China’s acquaintance with *The Tempest*, as with all of Shakespeare’s plays, began in an indirect way: Chinese readers first encountered the story through early-twentieth-century translations of Charles and Mary Lamb’s *Tales from Shakespeare*; then early spoken drama adaptations based on the *Tales* were acted for Chinese audiences. Gradually, over the 1930s to early 1960s, China saw accomplished translated productions of Shakespeare’s great works, except for *The Tempest*. Not until 1982, six years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, was a full translation of *The Tempest* first staged in mainland China.

Based mainly on stage images – first-hand materials from the respective theatre companies – this paper examines three performances of *The Tempest*: a spoken drama production in Beijing (1982, Fig. 1); a Taiwanese song-music adaptation (2004, revived in 2008, Fig. 2); and a Chinese/Danish co-production (2010, Fig. 3) by the Shanghai Spoken Drama Arts Centre in collaboration with the Shanghai Acrobatic Troupe and the Copenhagen-based companies Meridiano Theatre and Batida Theatre.

Figure 1: A kind father and an obedient daughter, Central Academy of Drama, 1982. Courtesy of the Central Academy of Drama (CAD).
Figure 2: A blissful couple, Contemporary Legendary Theatre, 2004. Courtesy of the Contemporary Legendary Theatre (CLT).

Figure 3: Acrobatic techniques are used in the Chinese-Danish Tempest, 2010.
Spanning three decades of immense change in every sphere of life, the contrasting genres of these three versions of the play serve to express the different intentions of their respective practitioners because each stage presentation conveys its practitioners’ understanding both of the text of *The Tempest*, created four centuries ago, and of the current reality in which they live and work. These productions, as witnesses to the ongoing transformation of the Chinese-speaking world, testify to the retrospection of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), the complexity involved in Taiwan’s past and present, and the adjustment of the Communist ideology in mainland China when economic reform induced a taste for extravagant style on the stage.

The following analysis, based on production images and set in the context of the rapid social-political-economic changes experienced in mainland China and Taiwan, investigates each production’s distinct approach towards subjects such as magic, politics, revenge, conspiracy, and romantic love. It is also, in a sense, a response to my own work on the topic of Shakespeare on the Chinese stage during the 1980s and 1990s (2003), which critiques Rustom Bharucha’s passionate argument that intercultural performance is a “dead end” (2) and supports the proposition that intercultural theatre is a “two-way street” (Li 2003, 8). My analysis of Chinese practice demonstrates that when Shakespeare is performed by Chinese theatre the latter is certainly affected, but Chinese theatre also contributes to Shakespeare performance and scholarship. Yet, as the twenty-first century develops, the global impact on Chinese practitioners appears far greater than I had anticipated, and the three versions of *The Tempest* illustrate a more complicated process than a clearly-signed “two-way street” (ibid.) that I had discerned ten years ago.

Erika Fische-Lichte points out that “the process of interweaving would yield something new that cannot readily be identified with any culture in particular” (294). Thus the investigation below questions how, amid the globalizing influence, the three productions successfully stretched the boundaries of Bourdieu’s concept of a “cultural field” – despite various problems on the artistic side while experimenting with disparate genres – and explored new theatrical and cultural spaces through a process of struggle, negotiation and compromise with Shakespeare’s text. The article pays specific attention to the performers’ gestures, movements, makeup, costumes and the mise-en-scène, testing the visual relation to the written play and its material scope and philosophical implications. Bourdieu’s idea that the cultural field is not only a “field of forces” but also a “field of struggles” (30) well defines the active nature of the long and complicated process of an intercultural work:

Every new position, in asserting itself as such, determines a displacement of the whole structure and that, by the logic of action and reaction, […] leads to all sorts of changes in the position-taking of the occupants of the other positions. (58)
Seventeen years later, Ric Knowles’s conclusion concerning the process of the intercultural theatre is more severe and designates it as the “interculture war” (21).

Shakespeare is staged by both modes of Chinese theatre: spoken drama, *huaju*, a modern Western-style theatre devised by reformers at the beginning of the twentieth century; and the traditional Chinese theatre of sung-verse, *xiqu*, a generic term for over 300 indigenous regional operatic theatres. Spoken drama (*huaju*) has been the predominant mode for performing Shakespeare ever since the modern theatre first emerged and found that his plays provided it with a ready-made repertoire. Most spoken drama Shakespeare productions are based on straight translations. Productions of Shakespeare by the traditional Chinese music theatre have to adapt his plays to suit the performing styles of aria singing, dance, mime and acrobatics. Some adaptations have tried to follow the spoken drama conventions by retaining a European Renaissance setting with performers made-up to look like Westerners. Other sinifiers instead treat Shakespeare as a source of raw materials from which to create Chinese stories with Chinese characters.

The 1982 spoken drama production: an ode of forgiveness

The 1982 production at the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing was a presentation by the finalists, including twenty-one male and nine female students, of a four-year BA training course in the Department of Acting. It was directed by Tsai Chin, a British Chinese artist, who was among the first few “foreign experts” (Chin 118) invited after the Cultural Revolution to teach at one of the two most prestigious drama academies. The first performance on the Chinese stage of a full translation of *The Tempest* was marked by both the Academy and the National Association of Chinese Dramatists which organized seminars involving Shakespeareans and practitioners. As a “report” of a five-month-long teaching and learning experience (September 1981–January 1982), the production was the debut public performance of these students who had been admitted in 1978. The first entrants to the academy once the national higher-education system had been rebuilt after the end of the Cultural Revolution, they had been selected from some four thousand applicants through a strict entrance procedure of three written exams plus two auditions. It was also the first time that Chinese students had worked with a professional director from abroad rather than with their own tutors, although

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1 Since the establishment of the two drama academies in the 1950s, finalists of both academies in Beijing and Shanghai present two public performances each year and these productions tend to make great contributions to theatrical activities because, as works done by teaching organizations, they enjoy less ideological interference (also less box office pressures nowadays) and more freedom of doing experimental work.
most of them also worked on the professional stage. Those many “firsts” meant unfamiliarity and demanded adjustments.

