International Journal of Asian Studies (2022), **19**, 135–151
doi:10.1017/S147959142100019X

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Dragon King in a contentious sea: Sino–Japanese intercultural theatre in 1989

Josh Stenberg[1]* and Tove Björk[2]

[1]The University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia and [2]Saitama University, Saitama, Japan
*Corresponding author. Email: josh.stenberg@sydney.edu.au

(Received 9 January 2021; revised 14 April 2021; accepted 19 April 2021)

Abstract

Interculturalism in theatre, although much critiqued, is an inevitable category for understanding theatre practices and histories. Critical approaches have highlighted the complicity of "hegemonic" Euro-American-led theatre with imperialist structures. Newer critiques tend to focus on encounters in European languages in multicultural cities, and to posit multilateral non-Western collaborations as liberated from colonial power structures. This paper argues that it is necessary to fundamentally rethink interculturalism in theatre by taking seriously the long-standing major theatrical exchanges which do not reference, and are not principally influenced by, Western theatre's sphere. Considering a major example of Sino–Japanese collaboration from 1989, *Ryū-Ō* (Dragon King), we place it within the genealogy of the two countries' long-standing theatrical practices of interculturalism. Ryu-O, a kabuki-*jingju* collaboration, shows that intra-Asian interculturalism has its own genealogy and is neither new nor beholden to Euro-American models, nor necessarily characterized by the idealism easily invested in overtly counter-hegemonic projects. By examining the show's production process, performance and reception, we re-evaluate how interculturalism in theatre is conceived, urging serious engagement with areas of practice historically grounded and fully independent of both "hegemonic" and "new" intercultural theatre tendencies.

Key words: jingju; kabuki; intercultural theatre; Sino-Japanese relations

Introduction

Interculturalism in theatre, although a "theoretical, theatrical and cultural minefield,"[1] nevertheless remains an indispensable category for understanding theatrical creation. It describes a major and common feature of theatrical creation: exchanges across cultures, including the introduction and representation of as well as collaboration with the cultural Other. Serious engagement with interculturalism in theatre fosters a robust resistance to any neat national and ethnic silos retrofitted by the nation state onto theatrical heritage, since all national theatres reveal themselves to be cross-pollinating and interpenetrating. This, in turn, undercuts attempts to perpetuate and project a national essence into an imagined future, since cultural products, once understood interculturally, are less amenable to use in essentialist narratives.

But, defining interculturalism in theatre is an area of frequent skirmishing. This is in part because the concept has been continually updated and adjusted over the last half-century of theatre studies, but also due to a fundamental disjuncture: interculturalism in theatre from the outset and as continually adjusted generally appears as a reflection of certain *recent* changes in stage practice. The phenomenon it seeks to describe, however – the mixing of theatre cultures, their narratives and materials – is as old as theatre itself, and located across a much broader geography than that sliver of the performance

[1]Holledge and Tompkins 2000, p. 10.

world habitually examined by theatre studies in European languages. Laudable attempts to correct or modify "intercultural theatre" tend to extend the concept by actualizing the timeline and broadening the scope to refer to, newer, more local, expansive or egalitarian, practices. This ends up shifting focus and sometimes boundaries to capture work in a recent and select group of multicultural, cosmopolitan, but again usually European-language-speaking, cities. But despite that work, as well as the long-standing efforts of Asian theatre specialists to show that interculturalism is not a Euro-American phenomenon, the study of interculturalism in theatre is still in need of a fundamental reality check. Theatre studies attention needs to cross further seas, geographic and temporal, if it is to describe a real feature of theatre rather than immediate subsets – cosmopolitan, Anglophone or subtitled for Anglo consumption – that are its stock cast.

As an artistic practice there can be no sensible beginning or end to "intercultural theatre," but as a category of theatre studies research "intercultural theatre" has an intellectual kick-off appearing in the 1980s. A key impetus for this category was volumes emerging from theatre studies in Europe in the 1990s.[2] Erika Fischer-Lichte's introduction to a 1990 volume began: "In recent years, theatres of widely different cultures have shared an increasing trend of transplanting elements of foreign theatre traditions into their own productions."[3] Fischer-Lichte then cites several Western directors who would grow to be closely associated with the phenomenon: Ariane Mnouchkine, Peter Brook, Robert Wilson and Eugenio Barba. Several Asian correlates are also mentioned: Chinese Shakespeares, Japanese Greek tragedy and Indian Molière. Given the relentless and persistent Eurocentrism of theatre studies in European languages, this kind of branching out was path-breaking, and drew attention to a real and interesting phenomenon.

But, it did not describe something new; it was the giving of a new name to an old phenomenon. Indeed, specialists in East Asian theatre have pointed out that theatre is "inherently and perpetually intercultural" and that in recent decades "inter-Asian exchanges have grown in prevalence, both in practice and in the scholarly materials about them."[4] The theatres of Asia have never been discrete, and exchanges and migrations characterize form and content in the East, South and Southeast Asian realms of theatre from a very early period. The critiques of intercultural theatre which later emerged for to interrogate "Western appropriations of non-Western cultural forms in service of falsely universalizing claims that extend rather than intervene in imperialist cultural agendas,"[5] recognized an important dynamic. Other interventions pushed further, denouncing intercultural theatre for pursuing imperialism by cultural means,[6] or for extending hegemony by combining "First World capital and brainpower" with "Third World raw material and labour, and Western classical texts with Eastern performance traditions."[7]

Indispensable as such critiques are, they continue to fundamentally conceive of intercultural theatre as recent, and as being characterized principally by Western or Northern power appropriations of Eastern or Southern culture. Even as they rightly call for reassessment, they reenergize West-East and North-South binaries, reinscribing them as the fundamental dynamic of interculturalism. Asian theatre scholars have sought to rectify this imbalance. Thus, Rossella Ferrari, in her recent study of transnational Chinese theatres, posits "an extended 'transnational Asian' type of intercultural network, which both contains and expands the latitudes of 'transnational Chinese'."[8] Perhaps somewhat optimistically, Chengzhou He even hails such an "East Asian Paradigm of Interculturalism" as apt to foster "connecting instead of othering, sharing instead of influencing, complementing instead of exploiting" in intercultural theatre.[9]

[2]Fischer-Lichte 1990; Pavis 1995.
[3]Fischer-Lichte 1990, p. 11.
[4]Wetmore, Liu and Mee 2014, p. 266.
[5]Farfan and Knowles 2011.
[6]Bharucha 2000.
[7]Lei 2011, p. 571.
[8]Ferrari 2020, p. 5.
[9]He 2016, p. 219.

Seeing Western auteur-centred interculturalism as the defining expression of interculturalism in theatre is a result of the positionality of European-language academe. However, there are many areas of theatrical activity, including overtly intercultural ones, where Western-auteur intercultural theatre is practically unknown. Western academe and journalism gravitate naturally to large-scale production with the involvement of Western directors; few of them outside the regional specialties read in Asian languages. Engaged Western figures such as Richard Schechner or Marvin Carlson interact with that section of Asian theatres that are outward-facing and that are translated and interpreted for their benefit. Although laudable, this is only a tiny proportion of Asian theatre practice.

In the considerably autonomous worlds of Mainland Chinese *xiqu* 戏曲 ("Chinese opera," including *jingju* 京剧 "Peking Opera") or kabuki 歌舞伎 in Japan, Western-auteur works are peripheral to theatre activity and knowledge. Especially, when occurring outside of Asia, they are close to unknown for general audiences and to many practitioners. A medium-sized Chinese city such as Nanjing has regular *jingju* and other *xiqu* performers from four or five state troupes and more from amateurs; a Japanese city of similar national importance, such as Nagoya, has regular kabuki, *noh* 能 and *kyōgen* 狂言 performances from major acting houses. Neither city's theatregoers are regularly exposed to "hegemonic" forms of theatre in which prominent Western theatre workers make use of local theatre practices for the purposes of intercultural éclat – these aren't the audiences that auteurs are trying to impress. What, then, is a hegemony that has no penetration, does not alter practice, and does not come to the attention of those putatively subject to it?

In the last two decades, a theoretical tendency termed "new interculturalism" has emerged, with a focus on "the continuing renegotiation of cultural values and the reconstitution of individual and community identities and subject positions."[10] Scholars using the term have pointed out that "Intercultural theatre, as a Western performance discourse defined by Western theoretical frameworks, is experiencing an evolution,"[11] and instead "is driven from below by minority and subaltern voices, whether gathered in diverse, contemporary urban locations or excavated from the recesses of colonial archives."[12] This account, however, still presumes that Western power is part of the central dynamic, and as such still does not do justice to the long and ongoing history of intra-Asian theatre interculturalism that is caught neither by "hegemonic" nor by "new" interculturalism.

