SURVEYING ASIAN THEATRE STUDIES

Siyuan Liu
University Of British Columbia, Canada

Before discussing Asian theatre studies in the West, I want to give you some background about my involvement with the Association for Asian Performance (AAP) and *Asian Theatre Journal* (ATJ) as well as the projects I worked on regarding Asian theatre in general, so as to give you some sense of where I came from and what shaped my understanding of the history and current scholarship of the field.

I first participated in the AAP annual conference in 2005 when I won that year's emerging scholar award. Later, I was AAP's Membership Outreach Director for two years and President for four years. During those six years, I organized two panels on "Founders of the Field" that looked at the scholarship, teaching, and theatrical productions of the first generation of Asian theatre scholars in the West. I also co-edited the two follow-up "special series" on these pioneers in *Asian Theatre Journal* in 2011 and 2013 respectively. They were followed by two AAP panels and ATJ special series on "Founding Mothers of the Field" that celebrated female pioneers of Asian theatre studies. As a result of these four rounds of collective efforts between 2011 and 2017, *Asian Theatre Journal* has published articles on a total of thirty-one male and female scholars, teachers, artists, and cultural facilitators whose tireless efforts have successfully introduced Asian theatre to the Western stages, classrooms, and scholarly discourse. Furthermore, the first "founders" series also included a history of the Association for Asian Theatre by James Brandon, the great scholar of kabuki and Southeast Asian theatre who unfortunately passed away in 2015.

In 2013, while I was still AAP President, I was approached by Routledge to edit *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre*. After three years of intensive work involving fifty-five established and emerging scholars from Asia, Europe, and North America, the nearly 600-page volume was finally published in 2016. As I discuss later, its twenty-four chapters include both traditional and modern Asian theatre, providing both country-based coverage and thematic discussions of topics that concern current scholarship such as colonialism and modernity, gender performance, and intercultural theatre. Around the same time, I was also involved in a project on modern Asian theatre, which resulted in two volumes published by Methuen in 2014. One of them is an anthology titled *The Methuen Drama Anthology of Modern Asian Plays* and the other is a companion history called *Modern Asian Theatre and Performance 1900-2000* (Liu and Wetmore 2014; Wetmore, Liu, and Mee 2014). I and others have been using the two books for teaching modern Asian theatre.

Soon after the publication of *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre*, I was asked to take over the editorship of *Asian Theatre Journal* from Kathy Foley, who had since 2005 skillfully and tirelessly guided the flourishing Asian theatre scholarship and significantly enhanced the content and reach of *Asian Theatre Journal*. Kathy's work is a hard act to follow; I'll try my best.

Consequently, my following discussion of the history and current scholarship of Asian theatre studies in the West is significantly affected by my work involving AAP, ATJ, *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre*, and the Methuen volumes on modern Asian theatre. I will extensively utilize James Brandon's AAP history, the "founders series" articles, and the Routledge and Methuen volumes. I will start by tracing the emergence of Asian theatre studies in the West, followed by the history of Association for Asian Theatre, and finally a discussion of *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre*.

THE START OF ASIAN THEATRE STUDIES IN THE WEST

Western interest in Asian theatre can be traced back at least to the 18th century, with well known examples such as the 1750s adaptations of the Chinese Yuan Dynasty *zaju* play *The Orphan of China* by Voltaire in France and Arthur Murphy in England at the height of European chinoiserie that changed the play about loyalty to one's lord to the civilizing power of the Confucian mandarin over Tartar invaders. In the 1790s, William Jones translated the Indian Sanskrit classic *Shakuntala* by Kalidasa, which introduced to Europe the literary power of Sanskrit drama, which unfortunately served to confirm the European bias against Indian theatre as performance: "Sylvan Levi in his *Le Theatre Indien* explicitly states that for him Indian theatre meant Sanskrit drama. He dismissed all other forms of performance in India as '"unsophisticated," "indifferent to literary qualities," and offering "very little originality"'" (Banerji 2013: 296).

It was not until the early 1900s that the West started to witness Asian theatrical performance. Some of the best-known examples include the two tours of Japanese *shinpa* artists Kawakami Otōjiro and his wife Sadayakko who performed so-called pseudo kabuki in the US and Europe from 1899 to 1902 at the height of Japonisme, Bali dance at the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition that partially inspired Antonin Artaud's concept of theatre of cruelty, and the Chinese *jingju* (Beijing opera) star Mei Lanfang's tours in the United States (1930) and the Soviet Union (1935) that was partly responsible for Bertold Brecht's alienation effect.