Compared with the two later *Tempest* productions, the “struggles” to which Bourdieu refers involved in the 1982 work was a relatively straightforward issue since it was only five-and-half years after the Cultural Revolution when anything that had not conformed to Mao’s leftist ideology had been publicly denounced and banned. The early 1980s revealed how the whole nation was thirsty for knowledge and information from the outside world. In addition, Shakespeare was very popular in China at the time, and Chinese audiences were reawakened to the beauty of Shakespeare’s plays by six productions between 1979 and 1981: three mandarin productions of *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*; the Old Vic’s touring *Hamlet* (1979, directed by Toby Robertson); a Tibetan version of *Romeo and Juliet* (1981, performed by Tibetan students at the Shanghai Theatre Academy); and *Measure for Measure*, which Toby Robertson was invited to direct for the Beijing People’s Art Theatre (1981). So the Central Academy of Drama was ready to embrace *The Tempest* warm-heartedly without question. Nonetheless, over five months, the process for both the British-based professional director and the individual members of the Chinese student cast still entailed complicated negotiations to deal between a Shakespeare play and the participants’ different theatrical traditions. In addition, each individual’s social and training background also contributed to the eventual outcome of the performance. The following discussion will first explore the director’s artistic approach which exemplifies her intention of using *The Tempest* for her teaching; secondly her interpretation of the play; and finally the student cast’s reaction towards an experimental and intercultural work.

Director Tsai Chin, the daughter of one of the most famous actors in jingju (known as Beijing Opera in the West), moved to England after her early life in Shanghai, graduated from Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in 1951, and played the eponymous role in *The World of Suzie Wong* on London’s West End stage. As an invited foreign expert, and being able to communicate in Chinese with staff and students, Tsai Chin took advantage of her “dual identity” and felt she “had no communication problems and no difficulty reading facial expressions – a joke and a laugh in the class dispelled initial anxieties” (120). Yet this was her first trip back to her home country after a long absence; a trip with strong personal feelings because her father had died in the purges of the Cultural Revolution. Her article reveals her profound emotions after her five months’ work in China: “I followed the same profession as my father, but trained and worked in the West. Returning to share my professional experience with my countrymen after the holocaust was a sad but proud moment for me” (118). The discussions below tease out “the anxieties” and the different approaches in these situations.
Tsai Chin was keen to offer her experience and knowledge of the contemporary Western theatre to Chinese colleagues and students. *The Tempest* not only gave her a home to accommodate thirty young students but also afforded her a good opportunity to introduce contemporary Western concepts and methods of presenting plays on the stage. ‘Western’ here means her experience and knowledge of a group of avant-garde practitioners like Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook, and others who had not been content with the established theatre in the West and sought inspiration from Asian theatres. While such experimental theatre movements were being pioneered one after another during the post-war period in the outside world, mainland China’s traumatic years of civil war had been followed in the 1950s and 1960s by its self-imposed isolation behind the bamboo curtain. The fact that spoken drama practitioners had never staged *The Tempest* before 1982 illustrates the problematic binaries they established between the spoken drama – a theatrical form imported from the West – and China’s own indigenous song-dance theatre. The distinctiveness of *The Tempest*, its supernatural spirit, fantasy, destiny and the hand of God, all seemed far removed from the Chinese mental image of what drama should be, based on essentially naturalistic material, such as the works of Ibsen, Chekhov, O’Neill, or even Shakespeare’s own earlier tragedies or comedies. Yet what had deterred previous Chinese artists was something that inspired Tsai Chin. Although the two theatrical forms of modern spoken drama and indigenous song-dance theatre had their own aesthetic principles, they could absorb certain elements from each other to expand their own boundaries. The magic power and spirits in the original play assisted her to combine the Western canon with facets of *jingju*, China’s own theatrical tradition, and this helped her challenge the orthodox treatment of Shakespeare’s work on the Chinese stage that had been laid down in the 1950s by the Soviet experts invited at that time to teach at the two drama academies.2

The following two images illustrate the conventional Chinese presentation of a Shakespeare play. Figure 4 shows *Much Ado About Nothing* (1979, Shanghai Youth Spoken Drama Company), re-creating the 1957 production directed by the Soviet expert Yevgeniya Konstantinovna Lipkovskaya. This 1979 revival was the first Shakespeare production to appear after the Cultural Revolution. Fig. 5 is *The Merchant of Venice* (1981, China Youth Art theatre) by Zhang Qihong, a Moscow-educated director. The overt message from the two images is that the story takes place afar and has nothing to do with the Chinese reality. All characters are heavily made-up, making full use of wigs and prosthetic noses, with strongly-painted round eyes and artificial lashes, which help Chinese performers look like Westerners. They all wear well-cut costumes, precise copies of the Renaissance fashion. Their poses reinforce the

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2 Details of the Soviet’s works can be seen in Li 2003 (53–69).
impression of a different type of physical presence: for example, the way Beatrice stands in fig. 4; Portia raises her finger and holds her skirt in fig. 5; and how the two male characters position their legs. The careful composition of the actors expresses a hospitable and appreciative impression of the scenes (5.2 in *Much Ado* and 3.2 in *The Merchant*). Holding his arm high, Benedick looks up at Beatrice’s profile with his full attention, clearly revealing his admiration for Lady Disdain’s wit and quick tongue. Portia and Bassanio gaze into each other’s eyes, smiling and enchanted with each other’s company. The stylization of the setting – presented by the arch against which Beatrice and Benedick lean; Cupid (the Western icon of love) above the fountain’s elegant arcs of water; the projected shadows of tall Gothic buildings behind Bassanio and Portia – suggests the directors’ attention to the demands of presenting an exotic image on the Chinese stage.

Figure 4: The 1979 Revival of *Much Ado About Nothing*, first directed by Soviet director Yevgeniya Konstantivnovna Lipkovskaya in 1957. Courtesy of the Shanghai Theatre Academy.
Figure 5: The Merchant of Venice was one of the early Shakespeare productions in the post-Cultural Revolution period by Chinese Youth’s Art Theatre, 1980. Courtesy of the director Zhang Qihong.

By contrast to the above images of magnificent scenery, doublet and hose costumes, blonde wigs and prosthetic noses, the 1982 The Tempest adopted a minimalist design for set and costumes, conveying the flexibility of the acting space, a notable feature of the traditional Chinese theatre (see figs. 6 and 7).

