, whether the royal protagonist is aware of them or not.

Differently, in *King Qi's Dream* and *Birthday Greeting*, the parents seem less blameworthy. The reason that the daughters choose to betray their parents seems to be that they are spoiled. Therefore, one of the morals in the two plays seems to be that parents should not spoil their children. Such a message is much different from the one that warns parents against the abuse of their power, which is shown in the other two Lear adaptations. Generally speaking, both messages are right in their essence, as parents should neither spoil their children nor make themselves tyrants.

Though the righteousness of a given play's moral message is a matter of subjective interpretation, a greater degree of objectivity is possible in evaluating how convincing the plot and characters are. Even when playwrights have certain stances in their creations, a more complete depiction of the opposite stance also contributes to making the stance they hold more persuasive. By showing an issue from different angles before giving a direct conclusion and without dehumanizing any sides, a play is more likely to ignite deeper discussions and greater influence in its audience groups. As Brett Gamboa argues about *Lear* performances, "whatever the approach, each production must strike balances between Lear's majesty and dotage, suffering and tyranny, reason and lunacy."²⁶ Without such balance, the conflict in the play is inevitably weakened by a too black-and-white morality. In terms of Lear's tyranny and dotage, reasonable resentment of the unfilial children is usually indicative of a corrupted authority. Therefore, here, I aim to compare the villains' characterization and the extent to which they can be blamed in the five plays, as shown in the following form:

26. Gamboa, Brett. 2016. "King Lear: Performance Notes." In Stephen Greenblatt et al, ed., *The Norton Shakespeare*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company), p. 2329.

	<i>King Lear</i>	<i>Questioning Heaven</i>	<i>Lear is Here</i> ²⁷	<i>King Qi's Dream</i>	<i>Birthday Greeting</i>
Causes for the children's cruel deeds that are relatable for the audience	V (The two elderly daughters seem to suffer from their fathers' abuse and become unwilling to endure it anymore)		△ ²⁸ (The two only appear in the love test)	X (The two mistreat their father without apparent sufficient cause)	△ (A daughter betrays her parents after knowing that they are being persecuted by the government)
The tone created by the mock trial	A sense of irony and despair	A mixture of laughter and pity	X	A potential ideal of justice	X
The bastard's background story	V			X (The correspondence of Edmund is not a bastard)	X (There is no correspondence of such character)
The outsider's love	V (He seems to love both sisters)		The love triangle part is deleted	X (He only pretends to love them)	

To start with, the easier the audience can identify with the reasons behind the two sisters' deeds, the more Lear's tyranny and dotage can be felt. Also, the more one can understand a character's motivation, the more one can be immersed in the illusion that the character is *real*. For example, if the two elderly daughters have suffered from their parents' abuse, as suggested in *Questioning Heaven*, the audiences are less likely to judge them as flat villains that are evil just for the sake of being evil. Similarly, if the character corresponding to Edmund is kept with his bastard background story, the audience will understand more about the source of his ambi-

27. While there are different arrangements in the different versions of *Lear is Here*, this form only presents the one in the version I accessed. See bibliography.

28. In the two forms, the symbol V indicates the existence for the corresponding design, while X indicates non-existence. △ means a sort of middle-ground. That is, in *Lear is Here*, though the two elder daughters are not demonized as in *King Qi's Dream*, they are not given enough portrayal to become relatable, either. On the other hand, in *Birthday Greeting*, the reason for the daughter's betrayal is understandable but still less relatable than having experiences of being abused.

tion. Also, if he at least shows some love to the two sisters, he would seem less of a bloodless power seeker.

