

Transfigurations: *Hamlet* in Chinese Opera

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Hamlet is one of Shakespeare's most popular plays. In the four hundred years since it was performed in about 1600, there were numerous adaptations by others. The first adaption of *Hamlet* into Chinese opera, in 1916, was entitled *The Prince's Revenge*. From then on, there have been various versions of *The Prince's Revenge* giving a Chinese interpretation of this story, presented by companies such as Contemporary Legend Theater, Shanghai Yueju Opera Theatre and Shanghai Peking Opera Theatre. These theaters made a lot of changes to the original for different reasons – the screenwriter's creative idea, the characteristic of the theater, the actor's traits, the performance time, etc. *Hamlet* acted in the style of Chinese opera has presented many transfigurations and become “another kind of performance” both in style and meaning.

The Prince's Revenge played by Contemporary Legend Theater not only overturned the original play but also created an innovative type of drama. The prince did not experience the practical or psychological conflicts that Hamlet had to face. The former was simple and straightforward, an invariable character who reflected the restricted traditional model of a Chinese prince. The version played by Shanghai Yueju Opera Theatre featured Yin Guifang, a famous male *xiao sheng*. The portrait of Hamlet's psychology disappeared, adding a sentimental mood characteristic of Yueju Opera. Hamlet's dilemma was diverted to a romantic love story, turning him into a gentle, cultured and affectionate prince, and eliminating the self-analytical, introspective elements. The version played by Shanghai Peking Opera Theatre brought all the techniques of *wu sheng* and *lao sheng* into full play and highlighted the embellishment of a dramatic mood at the expense of narrative. The story was told with several extracts from the original. Its way of performance made it look like a “show” rather than a play.

This article compares the essential differences in structures, characters and the crucial arrangement of “story within a story” between the original and the adaptations. It elaborates on the deconstruction and reconstruction of *Hamlet* in Chinese opera, the hash of characters in a new form and the original and derivative functions of “story within a story”. Three versions of the adaptations were not exactly the same as the original. However, they played an important role in the development and innovation of Chinese operas and theaters. *The Revenge of the Prince* accentuated the value of cross-cultural adaptation.

Key words: cross-cultural adaptation *Hamlet* *The Prince's Revenge* Chinese opera Shakespeare