Figure 6: Prospero creates the storm battling Alonso and the company’s ship. Courtesy of CAD.
The presentation of the 1982 production was a bold innovation at the time, challenging the long-established conception of how spoken drama should deal with a Western masterpiece. To Tsai Chin, a simple set could help her students live on the stage more naturally. She says:

The set consisted of only two rocks, so that the students did not have to compete with the elaborate sets which the Chinese are so good at painting. The costumes were basic tunics and trousers not identified with any particular period or country; thus the students filled their costumes with ease and without self-consciousness. Miranda, the only mortal woman in the play, wore a long dress. Symbolic colours were used to denote status and character, a notion borrowed from Beijing opera (123).

Corresponding to the minimal stage design and simple costumes most actors were natural-looking, except for the spirits who wore stylized makeup, as did Trinculo and Stephano (see fig. 8).

Figure 7: Prospero encounters the shipwrecked survivor, 1982. Courtesy of CAD.

Figure 8: Flask in hand, Stephano and his friend Trinculo are admired by Caliban. Courtesy of CAD.
The rehearsals and blocking were based on a variety of exercises Tsai Chin gave students to carry out. “Lines were learned gradually rather than by rote, and both the history of the characters and off-stage happenings described in the play were improvised so that the actors were thoroughly familiar with the play before blocking” (Tsai 122). She discovered that students lacked spontaneity in acting due to the “obsessive analysis of script and character, plus the Chinese social expectation of restraint in public” (120). She concluded this was a problem caused by overemphasizing certain aspects of the Stanislavsky System taught by the Soviet tutors in the 1950s. It is fair to say that the Method in the 1980s was already strongly tinged with the Chinese colour, due to the country’s political, social and cultural impact over the past three decades. Not only the relationship between China and the former USSR encountered severe problems in the late 1950s, the decade-long Cultural Revolution further isolated China from the outside world. In addition, the conventional style of presenting Western plays, as shown in Figs. 4 and 5, invited students to put on a histrionic display.

In order to “force” the students to act spontaneously and from internal motivation Tsai Chin asked them not to “jot one word down on paper” (122), nor did she allow them to view the BBC production of *The Tempest*. Conversely, in the early 1980s, it was normal practice for Chinese companies putting on Western plays to seek special permission to see recordings of such exemplars; indeed, it was regarded as a major privilege theatre practitioners could enjoy because of the difficulty and cost of obtaining any foreign video recording.

Among various exercises of “physicalization” (ibid.), an expression used by Tsai Chin to describe how to help actors get to know their characters’ feelings through their bodies, the “rope exercises” proved to be most efficient. Tsai Chin interpreted *The Tempest* as a play about relationships: the rope symbolized the bond between people, and the ways lines were spoken accorded with the physical feelings delineated by the rope. Thus, for Prospero and Caliban, the latter was fastened while the master used the rope to drag or to control the slave. Between Prospero and Ariel the servant was asked to hold one end of the rope while the other end was in the master’s hand. Again, Prospero used the rope to react whenever Ariel was obedient or rebellious while Ariel had to feel the movement of the rope and respond spontaneously. When the rope was in the hands of Miranda and Ferdinand its nature changed to suit their relationship. Liang Bolong3, a lecturer at the Central Academy of Drama, observed:

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3 Chinese names are given in Chinese style, i.e. family name first, followed by given name, unless otherwise printed. All translations from Chinese into English are mine unless otherwise noted.
These exercises [of the rope] were very simple, but they helped students quickly gain feelings, and understand the characterization and the relationship between characters. The communication between characters was carried out through body reactions and thus it was more immediate and accurate (59).

Relationship was the key to the plot; it also helped the whole group understand the new reading of the play that the director wanted to achieve. Tsai Chin found *The Tempest*, written by an English poet in the 1600s, remained extremely pertinent to the reality of 1980s China because “the lesson in forgiveness […] mirrored the attitude adopted by the Chinese people towards their former persecutors during the Cultural Revolution” (121). The theme also reflected her personal loss since both of her parents had died tragically during that chaotic time. The original play’s motifs of tempest, shipwreck, revenge and reconciliation, and Prospero’s final speech, projected a complicated and intriguing perspective on contemporary China.

In many ways Chinese people in the early 1980s had similar impressions of the outside world to those of English audiences when *The Tempest* was first written. The stage direction in act 5 of the Folio *Tempest*: “Here Prospero discovers Ferdinand and Miranda playing at chess”, and Gonzalo’s amazement at the young couple’s sudden appearance paralleled the wonder Chinese people discovered in Shakespeare’s plays and in many other foreign or Chinese masterpieces after the Cultural Revolution. “Re-liberated” was the catchphrase of the time. The play prompted actors and audiences to “rejoice / Beyond a common joy” (5.1.206–7) at getting rid of the ultra-leftist control and gaining the enticing prospect of “O brave new world” (5.1.183). Tsai Chin paid much attention to the play’s final discovery scene, but she did not go for any spectacle. Simplistic but graceful was the style of the production. Instead of placing the couple at the back of the stage (as in the stagecraft of Shakespeare’s era) she moved them to the very front of the stage (fig. 1). Prospero looked on at the young couple, a miracle he had created, from afar without emotion.

The close of the play unites joy with forgiveness: “[t]hough the seas threaten, they are merciful” (5.1.178). A particular charm of the 1982 Chinese Prospero was that he valued forgiveness more highly than revenge, freely pardoning the “three men of sin” (3.3.53). Significantly, in this staging, Caliban was no longer a “savage and deformed slave” but unfolded himself “to stand like a proud man on the same rock where Prospero had first stood at the beginning of the play” (Tsai 124), (see fig. 9).