An accurate vision of both Asian theatres and of interculturalism in theatre depends on taking seriously interactions that are not initiated by the West, and do not involve it in either its hegemonic or multicultural incarnations. Thus, although wholeheartedly agreeing that it is imperative not to "lose sight of the power dynamics and historical genealogies"[13] that generate intercultural theatre, we suggest that there is also major lacuna at the heart of "new" interculturalism, even as it seeks to replace hegemonic or Western-auteur interculturalism. A focus remaining on recent theatre in European languages in many ways perpetuates East-West binaries and North-South binaries to the exclusion of important dyads such as China–Japan or India–Indonesia, to name only two major examples. Carol Sorgenfrei points to the laudable trend of including chapters on Asian and African theatre in theatre history textbooks, but at the same time raises concerns for how these chapters are treated as parentheses, or exotic oddities, rather than included as key factors in the overall discourse.[14] She also offers a solution to the problem of "theoretical imperialism" by showing the usefulness of applying both European and Asian theoretical paradigms when analysing *any* play, be it Western or Asian,

[10]Knowles 2010, pp. 4–5. McIvor (2016, p. 5) gives the following overview of the term's development in her introduction to *Migration and Performance in Contemporary Ireland*:

> In 2002, Una Chaudhuri celebrated a "new interculturalism" in the work of theatre and performance scholars including Julie Holledge, Joanne Tompkins, Rustom Bharucha and Johannes Birringer…This book continues the investigation of this "new interculturalism" extended even more recently in the work of Ric Knowles, Daphne Lei, Leo Cabranes-Grant, Hae-kyung Um, Marcus Cheng Chye Tan, Christopher Balme and Diana Looser among others.

[11]Tan 2012, p. 10.

[12]McIvor 2019, p. 1.

[13]*Ibid*., p. 5.

[14]Sorgenfrei 1997, pp. 223–26.

to enrich the possible interpretations.[15] However, more than 20 years after Sorgenfrei's intervention, the structure of new work shows that there is still a danger of tokenism.[16]

No one case study can illustrate the whole scale of the problem, but we make an effort to show how interculturalism in theatre can be usefully remodelled by considering a prominent and interesting exchange between Chinese and Japanese traditional theatres that has its own genealogy and total independence from Euro-American intercultural theatre. This was a collaboration between *jingju* performers and kabuki performers in 1989: *Ryū-Ō* (リュウオー, *Dragon King*, 龙王 *Longwang*). Our consideration of this episode, one of many exchanges between Chinese and Japanese theatres in the last century – itself only the most recent phase in a history of performance and theatre exchanges more than a millennium old[17] – intervenes in the debate surrounding "intercultural theatre" by showing simultaneously three things: that intercultural theatre need not constitute the hegemony of one art or culture over the other, nor does it depend on Western progressive critique to avoid hegemony; that multicultural cities speaking European languages are not the only or indeed the primary sites of overtly intercultural theatre[18]; that examples of intercultural theatre have genealogies not cognizant of and not substantially indebted to the Western auteurs associated, for better or for worse, with the practice. Taken together we would like to suggest that theatre studies have at present so far only scratched the surface of interculturalism in theatre, creating an unfortunate gap between the self-evidence of interculturalism as a continuing, widespread and fundamental practice, and the standard theatre studies account of it as a special and recent anomaly generated by neo-colonial geopolitical relations and now extended (as new or anti-hegemonic) to even later critical responses to such relations.

Kabuki and Jingju: theatres of postwar diplomacy

Japan did not switch its official recognition from the Republic of China on Taiwan to the People's Republic of China in Beijing until 1972, but informal cultural relations between Japan and the People's Republic formed soon after the latter's establishment in 1949. During the 1950s, relations were strained due not only to the recent trauma of Japan's invasion of China but also geopolitical and ideological divides. Nevertheless, Japan formed an important part of the PRC's lively cultural diplomacy in the "Seventeen Years" that preceded the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Many Japanese "groups and individuals…had built up connections on the mainland in business and cultural fields, and were keen to maintain the links despite the Cold War ideological divide which had appeared between the countries."[19] One Chinese-American analyst of the period diagnosed Japanese outreach to China as motivated simultaneously by "the nostalgia for China, the sense of kinship, and the guilt complex,"[20] and throughout the Cold War such factors motivated many Japanese in the cultural sphere to seek closer relations with the PRC.

A prominent element of the informal contacts in the early PRC was theatrical. Theatrical exchanges were a part of cultural diplomacy for Cold War powers large and small, from the United States and the Soviet Union to Indonesia, Canada and Yugoslavia,[21] and both China and Japan had deployed

[15]Sorgenfrei 2007, pp. 312–24.

[16]Consider, for instance, the structure of an influential and indispensable book such as *Theatre & Interculturalism* (Knowles 2010). Although the introduction states that "theatre has always been intercultural," the core chapters are "Brecht and the materialists," "Artaud and his doubles" and "The west and the rest," which clearly shows how much the discourse is conducted from an Euro-American standpoint. The conclusion discusses the problem of "Decolonizing the stage," but the example and theoretical stances suggest that intercultural theatre is still implicitly defined as a cross-section of ethnic theatre that is available to Euro-American auteurs.

[17]Terauchi 2016, pp. 4–6.

[18]Outside the Euro-American or Australasian sphere, the emphasis still tends towards a focus on cities such as Singapore and Hong Kong, which are part of the Anglosphere as well as the Sinosphere, rather than cities such as Jakarta, Tokyo, Hanoi, Kunming, Taitung or Tashkent, where interculturalism often does not involve English at all.

[19]Vyas 2020, p. 5.

[20]Leng 1958, p. 82.

[21]Canning 2015; Prevots 2012.

traditional theatre for cultural diplomacy purposes already in the pre-war period, including *jingju* actor Mei Lanfang's famous tours of Japan in 1919 and 1925 and leading reformist kabuki actor Ichikawa Sadanji's tour to the Soviet Union in 1928. Ichikawa Ennosuke II's kabuki troupe toured China for the first time in 1955 in exchange for inviting a *jingju* troupe to Japan in 1956, thus establishing important cultural ties.[22]

By the time Japan recognized the PRC in 1972, the Cultural Revolution had eased and the normalization of relations rendered further cultural exchanges possible as the PRC resumed international cultural diplomacy on a large and state-led scale. Under Deng Xiaoping, the PRC's Reform and Opening Up (from 1978) policies brought about substantial Sino–Japanese collaborations in many cultural fields. In the area of *xiqu* and *jingju*, large PRC troupes were once again sent abroad with considerable frequency, bearing messages of goodwill. Again one of the main target areas for collaboration and reception in the 1980s was Japan.

Ryū-Ō must thus certainly be seen in the context of fraught but generally warming relations. During the late 1980s, when our case study, *Ryū-Ō*, was performed, a series of troubles continued to strain Sino–Japanese relations. This included issues such as the treatment of Japanese imperialism in Chinese and Japanese textbooks and Japanese prime ministerial visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, which anger China.[23] In 1987, a fight over the right for Chinese students to stay in a dormitory previously reserved for Taiwanese students had also been a problem. Official support is thus legible as an effort to improve relations and defuse such tensions, and on the whole, the public image of China in Japan was at a post-war high.[24] Although the Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989 would set political relations back substantially only a few weeks after the end of *Ryū-Ō*'s run, theatre contacts were maintained.

On the Chinese side, international cultural collaboration by a state-owned unit such as the National Peking Opera Theater of China (NPOC) 中国京剧院 and its employees such as *Ryū-Ō* co-lead Li Guang 李光, was considered desirable in political quarters but tightly controlled, and the successful execution of any such project indicates considerable state support. The Japanese partners furnished the cash, although certainly with government approval: The Shochiku Company's investment in the production was announced as 1 billion yen (equivalent to roughly 11 million USD in 2021 dollars).[25] In the programme for the show, Lü Ruiming 吕瑞明, then the director of the NPOC, specifically thanked Nagayama Takeomi 永山武臣, the director of Shochiku, for his generous investment and efforts in promoting the show and his noble wish "to create a show which works as a platform for cultural exchange and which will reach out to the world."[26]

Several months before the premiere, Li Xinghai 李兴海, an NPOC set designer, had written that the project constituted a "cooperative and pioneering undertaking of eastern classical theater of major historical significance, which, though many creative difficulties also exist, but in an atmosphere brimming with hope and trust, and under the careful fostering by dramatists of the two countries, this lively and extraordinary work will be certain to shine gloriously on the world stage!"[27] Similarly, Fang

[22]The plan for this cultural exchange had been proposed by the Shochiku Company, likely with future potential economic profit in mind, as they viewed these cultural ties as an entrance to the Chinese market to sell their films and music recordings as well. Although the Japanese Foreign Office initially showed scepticism, the project eventually gained the support of both the Prime Minister (Hatoyama Ichiro) and the leader of the main opposition party (Socialist Party Chairman Suzuki Mosaburo). In China, both Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai gave their approval. Both sides saw the benefits such as cultural exchange, despite or perhaps because of the lack of official diplomatic ties at the time (Mogi 1992, pp. 59–69).

