

## **ADAPTATION OF A PLAY IS A FREE TRANSLATION: WILLIAM SHAKESPEAR'S HAMLET ADAPTED IN THE IMPACT OF CHINESE CULTURE UNDER THE NAME OF THE BANQUET**

**\* Farman Ullah, \*\*Wen Jen & \*\*\* Liaqat Iqbal**

### **Abstract**

*The current research highlights the comparative examination of the play Hamlet and its adaptation, The Banquet. The present study is qualitative and applies the close reading analysis method. The Banquet, directed by Chinese filmmaker Feng Xiao Gang, was officially the first Chinese-adapted version of Hamlet when it was displayed in 2006. The Chinese culture has a great impact on the adaptation of Hamlet, such as Chinese uniqueness i.e., a martial art which is good for self-defense, healthy body, relieving stress, and self-confidence are given to the play and including the Chinese Nuo mask and its variations in Feng Xiaogang's movie is the interpretation of the play. Feng seeks to Sinicize the play and interweave cultural components. The filmmaker highly emphasizes the martial arts cinema frame as the Chinese cultural touch used to change a Western play into a Chinese film. This technique works well to replace Western cultural aspects with philosophy, values, and the significance of Chinese culture. The current paper examines how much the adaptation version (The Banquet) is Sinicized to connect the Chinese culture to the Western culture. The paper also explores the differences between various characters in The Banquet and Hamlet.*

**Keywords:** *Chinese Adaptation of Hamlet, Sinicize, Characters, and The Banquet*

### **Introduction**

---

\* Master student in Majored World and Comparative Literature at East China Normal University

\*\* Professor, Department of World and Comparative Literature, East China Normal University

\*\*\* Associate Professor, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan

Adaptation is a form of translation that adds a bunch of changes to make the adapted version of the source text much more attractive and faithfulness-beauty which is not achieved in translation and interpretation alone that is why the adaptation technique is used for achieving the true faithfulness-beauty. The changes that take place in adaptation are addition, explanation, omission, and simplification. Nida and Taber (1982) focus on the very style and meaning to express translation, they use the term “reproduction”. Let me copy them; “Translation is the reproduction in a receptor language of the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning, and secondly in terms of style. Shi (2003) a Chinese translation theorist, assures that communicative translation needs what he calls “accommodation” which involves making several changes that are needed for the target text to be in line with the essence of the source text. To quote him: “We believe translation is not merely linguistic conversion or the transformation between languages but it involves accommodation in the scope of culture, politics, aesthetics and many other factors”. But on the other hand, Newmark ( 1995), defines translation as “rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text”, so, he stresses on the intention of the author during translation of a literary work performing for a film, theater, etc.

Julie Sanders in her genuine work *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2006), points out that adaptations are “reinterpretations of established texts in new generic contexts or . . . with relocations of . . . a source text’s cultural and/or temporal setting, which may or may not involve a generic shift”. No matter how valuable Sanders' focus on relocation and reinterpretation could be, it is debatable to what degree this particular definition enables a significant separation between adaptation and translation. Reinterpretation and relocation are also frequent procedures in translation, based on the general contexts and forms.

Shakespeare himself has never been abroad but his works have traveled abroad with the addition of changes to fit different areas and new times. The universal tragedies, such as Hamlet (1600–1), Othello (1604), King Lear (1605), and Macbeth (1606) by Shakespeare are regarded to be the best tragedies in literature. Hamlet is one of the most influential, impressive, powerful, and longest plays by William Shakespeare. It has been adapted and translated for theater, and film in various cultures and languages of the world. The story of Hamlet deals in love, peace, war, hatred, loyalty, appearance, reality, determination, friendship, revenge, and tactics. The play points out psychological, cultural, sociopolitical, and philosophical problems that can be found in every culture.

Shakespeare's plays have been adapted for the movie in a sizable number of films since the invention of the silent painting until the start of the new period, helping to create a distinct cinematic genre known as the Shakespeare film. Hamlet-themed movies have received the most nominations in this class of movies. Hamlet is by far the Shakespearean drama that has developed or inspired the most films. Shakespeare and Hamlet have not bound themselves to the 18th, 19th, or 20th-century renaissance but have played a popular role in every culture with changes according to a specific culture.

The Banquet by Feng, is the very first Chinese film adaptation of William Shakespeare Hamlet. Apart from this adaptation, it has also taken place in various traditional Chinese operas. The play was adapted into Sichuan province killing his brother and marrying his sister-in-law in the 1990s. The play was also adapted into the Beijing opera the prince's revenge in 2005 in an impressive intercultural way. Despite the fact that traditional Chinese operas are very different from western theatre performances, both adaptations demonstrate how well western and Chinese cultures can coexist. These two adaptations show the most exceptional artistic qualities of the latter and are skillfully structured to tell the story of Hamlet to Chinese traditional opera

audiences. They have also skillfully altered some Western norms into those that are appropriate to Chinese traditional opera circumstances without losing the real plot of the play. In ritualized Chinese stagecraft, acting, singing, dancing, songs, music, make-up, and dressing styles are still used. The play's core is translated for the Chinese audience. The characters have been thoroughly portrayed. This kind of adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet on the local Chinese stage helps a lot in the progress, uplifting, and advancement of intercultural understanding.

