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THE AMBIGUITIES OF CHINESENESS AND THE DISPUTE
OVER THE “HOMECOMING” OF *TURANDOT*

Chengzhou He

The China of the 1990s and later has been vigorously explored theoretically, both nationally and internationally. While Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu called for a “farewell to revolution” in the mid-1990s, Wang Hui has claimed that the revolutionary century came to an end by the 1980s: “The Nineties’ were actually the opening act to the end of a revolutionary century, from which would emerge a new play of events.”¹ In terms of culture, Liu Kang thinks that the 1990s may be understood as “a hybrid post-revolutionary culture that embodies the fundamental tensions and contradictions of globalization.”² Although there are undeniable continuities between the revolutionary century and the so-called post-new era, the new epoch also is utterly new in ways that can only be analyzed based on both domestic development and global changes.³ Central to theoretical discussions about the post-new era is the debate over the concept of Chineseness. What does it mean? How is it used in different academic settings? What implications does it have for cultural studies?

Chineseness Reconsidered

In “Cong ‘xiandai xing’ dao ‘zhonghua xing’” (“From Modernity to Chineseness”), Zhang Fa, Zhang Yiwu, and Wang Yichuan are very critical of the Western-style modernity embraced by China, which underwent several paradigm shifts successively in China from 1840 to 1990. Under the impact of marketization, mass media, consumerism, and the rise of the so-called middle class in the post-new era, China has experienced profound social and

cultural transformation, in response to which a new model of knowledge has come into being. Referred to as “Chineseness,” the new model of knowledge emphasizes both cultural diversity and the unique Chinese experience, both universal values and Chinese subjectivity. Instead of being the “other” of the West, China has been integrated into the world and is playing an important role in shaping its future. Related to the formation of Chineseness is what Zhang, Zhang, and Wang call “the Chinese Rim,” which shares common cultural heritage and ethical values.⁴ In “Zhongguo wenhua xiandai xing: Cong xiandai 1 to xiandai 2” (“Chinese Cultural Modernity: from the First Stage to the Second Stage”), Wang Yichuan argues that the major task of Chinese cultural modernity since the 1980s has been to establish a discourse of Chineseness and its unique characteristics in relation to other discourses in the globalized world.⁵

While domestic Chinese scholars are generally in favor of, or even obsessed with, Chineseness, scholars of the Chinese diaspora often critique or challenge the concept. In “Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem,” Rey Chow discusses how Chinese culture struggles for access to representation under Western hegemony and yet at the same time exhibits unnecessary hostility and mistrust toward everything Western and a habitual obsession with Chineseness. The problem of access, she explains, is typical of what she calls “the logic of the wound”; the hostility and mistrust, she warns, is in danger of “sinocentrism.”⁶ In addition, she thinks that the notion of Chineseness as “a monolithic given bound ultimately to mainland China” is problematic and that Chineseness, which is often taken for granted, remains untheorized.⁷ In “From Modernity to Chineseness’: The Rise of Nativist Cultural Theory in Post-1989 China,” Ben Xu is very critical of the theorization of the Chinese experience and the concept of Chineseness as discussed by Zhang, Zhang, and Wang. “Such a theory of cultural transformation has emphasized broad unidirectional patterns. . . . Its unidirectionality causes it to concentrate on some kinds of change but to ignore ideological continuity and the importance of countercurrents that arise in opposition to presumably dominant cultural tendencies.”⁸ Referencing Shao Jian, a staunch critic of cultural nativism, Xu warns that “the nativist blueprint for Chineseness reflects a dangerous dream of a new cultural hegemony, which is disguised as a struggle for cultural independence and counteraction against the old Western hegemony.”⁹

The concept of Chineseness resists a clear-cut definition. Instead, it is characterized by its ambiguities. Firstly, as Chow suggests, Chineseness emerges as a cultural supplement to Western hegemony but eventually challenges the stereotypical representation of China: “Against the systematic exclusiveness of many hegemonic Western practices, the ethnic supplement occurs first and foremost as a struggle for access to representation while at the

same time contesting the conventional simplicity and stereotyping of ethnic subjects as such.”¹⁰ In some Chinese adaptations of Western literature, for example, Chineseness is emphasized in order that these adaptations might be accepted as representations, but in the process it can come to function as a means of resisting or subverting Western “orientalism.”

Secondly, Chineseness is a fluid concept that moves between the center and the periphery. In “Cultural China: Periphery as the Centre,” Tu Wei-ming argues that although overseas Chinese may seem forever peripheral to the meaning of being Chinese, they can assume an effective role in creatively constructing a new vision of Chineseness that is more in tune with Chinese history and that sympathetically resonates with Chinese culture.¹¹ The regional paradigm in China also claims to represent Chineseness in service of its national as well as global interest. According to Tim Oakes, “Promoting Chineseness as a unique feature of regional culture serves to connect localities to broader networks of power that include the national scale of the People’s Republic of China, the supranational scale of ‘Greater China’ (including Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and other sites of Chinese capitalism), and the global scale of transnational capital.”¹² In certain local situations, claiming Chineseness has become an apt choice and a strategic move for acquiring resources and power.