[23]All the souls lost in war, including those of convicted WWII criminals, are enshrined there. Both North Korea and South Korea have also protested such visits.

[24]Wan 2006.

[25]Li 1988, p. 54; Lü and Nakawa 2006, p. 58. A private consortium which owns a large part of Japan's entertainment industry, Shochiku includes most of the kabuki theatres. They operate independently of the Japanese government, but pride themselves on having the government's blessing, and were during the post-war period considered to be a sort of unofficial "Ministry of Cultural Diplomacy" (Thornbury 2001, p. 215).

[26]Lü 1989, p. 38.

[27]Li 1988, p. 55.

Jie 方杰 writing in *People's Daily* quoted Japanese writer and noted Sinophile Inoue Yasushi 井上靖: "The results show that the motivation arises from the solid sea-crossing friendship between Mister Ennosuke and Mister Li Guang. It also arises from the hard work of people involved from China and Japan to nurture this friendship into a new creation. Cultural communication is in any era achieved by the interactions between person and person, between heart and heart."[28]

The project's rhetoric had to be one of international cooperation and friendship, a focus that was evident from the outset and was the major theme of the play. The claim to international cooperation existed independently of the considerable friction and struggle that occurred before the project could be staged. The project was also identified as a unique project due to its programme of collaboration rather than simply of hosting the other's troupes, recognizing it as "a sign of deepening international cultural exchange": that would also help "each to develop their theatrical arts, ceaselessly deepening the friendship between theatre people in the two countries."[29]

Ryū-Ō and Sino–Japanese exchanges

The project was evidently deemed in PRC state interest and was made possible through goodwill on both official sides. Its impetus and specific genealogy, however, also has much to do with historic Sino–Japanese theatrical links, specifically the revival of mid-century *jingju*/kabuki contacts. It was no accident that Tokyo-based Omodakaya 沢鷹屋 acting house, under the leadership of Ichikawa Ennosuke III 市川猿之助, was the principal driver behind the project, as they had been of the 1950s tours. The Omodakaya acting house is in kabuki lineage terms a relative newcomer, with Ennosuke I appearing as a major actor in the late nineteenth century. The four generations of Ennosuke to date have all at times been on the periphery of kabuki establishment, while at the same time gathering fame for their innovative approaches which have at times taken "entirely uncharted directions in order to restore kabuki's original creative flexibility."[30] Ennosuke II, for example, experimented with European theater in the 1930s, and his grandson, Ennosuke III established his own brand of kabuki called Super Kabuki, integrating techniques from musicals and films into his productions. The *Ryū-Ō* project also fits into this history of and reputation for innovation and experimentation.[31]

Ichikawa Ennosuke II had participated in the kabuki-*jingju* exchanges of 1955 and 1956, and these had played a major role in the reestablishment of informal relations between the PRC and Japan.[32] Kabuki toured Beijing (2, 5–13 October 1955), Shanghai (17–18 October) and Guangzhou (24–25 October), showing the plays *Kanjinchō* 勧進帳 (Subscription Roll) and *Domo Mata* 吃又 (Matahei the Stutterer) and *Meoto Dōjōji* 男女道成寺 (Male and Female Dancers at the Dōjōji Temple).[33]

Evidently, the PRC government considered the tour a major cultural event. As the elder Ennosuke commented on an interview at the time in *The People's Daily*, the performances were "certain to assist [Sino–Japanese relations]. Anyone who says otherwise is lying." Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi attended, and met with kabuki administrators and performers after the show.[34] The troupe was seen off at the Beijing station by sixty *jingju* performers as well as leading writers Tian Han 田汉, Cao Yu 曹禺 and Zhao Shuli 赵树理. One of the leading *jingju* performers, Li Shaochun 李少春, wrote in the *Xiju Bao* 戏剧报 (Theatre Journal) in praise of the shows.[35]

[28]Fang 1989.
[29]Lin 1992, p. 59.
[30]Bach 1989, p. 80.
[31]Ennosuke III is today over eighty years of age, and uses the retirement name En' ō 猿翁, having handed over the management along with his name to Ennosuke IV in 2012. The current Ennosuke IV continues this tradition of innovation and presently stages shows based on popular manga and anime works, thereby enticing new spectators with his straightforward storylines and flashy stages shows (Hattori, Tomita and Hirosue 2011).
[32]Jacobs 2011.
[33]Mogi 1992, pp. 59–69.
[34]*Renmin ribao* 1955.
[35]Li 1955.

Scholarship in both Chinese and Japanese has tended to regard the *Ryū-Ō* production as emerging in the late 1980s as a direct result of a longstanding connection between *jingju* star Mei Lanfang and the Ennosuke family.[36] There is substantial evidence for this: a lifelong fan of *jingju*, Ennosuke III, then a teenager, had seen Mei Lanfang perform during his reciprocal Japan tour of 1956, watching twenty-six of the thirty shows the troupe performed in Tokyo.[37] He would record in the text *Jingju to watashi* 京劇と私 (Jingju and Me), included in the programme for *Ryū-Ō*, his "deep attraction" to the art.[38] A teenager newly enrolled at the Keio University High School that year, he skipped a lot of classes to see the shows of Mei Lanfang at the Kabuki-za theatre.

The elder Ennosuke had entertained Mei, Ouyang Yuqian 欧阳予倩 and other Chinese guests at home in 1956, performing kabuki dance scenes with son and grandson.[39] One of the scenes on that occasion was the dance piece *Urashima* 浦島 which is based on the popular Japanese folk tale in which the fisherman Urashima Taro visits the palace of the Dragon King located under the sea, a theme we shall see mirrored in the choice of narrative for *Ryū-Ō*. Ennosuke II had hoped to collaborate with Mei Lanfang, so Ennosuke III would have felt that collaboration with *jingju* placed him within both a family lineage and a history of kabuki theatre serving friendly Sino–Japanese relations.

Ennosuke sought as his collaborators the foremost *jingju* company in the PRC, at that time the NPOC.[40] As the PRC's premier theatre for *jingju* and indeed any kind of *xiqu*, the NPOC was heavily involved in cultural diplomacy endeavours, having undertaken numerous trips abroad. Moreover, the NPOC was – and is – one of the largest theatrical companies in the world, and one of the few PRC companies under national (rather than provincial or lower-level) cultural authority. This means that it can represent the nation at the highest level, but also that its participation is more closely subject to scrutiny and political control. In 1979, as visits from abroad became easier to arrange for the first time since the Cultural Revolution, Ennosuke III visited China, establishing a friendly relationship with Li Guang.[41] In 1986, Li Guang returned the visit, going to Tokyo to see Ennosuke's first Super Kabuki production *Yamato Takeru* ヤマトタケル in 1986 while on a performing tour of Japan.

Like Ennosuke III, Li Guang was at the apex of a remarkable career, having in 1986 won China's highest award for stage performance, the Plum Blossom Prize, in only the third iteration. In that same year, he had toured Japan, performing his signature role of the monkey king Sun Wukong 孫悟空 in *Danao Tiangong* 大鬧天宮 (Uproar in Heaven), a role that had fascinated Ennosuke as a boy when performed by Li Shaochun 30 years earlier. During Li's 1986 tour, Ennosuke formally proposed the joint performance, a proposal he followed up with a letter sent to Beijing later the same year, citing collaborations with a French opera company, which had been praised as "a shining artistic pearl of East-Western fusion" and which was evidence for a "the global trend 泛世界化 of the contemporary stage."[42] He furthermore expressed the confidence that "*jingju* and kabuki can work hand-in-hand to fully realise to their respective artistic characteristics and jointly open up new areas of drama, thereby not only setting a landmark for the new stage art of the 21st century, but also acting as a profoundly meaningful activity for Sino–Japanese cultural exchanges."