The same period also saw books published on Asian theatre, usually by Westerners living in Asian countries, some of which include *Kabuki, the Popular Stage of Japan* (1925) by Zoe Kincaid, *The Chinese Drama from Earliest Times until Today* (1930) by Lewis Arlington, *The Kathakali* (1934) by Emily G. Hatch, and *Dance and Drama in Bali* (1938) by Walter Spies and Beryl de Zoete. However, as James Brandon pointed out, these prewar Western scholars were hampered by their sense of psychological superiority toward Asian cultures and the fact that "none were theatre

practitioners." Instead, they researched "in situ, often for scores of years, without entering the world of theatre themselves" (Brandon 1989: 30).

In this sense, the systematic study of Asian theatre in the West only started after WWII, in part as a result of increased postwar Euro-American presence in Asia, especially American occupation of Japan, the Korean War and the Cold War. In fact, the earliest postwar studies of kabuki were initiated by members of the American occupation authority's theatre censorship committee in Japan, specifically Earl Ernst, who authored *The Kabuki Theatre* (1956) and started the first Asian theatre program in the U.S. (at the University of Hawai'i), and Faubion Bowers, who wrote the first survey of Asian theatre in English (*Theatre in the East: A Survey of Asian Dance and Drama* [1956]). In fact, the roles of Ernst and Bowers regarding the censorship of kabuki have been the focus of fascinating scholarship, with Bowers often referred to in Japan as "the man who saved kabuki" from American censors, which turned out to be myth refuted by James Brandon's methodical research (Brandon 2006, 2011b; Okamoto 2001; Leiter 2011).

Brandon, himself a kabuki expert who continued Ernst's kabuki productions at the University of Hawai'i, in addition to being the founding editor of *Asian Theatre Journal*, editor of *Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre*, and author of multiple authoritative studies, "was drafted into the army in 1950 and stationed in Japan and Korea during the Korean War." This experience in the army allowed Brandon to watch his first kabuki in Tokyo, "[t]wo days before his tour of duty ended," which "'hooked him' on kabuki" (Jortner and Foley 2011: 343). After earning a PhD degree in theatre and television at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1955, he entered the foreign service and enjoyed extensive opportunities to study Asian theatre, first for two years stationed in Jakarta as a cultural affairs officer (1955–1957), which allowed him to study southeast Asian theatre, and then four more years in Japan. His Jakarta experience laid the groundwork for his book *Theatre in Southeast Asia* (1967), "which would look at the social and historical circumstances of performance in the region and reflect on theatre in the newly independent states of Southeast Asia" (Jortner and Foley 2011: 343). During his Japanese days, he studied Japanese and kabuki-style *nihon buyō* dance, watched numerous kabuki and other performances, and befriended kabuki artists who later helped him with his productions at the the University of Hawai'i.

In addition to kabuki, the first full-length study of a modern Japanese playwright, entitled *Toward a Modern Japanese Theatre* (1974) by J Thomas Rimer, also resulted from Rimer's army assignments in Japan in the late 1950s, which allowed him to see the modern *shingeki* (new drama) productions of *Tartuffe* and Sartre's *No Exit*, which led to his PhD study at Columbia on modern Japanese spoken drama (Jortner 2011).

Even as late as the 1970s, Kathy Foley, an expert of *wayang golek* and my predecessor as ATJ editor, benefited from a six-months recreational mission for the

US army at the Korean Demilitarized Zone as a DFA student at Yale. That experience first exposed Foley to Korean shamanism and other performance forms and allowed her to visit Indonesia where she saw her first *wayang parwa* shadow show and other music, dance, and ritual performances (Coldiron 2017).

In short, American military and diplomatic services during the three decades spanning the Japanese occupation, Korean War and Vietnam War were critical in initiating studies of theatre and performance in Japan and Southeast Asia. Another source of support that was instrumental in opening up the study of Indian and Southeast Asian was American governmental and private grants from such sources as the Fulbright scholarships, the John D. Rockefeller 3rd Fund (now the Asian Cultural Council), and the Ford Foundation Fund. According to Foley: "Significant research on South and Southeast Asian genres in the United States was not undertaken by theatre scholars until the 1960s, when political changes created funding opportunities and new alliances that made Americans welcome" (Foley 2011b: 465). For example, the Javanese *wayang kulit purwa* expert Roger Long was supported by a Rockefeller grant for a two-year dissertation fieldwork in 1967 in Yogyakarta, where he established a life longer relationship with the Habirandha Sekolah Pedhalangan (Habirandha School for Dalang) (Foley 2011b: 465).