Also, to what extent the elder sisters' deeds can be justified is not a dichotomous question, but a spectrum with different factors that may be influenced by both the adaptors' choices and the audiences' feelings. As Gamboa observes, in different productions, "Lear's knights can be decorous guests or hooligans" (2329), which affects the impression Lear and Goneril make on the audiences respectively. Likewise, Edmund's birth story can be "a source of anguish or a transparent excuse for villainy," and such difference is not only influenced by the acting of Edmund's actor alone but also by his father's and brother's attitude: when Gloucester discusses Edmund's bastardy, he may "charm or alienate audiences," and Edgar can be an "entitled favorite or a devoted father and son" (Gamboa 2329). In *Questioning Heaven*, the queen's knights are directed to be likable but noisy; the games they play with Bin Hela offer a chance for diva Wang to show off her martial skills, but such design also gives the impression that their bustles and shouts can sound extremely noisy to the hostess. On the other hand, Gloucester's discussion of Edmund's bastardy is deleted from the adaptation, while Duanmu Jia (Edgar) is portrayed as devoted, loyal, and kind-hearted. With such depictions, the two sisters in *Questioning Heaven* seem much more pitiful and relatable than the bastard. Alternatively, in *Lear is Here*, Gloucester's discussion of Edmund's bastardy is deleted, and Edgar has no interaction with Edmund. In Wu's production, the goal is less to portray distinct characters than to highlight certain emotions in their storyline to echo Wu's life story.

In addition to the motivations of the sisters, the different tones created in the adaptations of the mock trial also contribute to the impressions that the king/queen and the two sisters make. In *Lear* and *Questioning Heaven*, despite their different tones, Lear and Bin Hela both show more of their lunacy in the mock trial scene. By contrast, in *King Qi's Dream*, Qi shows more reason, and his arguments are often as-

sented by the fool, as discussed in the previous section. Therefore, the extent that the sisters are blamed as evil or ones who deserve death is much stronger in *King Qi's Dream* than in *Lear* and *Questioning Heaven*, and the audiences can relate to them much less in *King Qi's Dream* than in the other two.

To make round characters, giving them relatable motivations is not the only way. As Gamboa notes, in recent *Lear* performances, directors increasingly take more “neutral positions, showing Lear’s peremptory dismissals of Kent and Cordelia as more characteristic than anomalous, and letting Goneril and Regan act upon legitimate grievances” (2329). Gamboa further notes that such productions may moderate the two sisters’ cruelty “by giving them distinct personalities, affections, and insecurities” (2329). With such depictions, the two will seem more human rather than bland symbols of evil, cruelty, and ingratitude. Following this trend, in *Questioning Heaven*, the actress plays Du Xu (Goneril) in a calm way, while Du Shao (Regan) is played as a more lively girl.

It has to be clarified that to relate to the villains is not to reverse the common judgment and to say that they are right to be cruel. Rather, these feelings often contribute to arousing more pity and fear in one’s mind. That is, such relatedness creates a sense that anyone can become a villain if ever overcome by negative thoughts such as anger, as to seek revenge in an excessive way may make anyone become as cruel as Goneril, Regan, and Edmund. Similarly, by relating to Lear and Bin Hela, one may be led to realize that the demands of unconditional obedience and flattery in authoritarian filial piety and parents’ insistence on a dignified image may lead to tragic results. By contrast, if the line between good and bad or victims and perpetrators is clearly drawn, the space for reflection is reduced. In such a dichotomous depiction, the reason for Lear’s suffering might be reduced to mere bad luck, unfortunate encounters with bad people, i.e., a single misstep of old age. Likewise, the reason for the unfilial children to become villains might also be reduced to inherent evil, which is less relatable for the audience.