Ennosuke first proposed a show based on *Kokusen'ya kassen* 国姓爺合戦 (The Battles of Coxinga, known in Chinese as *Guoxingye dazhan* 国姓爷大战). With the help of Shochiku's producer Nakawa Shosuke 奈河彰輔, a newly written script based on Chikamatsu Monzaemon's 1715 original was

[36]Huang 2014; Shinagawa 2013.

[37]Ennosuke III himself states that he as a boy had been most impressed with Mei Lanfang's beautiful interpretation of Yang Guifei in *Guifei zuijiu* (貴妃醉酒 The Drunken Consort Yang), and equally fascinated by Li Shaochun 李少春's skillful fighting and singing.

[38]Ichikawa 1989, p. 36.

[39]Ma 1957, p. 10.

[40]Established in 1955, the troupe has been known since 2007 as the China National Peking Opera Company 中国国家京剧院 (Zhongguo guojia Jingjuyuan). Li Guang's father, Li Zongyi 李宗义, and wife Shen Jianjin 沈建瑾, are also members of the troupe.

[41]Ichikawa 2003, pp. 50–51.

[42]Li 1988.

translated and sent to Beijing in February 1987. However, Lü Ruiming, then the director of the NPOC, and Xia Huchen 夏虎臣, the vice-director, were sceptical about the suitability of this material. According to Ennosuke (cf. trad 呉) account, the Japanese side received the following response from the troupe: "In China, everybody is well-aware of the historical realities of Coxinga and the downfall of Ming dynasty, and the role of Wu Sangui 呉三桂 and other historical figures played at that time. This makes it difficult to treat the material as fiction, and we are afraid that we would lose the trust of the Chinese audience if we made the attempt."

Chinese sources basically concur, although the rationale for rejecting Coxinga is more carefully coded. Lü, after receiving the Chinese translation and extensive examination "exchanged views with relevant authorities and with Li Guang and expressed enthusiasm for Ichikawa Ennosuke's brilliant idea of collaborating. At the same time, because *Kokusen'ya kassen* is a work from 1715, it is limited by the conditions of the era and of geography, and its plot diverges too far from the historical reality, the evaluation of some historical figures also being debatable, and it is hoped that many options can be considered in choosing the topic."[43] This evasive answer must still have made it very clear that Coxinga was not considered an appropriate figure for the show and that the final approval for subject matter rested not with Li or even with Lü, but in the higher echelons of the PRC state apparatus. Li's and Ennosuke's roles in the production genesis are thus not symmetrical.

Indeed, the project could evidently have died there. Ennosuke, however, was not prepared to abandon it, returning to China in April 1987 especially to drive it forward. During his visit, both sides agreed that they would pursue a collaboration using a different narrative material. Then, in May, Lü proposed new material, and together they decided on developing a story using legends of the underwater palace of the Dragon King familiar to audiences in both in China and Japan, eventually to become *Ryū-Ō*. The Chinese characters were based on the Nezha narrative, well-known from the Ming novel *Fengshen Yanyi* 封神演义 (Investiture of the Gods) but also widely present in popular religion and theatre, including *jingju*. They were universally known to post-Cultural Revolution Chinese society, not least due to the 1979 animated film *Nezha Naohai* 哪吒闹海 (Prince Nezha's Triumph against Dragon King), which itself draws on operatic Nezha in its music and movement design. Although many other Nezha stories exist, including also a famous patricide tale, the elements adopted by *Ryū-Ō*, like the animated film, concerns the righteous struggles of the child Nezha against the depredations of the ocean-dwelling Dragon King upon the coastal peoples.

The principal Japanese character is based on a semi-divine figure Yamahiko 山彦 (Luck-of-the-Mountain), who in the eighth century imperial chronology *Kojiki* 古事記 (Ancient Matter) travels to the Dragon Palace 竜宮 kingdom to retrieve a lost fishing hook. Presumably, in order to highlight the play's maritime connections, his name has been changed to Umihiko 海彦 (Luck-of-the-Sea).[44] However, part of Chikamatsu Monzaemon's storyline from Coxinga's Battles, revolving around the hero gaining the necessary power to fulfil his goals thanks to self-sacrificing mothers and wives, was kept intact.

Production history and artistic conception

The scale of the production was by design spectacular, with over eighty kabuki performers and sixty *jingju* performers. Creating a show of such a size that furthermore operated in two different codes and two different languages, operating between countries with strained and high-profile relations, was naturally a delicate and complicated matter. Several trips were required: Ennosuke and the producer Nakawa travelled to Beijing in February 1988 to compare the scripts of each side and discuss the

[43] *Ibid*., p. 55.

[44] In *Kojiki*, the two brothers Umihiko and Yamahiko exchange their hunting gear. Yamahiko loses his brother's fishing hook but retrieves it with the help of the Dragon King. Umihiko still won't forgive him, so Yamahiko uses a pearl he got from the Dragon King to cause droughts and floods to torture his brother, until he gives up, and becomes his brother's servant, re-enacting his own drowning for his brother's pleasure. In *Ryū-Ō* they simply borrow the setting of the Dragon King's palace, and not the sibling rivalry story line, so it was probably considered simpler to just use the name Umihiko in the play.

performance schedule and certain economic problems on the Chinese side. The script on the Chinese side was undertaken by Lü Ruiming, and on the Japanese side by Nakawa.

The *jingju* troupe began making their props and costumes, with their own rehearsals beginning in July 1988. In August the same year, Ennosuke, Nakawa and a larger team travelled to confer with Lü as well as Li Guang and Li Xinghai, who was in charge of the artistic planning. Scripts continued to be worked on and translated. In December, Li Guang, Li Xinghai and musical director Tang Jirong 唐继荣 visited Tokyo.

In January 1989, nineteen members of the Japanese production team again visited Beijing to coordinate music and fight scenes. Rehearsals in Beijing continued until 16th February, after which Japanese and Chinese teams made their way to Japan. The Japanese team, meanwhile, returned to deal with difficulties regarding the stage set construction and rehearsal spaces, technical difficulties that were only overcome 3 days before the premiere.[45]

Over the course of the show's complex development, several issues surrounding artistic concept had to be resolved. Perhaps because Li had seen Super Kabuki and wanted to use the opportunity to experiment outside traditional *jingju*, the *jingju* troupe planned to use contemporary music instead of traditional *jingju* music, and amongst other things, use the popular Japanese folk song "Sakura sakura" for Nezha's suicide scene.[46] According to Ennosuke's account, they also intended to use black light installation and other very modern devices, whereas Ennosuke (despite using such modern devices in his previous Super Kabuki production Yamato Takeru – which Li Guang had seen) this time intended to explore the classical techniques of *jingju* and kabuki, and especially the traditional music to its full effect. Li Guang similarly had hoped to use either kabuki's flying mechanism or the stage lift for his enactment of the scene where Nezha flies to Japan. Ennosuke, however, thought it would be preferable to enact the flying scene as a dance scene.[47] Ennosuke ultimately convinced Li to do the dance scene with the promise of employing dry ice smoke to imply flying over clouds.

Other problems were of a more fundamentally technical nature: *jingju*'s soft stage surface made it impossible to use the stamping needed for kabuki acting, and made the use of kabuki's revolving stage and the stage lifts more complicated. Kabuki's flooring, on the other hand, is slippery and dangerous for the *jingju*'s acrobatic parts. Jingju actors were unaccustomed to using the whole width of the kabuki scene, and the 25 metre long *hanamichi* pathway through the audience was difficult for them to act on, so they had to invent a Chinese style "*roppo*" 六方[48] walk to cover the distance.

According to Ennosuke, in the beginning of the production process, the purpose of letting Chinese actors have lines in Japanese and Japanese actors speak some Chinese on stage was to make the audience laugh, however, during the process, breaking down the language barrier turned into real and actual tool of communication for the actors. Yuan argues that when popular lead actor Ennosuke spoke Chinese in the act when Umihiko arrives in China, it sent a strong message of his respect towards Chinese culture in general.

The music functioned in a similar fashion. For most of the play, *jingju* music was used in the acts starred by the *jingju* actors co-acting with kabuki actors, with the addition of kabuki's special effects sounds, and in acts led by kabuki actors, but co-acted by *jingju* actors, the relationship was the opposite. However, in the third act, Ennosuke and Li Guang performed a celebratory sword dance

[45]Ichikawa 2003, pp. 64–74; Li 1988; Yiding 1990.