Similarly, "[t]he 1970s and 1980s was a period when the American government was interested in having a sphere of influence in India. Funding was available… from the Indo-American Sub-commission, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and other organizations" (Foley 2011a: 447). Farley Richmond, who received his PhD under James Brandon at the Michigan State University and is crucial in introducing the ancient Indian form *kutiyattam* to the West, benefited from multiple Fulbright and Rockefeller fellowships that allowed him to travel extensively in India and document its rich performance traditions, especially *kutiyattam*. Significantly, although his initial interest started with classical Sanskrit drama, following the Western bias mentioned earlier towards the form's literary values over performance, Richmond's extensive travel in India drastically changed his views of Indian theatre and "his interest soon expanded to folk, traditional, and even urban contemporary theatre" (Banerji 2013: 296).

However, while American military, diplomatic, and funding opportunities launched the studies of Japanese, Indonesia, and Indian theatres, China remained largely closed to the West during the Cold War, making field and archival research of Chinese theatre virtually impossible until after the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s. This restriction was compounded by the McCarthyist Red Scare in the US that caused a brain drain of America's China experts. Consequently, Chinese theatre studies in the US in the 1950s and 1960s was, to a large extent, a lonely endeavor by A. C. Scott, a British scholar and artist who founded the Asian/Experimental Theatre Program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and researched and translated Chinese theatre during those two decades. Scott's route to Chinese (and Japanese)

theatre was similar to Brandon's, through military and diplomatic services. A trained artist from the Royal College of Art in London, Scott first went to Asia during World War II as a photographer for the Royal Air Force and, after the war, as a member of the British Council for Cultural Relations. He was immersed in Chinese theatre, first in China until 1949 and then for a couple of years in Hong Kong where he befriended several first-rate *jingju* (Beijing opera) actors before they returned to China in 1951. He published *The Classical Theatre of China* (1957), a biography of the *jingju* star Mei Lanfang (1959), a memoir of his interactions with Chinese actors titled *Actors are Madmen* (1982), and three volumes of translations of traditional Chinese plays that include extensive performance notations and exquisite sketches from onstage and off (Scott 1957, 1959, 1967, 1969, 1975, 1982). He also managed to stage a *jingju* play, *The Butterfly Dream* (*Hudie meng*), in New York and at the University of Wisconsin–Madison (Liu 2011).

It was only in the late 1960s and early 1970s that Scott was joined by three young scholars of Chinese theatre; conspicuously, none of them was American. Among them, Colin Mackerras is Australian and the other two, Daniel S. P. Yang and John Yu, are Taiwanese. As a historian, Mackerras was one of the extremely few Westerners allowed into China for research when he was invited in 1964 to teach English in Beijing while pursuing MA studies at Cambridge, which given him two years before the Cultural Revolution to collect sources on *jingju* and other Chinese theatrical genres. That first foot in China's iron door also allowed him, again as one of the extremely lucky few, to return to China in 1973 during a brief thaw of Sino-Western relations after the Nixon visit to China in 1972. Both Yang and Hu came to the US from Taiwan and finished their graduate training in theatre in the US, with Yang receiving an MFA (1964) at the University of Hawai'i and PhD (1968) at the University of Wisconsin under Scott, and Hu receiving a PhD at Indiana University. It was not until the late 1970s, after the end of the Cultural Revolution, that normal exchange allowed American students, such as the *jingju* expert Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak, to conduct study and research in China and Chinese students, such as Xiaomei Chen and Ruru Li, to study theatre in the West.

As a result of all these opportunities, by 1976 James Brandon was able to publish the first survey of the field titled "Asian Theatre: A Review of Current Scholarship" in *Educational Theatre Journal*, a journal for general theatre scholars and the predecessor of today's *Theatre Journal*. He surveyed a total of twenty-six recently published books on Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and Southeastern Asian theatre, declaring: "The relatively young field of Asian theatre scholarship is experiencing a boom. At rough count, more than seventy books on Asian performance, theatre history and criticism, and play translations have been published in the last ten years" (Brandon 1976: 442).