Possibly, the space for different kinds of reevaluation is just what Perng seeks in the depth of Shakespeare's portrayal, as discussed in the earlier sections. That is, as clear-drawn lines can often be found in traditional *xiqu* works, adaptors like Perng, Chen, and Wu feel the need to innovate the genre and add in more polyvalence in their depictions. Thus, by pitying and fearing the tragic ends of the characters, the audiences may have more space to reflect on their own life experiences. In an online review written by the name Floating Feather 羽毛飄飄, the author shares that *Questioning Heaven* reminds her of her dementia grandmother's authoritarian rule over her aunt, so the plot is rather relatable for her.²⁹ In another review, Li Li-Xian 李俐賢 evaluates the play as thought-provoking and reflects on the faults of each character, such as Bin Hela's (Lear) and Du Wei's (Cordelia) ignorance of others' feelings, thoughts, and states, Duanmu Meng's (Edmund) exceeding desire for recognition, and the two sisters egotistic personalities that are developed under their mother's unfair treatment.³⁰ Likewise, Chen Yun-Fei 陳韻妃 praises *Questioning Heaven* for its non-dichotomous portrayal of human nature that combines both cultural specificity and universal experiences.³¹

4. Innovations of the *xiqu* industry with the depth in Shakespeare

How *Questioning Heaven* intends to depict the complexity in characters and morality echoes the literature on the innovations happening in the contemporary *xiqu*

29. 羽毛飄飄：〈（備份）臺灣豫劇團《天問》觀後--11/29（日）〉，痞客邦，2017年10月3日，<https://dsfish101.pixnet.net/blog/post/460300766-%EF%BC%88%E5%82%99%E4%BB%BD%EF%B C%89%E8%87%BA%E7%81%A3%E8%B1%AB%E5%8A%87%E5%9C%98%E3%80%8A%E5%A4%A9%E5%95%8F%E3%80%8B%E8%A7%80%E5%BE%8C--11-29-%28%E6%97%A5%29>

30. 李俐賢：〈why, or why not——豫莎劇《天問》觀劇心得〉，痞客邦，2015年12月27日，<https://folkanddrama.pixnet.net/blog/post/315355773-why%2Cor-why-not%E2%80%94%E2%80%94%E8%B1%AB%E8%8E%8E%E5%8A%87%E3%80%8A%E5%A4%A9%E5%95%8F%E3%80%8B%E8%A7%80%E5%8A%87%E5%BF%83%E5%BE%97>

31. 陳韻妃：〈原著精義詮釋《天問》〉，表演藝術評論台，2015年12月30日，<https://pareviews.ncafroc.org/tw/comments/25ccb3ce-1763-43b2-bea7-9b6fd7725157>

industry, so I seek to review the relevant research in this section. As Shanlin Zhao 趙山林 indicates, in traditional *xiqu*, there is an “emotional preference of distinct dichotomy of good and evil,”³² and for Feng, such ideological strategy is the part in *xiqu* that is less “appealing” to the contemporary audiences (182). Feng further indicates that in traditional Chinese theater, despite the existence of “alternative ideologies against Confucian codes” such as in Tang Xian-Zu’s 湯顯祖 works, the messages in even the plays that seek to highlight individual subjectivities tend to be “confined to the black-and-white binary” as well (53, 56). Feng argues that in those plays that “deeply explored characters’ emotional landscapes to reveal their individuality,” the “outspoken criticism of stale didactic ideas” still makes the emotions of characters represent those of the author (54, 55). Accordingly, “the alternative proposal to battle neo-Confucian norms with characters’ natural passions” becomes “yet another indicator of single voice,” and “the previous ideological and ethnic struggles simply shifted to one between didacticism and lyricism” (55, 56). Besides, as Feng argues, in the traditional acting in *xiqu*, “unique conventions of acting schools could often overwhelm empathy” (18), and thus the actors “did not have to identify with characters to find the proper movement” as “the Stanislavsky system proposes” (17). Moreover, as Chen also observes, when rehearsing the old plays, the actors usually have models set by the predecessors to follow, but such convenience also becomes “burdens” that may impede innovation (*Lyricism* 57).³³

While the depth Perng finds in Shakespeare without dichotomous simplicity may be exactly what he sees that traditional *xiqu* lacks, the attempt to produce transcultural adaptations with Shakespearean stories thus offers great chances for *xiqu* to challenge such ideological dichotomies and renew itself. As Chen further emphasizes, compared to the typified characters in most traditional *xiqu* works, the