[46]Ichikawa 2003, pp. 58–60.

[47]The prototype of a kabuki flying mechanism was first used over the stage in 1700 and developed to fly over the spectators in 1761. The mechanism is, however, not used just because there happens to be a flying scene in the play, but it is also a marker of hierarchy. Only lead actors get to fly, and since there were two lead actors in this case, either both – or none – of them could use it.

[48]*Roppō* 六方／六法 is a stylized form of walking – or rather jumping – down the *hanamachi* in which arms and legs are supposedly moving to point north-south-east-west-up-down. In reality is a swaggering walk using large arm movements and high knee lifts. This posing style of walking is associated with early seventeenth century street fighting gangs and popularized in kabuki. It is unclear exactly what is meant by a "Chinese style *roppō*" but one can assume it must be a flamboyant way of moving quickly down the *hanamachi*.

performed to *jingju* music (script), and at the end, Li Guang performed to Tokiwazu 常磐津 music and showed off a *mie* 見得 pose.[49]

Since Li Guang and Ennosuke were to some degree pulling in different directions, Ennosuke approached Lü with a request for support. Lü, who had been ailing and therefore at some remove from preparations, answered that Li Guang and his team were excited about this opportunity to work together and had gone a bit overboard with their plans. In the future, Ennosuke should consider himself the sole artistic director for the complete production, and Li Guang and the Chinese side acknowledged his right to make final decisions, likely because ultimately the project was funded by Shochiku and for Japanese consumption. Lü's cooperation ensured that the rest of the preparations went smoothly. In fact, although *Ryū-Ō* was Ennosuke's only cooperation with Li Guang, he would work again with Lü on *Shin Sangoku shi* 新三国志 (New Tale of The Three Kingdoms) 12 years later – when Sino–Japanese relations had recovered again from the Tiananmen Square incident.

Plotting a maritime brotherhood

The plot of the story drew on the Chinese tale of Nezha 哪吒 as it appeared in the Ming novel *Fengshen yanyi* 封神演义 (Investiture of the Gods) as well as the story of a fisherman Umihiko 海彦 (Ennosuke) from the *Kojiki* collection 古事記 (Ancient Matter). These two elements are held together, to judge from the script not always very smoothly, by the device of the Dragon King Ao Guang 敖光, who is threatened by Nezha's fabled skills and covets the beauty of the fisherman's wife. Played by a *jingju* painted face character, he lives in the East Sea and is the villain of both stories, with the result in this singular Sino–Japanese narrative that Nezha and Umihiko join forces. The Dragon King's motivation for executing two nefarious schemes at once is given as dissatisfaction with the tributes offered him by the people on either side.

Just as Umihiko's wife has been carried off, Nezha appears and the Chinese divine child and the Japanese fisherman swear blood brotherhood. Nezha foils the abduction but, as in *Fengshen yanyi* and the *jingju* plays that derive from it, in the process kills the Dragon King's son. As a result, he is obliged to commit suicide in the face of the Dragon King's threat to flood his home. Umihiko sets out to bring him back to life, which is ultimately accomplished with sacrifices and divine aid.

Although much was made, at the time and thereafter, of this being the first time that Chinese and Japanese traditional actors collaborated "on the same stage," and the claim that the show represented "a 'marvellous and harmonious fusion'"[50] many of the fourteen scenes were in one genre or the other, with more alternation between *jingju* and kabuki scenes than mixing on stage. Scenes taking place in the Chinese sphere, which in principle is set in the Shang Dynasty, were entirely acted by *jingju* characters, whereas the fisherman's story was acted entirely as kabuki. Combined scenes functioned mostly as comic interludes, such as when *jingju* character Lei Kai 雷開 goes tiger hunting on a donkey, presumably enacted by kabuki stage horse actors, or Lei Kai and his underling Zhang Yong 張勇 parody the *hanamichi* exit of Sagisaka Bannai, famous foolish character from the play *Kanadehon chūshingura* 仮名手本忠臣蔵 (Storehouse of Loyal Retainers), well known to the kabuki audience.[51]

Only when the two righteous characters vow brotherhood and join forces can they overcome the forces of evil, and at this point – with Li and Ennosuke – on stage together, that likely represented the symbolic high point of fusion or collaboration. The plot, featuring Japanese and Chinese characters fighting together against an external enemy (situated between the two countries), seems designed to highlight an image of Sino–Japanese solidarity (against the shadow of the war and contemporary conflicts).

[49]Yuan 2017, p. 27. A kabuki *mie* pose is a striking pose meant to attract the spectator's gaze to the actors' face, often performed by doing a three-stage head shake while physically imitating well known Buddhist deities, such as Acala or the Deva Kings (Takei 2000).

[50]Lü and Nakawa 2006, p. 58.

[51]Mori 1989, pp. 50–51.

It is noteworthy that *Kokusen'ya kassen*, although officially no longer part of the script's sources, seems still to have left traces. To the Japanese audience, scenes such as Umihiko pondering on his half Chinese and half Japanese heritage – in which the name of his father and his reasons for living in Japan were kept identical to *Kokusen'ya kassen* – make the character an obvious Coxinga proxy. The famous tiger wrestling scene, wholly extraneous to the plot, would further reinforce it. The practice of changing the names of characters to avoid censorship has a long history in both Chinese and Japanese theater. In this case, however, direct censorship would not have been the case – rather, to accommodate both Ennosuke's original inspiration and the PRC's condition that the Coxinga story be binned – elements of Coxinga appear in ancient garb.[52] It is also possible that this treatment of *Kokusen'ya kassen* added parodic entertainment to the performance.

Run and reception

The *jingju* performers arrived on 17 February for joint rehearsals. The show was performed from 4 March to 27 April in Tokyo (for over seventy performances), followed by over thirty performances in Nagoya (starting 3 May). In June 1988, a press conference announcing the collaboration was widely covered in Japan, whereas the cover story of *Chinese Drama*, written by troupe leader Li Xinghai, in September 1988 was devoted to *Ryū-Ō*, with Li Guang and Ennosuke shown in full costume.[53] The performance was also important enough to rate a visit from PRC Premier Li Peng on 13 April, who was observed to wave approvingly at the actors from his balcony seat[54] on his second day of visits to calm Japanese jitters about China's incipient austerity policies.[55]

The play premiered on the 4th of March to continue successfully for 3 months. The Chinese team went home on the 1st of June, only 3 days before the Tiananmen incident. Ennosuke remembers that the originally proposed schedule would have had the play staged on the stage of Kabuki za theatre from June to August that year, but since their stage was unsuited for this kind of production, the play was moved to the Enbujō theatre, and scheduled 3 months earlier. Given geopolitical developments, he felt lucky they had been able to stage the show at all.

PRC newspapers, seldom critical of official theatrical projects, were positive. According to an article by Fang Jie, a Ministry of Culture official,[56] in the *Renmin ribao*, he and actor Ying Ruocheng 英若诚, at the time Vice-Minister of Culture, were invited by Ennosuke to attend the premiere, spent the whole flight in "worried" conversation about the play: "This is a play where *jingju* and kabuki share the stage, what would it be like after all, would it achieve success, this question mark was ceaselessly lingering in our minds."[57]

Japanese newspapers such as *Asahi Shimbun*, *Sankei Shimbun* and *Engeki kai* were generally positive, remarking about the balance between what they considered kabuki's "Stillness" and *jingju*'s "Movement" was interesting. However, a critic for a more specialist magazine, *Engeki*, opined that the stage direction of the 40 min-long final fighting scene failed to efficiently use kabuki's *tachimawari* fighting techniques, and instead relied too heavily on *jingju* acrobatics,[58] whereas another critic felt that the constant action of the play failed to make use of *jingju*'s musical potential.[59] Still, despite these slight technical flaws, both critics lauded the production as groundbreaking.

[52]Towards the Chinese side, *Kokusen'ya kassen* is not mentioned as source material, but on the Japanese side, critics talk about it as a *Kokusen'ya kassen* re-write, so the discarding of the play was quite clearly only superficial (Mori 1989, pp. 50–51).

[53]Li 1988; Cong 1990.

[54]Zhao 1990, p. 165.

[55]Kruze 1991. According to Ennosuke (Ichikawa 2003, p. 56), the project nearly didn't go ahead because the Chinese side had financial difficulties – since it was a state troupe, one might surmise a connection with PRC austerity policies being introduced at that time. The problem was, it would seem, resolved by Shochiku covering the shortfall.

[56]Li 2018.

