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Stepping Out of Eurocentrism and Achieving Equal Dialogue: A Review of the book *A Study on the Intercultural Theatre Adaptations and Chinese Opera Performances of Ancient Greek Tragedies*

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Abstract: Chen Rongnü's monograph *A Study on the Intercultural Theatre Adaptations and Chinese Opera Performances of Ancient Greek Tragedies*, published in 2023, systematically examines the development, achievements, and shortcomings of intercultural theories both domestically and internationally from the perspective of intercultural theater theory, and she strives to establish a localized Chinese theoretical framework. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, the book focuses on China's intercultural theatrical stage practices and employs "field work" method to provide a clear and detailed analysis of how Ancient Greek tragedies are integrated with Chinese traditional operas. This process—from adaptation and performance to dissemination—realizes a circular journey of intercultural theater. Throughout the book, the author's reflective spirit is evident. Through the Chinese intercultural stage practices, Chen explores the intellectual anxieties arising from differing Eastern and Western perspectives and their impact on intercultural theater, ultimately addressing the book's core purpose: to uncover the dynamics of exchange between different civilizations and achieve equitable dialogue and mutual learning. *A Study on the Intercultural Theatre Adaptations and Chinese Opera Performances of Ancient Greek Tragedies* holds significant theoretical and practical value, offering critical insights for the development of China's intercultural theater in both theory and practice.

Keywords: intercultural theater; localized paradigms; stage practice; equal dialogue

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标题: 走出西方中心主义, 实现平等对话——评《古希腊悲剧在中国的跨文化戏剧实践研究》

摘要:《古希腊悲剧在中国的跨文化戏剧实践研究》是陈戎女教授于 2023 出版的学术专著, 运用跨文化戏剧理论的视野, 系统爬梳国内外跨文化理论的发展和得失, 并致力建立中国本土的跨文化理论。作者打通理论和实践之间的界限, 聚焦于中国的跨文化戏剧舞台实践, 结合“田野调查”的研究方法, 清晰而细致地分析古希腊悲剧如何和中国传统戏曲相融合并搬上舞台, 从改编、搬演到传播实现跨文化戏剧的圆形之旅。在书中, 作者的反思精神贯穿始终, 通过中国跨文化戏剧的舞台实践, 作者探讨东西方视角差异所带来的思想焦虑以及对跨文化戏剧的影响, 最终指向了本书的目的——挖掘不同文明之间的动态交流, 实现平等对话和文明互鉴。《古希腊悲剧在中国的跨文化戏剧实践研究》具有理论意义和现实价值, 对中国的跨文化戏剧在理论和实践具有重要的启示作用。

关键词: 跨文化戏剧; 本土化范式; 舞台实践; 平等对话

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There is a theory that traditional Chinese opera can be traced back to the ancient shamanistic rituals, and that it matured during the Ming and Qing dynasties, diversifying into various local genres. Traditional Chinese opera employs singing, recitation, acting, and acrobatic to narrate stories, shape characters, and convey themes (Zhang & Guo, 2014, p.111). It also features rich and varied stories: some works celebrate the pursuit of love and freedom, such as the Kunqu opera *The Peony Pavilion*; others defend justice, such as the Henan opera *The Orphan of Zhao*; and still others commenting on history, such as the Peking opera *The Eight Greats*. Ancient Greek theatre, in contrast, represents the splendor of human civilization in the West. Ancient Greek theatre emerged around the 6th century BCE, associated with the worship of Dionysus. Driven by the social needs of the Athenian city-state, folk ritual dances gradually evolved into ancient Greek tragedy. Drawing from mythology, Ancient Greek tragedies tell the stories of heroic figures, exploring metaphysical issues concerning humanity, fate, and the gods. Due to the limitations of performance conditions, the features of Greek tragedy can be summarized by Aristotle's classical unities—unity of time, unity of place, and unity of action. “Yet these limitations not only did not hinder the development of ancient Greek drama, but also

contributed to its artistic success” (Luo, 1985, p.12). How can the civilizations originating from the Yellow River and the Mediterranean region achieve mutual understanding and exchange in the modern era? Professor Chen Rongnü, in her book *A Study on the Intercultural Theatre Adaptations and Chinese Opera Performances of Ancient Greek Tragedies*, adopts the theoretical perspective of intercultural theatre, traces the history of “performing Greek plays through Chinese opera,” explores the adaptation of Greek tragedy with traditional Chinese opera, and finally articulates the significance and value of this practice.