Thirdly, Chineseness can be both local and global. Scholars of globalization studies often say that the global is local. “As the commodity form expands into new cultural contexts around the world,” Oakes notes, “capitalists have recognized the importance of appropriating local cultural practices and products into their repertoire of marketing images.”¹³ However, the local can also be global, and globalization can bring both challenges and opportunities. Reflecting on the impact of globalization on the Chinese culture, Wang Ning claims that “if we face the challenge in a critical way and try to develop our national culture in a broader international context, we will most probably highlight the Chinese national and cultural identity and make it known to the international community.”¹⁴

Last but not least, the representation of Chineseness may on the one hand be affected by globalization, independent of national ideology, while on the other hand, it may attract strong support from government, both institutionally and economically. Therefore, some kind of “conspiracy” can obtain among culture, capital, and ideology, such as in the current state-sponsored internationalization of Chinese literature and culture, in the process of which Chineseness is knotted into a complex network of knowledge, capital, politics, ethnicity, and nationalism.¹⁵ The presentation of Chinese literature to its global readers should be considered not just in terms of the so-called soft power of culture and a resistance to the Western hegemony

but also, increasingly, in terms of what David Damrosch calls “circulation, translation, and production.”¹⁶

The complexities of representing Chineseness in the context of globalization and world literature are nowhere more evident than in the history of adapting and performing the Western opera *Turandot* in China, which dates to 1990 and has caused much dispute among Chinese intellectuals. Based on careful analysis of the different Chinese productions of *Turandot* and their reception both at home and abroad, this article addresses some major questions concerning the representation of Chineseness in Chinese intercultural performance today: How is Western “orientalism” resisted or compromised in different Chinese productions? For what purposes do regional *Turandot* performances claim Chineseness? How do Chinese performances of *Turandot* secure access to global capital and markets while at the same time resisting or subverting the stereotypical images of China? What happens during the processes of localization and globalization? And, more importantly, to what extent do these cross-cultural performances constitute a significant part of contemporary Chinese literature and theater and to what extent have they played an important role in bringing world literature into China and Chinese literature into the world? In the following, I first describe briefly how the story of *Turandot*, which originally came from the East, “returned” to China.

Turandot and Its “Homecoming” in China

Turandot is an opera in three acts by Giacomo Puccini. It is set in the Peking palace of a Chinese emperor called Altoum, whose loving daughter and only child is of marriageable age. Princess Turandot strongly suspects that her suitors, who are princes from far and wide, actually come not for her but for the throne. Thus, she orders that the suitors must solve three riddles to win her hand or they will be beheaded. Several princes fail and lose their lives. Calaf, son of the exiled King Timur of Tartary, is struck with Turandot’s beauty and decides to enter the competition. Despite advice from ministers Ping, Pang, and Pong for him to give up and protests from his father and Liù, the servant girl who loves him, Calaf announces that he will take up the princess’s challenge. He answers the three riddles, which makes Turandot angry. Since he does not want to force Turandot to fulfill her promise, the prince offers her a deal: if she can discover his name by sunrise, he will give up the marriage. Timur and Liù are captured and tortured by Turandot, but they will not tell her the prince’s name. To keep the secret, Liù commits

suicide. Touched by Liù's sacrifice and Calaf's devotion, Turandot regrets her cruelty and falls in love with Calaf. After announcing that his name must be "love," she is married to Calaf in the end.

Puccini's opera *Turandot* has at least two sources: Friedrich Schiller's adaptation of Carlo Gozzi's 1762 commedia dell'arte *Turandot* and Gozzi's play itself, which Schiller's adaptation motivated Puccini to read. Gozzi was in turn inspired by "The Story of Prince Calaf and the Princess of China" that appears in a collection of Persian fairy tales called *Les mille et un jours* (*The Thousand and One Days*) that was published in 1710 and is believed to have been translated by François Pétis de la Croix (1653–1713) from the Persian original. La Croix said that he got the original Persian version, called *Hazar yek ruz* (*The Thousand and One Days*), from a dervish named Mocles in 1675, who might have adapted the stories from certain Indian comedies.¹⁷

Having acquainted himself with the different *Turandot* stories and the musical representations of the play, Puccini added some Chinese elements to the already rich tradition of the story. First, he invented the servant girl called Liù. As a contrast to Turandot, she plays an important role in Turandot's transformation from an icy princess to a woman in love. Second, Puccini asked one of his librettists to find a certain piece of Chinese music for his opera "to enrich the drama and relieve the artificiality of it."¹⁸ The music turned out to be "Mo-li-hua" ("Jasmine Flower"), a Chinese folk song, which was known to many in Italy and Europe at that time. Puccini left *Turandot* unfinished at his death in 1924, but he had jotted down suggestions for the ending. Following Puccini's wish, Franco Alfano had Calaf kiss Turandot despite her reluctance, which melts away her coldness. The play ends with the happy marriage of Calaf and Turandot.