The five-month learning experience through workshops, exercises and rehearsals was not easy for the class of thirty students. They found Tsai Chin’s approach to spoken drama and to a Shakespeare play differed mar-

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4 The Arden revised edition (2011) by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan is used in this article.
Tsai Chin observed that some had considered her use of *jingju* concepts in *The Tempest* a “sacrilege to Shakespeare” and sighed: “Reverence for this Western genius was greater than for their own traditional theatre” (124). Similarly, it was difficult for students to access the characters and the action in the play through Tsai Chin’s method of “physicalization” because, to them, literary analysis would constitute the only correct mode of approaching such profound characters as Shakespeare had created. Many games and exercises were regarded as childish and “all a bit of a joke” (Tsai 122–23) as, for instance, the exercise of “carrying chairs”. In the rehearsals, the student who acted Ferdinand was ordered to carry chairs up and down the rehearsal hall just as he would have to carry logs in the play. Although initially reluctant, the student eventually found the tiredness and frustration he endured from carrying the chairs turn into feelings of real anger which helped him begin to understand Ferdinand, his situation and his relationship with Miranda in 3.1. The exercise for this particular student was significant because it put him in a new position in his way to acting Ferdinand and offered him a new perspective of performance in general.
The question of the makeup presented a similar “struggle” to other students. In the 1980s, using wigs and prosthetic noses, plus heavy paint, was the norm when spoken drama performed a foreign play. Tsai Chin’s insistence on a natural look in the 1982 production proved contentious, as she recorded:

Confrontation came during the dress rehearsal. The male actors wanted to put on their usual heavy rouge and thick eyebrows. I made up one man and woman “naturally” and challenged them to tell me which makeup, theirs or mine, looked more like a human face. It was their will against mine (124).

While the 1982 Tempest paid much attention to the power relationships between characters in the original play, Tsai Chin’s experimental exercises and rehearsals on relationship gave rise, in turn, to effects that altered the actual relationships both between student and tutor and between actor and acting.

The 2004 Taiwanese musical adaptation: fantasy or Zen interpretation?

The 2004 Tempest adaptation was by the Taiwan-based Contemporary Legend Theatre (CLT hereafter) and its founder Wu Hsing-kuo, who co-directed the play with film director Hsui Hark, a major figure of Hong Kong cinema. The stage and costume designer was Tim Kam-tim Yip, whose work for the film Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon won him an Oscar. The script was co-written by Xi Zhigan, a playwright based on the mainland, and Wu Hsing-kuo.

Wu’s CLT is one of the most exciting theatre companies aiming to fuse Western and Eastern theatrical arts. Among the productions Wu and the CLT have staged since 1986, when the company was founded, four have quarried materials from Shakespeare plays: Macbeth (1986), Hamlet (1990), King Lear (2001) and The Tempest (2004). Among these adaptations, The Tempest has attracted the greatest controversy. It was hailed for its breathtaking visual effect on the stage, yet it was also severely criticized for lacking clear directorial control. Through the following discussion of key scenes in the adaptation, the change of themes of the performance, and how the production team sought to express the fantasy created by the original, we will find that the practitioners seemed to have become lost in the dynamic sources of a versatile play: bewildered by the diverse directions of interpretation and debate offered by Shakespeare’s text. Not just “interculture wars” are involved, the intracultural aspects are even more fascinating.
This adaptation of The Tempest consists of twelve scenes divided into two acts, and the new structure is based on Prospero’s fondness for books. Very possibly it was influenced by Peter Greenaway’s film Prospero’s Books. The performance of every scene displays the magical power of Prospero’s knowledge and his insight into the whole world, with the word “book” appearing in each scene’s title. For example, scene 1 is “The Book of Magic” which portrays the shipwreck, while scene 9 is “The Book of Slavery” which involves the conspiracy between Caliban and the jester and the butler. The images in this section show the extensive use of the written Chinese characters as symbols of knowledge, printed either on the backdrop or on Prospero’s magic gown. The stage/costume design visually expresses the theme and the structure of the adaptation.

Figure 10 below is from scene 1, “The Book of Magic”. The material of the magic cloak is printed with Chinese characters in the style of ancient inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells from the 16th–11th centuries BC. Bobuluo (Chinese Prospero) gives Ailier (Ariel), a female figure in white, the order to unleash the tempest on the sea:

Figure 10: Waving the banner in her hand, Ailier follow her master’s instruction to create the tempest. Courtesy of CLT.

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5 Both 2004 and 2008 versions contain twelve scenes, yet the contents are different. In the 2004 version, act 1 consists of seven scenes including the one in which “Bobuluo’s ugly slave Kaliban seeks to approach Milanda but only to be scolded and insulted by Bobuluo.” The 2008 version deleted this scene but added one to act 2, in which Bobuluo made Kaliban a Spirit of the Earth, who was equal to Ailier, the Spirit of the Air.

6 Instead of using a Chinese transliteration of their names, the adaptation used their job titles to make it easier for audiences to understand.
The Chinese reception of *The Tempest*

The following image (fig. 11) is from scene 3, “The book of Time”, when Bobuluo tells his daughter Milanda (Miranda) the background story of the usurpation, the honest counsellor Gangzhaluo (Gonzalo), the divine providence, and this remote magic island. The written characters on the backdrop and its yellow and red colour scheme blend well with the aria singing about the melancholy and intriguing history of the past twelve years.

![Figure 11: Courtesy of CLT.](image)

As the designer Tim Yip expected, written characters ably convey the image of knowledge contained in the original play. Yet the real magic power of the play, which has invited many different renderings since it was first performed in 1611, needs more dramatic action. Wu Hsing-kuo believes that “to make traditional topics more meaningful they must be given not only a change of style, but also a new spirit, new thinking, and new attitudes that reflect contemporary society” (2004).⁷

Indeed, the choice of *The Tempest* in 2004 demonstrated the artist’s intention of using the play’s socio-historical implications to mirror Taiwan’s reality. Stimulated partly by the political and colonial themes that had excited much interest among academics and practitioners, and partly by the changing political landscape in Taiwan, the adaptation emphasized its representation of Kaliban (Caliban) as a Taiwanese aborigine. Wu asserted: “The Tem-

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⁷ Cited from his speech at the conference: ‘Tradition and Innovation in Chinese Opera – Professional Identity and Interculturalism,’ organized by the Centre for Theatre Laboratory Studies in the Institute for Aesthetic Studies (29 September to 3 October 2004). I went to Aarhus and Holstebro in Denmark to join the CLT which had been invited by Eugenio Barba to perform their adaption of *King Lear* for the 40th anniversary of the foundation of the Odin Theatre.
pest was a play that the CLT produced especially for the place we live, work and love dearly” (2011).8