SCHOLARLY ORGANIZATION AND OFFICIAL PUBLICATION

After this brief history on the rise of Asian theatre studies in the West, I would like to discuss the Association for Asian Theatre and *Asian Theatre Journal* as the scholarly organization and official publication that accompanied our field's emergence.

In terms of our organization, AAP can be traced to the Asian wing of the Afro-Asian Theatre Project (A-ATP) that Brandon and several like-minded scholars formed in 1965 as a focus group of the American Educational Theatre Association (AETA). As a sign of Asian theatre study's still fledging status, the involuntary combination of Asian and African/African-American theatre scholars as one focus group was due to AETA's refusal to "recognize an Asian theatre interest group within AETA; it was too small, and unimportant," according to Brandon (Brandon 2011a: 283). Over the next two decades, this same core group of scholars and new comers went through four name changes: the Asian Theatre Project (ATP; 1969–1971), Asian Theatre Program (ATP; 1972–1985), Association for the Study of Asian Performance (ASAP; 1986–1987), eventually acquiring its present name the Association for Asian Performance (AAP) in 1987. As Brandon chronicled in 2011, much of the changes resulted from the structural fluctuations of the broader theatre organization it affiliated with that eventually became today's the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE). Notable, there was a heated discussion in 1987 about the usage of "performance" vs. "theatre" in our organization's name. Farley Richmond recalled that "the word 'performance' was gaining currency around the country and that using 'theatre' to describe ourselves was considered too 'old fashioned' and perhaps too western." Kathy Foley added: "The discussion that I remember in detail is what the name of the organization would be. Performance was chosen in hopes that we could thereby indicate to people in dance and music that we were not confined to theatre as a dialogue model" (qtd. in Brandon 2011a: 293-94).

The official journal of AAP is *Asian Theatre Journal*, which has been published since 1984 under the following editors: James Brandon (with Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak as Associate Editor, 1984-1991), Samuel Leiter (1992-2004), and Kathy Foley (2005-2017). I took over the editorship in September 2017. ATJ is published twice a year. Each issue generally includes translations, articles, reports, and performance and book reviews. According to the new author guidelines, the recommended length for manuscripts is 6,000-8,000 words for articles (including endnotes), 4,000-5,000 words for reports, and 800-1,500 for reviews. From time to time, it has published special issues with established scholars as guest-editors, such as those on the Japanese comic form kyogen (spring 2007), Shakespeare 2.0 (spring 2011), global encounters in Southeast Asian performing arts (fall 2014, edited by Matthew Cohen), and women in Asian theatre: conceptual, political, and aesthetic paradigms (spring 2016). There have been also special sections such as the annual "emerging scholars" series and the "founders of the field" series from 2011 to 2017.

EARLY BOOKS AND THE BOUNDARIES FOR THE FIELD

Having discussed the emergence, organization and official publication of Asian theatre studies, I will use the second half of my talk to discuss the field itself, starting from earlier books that helped form the boundaries of the field as we know it today.

Two early attempt to define the field are Faubion Bowers' first survey of Asian theatre in English titled *Theatre in the East: A Survey of Asian Dance and Drama* (1956) and A. C. Scott's *The Theatre in Asia* (1972). These two books revealed the substantial challenge of understanding and presenting the impossibly rich performance traditions and contemporary practices of the continent, especially as a single-person endeavor, which prompted James R. Brandon to declare in 1976 that "we do not yet have a comprehensive, even-handed Asian theatre history text… nor an introduction" (425). Between then and when I embarked on a similar journey with *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre*, two edited volumes involving field-wide scholars had been published, namely Brandon's *Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre* (1993) and Samuel L. Leiter's *Encyclopedia of Asian Theatre* (2007).

A number of parameters and themes had emerged from these four volumes that affect future books of Asian theatre, including mine. The first such parameter is the geographical scope of Asian theatre. As a first attempt, *Theatre in the East* includes South, East, and Southeast Asia. As Bowers wrote: "In terms of theatre, Asia defines itself clearly as that area which starts with India and extends eastward as far as Indonesia and the Philippine Islands, and northward through China and Japan as far as Siberia" (Bowers 1956: vi). Notably, Bowers decided to exclude the Middle East from his list, even though the area is generally considered as part of the Asian continent:

> As far as dance and drama are concerned, those countries are not, however, what I feel to be characteristically Asian. That area has in common the Mohammedan religion, which on the whole condemns theatre, and must of necessity be omitted from our attention, partly because of the virtual absence of dance and drama there, partly because of the 'un-Asian' atmosphere of what little has survived. (ibid)

Both Brandon and Leiter followed Bowers' precedent—with the addition of an eight-page chapter on Oceania in Brandon's volume—while Scott included the Middle East and excluded Southeast Asia, choices that Leiter and Brandon deemed 'questionable' and 'highly idiosyncratic' in their respective books reviews (Leiter 1974: 272; Brandon 1976: 425).