Puccini's *Turandot*, set to a libretto in Italian by Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni, premiered in Milan in 1926 and has since been performed around the world. However, due to its orientalist fantasies of China and a Chinese princess, *Turandot* has been criticized and resisted in China, and even the question of whether or not Turandot acts like an actual Chinese princess has been much debated.¹⁹ It has also been derided by Western scholars as an "unconscious manifestation of racial arrogance."²⁰ When the Shanghai Opera House performed *Turandot* for the first time in Chinese in 1990, some complained that it would "hurt the feelings of the Chinese people."²¹ In 1993, Wei Minglun adapted *Turandot* into *jingju* (Peking opera). Wei subsequently worked on adaptations of *Turandot* into other kinds of Chinese opera, including *chuanju* (Sichuan opera) and *yuju* (Yu opera of Henan). Lin Zhaohua in collaboration with Beijing Jingju House directed the *jingju* version of *Turandot* and his company was subsequently invited

to perform the opera in Rome, Italy. The Chinese opera adaptations of *Turandot*, which significantly revise the original plot and characterization to resist the “orientalism” of the original play, have since been closely connected with the promotion of cultural understanding and exchange. In 1995, the China Central Opera House sang *Turandot* for the first time in Italian at the Century Theater in Beijing. The plot remains the same as in Puccini’s original, but the setting of the opera is changed to an unnamed location in Central Asia. As director Xu Xiaozhong explains, to de-sinicize *Turandot* to avoid offending the audience is to “negate any criticism that might have been leveled at the opera.”²²

An interesting turn in the history of performing *Turandot* in China took place in 1998, when Zhang Yimou brought Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, an Italian opera orchestra, to Beijing, after he had been invited to direct the play in Florence the year before. This time, Zhang “authenticated” the Chineseness of *Turandot* by using the building of the Ancestral Temple as the backdrop of the performance. Promoted as an opera performed on an original site, it attracted a large international audience to Beijing for the occasion. However, the Zigong Chuanju Theater’s production, based on Wei Minglun’s script, challenged Zhang’s production. Accusing Puccini’s opera of being “a fairy tale that the occidentals have fabricated . . . without an understanding of Chinese culture,” Wei has significantly revised the play and “authenticated” *Turandot*. More *jingju* and other Chinese opera adaptations of *Turandot* have echoed Wei’s *chuanju* adaptation. While *chuanju* is a regional opera, *jingju* is a national art form and thus is much more popular. Therefore, the *jingju* adaptations of *Turandot* have further spread the sinicized story of *Turandot* both in and outside China. The dispute over Zhang Yimou’s version and Wei’s adaptation is symbolic of the multiple and conflicted Chinese approaches to *Turandot* and Western drama in general.

In the aftermath of the 1998 concurrent staging of the different versions of *Turandot* and the wide-scale dispute over them, the Chinese enthusiasm for *Turandot* remained unabated. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it entered popular vocabulary, which stimulated more interest in the play, both among the public and the theater circles. In 2000, a *yuju Turandot*, based on the script by Wei Minglun, was performed by the Taiwan Guoguang Theater and later revived in 2004 in Henan and in Beijing’s Chang’an Grand Theater in 2005. There have also been two ballet versions of *Turandot*, one by the Guangzhou Ballet in 2001 and the other by the Hong Kong Ballet in 2004. *Turandot* was even adapted into *huaju* (modern spoken drama). It was presented by the Central Theater Academy in 2006 in Beijing based on Friedrich Schiller’s play and by Shenyang Huaju House in north China

also in 2006. The year after, the Shanghai Opera House experimented further with *Turandot* by setting it in modern-day Shanghai. In this coproduction with the Zurich Opera House, Calaf wore jeans and found the answers to Turandot's riddles by surfing the internet. In 2008, the new National Center for the Performing Arts chose *Turandot* to be performed as part of its opening ceremonies. To further "authenticate" the Chineseness of the production, a bold decision was made to commission Hao Weiya, a young Chinese composer, to write a new ending to the opera. After having spent some months in Italy, Hao accomplished his task and this new version of *Turandot*, with a Chinese ending, was staged. A new aria called "The First Tears" was added for Turandot in order to shed light on her dramatic transformation in addition to a duet for Turandot and Calaf.

Performances of *Turandot* in China for a little more than two decades have been characterized by experimentation, competition, and dispute. Librettists have localized these various versions of the opera in one of two ways: either by hybridizing the performance through the interweaving of different performing styles or by indigenizing the play through local opera forms. These two different approaches, as represented by Zhang Yimou and Wei Minglun, reflect different conceptions of how Chineseness ought to be represented for both domestic and cross-cultural (or multicultural) audiences and markets.

Adapting Turandot into Chuanju

Adaptation, according to Linda Hutcheon, is "an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable work or works, a creative and interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging and an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work."²³ An adaptation stands in relation to a prior text, which is usually a classic. Intercultural performance is not only concerned with the relationship between the adaptation and the source text but also with that between the adaptation and the audience.²⁴ In addition, attention should be given to the social and cultural context in which both the adapted work was written or performed and in which the reception took place. More importantly, intercultural performance is an interactive space in which the source culture and target culture engage in a dynamic dialogue. To be more specific, intercultural performance is usually defined and determined by three factors: the purpose of the director or scriptwriter, the performance of the actors, and perception of the audience.