Taiwan, a mountainous island off the southeast coast of mainland China, underwent periods of colonization by the Dutch (1624–1662) and Japanese (1895–1945). Since 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) gained control of the mainland and established the People’s Republic of China, the Nationalist government of the Republic of China moved to Taiwan. The Nationalist policies in the early 1950s further sharpened the social divisions evidenced by the 1947 massacre when Nationalist forces suppressed an anti-government uprising resulting in a great number of civilian deaths. The Nationalists’ political dominance remained uninterrupted until 2000 when the presidential election was won by the Democratic Progressive Party, which has a distinctive Taiwanese identity. Taiwan’s 23 million residents consist of Han Chinese, Taiwanese, and nine different aboriginal groups. The intricate history of occupation by different rulers and the social issues between ethnicities made the island sensitive to the conceptual relationships of outsider/occupier and insider/native, giving The Tempest particular topicality. Using a jingju actor with an aboriginal family background to act Kaliban added further connotations to the performance.

The character of Kaliban is highlighted in scene 8, “The Book of Dream”, which opens the second half of the performance. Kaliban, acted by Yang Jingming, a jingju actor from the Paiwan tribe (Wu 244), appears on the stage amid a smoke effect suggesting the beautiful mist of the mountains, accompanied by newly-composed music tinged with a strong Paiwan melodic colour. Whereas in previous scenes (especially in front of his master) Kaliban had always appeared bent-over in a humpbacked posture, he now stands tall despite carrying heavy logs on his back. Wearing a costume of leaves with a long thick tail, he shows his dignity, walking freely in his own land. To match the tail, his handsome face is painted with several chevron-shaped white strokes across the nose, quite unlike any of the customary facial patterns in jingju. The first line of his song contains only a few vowels without words, giving the impression that he enjoys the freedom on his own. Suddenly he stumbles as if the wounds, caused previously by Bobuluo’s whipping, hurt him. It is worth noting that Kaliban’s dance is not choreographed in accordance with the jingju principles of movement, such as “roundness” or “opposition”.9

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8 Interview with the author held 14 August 2011 in Edinburgh when Wu performed his one-man show Li Er Is Here at the Edinburgh Festival.

9 The principles stem from the contradictory forces of yin and yang that interact to produce the Great Ultimate in Chinese aesthetics. For example, when raising one’s leg in jingju the upward and outward motion of the actor’s foot towards his forehead produces a rounded shape. Similarly, when the actor’s arms stretch out to both sides (before leg kicking starts) they should form a curve rather than a straight line. In order to
Instead, it is a blend of folk dance with types of movement in-between an ape and a human being.
Kaliban starts his main aria created on the basis of the original song of “noises, / Sounds and sweet airs” (3.2.135–6). Again, it is not in a jingju musical mode but in a Taiwanese folk melody.

Haystacks piling high, / Let the flame grow. / Burn, burn Bobuluo to death, / That tyrant should die. / I still remember when you first landed, / You used sweet words to trick me. / I told you where the best springs and the salt wells are, / Where good soil and ponds are. / Oi-yi-ya-ho, hi-yi-ya-ho. / You taught me to be civilized, / Saying you were helping me / But in the end you made me / A home-less wandering destitute, / Lost in my own land. / Oi-yi-ya-ho, hi-yi-ya-ho. / (Starting a speech style of shuban10.) / Words and moral codes of conduct, / Moving my head sideways, / Reciting all this nonsense. / You scolded me calling me / Dirty low-class savage mongrel, / Good-for-nothing loudmouth. / I learn your walk, / With my back straight, / Sticking out my belly, / Lowering my head, averting my eyes, / Swaying my bottom sideways. / You accuse me saying I’m ugly, / Moving about, (starting to sing again) like a praying mantis. / Oi-yi-ya-ho, hi-yi-ya-ho. / (Shuban again) / I swear and curse so that venomous spells / Will land on your head / From inside out from head to toe, / Poisonous zits will spread all over your body. / I’ll curse so you will become a monkey, / Unable to control your face, mouth always agape. / I curse so you will become a porcupine, / Your prickly spines piercing through your stomach. / (Singing) / Ancestral mother or mother, / To curse him daily. / I suffer huge pains in my heart and all through my body, / How come he’s still alive / That evil tyrant! / Ancestral mother, oh mother, / Oi-yi-ya-ho, hi-yi-ya-ho. / Ancestral mother or mother, ancestral mother. 11

While still calling for the ancestral mother, Kaliban falls to the ground. Then, at centre stage, a triangular-shaped monumental statue begins shaking with a strange noise and splits apart. From the smoke emerges a witch (fig. 12) who claims to be Kaliban’s ancestral spirit from the Flying-fish tribe.

Summoning her spirit warriors to fight against Bobuluo’s spirits, led by Ailier, the witch launches a fierce war, presented through jingju’s martial arts and acrobatic tricks. During the fight the witch becomes increasingly angry with Kaliban, scorning her offspring as weak-kneed, and hits him down. Finally triumphant in the battle, the witch and her spirits celebrate their victory:

achieve ‘roundness’ every movement must begin in the opposite direction to its final destination. Those who are interested in the jingju movements can see Li 2010.

10 Literal translation is: count beats. It could be over-simplified as the Chinese rap, in which lines of different lengths are in strict rhyme, speaking rhythmically to the percussive beat without other musical accompaniment.