Indeed, this geographical definition has become settled practice in Asian theatre studies, as evident in the membership expertise of AAP, the contents of ATJ, and the presentations at the annual AAP conference. At the same time, new scholarship on Arabic performance has emerged in the past decade. One such effort

is the 2005 *TDR* special issue on the Iranian devotional drama *Ta'ziyeh* that starts with an introduction by the journal's contributing editor John Bell criticizing 'the West's problem with Middle Eastern and Arabic performance traditions' (5). On the modern and contemporary theatre front, *Asian Theatre Journal* published an article on modern Iranian theatre in 2012 (Sohi and Ghorbaninejad 2012) and, for several years, AAP sponsored a panel on modern Arabic and Arab-American theatre at the annual Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) conference. These developments seem to point to a promising if still somewhat uneasy relationship between Asian theatre studies and the scholarship of theatre in the Middle East. This was the lay of the land when I was invited to edit *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre* in 2013. Another consideration affecting my decision on the structure of the handbook was the scopes of Asian studies as an academic field and of the Routledge Asian Handbook series. I was told by my editor that Arab theatre belonged to Islamic studies and therefore was not part of the Routledge Asian Handbook series. Consequently, *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre* covers the conventional scope of traditional and modern theatres in South, East, and Southeast Asia.

STRUCTURES OF ASIAN THEATRE STUDIES

Apart from geographic boundaries, another issue for a field-wide volume like the Routledge handbook concerns its structure, which can be seen as different ways of understanding Asian theatre. The previous volumes I mentioned fall into two formats. The first format is to devote a chapter to each country (or region), arranged either geographically or alphabetically. This is the structural approach used in Bower's *The Theatre of the East*, Scott's *The Theatre in Asia*, and Brandon's *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre*. The other structural approach is the A-Z entries used in Leiter's *Encyclopedia of Asian Theatre.* It lists alphabetical entries on general country/region histories, artist biographies, theatrical genres and forms, and about thirty general topics on acting/directing, technical theatre, theatre organization and other issues such as censorship, Western influence, and women in Asian theatre. Each of these general-topic entries includes a varying number of countries.

While indebted to these approaches, *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre* offers a third way of structuring—and understanding—Asian theatre. Designed to partially fulfil Routledge Asian Handbook series' mandate of thematically arranged chapters, it adopts a hybrid structure that seeks to balance country coverage with thematic discussion and cross-region comparison, give equal weight to spectacular traditional forms and vibrant modern and contemporary practices, and showcase recent scholarship. Consequently, the book's twenty-four chapters are arranged into four parts, with the fist two devoted to traditional theatre and the last two to modern and cotemporary theatre and performance. Parts One and Three are devoted to general country surveys of traditional and modern theatres respectively and Parts

Two and Four offer thematic analyses with a rough although often blurred traditional/modern divide.

Specifically, Part One focuses on the theatrical traditions of India, China, Japan, and Indonesia, widely considered the most representative sites of classical and folk theatre in Asia. They are followed by the six chapters in Part Two that examine dance, music, masks, puppets, costume and makeup, and space/architecture in traditional Asian theatre, using examples from these four and other performance cultures such as other Southeast Asian countries, Tibet, Uighur, and Korea. Part Three focuses on modern and contemporary theatre and performance in virtually all countries/regions in South, East, and Southeast Asia, with some chapters including multiple countries or regions. Finally, Part Four examines critical topics of Asian theatre in the modern times that have attracted significant scholarship in recent years.

CURRENT SCHOLARLY FOCUSES

This geographically and thematically hybrid structure highlights several active areas of current scholarship that are highlighted in Part Four of *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre* entitled "Perspectives of Modern and Contemporary Asian Theatre."

One such topic is the interrelated relations between traditional and modern theatres since the onset of colonialism and modernity. On the one hand, traditional Asian performance, with its dazzling display of total theatre, has continued to attract the majority of attention outside Asia, at times eclipsing modern theatre in the vision of general theatrical practitioners, scholars, and teachers in the West. Consequently, while the book devotes significant portions to traditional performance, its dedicated sections on modern and contemporary Asian performance are designed to attract attention to this significant and vibrant component of the Asian theatrical fabric.