Since the 1980s, Chinese theater has shown great zeal for internationalization and cross-cultural dialogues. One of the important indicators of this zeal is that there have been numerous adaptations of Western plays into different genres of Chinese theater, many of which have then been brought to other countries. Shakespeare, Ibsen, Beckett, O'Neill, and Chekhov are among the foreign playwrights who have been frequently adapted and performed onstage in China and beyond.²⁵ The attraction to adapting Western plays is at least threefold: directors and playwrights hope to draw young people into theater, to modernize traditional theatrical forms, and to be invited to the international theater festivals. For Wei Minglun, a playwright who is inclined to subvert the stereotypical representation of characters in plays, especially women, adapting *Turandot* presents an opportunity to challenge the "distorted image" of a Chinese princess and to create the possibility of a cross-cultural encounter.²⁶

The intercultural performance of *Turandot* into *chuanju* may be studied in terms of narrative, music, and stage semiotics. First, the *chuanju* adaptation sinicizes Puccini's story and "resists" the orientalist portrait of a Chinese princess. Instead of three riddles, the *chuanju* version features three "comprehensive" and typically Chinese tests: the suitors must lift a heavy tripod, make Turandot open her eyes, and defeat Turandot in martial arts. Another important change is that the failed suitors are not executed but instead reappear on the stage near the end of the play. Turandot is rendered into a charming, bright, and merciful princess who seeks an honest man, true love, and freedom. She only sets up the challenge whereby a prince seeking to marry her must answer three riddles or die because the princes, who are eager to inherit her father's crown through marriage, are causing trouble in the capital. She gives orders to execute two of the sinister princes as a warning to the others but that order is actually not implemented. More importantly, the theme of love wholly displaces that of revenge and hatred, not just in the end, as in the original, but throughout the play. In the *chuanju* version, the title is also different; it's called *Chinese Princess Turandot*, which emphasizes the Chineseness of the adaptation. On the differences between his adaptation and Puccini's original, Wei briefly states: "*Turandot* is about the foreign imagination of China, *Chinese Princess Turandot* is a recreation of a foreign tale. While Puccini has made this oriental story into a European opera, I have this Western opera adapted to a Chinese Sichuan opera."²⁷

Secondly, the language employed is the vernacular, albeit archaic, Chinese of traditional *chuanju*, which allows the songs to be better appreciated by young audiences nationwide. A revised version of the famous

aria “Nessun dorma” (“None Shall Sleep”) is included in the performance, connecting it to Puccini’s *Turandot*. Monologues, absent in Puccini’s opera, are employed to make the double personality of the Chinese princess Turandot more believable: cruel and cold on the outside, human underneath. The mise-en-scene is simple. The performance presents Chinese martial arts on stage. Not only is Turandot fond of practicing martial arts with a double rapier that combines male and female swords, but also she conducts martial arts competitions with her suitors. *Chuanju* is well known for its special effects, particularly “face changing” and “spitfire,” both of which are spectacular and awe inspiring. For his second test, one suitor actually performs the “spitfire” on stage in order to frighten Turandot and make her open her eyes.

Wei’s *Turandot* was a big success in China, and it won eleven awards at China’s national drama festival in 1995. Intellectuals and scholars generally praised Wei Minglun’s adaptation for “resisting” the orientalist fantasy of Chinese culture and for providing a logical development of Turandot’s character.²⁸ Wei’s version emphasizes the regional and local identity of *chuanju*, especially in its later competition with Zhang Yimou’s production. A one-sided support of Wei’s *Turandot*, however, can also be problematic. Rey Chow is cautious of the Chinese essentialism that “draws an imaginary boundary between China and the rest of the world. Everything Chinese, it follows, is fantasized as somehow better—longer in existence, more intelligent, more scientific, more valuable, and ultimately beyond comparison.”²⁹ Despite the fact that Wei’s *Turandot* won the favor of the critics and intellectuals, Zhang Yimou’s production was much more well known both in and outside China.

The Forbidden City Turandot Directed by Zhang Yimou

Zhang Yimou directed the Forbidden City *Turandot* at a time when he was transitioning from his early artistic movies (*Raising the Red Lantern* [1991] and *To Live* [1994]) to his later commercial blockbusters (*Hero* [2002] and *Curse of the Golden Flower* [2006]). Although he was known for his picturesque style, luxurious costumes and spectacular scenes characterized his later films. He was more concerned with commercial success, attracting larger audiences, and bringing in big box office profits. Nevertheless, his production of *Turandot* foreshadows the change of his directing style.

The Forbidden City *Turandot* was mainly comprised of foreign artists, but Zhang tried to make it look Chinese through setting, costume, music, dancing, and so on. Zhang’s *Turandot* is more overtly characterized by its

specific locality, which is made up of several components: the setting of the play, the location of the performance, the local participation in the performance, the local performing styles, and so on. The play is set in the Chinese Ming dynasty (1369–1644), during the most part of which Beijing was the capital of China. This justifies the choice of the Ancestral Temple of the royal family (now the Working People's Cultural Palace) as the location for the performance. The performance area consists of a rectangular space at the entrance of the building. The “authentic” space is key to the concept of performing the opera at the original site. For many Italian opera singers and directors, to perform *Turandot* in front of the Forbidden City was a long cherished dream.