11 Transcription of the English subtitles from the DVD recording kindly offered by the CLT.
Despite the prominence assigned to Kaliban in the CLT’s Taiwanese adaptation the attempted post-colonial presentation of the play seemed rather half-hearted. There were several reasons for this problem. Firstly, although the adaptation stressed Kaliban’s victim status it could not extenuate the moral
outrage of his crime of attempted sexual assault on Milanda written in the original play. Secondly, Wu Hsing-kuo, the real driving-force behind this production, had an ambivalent attitude towards Taiwan’s reality when the work was first created. On one hand, he was against what the Nationalists had done to the aborigines in Taiwan; on the other, he did not agree with the Democratic Progressive Party’s policy of exclusively promoting the ‘Taiwanese consciousness.’ For Wu, there was no conflict between the Chineseness and the Taiwaneseeness of his own cultural identity. He was born and bred in Taiwan, and regarded the island as his sole homeland. Yet, having worked on the jingju stage since he was ten years old, jingju – a theatre that originated from Beijing – was not only his career but also a crucial part of his life. He loved it but also hated it because he found the stylized theatre shackled his own creativity. The psychological complexity surrounding this Taiwanese actor and his feelings for jingju, best illustrated by Wu’s one-man-adaptation of King Lear, put him in the avant-garde of the performing world. Since 1986, long before the DPP came to power, he had been seeking to revolutionize jingju through the perspective of his particularly Taiwanese upbringing. Thus, as cited in Wu Peichen’s article, Wu Hsing-kuo made a defiant personal statement:

I was very frustrated and annoyed by the nativist cultural policy and its monopolization of art festivals [in Taiwan]. ... Why was I suddenly labelled an “outsider” by the new dominant discourse of nativism? Who is the real native Taiwanese, then? Why did the art that I perform, jingju, suddenly become an antithesis to the Taiwanese identity? (243).

The complicated historical background of the island and its current politics made it difficult to define a clear strategy for adapting The Tempest in Taiwan, while the casting arrangement, with Wu acting Bobuluo using jingju elements and Yang acting Kaliban using Taiwanese aboriginal song/dance, added more strands to an already tangled mesh. It is worth noting that in order to tone down the unpleasant side of Kaliban and lessen the antagonism between the slave and the master, Wu, in the 2008 version which was taken to the Hong Kong Arts Festival, cut the whole scene concerning Kaliban’s approach to Milanda out. However, the cutting was not enough to solve the problems entangled in an ambiguous text, social and political background to Taiwan and to the individual performers, and the different origins of the performing forms. As Wu Peichen observed:

By representing native Taiwan by the Taiwanese aborigines only, and by making changes in the relationship between Ariel and Caliban, Wu still reaffirmed hierarchical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in his production, thus

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12 Those who are interested in Wu’s adaptation Li Er Is Here can see Li 2006 (195–215), and Alex Huang (31–47).
in turn reflecting the deeply rooted ideological hegemony of the ruling class coming from the outside. (247–48)

Not only taking the above Kaliban’s scene out of the revised work in 2008, Wu also tried to emphasize the idea of “reconciliation.” He felt he could discern the Buddhist concept of zen or meditation in The Tempest. The anger originally expressed in the adaptation diminished. Instead, the revised work placed greater emphasis on the theme of understanding in the later scenes, with a peaceful relationship growing between Babuluo and people harmonizing together with the environment. Wu Hsing-kuo said at the interview when the adaptation revived:

Recently, in Taiwan’s special political environment, the mutual exclusion, intimidations, and divisions of ethnic groups were Taiwan’s historical wounds. Producing The Tempest was to pray for the serenity after the purification of the mind. The care for aboriginal people and nature should be one of the most concerned issues in the contemporary world.

The new theme of reconciliation and freedom was illustrated by the end of the performance. After discarding his enchanted red gown, the book and the magic banner, Bobuluo starts a long aria, delivered through a blended style of singing and chanting on the basis of the kunju\(^{13}\) mode.

![Figure 14: Holding the magic banner in his hand, Babuluo is asking the heaven what he should do with the power he once had. Courtesy of CLT.](image)

\(^{13}\) It was an older theatrical genre than jingju.
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Figure 15: Dropping his enchanted red gown on the ground, can Babuluo really go back to his real self and normal life? Courtesy of CLT.

From now on my hands are empty, / I forego all magic art, / No longer imprisoned by my own spells and curses, / No longer commanding spirits and genies, / I return to my old self and my country. / I’ll no longer care about power and desire, / I’ll forgive what was wrong in the past. / No more blessings or guilt, / I leave behind the shackles of the spirit, / I’m grateful Heaven has relieved me of my vengeance, / With your kind applause, / Please grant me a gentle breeze, / So I can sail home, / Allow me to bid farewell to the stage, / This play ends now set me free. Set me free. 14

Chen Fang, a Taiwanese scholar, found that the new adaptation “revealed the Chinese Prospero’s psychological path to the Buddhism” (115). In order to reach the ultimate reconciliation, not only, as in the original play, does Bobuluo make possible the romance between his daughter Milanda and the Prince Huodingnan (Ferdinand) (see figs. 2 and 16), but now he also arranges a marriage between white-winged Ailier and Kaliban. Babuluo refers to the former as the Spirit of the Air while the latter is Spirit of the Earth.

Wu Hsing-kuo said at the interview “Love and caring is what Taiwan needs today.” 15 However, the result shown on the stage was that Bobuluo intended to control everything, while critic Wang Youhui was anxious that such an arrangement “may cause the ‘family violence’ rather than the happiness of reconciliation brought by the love and forgiveness” (2005b, 106).

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14 Transcription of the English subtitles from the DVD recording kindly offered by the CLT.

15 Recorded on the DVD *The Tempest*, produced by CLT, kindly offered to me by the company.
Figure 16: Miranda, Prince Huodingnan and the spirits are happily together. Courtesy of CLT.

Figure 17: The white-winged spirit Alier and Kaliban are forced to be a couple. Courtesy of CLT.
Wang Anqi, a renowned scholar, playwright, and the Artistic Director of the Guoguang Jingju Company in Taiwan, points out astutely that when practitioners become confused by the various ideas that they want to use to interpret Shakespeare’s text the only thing one could expect from *The Tempest* would be “the magic effect” on the stage.16 As a result, the fantasy born out of the artistic world created by Shakespeare offered the practitioners an easy escape.

Tsui, as a film director famous for his kung fu masterpieces, worked on a stage production for the first time. As he wrote in his Director’s Words: “Even I was wondering what would happen when stage, Beijing Opera, Shakespeare worked together in my hands.”17 He was fascinated to see how a Shakespeare play could stretch the possibility of the stage and the ability of jingju actors.

Figure 18 shows the battle between the rival spirits. Ailier in white, using the stage convention of a female warrior role, jumps up and kicks the poles thrown towards her by the enemy led by the witch.