On the other hand, current scholarship has also contested previous tendencies to dichotomize traditional and modern Asian theatres and has instead focused on the fluid hybridity between them. As attested by a number of recent studies (Mee 2008; Tian 2008; Brandon 2009; Diamond 2012; Liu 2013), the division between traditional and modern theatre has been blurry at best throughout the twentieth century and well into the new millennium. To start with, the so-called traditional theatres have continued their evolution after the onset of modernity, partially in response to colonialism (Cohen 2010), nationalism (Goldstein 2007; Brandon 2009), and globalization (Diamond 2012).

One of the landmark studies over the past decade was James Brandon's debunking of the myth of kabuki stopping the writing and staging of new plays by the end of the 19th century. Relying on contemporary archives and publications, Brandon convincingly documented kabuki's active participant of Japan's imperial war efforts and demonstrated that kabuki only stopped staging new plays after WWII as a deliberate effort to evade American occupation authority's demand for democratic kabuki. In 2006, Brandon published a 110-page article in *Asian Theatre Journal* titled

"Myth and Reality: A Story of Kabuki during American Censorship, 1945-1949." Using archival records from the kabuki producer Shōchiku Company, he showed that the company adopted a "classics-only" policy against American occupation authorities' demand for democratic kabuki and protect Japanese culture from American contamination, which inadvertently fashioned "the repertory into today's fossilized, 'classics-only' configuration" we see today (Brandon 2006: 2). Three years later, Brandon broadened the scope of kabuki's role in Japan's imperialist adventures in the book *Kabuki's Forgotten War: 1931-1945*, in which he used over 100 new kabuki plays up until the end of the war in August 1945 to argue that "the institution of kabuki actively participated in Japan's wartime adventures between 1931 and 1945" (Brandon 2009: x). Specifically, his focus on the period of Japan's "Fifteen-Year War" (1931-1945), through Shōchiku performance records and contemporary publications, revealed "title after title indicat[ing] a war play set in the present time: *Three Heroic Human Bombs* (1932), *Secret Agent of a Nation at War* (1938), *Tank Commander Nishizumi* (1940), *Submarine No. 6* (1941), and *Pearl Harbor* (1942)" (ix).

Brandon's work on kabuki's inexorably intertwined relationship with Japanese imperialism also reflects similar studies on the fate of traditional theatre in other Asian countries during the continent's tumultuous modern era that underscores traditional theatre's continued evolution, both voluntary and forced during Asia's modernity process. Chapter 22 of the Routledge handbook titled "Traditional Asian Performance in Modern and Contemporary Times" examines such cases in India, Japan, China, Korea, and Southeast Asia.

In the case of China, for example, Joshua Goldstein's *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-Creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937* (2007) provides new sources unseen in English scholarship on some of *jingju* (Beijing opera)'s most innovative decades well into China's colonial modernity. Another scholarly focus of the past decade has been China's attempt to reform traditional theatre known as *xiqu* (song drama) in the 1950s right after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, with several book projects in the making, including mine.

I consider the *xiqu* reform campaign as part of the modern intellectual movement that attempted since the turn of the twentieth century to modernize *xiqu*'s dramatic content, performance conventions and organizational systems. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, the reformers censored or revised a great number of *xiqu* plays and techniques; reorganized the star-based private troupes into collective- or state-run companies; removed the power of play selection and creation from star actors and reassigned it to the newly created functions of the playwrights, directors, and composers; eliminated market-oriented functionaries such as the agents; and converted traditional training systems into modern academies. While the repertoire censorship has been abandoned since the 1980s, the major elements of the reform have remained intact: the contemporary *xiqu* ecosystem includes modernized scripts, the supremacy of the playwright/director/composer, and state-owned companies and academies. The consequences are manifold: Many traditional scripts (or parts of them) and acting techniques are no longer in performance. Actors,

especially star actors, whose physical memory of repertoire and techniques that were traditionally the center of play selection and creation, have been superseded by directors, playwrights, and composers. The net result is significantly diminished repertoire and performance techniques, and the absence of star actors capable of creating their own performance styles through new signature plays that had traditionally been one of the hallmarks of a performance school.