### **Literature Review**

“For better or worse, every adaptation is an expression of love, however, selfish or perverted that love may seem.” (Thomas Leitch 2011: 10)

Our local and international social and cultural perspectives, as well as our objectives, are fundamentally and intricately linked with translation and adaptation—as both practices and products. As it both develops and reflects perspectives adopted, translation is essential to our knowledge of ideologies, politics, and civilizations. Similarly, to this, adaptability provides information on and aids in the establishment of cultural and social hierarchies. In order to properly comprehend the effects that translation and adaptation have on the creation and understanding of culture as well as society, it is increasingly vital to research these rewritings. For instance, in popular culture, the amount of adaptation and translation has increased dramatically (Hand and Krebs 2007).

Two independent academic disciplines and discourses have emerged to study such closely linked acts of rewriting as adaptation and translation, yet they have not interacted with one another's critical stances and methodology. This seems to be an odd state of affairs. This emphasis on division and boundaries is not unique to the institution. Western popular and scholarly discourse frequently contrasts translation, which is presumed to offer oneness, with

adaptation, which is seen as a creative rewrite or interpretation of a source material (Kreb, 2014).

According to Bassnet and Lefevre, translation plays an unbelievable role in the development of world culture, as they describe in their article "The translation turns in cultural studies" which tells that how a translator selects a text to be added with cultural changes and how text is treated in the target language culture (Susan Bassnet and Lefever, 1998). Adaptation of a literary work may change the whole plot of a literary piece of work in the cultural context to have a serious impact on the audience, therefore, certain translation studies theorists have reconsidered their views on translating theatre texts in light of the troublesome idea of playability or performability in particular (Nikolarea,2002). Drama adaptation and translation have emerged over the past ten years as a significant field of study around the globe. Drama translation is also known as theatrical translation, stage translation, performance translation, translation for theatre, and other names that connect the idea of interpreting with the stage of the movie house.

The play "Hamlet" is not for a single period or age but it is for all ages and all people because it suits every culture of every age as John D, Jump claims Hamlet is —one of those rich and complex works of art that convey different meanings in different generations and to different individuals" (Partovi Tazeh Kand, P. 2013). This is how in every cultural contest it fits and meaning is taken whatever is demanded for. Apart from the cultural perspective of hamlet, modern scholars also applied psychoanalysis techniques for the last few centuries. Sigmund Freud reads Hamlet —as a modern Oedipus Rex (Partovi Tazeh Kand, P. 2013).

The Banquet by Feng Xiaogang is China's first transcultural and cross-media Hamlet adaption. The Banquet, like the majority of Asian Shakespearean film adaptations, ignores the language consistency of the original text while maintaining the play's melancholy tone and parallel plot and set of characters

under the influence of Chinese culture. The play's time frame and location are changed from Denmark Elsinore in the 12th century to China's Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, which covers the majority of the 10th century. This change suggests a greater degree of historical distance. Emperor Li/Claudius (Ge You) had taken the throne in this time of conflict by brutally killing his brother by injecting venom into his ear canal. In order to protect herself and the Crown Prince/Hamlet (Daniel Wu), who was once her young beloved but is now her stepson, the widowed Empress Wan/Gertrude (Zhang Ziyi) marries the new Emperor. She secretly plans to kill the Emperor as well. The Emperor's assassin is thwarted, and the Crown Prince returns to the palace. The Prince is torn between his current love Qing Nü/Ophelia (Zhou Xun) and his former love Wan, and he is unable to exact revenge. Every member of the court has their ideas for the throne. When the Emperor requests a magnificent night banquet, the intrigues reach a crescendo and homicidal preparations are put into motion. critical examination of the movie *The Banquet* demonstrates that during the production of this multicultural Hamlet film version, alterations were made to the storytelling frame, character focus, theatrical theme, and cultural ideology. the director of the film *The Banquet*, Feng Xiaogang said that "A thousand people will have a thousand Hamlets. It does not make much sense for him to be merely changed into a Chinese prince speaking the Chinese language. Therefore, I want to have a huge shift; I want to 'make love to' Shakespeare; I want to create a new Hamlet." (Feng, 2006). Feng Xiaogang's adaptation of Hamlet succeeds with the Chinese public and appeals greater to the international market due to the translation and relocation of the main themes, the employment of Chinese characteristics to decorate, and the polishing of the very psychological mindset of characters to explore the more optimistic nature of various negative characters.