[57]Yi 1989. For a first-person account of Ying in the ministry, see Ying and Conceison 2009.

[58]Mori 1989, pp 50–51.

[59]Nomura 1989, pp 103–04.

Chinese reception was limited, since the show was not performed in China as initially planned[60] and because the state media would not normally have provided a critical account of the production. Errant branches of the *jingju* world were also cited to show PRC dominance of the art. Li Yuzhi 李玉芝, the sister of Li Yuru 李玉茹 and a well-known *dan* actor in her own right, had been living in Japan since 1945; she was quoted enthusiastically that "Mainland China's *jingju* is much stronger than Taiwan's."[61] William Chow (Zhou Shaolin 周少麟), who had emigrated to the USA in 1980 and whose father Zhou Xinfang 周信芳 had been viciously persecuted in the Cultural Revolution "made a special trip to see the show" and exclaimed that the performance had been excellent.[62]

Such press coverage in 1989 to a substantial degree echoed that of 1955, in that it "was intended to persuade a domestic audience that China and Japan were natural allies whose cultural and racial ties far outweighed the unpleasant immediate past."[63] In 1955, there had been also a suggestion that kabuki narratives were suitably proletarian, although in reality it is a wholly commercial genre.[64] But by the 1980s that narrative was no longer foregrounded. International proletariat theatre was replaced by a gesture towards pan-Asianism: the endeavour probably suggested to many that, at a more fundamental level, Japan and China shared culture. Fang in *Renmin ribao* noted that "despite the difference in style, there is a family resemblance. In certain places it was easy to find crossover points (契合点). For instance, they all have theatre conventions (程式), and both use percussion to pace the drama…and so there was a basis for natural cooperation." The scene which provoked the most emotional response from the audience was when the Chinese and Japanese main characters swore to be blood brothers, taking each other's hands.

All in all, the project was officially remembered as "writing a beautiful page in the history of Sino–Japanese cultural exchanges and winning honour for China's *jingju*."[65] Even now it is cited as an example of successful collaboration, having caused "many Japanese kabuki audiences, via this collaborative performance, to enter for the first time the world of *jingju*, attracted and fascinated by the superb performance of *jingju*, conquered by the vast and deep art of *jingju*."[66] It may also have had the effect of encouraging theatrical self-confidence for Chinese theatre makers. Li Guang for one is quoted as saying

> At present, our country is still very poor, but our art is not poor, our nation's traditional culture is not poor. Not only is it not poor, it is actually rich in the extreme. If you organise a superior cast and crew, and perform excellent repertoire, a warm welcome is assured.[67]

Certainly, members of the troupes and official responses deemed that the performance had been successful. At the blood brothers scene, the audience applauded wildly, and theatre critic Tobe Ginsaku 戸部銀作, who was watching the premiere together with a friend who also personally had experienced the Sino–Japanese war, wrote that his friend could not stop crying during the curtain call, saying that he felt like finally all the bad feelings between the two countries had been wiped away.[68]

[60]Zhao 1990, p. 165.

[61]Yiding erroneously identifies her as Li Yulan 李玉兰 rather than 李玉芝, but since she is referred to as one of the "Four Jade Gems" it is clear who is meant.

[62]Yiding 1990, p. 56.

[63]Jacobs 2011, p. 163.

[64]This PRC reading would later be echoed by certain Western scholars eager to see in kabuki plots a critique of imperialism or capitalism. Although many plays indeed show off the underdog overcoming a seemingly stronger foe, this is hardly a rare dramatic function, and class-struggle readings tend not to account for the wholly, consistently and unabashedly commercial nature of kabuki economics.

[65]Xiao 1991, p. 51

[66]Zhou 2011.

[67]Zhao 1990, p. 165.

[68]Tobe 1989, p. 97.

Ryū-Ō evidently had other positive developments in Sino–Japanese theatrical relations. According to one Chinese account of the Japanese stage year in the review, the show was one of the most important experiments of 1989, "marvellously combining Japanese and Chinese traditional drama's differences and commonalities into a new stage practice, generating an enormous influence in society."[69] The theatre press was full of Japanese fans resolving to learn to speak Chinese and congratulatory letters from Japanese playwright and stage directors. Japanese television had apparently "broadcast the show three times to forty countries, to great acclaim."[70] In total, 250 of Ennosuke's fans reportedly presented him with a pine tree decorated with 250 chocolates of various shape and crowned with Chinese and Japanese flags.[71]

Ryū-Ō also set in motion other collaborations. Playwright and director Mayama Miho 真山美保, the eldest daughter of kabuki playwright Mayama Seika 真山青果, was inspired by the *Ryū-Ō* performance to cooperate with Li Guang to produce a *jingju* version of her father's play *Sakamoto Ryōma* 坂本龍馬.[72] This play, about the eponymous late nineteenth-century Japanese reformer, may have been an attractive subject for China's Reform and Opening Up period, and was performed in Beijing in 1991 and also broadcast in Japan. Ennosuke, for his part, was surely disappointed that a mooted plan to bring *Ryū-Ō* to Beijing for the Asian Games in 1990 did not materialize.[73] However, he also continued his cooperation with Chinese theatre makers, directing a play *Xi Taihou* 西太后 (Dowager Empress Cixi) written by playwright Sun Demin 孙德民. These three acts and fifteen scenes long play starring Ennosuke's wife, traditional kabuki style (buyo) dancer Fujima Murasaki 藤間紫 in the lead role in 1995.[74] Ennosuke, again with Lü's help, borrowed *jingju* actors to enact the fighting scenes in his production of *Shin Sangoku shi* 新三国志 (The New Romance of Three Kingdoms) in 1999.[75] Evidently, theatre makers continued to work on building cultural bridges, borrowing from each other's dramatic traditions, despite strained diplomatic relations. In February 1989, when Ennosuke and Lü announced their cooperation on *Ryū-Ō*, the *People's Daily* announced that the show would represent a "major event in Oriental theatre history,"[76] and we argue that this optimistic prediction can be sustained.

Conclusions

Theatrical communication between China, the kingdoms of the Korean peninsula and Japan is recorded to at least the sixth century.[77] Japanese imperial chronicle *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (Chronicles of Japan) state that empress Suiko 推古天皇 employed a dance teacher from the kingdom of Paekche on the Korean peninsula in 612 to train performers in continental-style dance specifically for Buddhist ceremonies; this eventually led to the development of the genres gigaku 伎楽 and gagaku 雅楽 (bugaku 舞楽) in Japan.[78] Intercultural theatre is not new and not Western, nor does it depend conceptually or historically on the involvement of European languages. The daily practice or socioeconomic relations of kabuki or *jingju* are in truth not very much affected by interculturalism as practiced or originating in a putative Western core, but by their own interests, whether artistic, diplomatic or commercial.

[69]Cong 1990, p. 64.

[70]According to Lü (2006, p. 58), the NHK broadcast it in September 1989 and January 1994.

[71]Yiding 1990, p. 56.

[72]According to Xiao (1991, p. 51), Mayami Seika had also been a long-term friend of Zhou Enlai, which gives that production yet another genealogy of Sino–Japanese cultural relations.

[73]Zhao 1990, p. 165.

[74]According to the Shichiku Otani Library Database, the play was performed in this format at the Shimbashi Enbujō theatre in September 1995, again in January 1997, and then at the Osaka Shochiku za theatre in June the same year. It was revived with two acts cut in at the Hakata za theatre in Kyushu in January 2003, and following that again performed at the Chūnichi Gekijo theatre In Nagoya in June and the Shimbashi Enbujō theatre in September the following year.

[75]Ichikawa 2003, pp. 178–208.

[76]Yi 1989.

[77]Knowles 2010, p. 7.

[78]Terauchi 2016, pp. 4–6.

Of course, we have offered only one example, but intra-Asian intercultural theatre is widespread, diverse, ancient, contemporary and both reflects and exerts and influence on the shifts and major events of Asian history. Whenever examined on their own terms, the "traditional" and modern theatres of East Asia show themselves to be every bit as dynamic and acquisitive of Western theatrical traditions. We are equipped to speak of Sino–Japanese relations, but Southeast Asia has also been a site of interculturalism, and the genesis of modern Indonesian theatre, for instance, is a long-term case study as Western, Indian, Chinese, Javanese, Malay and Arab elements melded and cohered on the archipelago.[79]

What has the investigation into the historical and political circumstances of *Ryū-Ō* – its production process, performance and reception – shown us about the workings of intra-Asian intercultural theatre?