The studies from Brandon, me and others underscore one of the dangers of the binary view of traditional and modern theatres, the ideological blind spot that conceal theatre's complicity to ideological zealotry and nationalist atrocities. Indeed, until the recent decade or two, due to the dominance of literary studies and often inadvertent Europe-centrism, the study of modern spoken drama in Asia often preferred the purely Western forms of politically progressive, foreignizing and literary translation, and realistic performance supposedly based on the Stanislavsky System. More recent studies have challenged such tendencies that denigrate attempts by modern theatre artists at literary and performance hybridities as crowd-pleasing ploys that were artistically inferior to those adhering to the western original. Such works include studies on Japanese *shinpa*, particularly Kawakami Otojirō and Sadayakko (Kano 2001), Matthew Cohen's book titled *The Komedie Stamboel: Popular Theater in Colonial Indonesia, 1891-1903* (Cohen 2006), and my 2013 book titled *Performing Hybridity in Colonial-Modern China* that focuses on the first, hybrid form of modern Chinese spoken drama of the 1910s called *wenmingxi* (civilized drama). Specifically, I argued for the recognition of different forms of hybridy, in terms of ideology (nationalism and commercialism), translation (literary translation vs. localized adaptation), dramatic literature (complete scripts vs. scenarios and improvisation), and performance (realism vs. conventionalization, gender-appropriate casting vs. female impersonation) (Liu 2013).

Today, much of the traditional theatre in Asia has continued to respond to the challenges of the new century, as exemplified by Sedana's report on Balinese artists' response to a 2002 terrorist bombing by staging a new *wayang kulit* puppet play in an effort to renew natural harmony (Sedana 2005) or the efforts of other contemporary Southeast Asian artists in braiding traditional and modern forms, as Catherine Diamond documented in her book titled *Communities of Imagination: Contemporary Southeast Asian Theatres* (Diamond 2012).

Consequently, in recognition of this new trend in scholarship, the recent *Modern Asian Theatre and Performance 1900-2000*, which I coauthored, regards the history of modern theatre in much of Asia as encompassing four periods: 1) initial "intercultural adaptation, appropriation and hybridization," 2) "modernist orthodoxy" of speech-only illusionist realism, 3) "emergence of nationalistic culture and identity from the sixties to the eighties," and 4) "contemporary pluralism and theatrical globalism" (Wetmore 2014: 12-13). In other words, despite the fact that modern theatre is often known in Asian countries as "spoken drama" or "new drama," its fate has been intertwined with traditional performance from its beginning despite futile attempts to rid itself of indigenous influence in mid-century (Rolf and

Gillespie 1992; Oh 1999; Poulton 2001, 2010; Cohen 2006; Mee 2008; Liu 2013). Two chapters in Part Four of the Routledge Handbook examine this interrelatedness between traditional and modern theatres from different angles: 18 (The Beginning of Spoken Theatre in Asia: Colonialism and Colonial Modernity) and 21 (Modern Asian Theatre and Indigenous Performance).

One area where spectacular traditional Asian theatre and Western spoken drama have often inspired each other is the intercultural Shakespearean productions of the recent decades, which has been a particularly fascinating area of research, having inspired two databases with full-length videos (A|S|I|A; MIT) and many studies (Sasayama, Mulryne, and Shewring 1998; Minami, Carruthers, and Gillies 2001; Li 2003; Trivedi and Bartholomeusz 2005; Kishi and Bradshaw 2006; Huang 2009; Kennedy and Yong 2010; Trivedi and Minami 2010). In China alone, there are at least four book on the topic of Shakespeare in China (Zhang 1996; Li 2003; Levith 2006; Huang 2009). Chapter 23 of the Routledge handbook provides a survey of Shakespearean productions in India, the Sinophone region (China, Hong Kong, Taiwan), Japan, and Southeast Asia.

Of the two online databases, the Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive (or A|S|I|A, http://a-s-i-a-web.org/index.php) is "a collaborative, multilingual online archive of performance materials… supported by several government and academic bodies, with contributions from theatre companies in East and Southeast Asia." It is put together by a group of Asian Shakespeare scholars from Singapore, Japan, China and Korea under the direction of Yong Li Lan, a professor of the National University of Singapore and co-editor of *Shakespeare in Asia: Contemporary Performance* (2010). The other database is Shakespeare Performance in Asia (http://web.mit.edu/shakespeare/asia/), which is hosted at MIT and developed by Peter S. Donaldson of MIT and Alexa Huang of George Washington University. Both provide full length videos, although the former, with its wide collaboration and support from governments and institutions, hosts more videos with better qualities, multi-language translations, and production data.