The book *A Study on the Intercultural Theatre Adaptations and Chinese Opera Performances of Ancient Greek Tragedies* consists of five chapters. In the introduction, the author adopts a macro-level perspective, clarifying the developments and debates in intercultural theatre theory since the second half of the 20th century, as well as how directors from different regions have practiced their intercultural theatre. The author does not merely focus on the notion of “intercultural”; she also provides a terminological analysis of “theatre,” “drama,” and “opera” within the context of intercultural theatre. The term “xiqu” (traditional Chinese opera) cannot be directly equated with these English words, reflecting differences in Chinese and Western conceptions of theatre. In the introduction, the author also proposes the theoretical paradigm of a “circular intercultural journey of ‘translation-adaptation-performance-communication’” (Chen, 2023, p.30), which runs through the case studies in the following four chapters. In Chapters Two to Five, the author employs case study methods to explore, respectively, how the ancient Greek tragedies *Medea*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, and *The Oresteia* were strategically adapted and transformed into Chinese xiqu. Through the theory perspective of intercultural theatre and case studies, the author further examines in the conclusion the practical values, significance, and problems of intercultural theatrical practices, thereby pioneering new directions for the future development of Chinese xiqu.

1. Expansion of Theoretical Perspective

This book focuses on adaptations and stage practices of ancient Greek drama in China. Grounded in intercultural theatre theory, it aims to explore the dynamic cultural exchanges between the two ancient civilizations. In this monograph, the author systematically examines intercultural theatre theory and bridges the gap between dramatic theory and stage practice, which can help us study Chinese and Western drama from a new theoretical perspective.

1.1 Intercultural Theatre Theory

In her book, Chen Rongnü reviews the debates on intercultural theatre theory that have taken place both in China and abroad in recent years. According to Chen (2023), two key issues emerge in sorting out the development of intercultural theatre theory abroad: first, Western scholars disagree on the definition of “intercultural theatre”; second, any discussions of it inevitably involve East-West issues. French scholar Patrice Pavis proposed the theory of the “Hourglass of cultures,” which conceptualizes intercultural exchange as a unidirectional, static process flowing from the “source culture” at the top to the “target culture” at the bottom. German theorist Erika Fischer-Lichte, in her early work, proposed the concept of “theatrical lingua franca”, referring to a share “language” that every culture can develop to be accepted and understood by other cultures. Later, influenced by postcolonial theory, she put forward the concept of “Interweaving Cultures in

Performance,” which emphasizes cultural equality and critiques colonial mindsets and power imbalances. The East-West issue is an unavoidable topic in the exploration of intercultural theatre theory. American theatre scholar Richard Schechner advocates for bridging Eastern and Western ways of thinking. However, Professor Chen argues that his notion of “East-West isomorphism” obscures the discursive imbalance between the two and imaginarily bridges the power disparity. Polish director Jerzy Grotowski believed that intercultural theatre is marked by Eurocentrism and fails to reflect the distinctive characteristics of different cultures. Indian scholar Rustom Bharucha critiques the Eurocentrism of intercultural theatre, pointing out that the image of the East in the minds of European and American directors is merely a cultural Other of their own construction; they show little concern for the social reality of Eastern cultures. In 2019, Irish scholars attempted to propose a “new interculturalism” in their published essay collection. They abandon hegemonic intercultural theatre and reconstructs a multifaceted space for cultural exchanges between the Global North and the Global South. Although some foreign scholars are vigilant against Eurocentrism, Professor Chen points out the pitfalls of rigidly adhering to local identities. What intercultural theatre emphasizes is equality and dialogue.