![Figure 18: Courtesy of CLT.](image)

Figure 19 below is the scene of the shipwreck. Working with Tim Yip, the stage and costume designer, the tempest and the shipwreck were portrayed through the costumes and body movements. This integration of scenes and costumes suggested a new direction for the stage design, imagery and per-

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16 I was offered by CLT a letter written by Wang to both Wu Hsing-kuo and Lin Hsiu-wei about her comments on *The Tempest*.
17 The writing was kindly offered by the CLT Archive.
formance. The “head” of the ship was formed by Ariel, who wore a phoenix hat, and the movements of her long cloak and of the performers depicting the people aboard created the storm-stricken vessel:

Figure 19: Courtesy of CLT.

As discussed earlier, Yip’s fascination lay purely in the materials and visual effect on the stage. Being a designer of both the set and costumes, he attempted to use the Chinese aesthetics of dialectic relations between fluidity and solidity, and concrete and abstract, to interpret the magic power of Prospero. To Yip, everything should be expressed by means of colour and shape. The most powerful character in the play, Prospero, not only seemed to know what and when something was going to happen but also managed to control everyone around him to a certain degree. Accordingly, Yip designed a most impressive red gown, 4 metres in length and 5 metres in width, which took twenty tailors to sew. Covered with golden symbols, the gown and backdrop created a fantasy world of the magical knowledge on the stage.

The following image shows part of the width of the gown and the written characters:
The design of the costume gave Wu Hsing-kuo, who acted Prospero, great difficulties to overcome in performing the protagonist’s movements. Moreover, to display the full length of the gown, Wu had often to stand on a high platform (this platform too was wrapped in a huge cloth with printed written Chinese characters). However, the flowing red, symbolic of Prospero’s power, together with the white colouration of Ailier and her retinue of spirits, enhanced the simplicity of the stage design to create a startlingly magical world. Yip referred to his work for *The Tempest* as ‘a costume theatre’ (Contemporary Legend Theatre).
Challenged by the unusual costume and set design, Wu Hsing-kuo as a trained jingju actor and modern dancer had to be more creative. His versatility offers all kinds of possibilities for this intercultural work. The 2004 Tempest is not a Beijing Opera adaptation of the original play; rather it is an experimental work to blend vocal, musical, and physical elements from jingju, kunju, Taiwan aboriginal melodies, martial arts, and dance.

Shakespeare’s plays have always offered Wu an opportunity to explore the Chinese tradition. Ailier-Ariel, the origin of the winged god Mercury (Vaughan and Vaughan 1998, 118) and the sea-nymph imagery from the text (1.2.302) stirred the Chinese practitioner’s imagination. As seen in the above images, in Wu’s production Ailier and her companions all wore large wings and qiao, a special type of high-heeled shoe used by female roles on the traditional stage to simulate the former Chinese custom of binding women’s feet. Unlike the traditional ‘hard’ wooden qiao, the modern-day reformed version is a soft type as depicted in fig. 22 with the rolled strips which are wrapped around the actor’s ankles to secure the shoes. Wearing qiao involves particular postures and steps expressed in light and speedy movements.

Figure 22: Photograph taken by the author.

It remains a matter of debate as to the effectiveness of Wu’s adaptation in articulating his concerns for aboriginal people and the environment in Taiwan or the zen he has sensed in the Tempest. Yet Wu takes a positive view of
each of his attempts in intercultural theatre: “I’ve been on a difficult path. Every step was a fierce struggle, but every time these struggles brought me happiness” (Wang 2005a).

The 2010 circus performance: from small dream to international co-production

Akin to the artists in Taiwan in 2004, the Italian artistic director Giacomo Ravicchio of the Copenhagen-based Meridiano Theatre chose *The Tempest* because of Shakespeare’s great creativity. The play could enable him to realize his dream of adapting a canonical work into a circus performance with clowns, acrobats, contortionists, magicians and ringmasters.

![Image](image-url)

Figure 23: A stunning scene at the opening. Courtesy of SDAC.

Ravicchio saw the similarities between mariners and acrobats:

I had in mind that the crew of a ship is very similar to the crew of a circus: they are people who come from different countries and travel constantly. Often they have problems with strings and tissue at the mercy of the wind. Shakespeare’s *Tempest* is a story made of numbers, one after another. It seemed to me that the idea of the circus was perfect for the show; the circus as we know it always mixes different styles and genres. (Nicholoson)
The Chinese-Danish *Tempest* premiered for the opening of the Danish Pavilion at the 2010 Shanghai Expo. It employed a cast of five actors from the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre, six actors from Meridiano Theatre, four acrobats from the Shanghai Acrobatic Troupe, and eleven musicians from Batida Theatre orchestra. The language of the production was English, and Chinese side-titles were projected when it was performed in Shanghai.
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This large-scale work of international cooperation had its origin in 2009 when Ravicchio was invited by the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre to direct *White Snake*, a play adapted from a traditional Chinese folk tale with a wide variety of regional operatic versions. His bold exploration of homosexual themes added a modern twist to an old story, and his use of technology and digital images in the production impressed both the company and the audience. His idea of presenting a Shakespeare play in the form of a circus performance for the following year’s Expo was warmly accepted. It fits the current theatrical trend in twenty-first-century China: light-hearted, with extravagant visual effects and a show of pageantry.

The production reduced the weight of the language and externalized the power and prominence in the canonical work by using colour, multimedia technology, music and acrobatic tricks. It is the “grand illusion” (2010) that the director Ravicchio attempted to create. The performance script follows the original structure of five acts but the Elizabethan poetic language is rewritten into more accessible everyday English apart from a few lines of Prospero’s monologues. Simple sentences from the original such as Ariel’s line “Do you love me, master?” (4.1.48) are kept. In this 2010 work, Ariel repeated it whenever she was in a dialogue with Prospero, and the catchphrase helped the audience understand the master-servant relationship.
Drama Artistic Centre 2010). However, it is worth noting that the original “No?” at the end of the line is dropped to further simplify Ariel’s motivation.

Figure 27: The master and the servant. Courtesy of SDAC.