Another area of scholarly focus of the past decade, which is also related to modernity in Asian theatre, is gender performance and the rise of actresses in the twentieth century in both traditional and modern theatre. While female impersonation as a result of premodern censorship of actresses in most Asian cultures has long drawn critical attention, the fate of actresses who (re)emerged in the past century, together with their often complex relations with the theatrical establishment, including female impersonators, and the society at large have been the focus of a number of studies in recent years (Kano 2001; Edelson 2009; Goodlander 2010; Singh and Mukherjee 2013; Madhavan 2015). The latest example is this year's volume, *Women in Asian Performance: Aesthetics and Politics*, edited by Arya Madhavan, a female performer of the ancient Indian form *kutiyattam* and senior lecture at the University of Lincoln in England. This collaborative effort is divided into three sections that are respectively titled erasure, intervention, and reconstruction. Madhavan employs "erasure" as the core critical concept instead of "absence" from

Western gender performance theory because "[a]bsence indicates the non-existence, while erasure signifies a traceable past of 'her' presence, a possibility, a hope of existence and a historical 'trace'" (Madhavan 2017: 8). This frame perceptively points to patriarchal suppression of the female body on stage in both historical and contemporary practices. Even today, women are not seen on the professional stages of *kathakali*, noh, or kabuki even as *jingju* was forced to open its doors to the actresses in early twentieth century. Madhavan calls the reentry of the actresses and their reintegration of male performers, at times against staunch resistance of patriarchal cultural codes, as "intervention."

The same is true in modern spoken drama where women often co-existed on stage with female impersonators in the earlier, hybrid era. Here, Ayako Kano's 2001 book *Acting Like a Woman in Modern Japan* studies two such pioneers in Japan, Kawakami Saddayako of the first, hybrid form *shinpa* (new school drama) and Matsui Sumako of the later, canonically Western form *shingeki* (new drama). According to Kano, it was the separate performance of Oscar Wilde's *Salome* in 1914 by Sadayakko and Matsui, specifically its climactic Dance of Seven Veils, that established the advantage of the female body on Japan's modern stage (Kano 2001). On the Chinese side, my *Performing Hybridity in Colonial-Modern China* discusses the bias against the emerging actresses and their competition against the dominant female impersonators in *wenmingxi* in the 1910s Shanghai (Liu 2013). For China's later, canonically Western *huaju* (spoken drama), the journal *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* published in 2015 a special issue, which I co-guest edited, on Hong Shen, one of the three so-called *huaju* "founding fathers" who returned to Shanghai in 1922 after studying theatre in the US. The issue sheds new light on a number of gender performance issues such as the circumstances around his introduction of actresses to replace female impersonators at the Shanghai Stage Club as well as the Fudan University at a time when many other universities and schools in China still segregated male and female campuses and forbade gender-integrated casting (Liu 2015: 106-71).

To high such scholarship on gender performance, Chapters 19 of the Routledge handbook is devoted to "Gender Performance and the Rise of Actresses in Traditional Theatre" while Chapter 20 discusses "Gender Performance and the Rise of Actresses in Modern Theatre.

Finally, the handbook's last chapter is devoted to American-style musicals in Asia, a fast growing genre with palpable popular appeal, especially to the young generation, as well as the capacity for probing deconstructions of cultural identity and nationalist myths. In a sign of the field being pushed forward by new blood, I added this chapter after listening to several presentations at the AAP conference by graduate students, who ended up contributing sections to chapter, including one on Southeast Asia by Caleb Goh who wrote his dissertation on Asian voice in musical theatre in the US and Singapore at the Edith Cowan University in Australia.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Asian theatre studies in the West has come a long way since its emergence as an academic field in the second half of the twentieth century. In this sense, it is still a relatively new field that is as energetic and vigorous as its founding days. As I alluded in the previous paragraph, a significant force of our recent growth comes from graduate students from Asian who are writing their dissertations or working in Asia, Europe, and North America. Their capability in native language and culture as well as experience in rigorous academic training have significantly expanded the breadth and depth of Asian theatre scholarship. At the same time, we are also working to expand Asian theatre into the general theatre curriculum in Western universities so that more and more theatre graduates will be familiar with spectacular Asian theatre traditions and contemporary practices. Indeed, such an integrated curriculum is gaining more traction as theatre programs are beginning to realize the significance of Asian theatre to the understanding and practice of intercultural performance in the globalized twenty-first century.

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