In this monograph, the author (2023) also reviews intercultural theatre theory in China. Chinese scholars who have focused on intercultural theatre theory include Sun Huizhu, He Chengzhou, and Zhou Yunlong. Sun was an early scholar in this field; he believes that intercultural theatre should embrace not only cross-border exchanges in theatrical forms but also “intercultural content”. In Chapter Four of this book, the author analyzes Peking opera *Oedipus the King* adapted by Sun. This adaptation employs a localization strategy, reshaping not only the structure and theme but also the characterization, creating an image of Oedipus different from that in the original play. Oedipus becomes a young, virtuous, and wise ruler who sacrifices himself for justice. The adaptation also conveys the character’s painful emotions through Expression of the Performance—integrating stylized movements with the character’s emotions and music (Sun & Liu, 2011, p.8). He Chengzhou has also discussed intercultural theatre in several of his essays. He examines China’s intercultural theatre practices in the context of global scholarly discourse and affirms their positive significance for new theoretical paradigms. He also points out that while China has rich experience in intercultural theatre, its theoretical system remains underdeveloped and requires further effort. Through a systematic review of intercultural theatre theories from both Chinese and foreign scholars, the author clarifies the difference between Eastern and Western theorists and identifies one of the reasons for this: the imbalance in the global cultural and political order, as well as the anxiety arising from Eastern scholars’ lack of discursive power among Eastern scholars. The author provides a clear exposition of intercultural theatre theory, laying a solid theoretical foundation for the entire book. In the case studies of Chapters Two to Five, grounded in intercultural theatre theory, the author examines how Chinese playwrights and directors freely navigate between two civilizations, realizing the localized reconstruction and staging of ancient Greek tragedies. Through these efforts, the author explores a viable path for the development of Chinese intercultural theatre.

1.2. The theoretical paradigm of a “a circular intercultural journey of ‘translation-adaptation-performance-communication’”

Chen’s monograph focuses on the stage practices of ancient Greek tragedy in China. Professor Chen (2023, p.30), building upon the three-tier cultural transcoding model of “translation-adaptation-performance”, proposes the theoretical paradigm of a circular intercultural journey of “translation-adaptation-performance-

communication”. Intercultural theatre comprises four stages: first, translating the dramatic script from the source language into the target language; second, adapting and rewriting it into a script fit for the local context; and third, performing it on stage. Professor Chen adds a fourth stage— “communication”, accounting for international dissemination and audience reception. Intercultural theatre should be disseminated not only in China but also across cultures. This dissemination is not a linear, one-way process; rather, it breaks with Pavis’s “hourglass of cultures” model and emphasizes “intercultural mutual transmission” (Chen, 2023, p.31), enabling intercultural theatre to circulate between different countries and cultures. The “communication” stage is often easily overlooked. According to Colin Hoskins’s theory of “cultural discount”, when intercultural communication occurs, people in the target market may encounter difficulties in acceptance due to the “lifestyle, values, history, institutions, myths, and physical environment” in the foreign culture (Hoskins, McFadyen, & Finn, 2004, p.6). If ancient Greek tragedies were directly transplanted to China in their original script or performance style, or if Chinese opera were to be disseminated abroad, “cultural discount” would inevitably occur, particularly in terms of aesthetic concepts. However, after localized adaptation, ancient Greek tragedies are transformed into Chinese xiqu, thus naturally resolving the “cultural discount”. When the Hebei Bangzi Opera *Medea* and the Peking Opera *Oedipus the King* travel abroad, these stories, already familiar to foreign audiences, are reinterpreted through Chinese opera. Professor Chen Rongnü (2023, p.87) points out in her book that in the staging of *Medea*, the retention of the chorus creates a sense of both familiarity and strangeness for audiences both at home and abroad. “Performing Greek plays through Chinese opera” not only reduces the “cultural discount” for local Chinese audiences but also generates new aesthetic experiences. Of course, it should also be noted that Colin Hoskins’ theory is aimed at film and television; theatre has an additional characteristic—it is more flexible and can be adjusted according to audience reception and stage effects.