32. 趙山林：《中國戲曲觀眾學》（上海：華東師範大學出版社，1990年），頁155，由Wei Feng翻譯於*Intercultural Aesthetics in Traditional Chinese Theatre: From 1978 to the Present*頁182。

33. 陳芳：《抒情·表演·跨文化：當代莎戲曲研究》（臺北：臺灣師大出版中心，2018年），頁57。

Shakespearean characters are complicated and with different layers (Chung 108), and the plot is often full of “different kinds of conflicts that rarely happen in traditional plays” (Chen *Lyricism* 57). To perform such complexities, the Shake-*xiqu* actors need to go beyond the traditional training of the formalist skills for singing and movements, adding the identification of the emotions and intricate motivations that they may have never encountered before to their newly-created performance (Chen *Lyricism* 57). In order to achieve this goal, the actors would need to first build a deep understanding of the contextual elements relevant to the characters they play and secondly read the subtle emotions behind and between the characters’ lines (Chen *Lyricism* 57). That is, transcultural adaptations provide the space for innovation not only in a textual level but also in the training system of the actors.

As Chen further indicates, after “interpreting the characters on their own” without models to follow, the actors would have to “create their own movements” based on both their new interpretations and the old formalist training, discuss with the director, and vividly act out those emotions (Chen *Lyricism* 57). In terms of the performance with a vivid body language, old formalist training is not a burden, but a great tool to deliver the emotions of the characters aesthetically. It can thus be seen that for Chen and Wu, the innovation is to combine the complicated emotions and motivations in Shakespeare and the traditional formalist skills altogether in new works. Such a consensus is also echoed by Feng’s arguments: for Feng, “innovation and experimentation are by no means antagonistic to preservation,” and “existing tradition” is “reused to refashion modernity” and always “transforms through its assimilation of other sources” (242). For Feng, the aesthetics in *xiqu* are the “more enduring and appealing” factors in contrast to the ideological preference of the distinct dichotomy of good and evil (182). As Zhao summarizes, there are three aesthetical criteria in traditional *xiqu*: “detachment from realism or fiction regarding the notion of artistic truth,” “simultaneous engagement with the plot and actors’ skills and techniques,” “recognition of conventions and general agreement” (155, trans. by Feng 182),

and these are the criteria Feng finds worth keeping in *xiqu*. To innovate *xiqu* without losing its aesthetical merits, Feng thus argues that “the experimentation needs to be monitored by *xiqu* artists—or at least artists acquainted with *xiqu*—so that dialogue based on sufficient understanding of the self and the Other can eventuate” (182).

5. Limitations in *xiqu* adaptations

Back to the discussion that focuses on the result Perng and Chen achieve in *Questioning Heaven*—despite the playwrights’ intention of adding Shakespeare’s depth to *xiqu*, the play still suffers some criticism for the flattening of characters. Wen-Ling Lin 林雯玲, the author of the only existing scholarship on the play aside from the articles written by the playwrights, wrote in 2017 that *Questioning Heaven* overemphasizes the idea of filial piety. While Lin maintains that though watching *Questioning Heaven* was a highly “pleasurable” experience, after leaving the theater, she couldn’t help but doubt whether the “thoughts and characterization” in the original *King Lear* are as traditional as portrayed in *Questioning Heaven*.³⁴ After reading the script, she criticizes *Questioning Heaven* for repeating the character *xiao* 孝 [filial piety] nearly 30 times and hence centering the play around Confucianism. For Lin, the “emotional intensity” depicted in *King Lear* is therefore “weakened” and “the protagonist’s revelation becomes limited” (95). Lin thus gives a harsh comment that under the Confucian didactic, the main characters in *Questioning Heaven* “cease to be human” 不得為人 (78). Echoing Lin’s reading, Huang Ting-Rung 黃婷容 reviews that she sees the moral in *Questioning Heaven* as the traditional value of loyalty and filial piety, which is the same as the didactics in most *xiqu* works.³⁵ For Huang, *Questioning Heaven* only uses the plot and characters in *Lear* to construct a