The costumes that were specially made for the production constituted a large part of the budget. The Western lead singers, who wore the gold-and-red silk costumes of Ming Dynasty aristocrats, “seemed to form a dream-like bridge between the past and the future, the East and the West,” says Shen Lihui, an artist-songwriter who saw the show.³⁰ Zhang not only was obsessed with costume design but also with the movements of the actors; he sought to make them familiar with Chinese court rituals and manners, so that they acted more like actual Chinese people. The dance scene in which the Persian prince is executed and in which a female dancer, dressed in red, plays the role of the executioner is not in the original production. Followed by a long procession, the executioner presents dance movements that are derived from Chinese martial arts. There are some changes in the music as well. The drum corps that opens *Turandot* attempts to replicate a Ming-dynasty convention in which percussion precedes court events.

Zhang's *Turandot* represents an intercultural endeavor to assert Chineseness in this Western production. “The demand for Ming-period costumes and sets, and for stylized Chinese movements from bowing to dancing suggest the very tenuous construction of Chineseness asserted again and again in order to maintain the cultural illusion. These visual and corporeal invocations of Chinese traditions balanced the Western musical score and Italian lyrics of the book.”³¹ Despite his efforts to add Chinese elements to it, Zhang's production was subject to much controversy. The Chinese performers have no voice in the operatic production, that is to say, no Chinese performer plays any vocal role and the basic plot remains unchanged, which caused a lot of criticism. “By having white actors play the leads of *Turandot* in front of the Ancestral Temple, Zhang Yimou falls into the trap of Western orientalism,” says Sun Huizhu.³² Similar criticism seems to haunt Zhang's films as well, both during the early stages of his career and for his blockbuster film *Hero*.³³ In contrast to the librettists of

the Chinese opera versions whose concerns are literary, Zhang is seemingly more concerned with the spectacle of the performance. "The staging of *Turandot* in the Forbidden City is both Puccini's dream of the East and Zhang Yimou's vision of Italian opera."³⁴ Zhang's efforts to represent Chinese culture in the performance were also questioned by his Western collaborators, for example, the sound director and light designer, who insisted on the more subdued lighting in Italian opera against his desire to use brilliant lighting on the stage.

Although it received vigorous criticism from different fronts, Zhang Yimou's *Turandot* was a stunning, star-studded spectacle that received much national and international press coverage and considerably raised the profile of *Turandot* in China. The success of *Turandot* further established his fame as a master director of both theater and cinema. He was invited to create a series of "impression" musicals in Lijiang and other Chinese cities, in order to promote the image of the local site for the sake of tourism. His fame culminated in his being invited to direct the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. He completely abandoned his early image as an independent filmmaker and became recognized as a trusted collaborator of the government. Zhang began to play a more important role in the official strategy of cultural politics, and the fact that he directed another megaperformance of *Turandot* at the Bird's Nest is proof.

Like the Olympic opening ceremony, the multimedia *Turandot* extravaganza was staged in the national stadium, or "Bird's Nest," for a huge audience in 2009. Video images, described as the "largest ever," were projected on a one thousand-square-meter screen by thirty-two projectors. Zhang Yimou wanted to combine art and high tech to make a really big performance event.

The last *Turandot* show at the Ancestral Temple highlighted an archaic style, to go well with the style of the place. This time, the stage, being the Bird's Nest, is a symbol of new China. It's a fashionable cultural symbol of modern China, so we've used many modern, fashionable elements, including the multimedia technology to forge a modern feeling *Turandot*. It is a combination of traditional Chinese culture, the modern feel of China, and the western operatic tradition, which is very interesting.³⁵

The Bird's Nest version of *Turandot* was much more sinicized than the Forbidden City version. Zhang Yimou had both the plot and the characterization modified to "eradicate the orientalism," emphasizing instead love and a happy ending. More importantly, the actors were mostly Chinese.

Finally, Zhang Yimou was able to fully “authenticate” the Chineseness in his version of *Turandot*.

The Logic of Depoliticization in the Representation of Chineseness

The 1990s in China, says Wang Hui, is “no less an ‘end to history’ than ‘history beginning again.’”³⁶ Toward the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, a profound transformation took place in Chinese society and culture, to which depoliticization is fundamental in the sphere of ideology and state cultural policy. The Chinese ideological state apparatuses, Wang claims, “operate according to a logic of de-ideologization and depoliticization, even though they make their appeal in the language of ideology.”³⁷ In the process of ideological depoliticization, globalization and the market have played a decisive role. In this context, the Chinese *Turandot* performances can be said to be negotiating the representation of Chineseness under the impact of globalization and the market in changing locations.

Chinese *Turandot* productions are among those that have been most frequently invited abroad. A *chuanju* version of *Turandot* with an orchestra symphony, which premiered at Beijing Chang’an Grand Theater, had a tour in Australia in 2004. *Jingju* versions of *Turandot* have so far toured many places in the world, for example, Warsaw, Poland, in 2004; Bucharest, Romania, in 2004; Budapest, Hungary, in 2004; St. Petersburg, Russia, in 2007; and Damascus, Syria, in 2010. It is the Chineseness of the *chuanju* and *jingju* *Turandot* that attracts global spectators. Wu Jiang, the then president of the China National Peking Opera House in Beijing, said he “hopes to import the Western-made Chinese story, reproduce it in true Chinese style and then export it abroad.”³⁸ In addition, the National Center for Performing Arts production was invited to perform in Seoul, South Korea, in January 2011. The China Central Opera House’s production was invited to Cairo, Egypt, in 2008 and to Damascus, Syria, in 2010. The Forbidden City *Turandot* has also been taken to many places in the world: Seoul Daegu Stadium (2002 FIFA World Cup) in 2003; the Stade de France in Paris in 2005; and Munich Olympic Stadium in 2005. During the touring performances, there has always been international collaboration. In the Munich performance, *Turandot* was played by a Russian, *Caraf* by an Italian, and *Liù* by a Chinese singer named Yao Hong. The Chinese stage design and scenery, colorful Chinese costumes, and 150 Chinese dancers offered an exciting massive spectacle at the various performance sites.