In the case studies, the author points out that the Hebei Bangzi Opera *Medea* and the Peking Opera *Oedipus the King* have successfully realized the circular intercultural journey, whereas the Bangzi Opera *Thebes City* and the Pingju *The Oresteia* have not been as widely disseminated. The Hebei Bangzi Opera *Medea* was directed by Luo Jinlin. In an interview between the author and Luo Jinlin, Luo (Luo, Chen, & Tian, 2016, p.6) noted that Hebei Bangzi Opera *Medea* had been performed in Europe, the Americas, and Latin American countries, totaling over 200 performances. Professor Chen (2023, p.53) believes that one of the reasons for this play’s great popularity is its emphasis on plot narration supplemented by lyrical expression, with thrilling martial sequences and touching dramatic moments. Building upon the ancient Greek tragedy, the Hebei Bangzi Opera *Medea* adds three episodes— “Obtaining the Treasure,” “Boiling the Ram,” and “Leaving Home”—depicting events prior to the crisis between Medea and Jason. These added scenes supplement the Chinese audience’s knowledge of the story of Medea, creatively reduce the “cultural discount” in intercultural transmission, and foreshadow the subsequent episode “killing of the children”. In her analysis of the “killing of children” scene, the author focuses on how the actress performs Medea killing her children. After learning that the princess and the king have been burned to death by the golden crown and robe she sent, and that her husband Jason is solely concerned with the safety of the children, Medea erupts with inner hatred.

In the Hebei Bangzi Opera *Medea*, Medea to kills her own children with her magic fan, but when she witnesses the death of her children, her maternal instinct bursts forth, and she embraces them. This scene moved audiences both at home and abroad, as the actress's emotions built up step by step, culminating in a powerful climax. After the Hebei Bangzi Opera *Medea* was performed in Athens in 1991, K. Georgousopoulos, a renowned Greek theatre critic and director of the Greek Theatre Research Centre, was full of praise for it (Chen, 2023, p.98). Professor Chen points out that the Hebei Bangzi Opera *Medea* exemplifies the circular intercultural transmission model of "translation-adaptation-performance-communication". *Medea* has traveled from ancient Greece to China, and then from China to modern Greece and other countries, eventually back to China (Chen, 2023, p.99). From the ancient Greek script to its modern interpretation through Chinese opera, it has achieved cross-temporal and cross-spatial communication between different civilizations. In this circular journey of transmission, "performing Greek plays through Chinese opera" has been interpreted by people of different civilizations, creating emotional resonance and contemporary relevance.

2. Position and Strategy: Moving Beyond Eurocentrism

The author reviews overseas practices of intercultural theatre in the introduction. Professor Chen (2023, p.21) holds that in overseas intercultural theatre practices, Western directors tend to merely borrow Eastern theatrical elements, whereas Eastern directors strive to integrate traditional theatre with Western dramatic works as much as possible. Among Western directors, for instance, British director Peter Brook upholds the universality of theatre, advocating that humanity should be regarded as a whole, transcending national and individual differences. However, Professor Chen Rongnü believes that he has not escaped individualism. As for Polish director Jerzy Grotowski, she argues that in his borrowing from Eastern theatre, this European director ignored the differences between Chinese and Japanese theatre. Eastern culture is regarded as the Other. Implicit in the author's analysis is a critique of the West's tendency to use Eastern culture merely as a "tool" to mend the fractures within European civilization. The author instead hopes for equal dialogue and mutual learning between the two civilizations, achieving mutual benefit and win-win results. For the West, the East functions more like a mirror in which the West reflects upon itself and asserts its cultural superiority. For Edward Wadie Said (1999), culture has become an arena where various ideologies contend, and the West naturally extols its own culture. However, in the globalized world, non-Western voices are growing ever stronger and their influence is on the rise. Imperialist culture is no longer monolithic and cannot be completely isolated from other cultures. We should move beyond Eurocentrism and emphasize a spirit of dialogue. Professor Chen also calls for the rejection of "hegemonic intercultural theatre". In the following chapters, the author consistently emphasizes the local practices of "performing Greek plays through Chinese opera", avoiding the reduction of Eastern theatrical elements to mere Western tools.

In Chapter Four, Professor Chen (2023) analyzes *The Bacchae* as one of her case studies. *The Bacchae*, a tragedy of Euripides, tells the story of Dionysus, the son of Zeus and Semele, a princess of Thebes. Because his aunts slander his divine identity, he disguises himself as a mortal and returns to Thebes to avenge his late mother. First, he drives the women of Thebes mad, who then abandon their homes and flee to the mountains.