Not only is the language made less ambiguous, but also the interpretation. Instead of getting into complex questions regarding Caliban’s enslavement, or the post-colonial analysis of Prospero, or the multi-vocal nature and the openness of the play, Ravicchio found the play “concerns a planned staging of events, an arranged performance, of which Prospero is the initiator and that ends in an ultimate reckoning between him and the royal thieves who have robbed him of his dukedom” (2010). The director’s interpretation was in tune with the dominant voice on the play among mainland Chinese Shakespeareans. Echoing Romantic criticism of *The Tempest*, Fang Ping, the translator of the latest Chinese version affirms that play is “a romantic comedy flying in the sky above the reality. […] a beautiful ode for mankind” (489–90). He also shares Wilson Knight’s view that “the poet presents a reflection of his whole work” (247).

With a simplistic language and theme, the text afforded Ravicchio “a great opportunity to find previously unthought-of artistic approaches” (2010). The director paid his full attention to the theatricality involved in the original play and to the magic power as an outcome, when different cultures encounter and work together. At an interview with the *China Daily*, he said:

I don’t think it is very hard to integrate different elements. Diversity is the most interesting thing on this planet. […] The important thing is to take cultures, stories
and styles, and, day after day, feel the crew getting more involved in the project. Only then will you probably get something special. (Zhang Kun)

From the comments of the Chinese and Danish actors who rehearsed the play in both countries we can observe that conflicts occurred at all levels from the interpretation of the play, approaches to the character or to the acrobatic movements, to issues over language and even food. However, compromise was not difficult to reach because everyone was intrigued by what defines the play: a “process of poetic actualization” (Knight 247).

The actualization involved all aspects, among which two were most noticeable. One was the music. The sounds that enchant Prospero’s island and accompany Ariel’s songs were performed by eleven musicians from Batida Theatre Orchestra, Denmark.

Prospero’s magic power was conveyed to the audience by means of the music, and sometimes by the strange percussion, played by the onstage band: it led Ferdinand to his meeting with Miranda and it awakened Gonzalo when the traitorous Antonio and Sebastian were plotting murder. The band also played at the masque. Red costume, ginger hair and huge prosthetic noses, a caricature of Danes in cartoons, gave the production a grotesque image tinged with humour. Chinese audiences welcomed the exotica.

The other aspect of the production which received both wide acclaim and severe criticism was the style of circus performance of the canonical play. The challenging ‘sky-flying’ and breath-taking multimedia technology created a magical island on the stage.
Ariel’s first entrance was carried out on a ring hanging down from a bar high above the stage. When Ferdinand and Miranda recognized their fresh and natural love for each other they were floating as if on a cloud. (See fig. 3) Impressed by such stage imagery, Chinese audiences could more easily comprehend Miranda’s motivation in offering to carry logs for Ferdinand or her argument with her father concerning her beloved.

The Sino-Danish *Tempest* developed a distinctive blend of spoken language, dance, music and acrobats. It was welcomed by audiences in Shanghai for its extravagant style of romance tinged with foreign humour and the grotesque. It was also criticized for being a cheap pantomime performance, losing the real poetry and drama of Shakespeare’s play. Indeed, to what extent could poetry be expressed through acrobatics, dance and music, with a group of grotesque musicians who sometimes participated in the plot and sometimes behaved as a chorus? All the practitioners seemed to have enjoyed participating in the work because they were testing potential artistic approaches to stretch the concept of what is theatre.
Conclusion

The three Chinese productions invite us to ponder a number of questions relating to the “struggle” (Bourdieu) or “war” (Knowles) between cultures. Perhaps the most obvious is that in all three portrayals Ariel is a female figure, which interestingly corresponds to an image of the character on the Victorian stage (*Tempest*, eds Vaughan and Vaughan, 30). Apart from some pragmatic considerations, for example, the number of female students in the class with which Tsai Chin had to work, and certain acting/acrobatic skills that Wu Hsing-kuo and Ravicchio wanted to employ in their productions, there are possibly deeper issues. Chinese mentality tends to think of kind spirits as more feminine, reflected in the Chinese transliteration of Ariel in the form of three written characters: Ai (love); li (beautiful); and er (meaning “you” in classical Chinese but commonly used to express the sound of “I” in the transliteration). The apparent acceptance of a feminine Ariel reveals certain Chinese conceptions not only about the play but about gender roles in society as a whole.

The Chinese female Ariel reminds us of Bourdieu’s argument of cultural structure cited at the beginning of the article. In this case, the Chinese concept of gender assimilates the Western mythology without producing too much trouble. However it does not represent the whole story. New elements, such as Shakespeare’s text *The Tempest*, practitioners from different nations/races involved in the productions, and practitioners’ own artistic objectives, force people to struggle with their own identities and to take new positions. As the analysis in the article demonstrates, Tsai Chin and her students, the three leading practitioners in the Taiwanese production, and the Italian director, Danish actors/musicians and Chinese actors/acrobats all have their own ideas what a future production should look like. No matter it is “struggle” or “war,” necessary negotiation and compromise between the cultures have to take place. Otherwise, no production can be possibly staged. Since an intercultural performance always provides a special focus of struggle for both sides, the three Chinese (including Chinese-Danish) productions of *The Tempest* demonstrate that the Chinese understanding of Shakespeare and the interpretation of this particular play have evolved and transformed over the past thirty years. As I argue in *Shashibiya: Staging Shakespeare in China*, “Shakespeare in China is […] as much a story about China as it is about Shakespeare” (2003, 223).

The diversity of the three productions highlights the different paths chosen by these practitioners in formulating their individual answers to a question always confronting every theatrical practitioner: how to stage the modern when globalization reduces the distance between countries? Furthermore they open up new possibilities that *The Tempest* can offer to today’s audiences whose mental image of what constitutes theatre has changed so rapidly due
to the impact of new technology. Nevertheless, one must not neglect a fundamental question arising out of intercultural practice: where are Shakespeare’s lines and language? Perhaps the twenty-first-century audience is now so used to absorbing knowledge via electronic imagery that it cannot cope with the complexity of human beings’ psychological range and the intriguing layers of language? After all, Chinese audiences do need to listen to Shakespeare, even in a translated language.
Works Cited


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