Global localism is a two-way process. While the foreign spectators see the Chinese *Turandot* performances as interesting and supplementary variations on the Italian opera, the international performance trips give Chinese theater access to the global performance market. The Chinese *Turandot* performances, Zhang Yimou's in particular, also show how global capital has transformed the performances. In the West, the success of such musicals as *The Phantom of the Opera* (Her Majesty's Theatre, London, 1986), *The Lion King* (New Amsterdam Theatre, New York, 1997) and *Mama Mia!* (Prince Edward Theatre, London, 1999) has been legendary. Each of these "mega musicals" has been performed thousands of times in dozens of cities worldwide and amassed huge global box office sales. When the musicals are taken around the world, they appear to be more or less the same. That is because all performances share not only the same score and script but also similar sets, costumes, and so on, which guarantee that all the productions are to a large extent identical. This kind of performance model is nicknamed McTheater after McDonald's, as both are operated on similar principles. Bearing the effects of global capitalism, McTheater is also criticized as detrimental to the art of performance: "Many of the usual virtues of theatre are diminished: its liveliness, the uniqueness of each performance, its immediacy, its ability to respond to place and time."³⁹ Furthermore, because a high level of amplification is used instead of the natural acoustics of the space, performance is thought to be alienated from the body. Such problems were also encountered in Zhang Yimou's productions, which are in many ways modeled on McTheater.

In the world performance market, the Asian spectacle becomes both objectified and commodified. As Alexander C. Y. Huang notes, "In the late twentieth century, the assumption about the visual appeal of Chinese opera has become part of the cultural logic of touring Asian performances."⁴⁰ With Chinese spectacle as the focus, it is questionable whether the Chinese *Turandot* can contribute much to a real understanding of Chinese art. In "Chinese Opera in New York," Nancy Yunhwa Rao comments on Mei Lanfang's performance tour in the United States in 1930: "The fact that Mei's Chinese opera was beyond comprehension did not hinder appreciation, but rather satisfied the notion of 'Oriental ineffability.' An oriental object is to be appreciated aesthetically, not understood."⁴¹ Like many other Chinese opera performances abroad, the Chinese versions of *Turandot* have often been appreciated aesthetically rather than understood.

What is important for McTheater is not performers or even music but marketing. Therefore, branding the performance is crucial for the show's success. To promote his production of *Turandot*, Zhang Yimou arranged a

“princess of China” competition in connection with the Miss Chinese Global Competition in 2009. Miss Li Ruoning was selected to be the “princess of China” and became the “image ambassador” for the Bird’s Nest version of *Turandot*. In the meantime, a “princess of China” doll, an imitation of the actress playing Turandot in the production, was sold to promote the production. It is interesting to see how *Turandot* has been appropriated and then promoted as a Chinese brand in the world market; it is yet another example that shows how complex the Chineseness is that is being negotiated and branded. The notion of “authenticity,” which each Chinese *Turandot* production claims to own, has actually been manipulated for different purposes.

Zhang Yimou’s *Turandot* also reveals that performance can be combined with tourism. Michael Echer’s company, Opera on Original Site, is interested in the idea of “mixing culture with travel.”⁴² The same company brought *Aida* to Egypt, and *Boris Gudonov* to Moscow. The Forbidden City *Turandot* was criticized as being “largely a Western creation for a Western audience.”⁴³ With a budget of U.S. \$15 million, it was intended to attract wealthy Western tourists. Foreigners paid up to U.S. \$1,500 per ticket to see Puccini’s *Turandot* performed, for the first time ever, in its so-called authentic setting. Seventy percent of the audience for the Forbidden City version of *Turandot* were foreigners (not only from Western countries but also other Asian countries, Africa, and so on). Those audience/tourists provided an important opportunity for the local as well as national tourism industry.

Despite many differences between Zhang Yimou’s production and other Chinese opera versions of *Turandot*, they all claim to promote Chinese culture through them, which has attracted support from the government, both institutional and financial. The depoliticization of ideology actually implies a repoliticization in a different manner, an interesting topic for further discussions. Chinese intercultural performances, such as of *Turandot*, are used as means of public diplomacy. For example, in 1992 the 1990 Shanghai Opera House version of *Turandot* was reperformed under the baton of the Japanese conductor Yoichiro Omachi to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Japan.⁴⁴ Zhang Yimou’s production of *Turandot* received strong support of the Chinese Ministry of Culture. The different Chinese performances of *Turandot* in *chuanju*, *jingju*, *yuju*, opera, ballet, and musical forms have been praised as promoting real cultural exchanges. When they toured abroad, they won attention and warm support from Chinese foreign diplomatic institutions. The touring Chinese performances of *Turandot* abroad, like other intercultural performances, display the so-called soft power of Chinese culture since the 1990s. In turn, the popularity of *Turandot* in China over the past two decades inspired the Italian

government to institute a China project called *Programma Turandot* in 2009, which provides opportunities for Chinese students to study such subjects as arts, music, and design in Italian universities. As a result, *Turandot* has been transformed into an important bridge between China and Italy and beyond.