Pentheus, the newly crowned king of Thebes and Dionysus's cousin, is tricked by Dionysus (who has taken the form of a mortal) into dressing in women's clothing and going to the mountains to spy on these women—among them Pentheus's own mother. Using his divine power, Dionysus confuses the maddened women, and Pentheus is ultimately killed by his mother. *The Bacchae* is a collaborative work by Chinese-American director Chen Shizheng and his American partners. The adaptation reorganizes the original seven acts into five sections, with a chorus and three principal actors who wear masks to perform all the roles in the play (Zhou, 2007, p.69). Professor Chen Rongnü (2023, p.156) argues that the framework and performance style of this play remain fundamentally those of ancient Greek tragedy, with Peking Opera merely borrowed as tools. Artistic director Peter Steadman holds a Western artistic mindset, viewing Eastern theatre merely as a tool for Chen and his American partners to develop their own theatrical ideas. In Chapter Four, Professor Chen (2023, p.157) cites Erika Fischer-Lichte's assessment of *The Bacchae*. Erika Fischer-Lichte observes that in *The Bacchae*, Eastern elements, as a weaker culture, fail to achieve their own independent character, as the American partners exercise their cultural authority in a manner that subordinates Chinese culture. The author integrates theory with stage practice, drawing not only on positive examples such as *Medea* and *Oedipus the King* but also on the counterexample of *The Bacchae* to explore more deeply how Chinese theatre should engage in cultural dialogue with ancient Greek tragedy. This spirit of critical reflection runs throughout nearly the entire book.

2.1 Strategic Exploration and Equal Dialogue in “Performing Greek Plays through Chinese Opera”

In her book, Professor Chen Rongnü puts forward the theoretical paradigm of the circular intercultural journey of “translation-adaptation-performance-communication”. Beyond adding the “communication” stage, the author places greater emphasis on the stage practices of “adaptation” and “performance”. The author summarizes the staging strategies of intercultural theatre in China into two types. The first type features the Sinicization and localized reconstruction of foreign dramas, transforming foreign stories into Chinese one. The second type preserves original foreign themes while adopting the formal elements of Chinese opera (Chen, 2023, p.32). Drawing on Qi Shouhua's terminology of “localization” and “hybridity”, the author analyzes the stage practices of Chinese intercultural theatre. Among those cases in the book, the Hebei Bangzi Opera *Medea* in Chapter Two, Bangzi Opera *Thebes City* (adapted from *Antigone*) in Chapter Three, and the Pingju *The Oresteia* in Chapter Five adopt the second type—namely, the “hybrid” approach. Meanwhile, *Mingyue and Zihan* (adapted from *Antigone*) in Chapter Three, *Oedipus the King* in Chapter Four, and the Pu Opera and Henan Opera versions of *Oedipus the King* employ the “localization” strategy.

In the author's analysis, *Mingyue and Zihan* serves as a typical case of the “localization” of ancient Greek tragedy in China. *Mingyue and Zihan* is an adaptation of Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* by playwright Sun Huizhu. The play *Antigone* tells the story of Antigone, one of the children born from Oedipus' incestuous relationship with his mother. Her two brothers fight each other for the throne and both die in battle. Antigone wants to bury her brother, but this act violates the decree of Creon, the new king of Thebes and her uncle, who has forbidden the burial. Antigone defies the edict, buries her brother, and is subsequently imprisoned, where she takes her own life. The tragedy presents the conflict between divine law and human law, as well as between personal kinship and political authority. After adaptation, *Mingyue and Zihan* transformed into a Chinese story.

Professor Chen (2023, p.118) notes in her book that the theme of *Mingyue and Zihan* has been significantly altered, shifting the central conflict from “to bury or not to bury” in *Antigone* to “to rescue or not to rescue”. Sun Huizhu refers to this kind of “localizing” adaptation as “reinventing”. He argues that intercultural theatre encompasses both formal and content-based interculturality. The “reinventing” of *Mingyue and Zihan* represents an intercultural theatre that combines form and content: it adopts the form of Peking Opera, sets the story in the imperial court of the ancient Can Cong Kingdom in China. It tells the tale of Duke Ke, the regent, who sows discord between the brothers Tian En and Tian Ci. After Tian En’s death, Princess Mingyue is forbidden to save her brother Tian Ci, leading her to commit suicide (Chen, 2023, p.119). It is evident that the plot of *Mingyue and Zihan* has gone far beyond the original play. Comparing the intercultural form and content, Sun Huizhu believes that content-based interculturality is more important (Chen, 2023, p.31). The adapted work needs not be identical to the original; rather, it should reinvent something new (Chen, 2018, p.120). *Mingyue and Zihan* adopts the standpoint of its own culture, dilutes the religious dimensions of ancient Greek tragedy, explores family ethics—a theme familiar to Chinese audiences—within Chinese cultural context, and “highlights the core modern concept of ‘cherishing life’” (Chen, 2018, p.119).