First, the question of the terms of partnership. The Shochiku Company sponsored *Ryū-Ō*, with the Japanese government's blessing, no doubt, mainly to make a profitable, long-running show, which would pot good sales. The Chinese state, through a national-level theatre, supported the production presumably to further goals of political goodwill and propaganda. Neither side can plausibly be suggested as having exploited the other; interculturalism can involve strong state powers and be even; non-colonial interculturalism does not depend on the coalition of subalterns. At the same time, the idealism and sites of resistance proposed by "new" interculturalism are by no means the only way that intercultural theatre can happen on even terms.[80]

Second, when two autonomous genres with a long and strong performance tradition, such as *jingju* and kabuki are jointly performed, they can perform without one partner devouring the other or subordinating the other. The Chinese side directed what material could be performed, but Ennosuke had the final say in matters of stage direction, and there was a long process of consultation before the final decisions were taken. In the end, each genre was enacted in a fashion loyal to its own tradition, but occasionally communicative with each other, which shows that intercultural theatre can be authentic to each genre's roots at the same time as it is innovative.

Third, the reception of the show was such that it triggered a positive response among the Japanese audience, despite – or perhaps because – it embraced the culture of a former political enemy. Because of the Tiananmen square incident occurring shortly after the end of the performance, and since the play was never staged in China, it is difficult to say what the response there would have been. However, the play triggered several other Japanese–Chinese co-operations to be performed even during a period when diplomatic ties were cool, thus creating an undercurrent of theatrical exchange away from the political scene, which shows that intercultural theatre's resilience has practical outcomes for the strengthening of cultural links.[81]

It is a fundamental problem in the historiography of "intercultural theatre" that it continues to posit a recent Western-initiated phenomenon, disregarding the rich interactions in Asia that have preceded and continued alongside them. Many valid critiques still retain a fundamental dynamic of East and West, of subject and object, of active and passive. Holledge and Tompkins state that "In its current form…intercultural performance has emerged principally from the practice of western artists, in particular the practice of performing well beyond the borders of their own countries."[82] Such definitions are untenable, given the very substantial evidence that these practices are both common and long-standing without reference to the West. Lei claims that, "as the East is on the rise, it is at the turning point of not assuming that the West, hitherto defined as First World, should arbitrate sensibility and

[79]Cohen 2016; Winet 2010.

[80]Nor does this example of more balanced collaboration between strong states mean that Asian interculturalism cannot be exploitative or insensitive. Examination of the theatrical interaction between the stronger and weaker, or richer and poorer, elements of Asian theatre will show similar problematic dynamics. These unequal balances, too, operate largely independently of a putative Western cultural hegemony.

[81]Indeed, Li Guang himself starred, and Lü Ruiming adapted from a Japanese spoken theatre script by Mayama Miho 真山青果, a production of *Sakamoto Ryōma* 坂本龙马. The production, premiering in late 1991, was hailed as "the first *jingju* play reflecting the Japanese" (Luo 1991).

[82]Holledge and Tompkins 2000, p. 2.

taste."[83] Our close examination of a case of Sino–Japanese theatrical exchange – as no doubt examination of many other intra-Asian or other non-Western theatrical practices would also do – can show that the West never really did arbitrate in many cultural centres; it only seems so in a theatre studies still ensconced in Anglophone and Eurocentric practices of dichotomy even as it critiques them. "Intercultural theatre" as it appears in theatre studies, if it is to be worthy of the subject it purports to describe, must reconstruct itself without Western theatre or directors at its centre, and without a dependence on recent Eurocentric genealogies.

References

Bach, Faith (1989). "New Directions in Kabuki." *Asian Theatre Journal* **6**:1, pp. 77–89.

Bharucha, Rustom (2000). *The Politics of Cultural Practice: Thinking Through Theatre in an Age of Globalization*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press.

Canning, Charlotte (2015). *On the Performance Front: US Theatre and Internationalism*. Berlin: Springer.

Cohen, Matthew Isaac (2016). *Inventing the Performing Arts: Modernity and Tradition in Colonial Indonesia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Cong, Linchun 丛林春 (1990). "*1989 nian de riben xiju wutai* 1989 年的日本戏剧舞台 (Japanese theatre stage in 1989)." *Zhongguo Jingju* 中国京剧 (Jingju of China) 5, p. 64.

Fang, Jie 方杰 (1989). "*Zai Dongjing kan 'Longwang'* 在东京看《龙王》(Watching *Ryū-Ō* in Tokyo)." *Renmin ribao* 人民日报 (People's Daily), 12 April 1989.

Farfan, Penny and Ric Knowles (2011). "Editorial Comment: Special Issue on Rethinking Intercultural Performance." *Theatre Journal* **63**:p. 4.

Ferrari, Rossella (2020). *Transnational Chinese Theatres: Intercultural Performance Networks in East Asia*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika (1990). "Theatre, Own and Foreign. The Intercultural Trend in Contemporary Theatre." In *The Dramatic Touch of Difference: Theatre, Own and Foreign*, eds. Erika Fischer-Lichte, Josephine Riley and Michael Gissenswehrer, pp. 11–19. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.

Hattori, Yukio 服部幸雄, Tetsunosuke Tomita 富田鉄之助 and Tamotsu Hirosue 廣末保 (eds.) (2011). *Kabuki jiten* 歌舞伎辞典 (Kabuki Dictionary). Tokyo: Heibonsha.

He, Chengzhou (2016). "An East Asian Paradigm of Interculturalism." *European Review* **24**:2, pp. 210–20.

Holledge, Julie and Tompkins Joanne (2000). *Women's Intercultural Performance*. London: Routledge.

Huang, Aihua 黄爱华 (2014). "*Jingju yu gewuji de teshu yinyuan – Yi Mei Lanfang, Li Guang yu Shichuan Yuanzhizhu jiazu de jiaoyi wei zhongxin* 京剧与歌舞伎的特殊因缘 – 以梅兰芳、李光与市川猿之助家族的交谊为中心 (The Special Relationship between Peking Opera and Kabuki – Centred on the Friendship between Mei Lanfang, Li Guang and the Ichikawa Ennosuke Family)." *Xiju yishu* 戏剧艺术 (Theatre Arts) 1, pp. 42–50.

Ichikawa, Ennosuke 市川猿之助 (1989). "Kyōgeki to watashi 京劇と私 (Peking Opera and I)" In *Ryū-Ō Programme,* Tokyo: Shochiku, p. 36.

Ichikawa, Ennosuke 市川猿之助 (2003). *Sūpā Kabuki – monozukuri nōto* スーパー歌舞伎—ものづくりノート(Super Kabuki – Production notes), Tokyo: Shuei sha.

Jacobs, Justin (2011). "Preparing the People for Mass Clemency: The 1956 Japanese War Crimes Trials in Shenyang and Taiyuan." *The China Quarterly* **205**:March, pp. 152–72.

Knowles, Ric (2010). *Theatre & Interculturalism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kruze, Uldis (1991). "Sino–Japanese Relations." *Current History* **90**:555, pp. 156–79.

Lei, Daphne P. (2011). "Interruption, Intervention, Interculturalism: Robert Wilson's HIT Productions in Taiwan." *Theatre Journal* **63**:4, pp. 571–86.

Leng, Shao-Chuan (1958). "Japanese Attitudes Toward Communist China." *Far Eastern Survey* **27**:6, pp. 81–89.

Li, Li 李力 (2018). "*Yi jiujiu fang jie: yiren jie qian, diandi dao tianming* 忆舅舅方杰：一任阶前，点滴到天明 (Remembering Uncle Fang Jie: Standing at the Steps, the Raindrops Continuing Till Dawn)." *Shanghai Observer*, 26 August 2018. Available at https://web.shobserver.com/news/detail?id=101683 (accessed 30 December 2020).

Li, Shaochun 李少春 (1955). "Bu pingfan de yishu – kan Riben gewuji 'Kouchi de Youping' 不平凡的艺术—看日本歌舞伎'口吃的又平' (An Extraordinary Art – On Watching *Kabuki* 'Matahei the Stutterer')." *Xiju bao* 戏剧报 (Theatre Journal) 12, pp. 34–36.

Li, Xinghai 李興海 (1988). "Huaxia zhi ju, Fusang zhi shi, gongpuxinsheng – Zhongri liangguo xijujia de xin chuangju 华夏之剧, 扶桑之使, 共谱新声 – 中日两国戏剧家的新创举 (Chinese Play, Japanese Employ, Working Together for a New Sound – A Pioneering Undertaking from Chinese and Japanese Dramatists)." *Zhongguo xiju* 中国戏剧 (Chinese Theatre) 9, pp. 54–55.