Conclusion

The Chinese *Turandot* provides what Rey Chow calls a “cultural supplement”; however, it has also offered Zhang Yimou and Chinese opera access to the global performance market, which until the 1980s had been dominated by the West. Furthermore, the Chineseness in the Chinese *Turandot* performances has been recognized across cultures. Being both a local creation and a global product, the Chinese *Turandot* is able to transcend national, racial, sexual, and disciplinary boundaries. As Walter Benjamin has said, theater not only reflects but also predicts the changes of a society. In a similar way, intercultural performance is a useful way for us to understand a changing world that is characterized by the increasing exchanges of goods and ideas under the influence of globalization. It provides a chance for local culture to show off its charm to international audiences. It particularly serves the Chinese goal of spreading its culture abroad and winning it recognition. In the meantime, it also creates incentive for the reform of the local arts, such as Chinese opera, as performers in the traditional theater circles have realized that they both need and are needed by international spectators.

The series of Chinese *Turandot* performances are not just entertaining but also productive and constitutive. As part of the global *Turandot*, they illustrate that world literature is not static and stable but rather “multitemporal as well as multicultural.”⁴⁵ Less a set of works than a network, world literature is preoccupied with the exchange of ideas and the promotion of cross-cultural understandings. Over the decades, the Chinese *Turandot* productions have built bridges for peoples to cross, allowing them to meet in different locations and contexts both in and outside of China. In this process of circulation and reading, world literature seems to have suffered from a loss of authenticity and authorship, but it has gained insofar as it is being reinterpreted and reproduced. In its various Chinese productions, *Turandot* has been subject to different strategies of reinterpretation, adaptation, and appropriation, which often operate under the complex dynamics of culture, capital, ideology and so on. The contextualized reading of Chinese *Turandot* emphasizes the centrality of the local in selecting, appropriating, and

marketing world literature, but the Chineseness of the productions is situated in the global-local nexus.

Turandot, supposedly the daughter of China, does not return to China to “settle down” but is dressed up to travel again under the ambiguous image of Chineseness. Despite the dispute over the “homecoming” of Turandot, the Chinese versions of *Turandot* highlight the theme of the triumph of love over hate, which is also what Puccini himself sought to stress. In a letter describing his hope for the finale, Puccini wrote: “Let the coming of love be as a shining meteor while the people shout in ecstasy.”⁴⁶ May Puccini’s dream come true!

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Notes

1. Liu Zaifu and Li Zehou, *Gaobie geming: Huiwang ershi shiji Zhongguo* [*Farewell to Revolution: Looking Back at Twentieth-Century China*] (Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu Youxian Gongsi, 1995); Wang Hui, *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity* (London: Verso, 2011), xii.

2. Liu Kang, *Globalization and Cultural Trends in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 4.

3. The “new era” in China refers to the period after the “open-door” policy and reform was adopted in 1978. 1989 is regarded by critics as a transition, the period after which is called the “post-new era.”

4. Zhang Fa, Zhang Yiwu and Wang Yichuan, “Cong ‘xiandai xing’ dao ‘zhonghua xing’: Xin zhishi xing de tanxun” [“From ‘Modernity’ to ‘Chineseness’: An Inquiry into a New Mode of Knowledge”], *Wenyi zhengming* [*Debates of Literature and Art*] 2 (1994): 18.

5. See Song Geng, “Quanqiuhua yu ‘zhongguoxing’: Wenhua yanjiu zai Zhongguo de liangnan chujing” [“Globalization and ‘Chineseness’: The Dilemma of Cultural Studies in China”], in *Quanqiuhua yu ‘zhongguoxing’: Dangdai wenhua de houzhiming jiedu* [*Globalization and ‘Chineseness’: A Postcolonial Approach to Contemporary Culture*] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 5.

6. Rey Chow, “On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem,” *boundary 2* 25.3 (1998): 4–6.

7. Chow, “On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem,” 7.

8. Ben Xu, “From Modernity to Chineseness: The Rise of Nativist Cultural Theory in Post-1989 China,” *Positions* 6.1 (1998): 219.

9. Xu, “From Modernity to Chineseness,” 220.

10. Chow, “On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem,” 4.

11. See Tu Wei-ming, “Cultural China: The Periphery as the Centre,” in *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today*, ed. Tu Wei-ming (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 34.

12. Tim Oakes, “China’s Provincial Identities: Reviving Regionalism and Reinventing ‘Chineseness,’” *Journal of Asian Studies* 69.3 (2000): 669.

13. Oakes, “China’s Provincial Identities,” 672.

14. Wang Ning, “Comparative Literature and Globalism: A Chinese Cultural and Literary Strategy,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 41.4 (2004): 597.