The author regards the Pingju *The Oresteia* as another typical case of the “hybrid” strategy and provides a detailed analysis of it. The Pingju *The Oresteia* is adapted from Aeschylus’s trilogy of the same name, consisting of three plays—*Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*. Ancient Greek tragedy *The Oresteia* tells the story of Agamemnon, who sacrificed his daughter before departing for the Trojan War. Upon his victorious return, he is killed by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover. Agamemnon’s son, Orestes, flees into exile. As an adult, he returns to avenge his father following an oracle from Apollo, only to be pursued by the Furies. He seeks help from Athena, who casts the deciding vote in his trial, leading to his acquittal. When adapting ancient Greek tragedy, one must consider the differences between the two civilizations in terms of history, society, ethics, religion, and other aspects. Otherwise, a forced, mechanical adaptation would be incompatible with Chinese culture, create obstacles to understanding, and fail to achieve cultural exchange between China and Greece. Professor Chen (2023) affirms that the Pingju *The Oresteia* first modifies the structure, plot, and content of the original play. Instead of a trilogy, the Pingju *The Oresteia* is adapted into a single play, with a more tightly woven and dramatic plot, while reducing the religious overtones of the original. The characterization also undergoes “localizing” treatment, particularly that of Ke Lüdai (Clytemnestra in the original). The Pingju *The Oresteia* highlights the emotional bond between Ke Lüdai and her son, Orestes. She is both politically ambitious and deeply maternal. After killing her husband, Ke Lüdai seizes power in Thebes. However, as a mother, she resolutely seeks justice for the death of her eldest daughter. When she hears the false news of her son’s death, she weeps bitterly—unlike Clytemnestra, who merely feigns sorrow. Her lover, Aegisthus, warns her to heed the omens in her dreams, but she remains immersed in her grief over the loss of her son. When her son returns for revenge and raises his sword to kill her, she questions whether he truly intends to slay his own mother. In the Pingju *The Oresteia*, the mother-son relationship is portrayed with great emotional power. Yet, as a mother, Ke Lüdai is also a contradictory figure: she imprisons her second daughter and attempts to starve her to death. Ke Lüdai is not a flat, morally simplistic character; rather, she is “a more

multifaceted, three-dimensional, and complex figure than her counterpart in the original Greek play” (Chen, 2023, p.221). Chen’s monograph notes that the Pingju *The Oresteia* embodies a “staging approach that is both Greek and Chinese, integrating local and Western elements” (Chen, 2023, p.245). Director Luo Jinlin (2014, p.33) explains the creative concept behind this play, stating that it combines the tradition of ancient Greek tragedy, Chinese Pingju, and modern aesthetics. On stage, the actors wear Greek costumes, with distinctions in style and color between aristocratic and common attire (Chen, 2023, p.248). The actors’ movements retain the stylized conventions of Pingju while also creating new physical expressions adapted to the costumes. The singing preserves the distinctive vocal style of Pingju, but the spoken part is transformed into a “recitative” style, reflecting the linguistic style of ancient Greece while also incorporating elements of modern drama (Luo, 2014, p.34). Musically, the Pingju *The Oresteia* combines “digital music” with traditional operatic music: on the one hand, it retains traditional Pingju instruments such as drums, erhu, and pipa; on the other hand, it integrates a Western orchestra (Chen, 2023, p.253).