34. 林雯玲：〈從《李爾王》到豫莎劇《天問》：中國化語境下的教化衝動與改編議題〉，《戲劇研究》第20期（2017年7月），頁68。

35. 黃婷容：〈不同時代的相同扣問《天問》〉，表演藝術評論台，2020年10月28日，<https://pareviews.ncafroc.org.tw/comments/97b3f7ce-9524-4a3d-a3ae-4c1b799d394a>

space that is near to traditional Chinese society without seeking to show the essence of its source text, and the play thus fails to offer significance for the audience to reflect on the contemporary society 對於現代人對於當代的社會感知，並沒有辦法產生新的時空意義與內涵探問。

While the old morals have both values and limitations and thus cannot be easily termed as positive and negative, and it will be a bigger question on to what extent Confucianism and filial piety are out-dated or still relevant in the contemporary society, what Lin and Huang mean is that the narrative and characters in *Questioning Heaven* fail to completely convince them. Similarly, in a personal conversation with a teacher, Virginia Lin, she shares that she finds it difficult to relate to either Bin Hela or Lear in most adaptations, and she thinks that Duanmu Meng (Edmund) is acted in a way that is obviously evil, which makes this character dull for her. For Wen-Ling Lin, Duanmu Ge (Gloucester) is deprived of the possibility to commit suicide, and Bin Hela (Lear) is deprived of the possibility to be fully immersed in sadness when facing the death of her beloved daughter (80-85). That is, Duanmu Ge's insistence to help his queen even during his blindness and Bin Hela's later reaction that ponders on the unfairness in the world do not convince Wen-Ling Lin and seem unreasonable to her. Lin and Huang thus reach a consensus that *Questioning Heaven* as a *xiqu* overwhelms its status as a Shakespeare adaptation. Nevertheless, interestingly, 李俐賢 comments oppositely that *Questioning Heaven* is too faithful to the source text so that it has not shown enough of the special features in the *xiqu* genre. Also, to respond to Wen-Ling Lin's disapproval on *Questioning Heaven's* adaptation of Gloucester's choice and Lear's emotional expression and Virginia Lin's criticism on the characterization of Duanmu Meng (Edmund), I have to say that when I watched the play, the actors' performance somehow convinced me without triggering any sense of weirdness, and I found Duanmu Meng rather charming with his confidence to change his fate. Why can the same play be evaluated in such extremely different ways?

Some of my personal experiences with *King Lear* and *Questioning Heaven* may be a test case to show the instability in audience response, even when it is only compared between different ages of the same individual. Despite the relatively greater degree of objectivity in evaluating how convincing the plot and characters are than how righteous a given play's moral message is, subjective interpretation based on one's personality and life experiences still matters to a certain extent. When I first read *Lear* when I had just graduated from high school, I could not relate to any of the characters in *Lear*. For me at the time, this was just a wooden plot about the meanderings of a curmudgeon who could not distinguish flattery from true love. The second time I read it was in my first semester of graduate school, and at the time, I could somehow understand Lear's needs for care and praise, his insistence on a dignified image, his sense of loss, and the fool's comments on the snobbishness in human nature. Yet, during my reading, I felt a slight discomfort: the conflicts between the two sisters and their father and the results they led seemed to imply that disobedience towards one's parents (such as cutting the number of soldiers) will necessarily mean evil. The third time I encountered this play was through the filmed performance of *Questioning Heaven*, and this was the time that I truly felt pity and fear for the unfilial sisters. Only at this time did I genuinely feel their fear for the authoritarian parent and the gradual enhancement in their cruel deeds, and I thus felt that their problem was not in the first disobedience but the abandonment of basic sympathy and the unwillingness to have better communications. For me, *Questioning Heaven* has not only offered great *xiqu* performances that are both visually stunning and affectively striking but also led me to have new reflections on *Lear* and my family life, as the conflicts shown in the play truly remind me of my relationship with my father. Therefore, this adaptation is a successful one in my mind that is worth remembering and writing about, as it renders what is a very Western cultural phenomenon available to a Confucian society, even a 21st century one.