[83]Lei 2011, p. 586.

Lin, Yuxi 林毓熙 (1992). "Tuozhan duiwai wenhua jiaoliu de tujing – zhongguo jinngjuyuan yu riben xiju jie hezuo manyi 拓展对外文化交流的途径 – 中国京剧院与日本戏剧界合作漫议 (Ways to Expand Cultural Exchanges with Foreign Countries – A Discussion on the Cooperation between Chinese Peking Opera House and Japanese Theatre Industry)." *Zhongguo jingju* 中国京剧 (Jingju of China) 1, pp. 58–59.

Lü, Ruiming 吕瑞明 (1989). "Kyōdō no kenjōhin 共同の献上品 (A Common Gift)" In *Ryū-Ō Programme,* Tokyo: Shochiku, p. 38.

Lü, Ruiming 吕瑞明 and Shosuke Nakawa 奈河彰輔 (2006). "Longwang 龙王 (Ryū-Ō)." In Xinshiqi Jingju juzuo ji 新时期京剧剧作集 (Collection of Jingju Works of the New Era). Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, pp. 57–151.

Luo, Song 罗松 (1991). "Shutu tonggui – Li Guang paiyan Banben Longma de tihui 殊途同归李光谈排演《坂本龙马》的体会 (Same Goal, Different Routes – Li Guang's Experience of Performing Sakamoto Ryōma)." 中国戏剧 (Chinese Theatre) 11, pp. 16–17.

Ma, Shaobo 马少波 (1957). "Dongxing liangyue 东行两月 (Two Months' Journey East)." Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe.

McIvor, Charlotte (2016). *Migration and Performance in Contemporary Ireland: Towards a New Interculturalism*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

McIvor, Charlotte (2019). "Introduction. New Directions?" In *Interculturalism and Performance Now: New Directions?*, ed. Charlotte McIvor and Jason King. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–26.

Mogi, Chikashi 茂木千佳 (1992). *Kabuki kaigai kōen no kiroku* 歌舞伎海外公演の記録 (Records of Kabuki Performed Abroad). Tokyo: Shochiku.

Mori, Yōzō 森洋三 (1989). "Sōkyo no saranaru hatten wo 壮挙のさらなる発展を (Developments Beyond Grand Plans)" In Engeki kai 演劇界 (Theatre World) **47**:4, pp. 50–51.

Nomura, Takashi 野村喬 (1989). "Dō ni tsuyoku sei ni yowaku 動に強く静に弱い (Strong in Action, Weak in Stillness)" In *Engeki kai* 演劇界 (Theatre World) **47**:5, pp. 103–07.

Pavis, Patrice, ed. (1995). *The Intercultural Performance Reader*. London: Routledge.

Prevots, Naima (2012). *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Renmin ribao 人民日报 (1955). "Mao Zedong Zhuxi jiejian Jiuyuan Fangzhizhu, bingiqe kanle Riben gewuji jutuan de biaoyan 毛泽东主席接见久原房之助 并且看了日本歌舞伎剧团的表演 (Chairman Mao Zedong Meets with Fusanosuke Kuhara and Watches the Performance of the Japanese Kabuki Theatre)." 15 October 1955. Available at https://tinyurl.com/y8oyculw (accessed 30 December 2020).

Shinagawa, Aiko 品川愛子 (2013). "Cong Mei Lanfang zhijin: Riben de jingju jieshou shi yanjiu 从梅兰芳至今：日本的京剧接受史研究 (*Jingju* Reception History in Japan: From Mei Lanfang to Now)." *Huangzhong (Zhongguo Wuhan yinyue xueyuan xuebao)* 黄钟（中国·武汉音乐学院学报） (Huangzhong Journal of Wuhan Conservatory of Music, China) 3, pp. 32–38.

Sorgenfrei, Carol (1997). "Desperately Seeking Asia: A Survey of Theatre History Textbooks." *Asian Theatre Journal* **14**:2, pp. 223–58.

Sorgenfrei, Carol (2007). "Countering 'Theoretical Imperialism': Some Possibilities from Japan." *Theatre Research International* **32**:3, pp. 312–24.

Takei, Kyozo 武井協三 (2000). "Kyōgen no Niō, Yūnan no monomane, aragoto no mie" 狂言の仁王―ゆうなんの物真似、荒事の見栄（The Kyōgen Play 'Deva King', Yūnan's imitations and the *mie* in aragoto acting）in *Wakashu Kabuki, yarō Kabuki* 若衆歌舞伎・野郎歌舞 Tokyo: Yagi shoten.

Tan, Marcus Cheng Chye (2012). *Acoustic Interculturalism: Listening to Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Terauchi, Naoko (2016). "Ancient and Early Medieval Performing Arts." In *A History of Japanese Theatre*, ed. Jonah Salz, pp. 4–19. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thornbury, Barbara E. (2001). "The View From Japan – The Traditional Performing Arts as Cultural Ambassadors Abroad." In *Japanese Theatre and the International Stage*, eds. Stanca Scholz-Cionca and Samuel L. Leiter, pp. 213–27. Leiden: Brill.

Tobe, Ginsaku 戸部銀作 (1989). "Ennosuke kabuki no kiseki 猿之助歌舞伎の奇跡" (The Miracles of Ennosuke's Kabuki) in *Engeki kai* 演劇界 (Theatre World) **47**:5, pp. 94–97.

Vyas, Utpal (2020). "Cool, Warm, Soft and Sharp: Paradigms of Cultural Exchange in Japan–China Relations." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* **26**:7, pp. 1–16.

Wan, Ming (2006). *Sino-Japanese Relations: Interaction, Logic, and Transformation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Wetmore, Kevin J Jr, Siyuan Liu and Erin Mee (2014). *Modern Asian Theatre and Performance 1900–2000*. London: Bloomsbury Methuen.

Winet, Evan (2010). *Indonesian Postcolonial Theatre: Spectral Genealogies and Absent Faces*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Xiao, Geng (1991). "Li Guang – *Banben Longma* 李光 –《坂本龙马》(Li Guang – *Sakamoto Ryoma*)." *Zhongguo xiju* 中国戏剧 (Chinese Theatre) 8, p. 51.

Yi, Kai 易凯 (1989). "Dongfang liangda jingdian yishu jiang shouci tongtai yanchu: Zhongguo Jingju he Riben gewuji heyan 'Longwang' 东方两大经典艺术首次同台演出，中国京剧和日本歌舞伎合演《龙王》 (Two Classical Oriental Theatres Perform Together for the First Time: China's Jingju and Japan's Kabuki to Perform *Ryū-Ō* together)." *Renmin ribao* 人民日报 (People's Daily), 5 February 1989.

Yiding 一丁 (1990). "Hongdong riben de jingju gewuji 轰动日本的京剧歌舞伎《龙王》 *Longwang* (*Ryū-Ō* , the *Jingju Kabuki* that Triumphed in Japan). *Zhongguo xiju* 中国戏剧 (Chinese Theatre) 2, p. 56.

Ying, Ruocheng and Claire Conceison (2009). *Voices Carry: Behind Bars and Backstage During China's Revolution and Reform*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Yuan, Yingming 袁英明 (2017). "Kyōgeki to kabuki no gassaku "ryuuō" ni miru Chūnichi bunka kōryū" 京劇と歌舞伎の合作『リュウオー』に見る中日文化交流 (Cultural Exchanges between Japan and China in Collaborative Project "Ryū-Ō" by Chinese Beijing Opera and Japanese Kabuki)." *Ōbirin ronkō jinbun kenkyū* 桜美林論考 人文研究 (J. F. Oberlin University, Division of Arts and Culture Departmental Bulletin Paper) 8, pp. 17–30.

Zhao, Xiaodong 赵晓东 (1990). *Jingju yizhi lu* 京剧一知录 (A Record of Some Little Things I Know about Jingju). Beijing: Wen hua yi shu chubanshe.

Zhou, Long 周龙 (2011). *Jingju wenhua chuanbo duoyuanxing tanjiu* 京剧文化传播多元性探究 (On the Diversity of Cultural Dissemination of Jingju). *Fujian yishu* 福建艺术 6, pp. 11–14.

Cite this article: Stenberg J, Björk T (2022). Dragon King in a contentious sea: Sino–Japanese intercultural theatre in 1989. *International Journal of Asian Studies* **19**, 135–151. https://doi.org/10.1017/S147959142100019X