Grounded in intercultural theatre theory and focused on stage practice, Professor Chen takes the Hebei Bangzi Opera *Medea*, the Bangzi Opera *Thebes City*, the Peking Opera *Oedipus the King*, and the Pingju *The Oresteia* as primary case studies. The author analyzes and explores how, in today’s globalized world, Chinese opera can adapt and stage ancient Greek tragedies while completing the circular intercultural journey of “translation-adaptation-performance-communication”. In this theoretical paradigm, every component is indispensable: newly created adaptations must be stageable, and stage performances must account for audience reception both at home and abroad, with the ultimate aim of achieving equal dialogue between China and the West. As the author demonstrates that these stage practices also reveal a shift in China’s attitude toward Western drama—during the Republican era, modern Chinese writers and scholars sought to introduce Western drama to promote China’s modernization, whereas today Chinese practitioners actively absorb and creatively adapt Western drama. Professor Chen uses the term “creative adaptation” to highlight the distinctive characteristics of intercultural theatre such as the Hebei Bangzi Opera *Medea*: it is not merely a rewriting of the original script, but a creative endeavor that organically integrates the dramatic traditions of two different civilizations. Nevertheless, the East-West problem in intercultural theatre remains persistent. Scholar Zhou Yunlong (2023, p.30) argues that intercultural theatre is closely bound up with identity politics, functioning as “a political environment and collective provocation in the sense of an ‘affective medium’”. It is precisely in this sense that the stagings of the Hebei Bangzi Opera *Medea*, the Bangzi Opera *Thebes City*, the Peking Opera *Oedipus the King*, and the Pingju *The Oresteia* carry particular significance: they break free from the artistic logic of Western theatre, not only reconstructing local Chinese theatre but also shaping the audience’s cultural identity, ultimately declaring cultural autonomy to the world.

3. Academic Contributions and Implications

Professor Chen (2023, p.34) notes that her book is the first monograph to offer systematic theoretical discussion and stage analysis of intercultural theatre adaptations and performance of ancient Greek drama in China, demonstrating her sustained engagement with intercultural theatre theory and practice in China. The

author reviews the evolution of intercultural theatre theory at home and abroad, pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of each. Foreign theorists generally fall into two opposing camps in this field: one examines Eastern cultures through a Eurocentric perspective, attempting to obscure the differences between East and West; the other overly politicizes the theory, viewing intercultural theatre as concealing power imbalances between East and West. Such one-sided perspectives hinder equal dialogue. Compared with Western academia, China boasts abundant practical experience yet lags in theoretical research, requiring much more work in theoretical construction. In response to this theoretical dilemma, the author proposes a new theoretical paradigm of the circular intercultural journey of “translation-adaptation-performance-communication”. Through her review of existing theories and the construction of this new theoretical paradigm, the author demonstrates her conscious effort toward local theoretical construction. The author maintains a prudent attitude toward foreign theories, refraining from directly using them as a universal criterion for Chinese stage practice. Such cautious attitude resonates with “traveling theory” discussed by Edward Wadie Said in *Travelling Theory*. When a theory travels from one cultural and geographical context to another, where the cultural, historical, and geographical conditions differ from those of its original context, the journey becomes increasingly complex. The differences between Western and Chinese cultural contexts mean that China’s theoretical construction cannot mechanically replicate foreign theoretical models. The author grounds her research in China’s cultural context and stage practices, promoting local theoretical construction. In the book, the author provides a systematic and detailed analysis of domestic intercultural theatre stage practices, employing fieldwork methodology. By interviewing directors Luo Jinlin and Sun Huizhu to gather first-hand materials, she enables intercultural theatre theory to take root in China. Numerous gaps still exist in the field of intercultural theatre in China, and theoretical construction urgently needs to be addressed. The book *A Study on the Intercultural Theatre Adaptations and Chinese Opera Performances of Ancient Greek Tragedies* lays the groundwork for establishing a new research paradigm in this field.