In addition to the degree of subjective experience, formalist limitations might be

another reason that *Questioning Heaven* fails to convince all the audience. As Virginia Lin shares, according to her own taste, what she expects in a good play is a more sophisticated depiction of the affective world of the characters. However, to fit the numerous events in *Lear* in three hours and in *xiqu* format will almost mean a necessity to sacrifice the length for the characters' emotional landscapes and complexities in personalities, and she cannot help but lament for such a sacrifice. Just as Yao-Heng Hu 胡耀恆 points out in his analysis of CLP's *Jingju* adaptation of *Macbeth*, with the formalist performance in *xiqu* that relies on singing and dancing, it is barely possible to keep the "depth" in Shakespeare with its "psychological, ethical, and philosophical" dimensions in the *xiqu* adaptations.³⁶ While to "judge such adaptations with the standard of spoken dramas" and criticize them as losing the essence of the source text may be unfair, as Hu explains, such comparison also indicates the systematic problems in *xiqu* adaptations of Western works (78). This may be the main reason that Perng and Chen's intention to represent the depth of Shakespeare is not received by all the audiences despite the playwrights' aims. It is possible that for Huang and Lin, *Questioning Heaven* has triggered their dislike of certain aspects in filial piety, while the depiction in the play has not offered enough signs to differentiate this adaptation from the traditional didactic plays.

With existing limitations in each genre, when an adaptation creates something new, it definitely loses something from the source text at the same time. How should the adaptation authors make their selections to touch more audiences? Should they further simplify the plot in Shakespeare and focus more on characterization, or should they select other plays to adapt other than Shakespeare from the beginning? How can the merits of formalist performances be further highlighted and better connected to the stories? If Perng means by "depth of Shakespeare" multi-dimensional characters with complex motivations and the space for issues to be discussed with

36. 胡耀恆：〈西方戲劇改編為平劇的問題—以「慾望城國」為例〉，《中外文學》第15卷第11期（1987年4月），頁78-80。

different angles, how can a *xiqu* adaptation achieve this goal to a greater extent? Probably, the conflicts and complexity that the audience from both Shakespearean era and contemporary Taiwan expect from artistic works also reflect the need to mediate between different value systems in a changing society. Also, this fusion of formal dramaturgical elements in *Questioning Heaven* from different genres also reflects the attempt Taiwan mediates between East and West and between tradition and modern politically, culturally, socially, and linguistically. Therefore, to discuss how a transcultural play can touch more audience is also to answer how different audience groups react to contemporary society with their various concerns or value systems, whether it is Confucianism, *xiqu* conventions, Western individualism, or capitalism. While this essay stays on the level of textual analysis of this adaptation, its wider meaning remains to be discussed.

Appendix

Performance record of *Questioning Heaven*

Premiere: 2015/11/27-29, 3 sessions

National Theater

Tickets sold (including VIP tickets): 4089

Audience number: 3462

2016/4/30, 1 session

Chiayi Performing Arts Center

Tickets sold (including VIP tickets): 883

Audience number: 707

2016/5/22

Taiwan Public Television, 2 showings

2017/9/3, 1 session

Chang'an Grand Theatre (in Beijing)

Audience number: about 800

2020/10/9-10, 2 sessions

National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts (Weiwuying)

Audience number: about 1176

2021/5/28

York International Shakespeare Festival

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210924121842/http://yorkshakes.co.uk/programme/questioning-heaven/>

The same version as the DVD ver., the recorded performance of the session on 2015/11/28, recorded by Taiwan Public Television

2022/11

Released on Taiwan Public Television OTT

<https://www.ptsplus.tv/season/bc7ffdf4-f0d0-46fd-9413-27cf413bcad4>

Provided by Taiwan Bangzi Opera Company

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