15. Wang Yichuan elaborates on the notion of conspiracy in the politics of contemporary Chinese culture and the economy; see Song, “Quanqiuhua yu ‘zhongguoxing,’” 5–9.

16. David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 281.
17. See Justin Huntly McCarthy, preface, *Thousand and One Days: Persian Tales*, ed. Justin Huntly McCarthy (London: Chatto and Windus, 1892), vii–x, and Ying-Wei Tiffany Sung, “*Turandot’s* Homecoming: Seeking the Authentic Princess of China in a New Contest of Riddles” (MA thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2010). Sung’s thesis provides richer details regarding the history of *Turandot* and its “homecoming” in China than any other source that I have used as reference.
18. Sean Metzger, “Ice Queen, Rice Queens, and Intercultural Investments in Zhang Yimou’s *Turandot*,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 20.2 (2003): 210.
19. Tan Yuan, “Tulanduo gongzhu de Zhongguo zhi lu” [“The Road to the China of Princess Turandot”], *Waiguo wenxue pinglun* [*Foreign Literature Review*] 4 (2009): 129–40; Mu Hongyan, “Zai tan Tulanduo de zhongguo shenfen” [“Reconsidering *Turandot’s* Chinese Identity”], *Waiguo wenxue pinglun* [*Foreign Literature Review*] 2 (2010): 225–29.
20. Qtd. in Metzger, “Ice Queen, Rice Queens, and Intercultural Investments in Zhang Yimou’s *Turandot*,” 210.
21. Sheila Melvin and Jindong Cai, “*Turandot* in China: Rejected, Reinterpreted, Reclaimed,” *Opera Quarterly* 26.2–3 (2010): 487.
22. Melvin and Cai, “*Turandot* in China,” 488.
23. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 8.
24. “Intercultural performance” is a very much contested term, such as in the writings of Erika Fischer-Lichte and Rustom Barucha, among others. By “intercultural performance,” I refer to not just the collaboration of artists or to the interweaving of different performing cultures onstage but also to the interactions of different cultures, including the creative process of cross-cultural adaptation and the reception of performance in changing cultural contexts. In addition, “interculturalism” in theater may also refer to the sponsorship of multinational capital and the international cooperation between governments and cultural organizations in the global performance market.
25. See Chengzhou He, “World Drama and Intercultural Performance: Western Plays on the Contemporary Chinese Stage,” *Neobelicon* 38.2 (2011): 397–409.
26. Wei Minglun is famous for his modern rewriting of Pan Jinlian, in which he subverts the traditional representation of Pan as a bad woman, showing instead a sympathy for and an understanding of Pan Jinlian that derive from his ethical concern with individual freedom and happiness. Wei’s reinterpretation of Pan Jinlian caused quite a stir and added to his fame as a leading playwright in China. In addition, he has also adapted *The Good Woman of Setzuan* into Chinese from a feminist perspective.
27. Wei Minglun, “Zhongguo gongzhu Dulanduo” [“The Chinese Princess Turandot”], in *Wei Minglun juzuo jingpin ji* [*Selected Works of Wei Minglun*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1998), 205.
28. See Liao Ben, “Tulanduo—Wenhua yujing de zhihuan” [“*Turandot* and the Replacement of Cultural Context”], *Wenyi Yanjiu* [*Art Studies*] 1 (1999): 38–43.
29. Chow, “On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem,” 6.
30. Kevin Platt, “How Chinese Remade ‘Turandot,’ the Italian Opera on China,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 Sept. 1998, 7.
31. Metzger, “Ice Queen, Rice Queens, and Intercultural Investments in Zhang Yimou’s *Turandot*,” 211.
32. Sun Huizhu, “Tulanduo yu Dongxi fang Xingbie zhi zhen” [“*Turandot* and the Dispute over Gender between East and West”], *Nanjing yishu xueyuan xuebao* [*Journal of Nanjing Art Institute*] 2 (2005): 57.
33. See Rey Chow, “Towards an Ethics of Postvisuality: Some Thoughts on the Recent Work of Zhang Yimou,” *Poetics Today* 25.4 (2004): 680.
34. Platt, “How Chinese Remade ‘Turandot,’ the Italian Opera on China,” 7.
35. “Zhang Yimou Brings ‘Turandot’ to Bird Nest,” CCTV.com, 14 Sept. 2009, http://english.cctv.com/20090914/100983_1.shtml.

36. Wang, *The End of the Revolution*, xiii.
37. Wang, *The End of the Revolution*, 18.
38. "Turandot Comes Home Again," *China Daily*, 2 Dec. 2003.
39. Dan Rebellato, *Theatre and Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 43.
40. Alexander C. Y. Huang, *Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 168.
41. Nancy Yunhwa Rao, "Racial Essences and Historical Invisibility: Chinese Opera in New York, 1930," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 12.2 (2000): 144.
42. Metzger, "Ice Queen, Rice Queens, and Intercultural Investments in Zhang Yimou's *Turandot*," 214.
43. Henry Chu, "A Great Wall Comes Down: Puccini's *Turandot* Makes Its Long Awaited Debut in China," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 Sept. 1998, 1.
44. Melvin and Cai, "Turandot in China," 487.
45. Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, 16.
46. Giuseppe Adami, ed., *Letters of Giacomo Puccini* (London: Harrao, 1974), 281.