In her analysis of China’s intercultural theatre stage practices in the book, Professor Chen (2023) maintains a reflective stance, exploring how the two civilizations should integrate with one another. The book notes that the performance concepts of Chinese opera differ from those of Western theatre: Chinese opera prioritizes performance over ideas, and form over content. Through her analysis of stage practices, the author concludes that the ideas of ancient Greek tragedy can be transformed into themes that Chinese opera excels in expressing; that different themes can be downplayed or emphasized; and that adaptation can be made while preserving original elements. In this way, the contradictions between Chinese and Western cultures can be resolved. Intercultural theatre breaks free from the single cultural model and “confronts the issue of conflicts and exchanges between different racial cultures, allowing concepts and characters from different cultures to collide and engage with one another on stage” (Sun, 2005, p.34). Sun Huizhu argues that intercultural theatre is neither a drama monopolized by the West nor a closed-off form of drama that focuses solely on itself. It authentically embodies the interactions between different races, religions, and cultures. In addition, he rejects the rigid East-West dualism inherent in postcolonial theory: the West is not a monolithic entity, nor is the East entirely homogeneous. Sun’s perspective aligns more closely with Homi K. Bhabha’s theories of hybridity

and negotiation. Intercultural theatre reflects the current situation of cultural pluralism in today's world. How different civilizations can integrate and engage in communication with one another remains a persistent challenge. Therefore, the value of Professor Chen Rongnü's book extends beyond a mere analysis of theory and stage practice. She compels us to reflect deeply on the modern intercultural question: how can Chinese opera maintain its own spiritual core in dialogue with the West, while drawing on Western drama and participating in the global intercultural conversation? This ultimately touches upon the question of self and other.

It is important to recognize that the essential differences between civilizations cannot be erased. As Hans-Georg Gadamer elaborates through his concept of "prejudice" (Vorurteil), we cannot escape the limitations of history; yet "prejudice" also serves as the precondition for the fusion of horizons. Furthermore, Hans-Georg Gadamer emphasizes that the fusion of horizons takes place between a subject and another subject, not between a subject and an object. His theory provides important insights for intercultural communication. In intercultural communication, the two parties are not fully consistent; a utopian form of cultural fusion is unrealistic (Sun, 2005, p.35). The two parties are not in a binary opposition of a subject and an object. Instead, both subjects engage in mutual listening and adopt an open stance. Therefore, in intercultural theatre, we can neither ignore the differences between civilizations in the pursuit of a so-called universality—which is not only unrealistic but also ignores the cultural and political relationships between the two parties in the real world—nor completely obscure the theatrical characteristics of the other party. Instead, we must honestly address the differences between the two parties on stage. Thus, the book *A Study on the Intercultural Theatre Adaptations and Chinese Opera Performances of Ancient Greek Tragedies* offers us another insight: intercultural theatre is not about erasing differences between the two parties, nor about rigidly clinging to one's own cultural traditions. It emphasizes the subjectivity of both parties and generates new cultural meanings and values of intercultural theatre within the fusion of horizons and the Third Space.

Conclusion

The book *A Study on the Intercultural Theatre Adaptations and Chinese Opera Performances of Ancient Greek Tragedies* is a pioneering monograph by Professor Chen Rongnü in China's intercultural theatre field. In this book, she systematically reviews intercultural theatre theories at home and abroad and constructively puts forward the theoretical paradigm of the circular intercultural journey of "translation-adaptation-performance-communication", thereby providing theoretical support for subsequent intercultural theatre research. Taking intercultural theatre theory as her analytical perspective, she focuses on domestic intercultural theatre practices, taking the Hebei Bangzi Opera *Medea*, the Bangzi Opera *Thebes City*, the Peking Opera *Oedipus the King*, and the Pingju *The Oresteia* as representative case studies. Employing fieldwork methodology, she explores how ancient Greek tragedies are adapted and successfully staged in China. Her analysis is meticulous: she takes the strategies of "localization" and "hybridity" as criteria to conduct detailed examinations from script content to stage performance forms, thereby delineating the overall picture of the circular intercultural journey of "translation-adaptation-performance-communication". As the first monograph to offer a systematic

theoretical exploration and stage analysis of Chinese intercultural adaptations and performances of ancient Greek drama, this book demonstrates the author's sustained commitment of both theory and practice in Chinese intercultural theatre, filling a gap and addressing deficiencies in the academic field. Chinese intercultural theatre has long been confronted with the challenge of communication and integration between different civilizations. In her analysis of stage practices, the author maintains a reflective stance and emphasizes equality and dialogue between civilizations. Professor Chen's monograph not only presents a systematic overview of theory and practice for intercultural theatre but also provides important insights for reflecting on the boundaries of cultural dialogue and power in the context of globalization.

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