### **Research Methodology**

Bryman defines qualitative research as being conducted verbally and via the use of words, during which the researcher develops hypotheses and applies an inductive methodology to relate the study to theory. This kind of research aims to uncover a more modern understanding of social reality by examining the social environment (Bryman, 2015). Both, the play Hamlet by William Shakespeare and its adapted version The Banquet by Feng Xiaogang are closely analyzed for seeing the uniqueness in the very skeleton of Chinese culture.

### **Analysis of The Banquet**

The Banquet directed by Feng Xiaogang is a typical Chinese adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet. There are various characters and events which have been changed in the Banquet to a great extent by Feng Xiaogang under the influence of Chinese culture.

Firstly, there is a great difference between the leading characters, Wu Luan (the Prince) and Hamlet. Wu Luan in The Banquet is not suffering from a mental condition which is known as indecisiveness in the Banquet. Famous Soliloquy of Hamlet "to be or not to be" in Act III, scene I, in this soliloquy Hamlet shows melancholy and hesitation in action but on the other hand, Wu Luan in the Banquet does not feel any hesitation while doing some action and quick decisive. Wu Luan has the power and ability to a strategic decision; it does not make any difference to him whether his uncle's problems or himself. So, the character of Wu Luan is more optimistic as compared to Hamlet, it is because the Chinses are very close to rule and discipline and as well as taking decisions according to the basic laws provided by the government.

Empress Wan (Gertrude) in the Banquet is another significant character. Unlike Gertrude in Hamlet, who represented the stereotypical woman in the Old Masculine Society, compliant and silent, Empress Wan is a woman of

desire. She plans to poison the emperor with a glass of wine in order to overrule the throne.

Empress Wan was killed in the final scene of the movie by her own desire, which changed the topic from being mostly about revenge like in Hamlet to being more about desire.

Emperor Li (Claudius), in my opinion, is the most striking character since he brings the movie's concept to life and makes it rich and complex. He has a deep sense of affection in his personality. As we all know, Claudius is a ruthless and cold-blooded individual, but in Feng's film, the Emperor is a thoughtful and kind guy, and it is quite touching to see him prepared to sacrifice his life for his Empress.

Last but not least, Qing Nv (Ophelia) differs from the original Hamlet in several ways. In this movie, Qing Nv is nearly entirely a tragic figure. Qing Nv in the Banquet does not appear to be suffering from obvious mental damage, unlike Ophelia in Hamlet who did, but on the other hand, this could not affect her awful outcome. She constantly harbors a secret affection for the prince and accidentally absorbs the cup of wine. The Qing Nv persona is more like a victim of the Empress's wishes.

Feng gives his Chinese film adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet a new direction of narration, well-attractive dramatic impact, and graphic splendor, which successfully reaches out for both Chinese and western viewers by dressing up the play as a Chinese martial arts film and presenting action sequences for the audience.

The excessive use of the Chinese rituals Nuo mask to drive away unwanted elements and its variations is one of the director's many multicultural adaptation tactics that stands out as a particularly striking motif. The filmmaker aggressively emphasizes the Nuo mask theme throughout the movie as the Chinese cultural touch is used to change a western play into a

Chinese movie. This technique works well to replace the cultural aspects of Western with Chinese cultural philosophy and ideals. In *The Banquet*, the Nuo mask serves as a largely cultural symbolic element. Nuo, also known as Da Nuo, was a religious rite used in ancient China to drive off bad spirits and invoke the goodness of the gods to ensure a healthy body and good destiny, abundant products, and long life. Based on the ancient Chinese philosophical idea that everything has a spirit, Nuo rites first appeared in the Shang and Zhou dynasties. A typical Nuo ceremony involves donning a mask. "Fang Xiang Shi" was the name of the shaman who performed it. Fang Xiang Shi, known as the sublime Nuo deity, stricken, danced, and yelled to drive out spirits and disease while wearing a mask and holding a torch.

*The Banquet* makes heavy use of Nuo mask modifications in addition to the actual incorporation of the Chinese traditional Nuo mask within the movie. The young lover of Crown Prince Wu Luan becomes his stepmother when the Old Emperor weds Wan. Wu Luan decides to hide out in the Wu and Yue Mountains while studying dance and music in a bamboo-lined gallery. Wu Luan and his friends can be seen singing and dancing in the gallery at the beginning of the movie. All of the students are wearing masks and wearing sheer white clothing. The masks are constructed of gauze, have extremely basic shaping, and are unadorned. Chinese Nuo masks can be divided into three categories: masks of the violent, masks of the kind, and masks of the silly. Wu Luan and his companions wear masks that are of the warmhearted variety. However, the simplicity of these masks also differs somewhat from Chinese Nuo masks. They resemble neutral masks used in western theatre quite a bit. Typically, the neutral mask is made of one color of the leather. It lacks any specific emotion or expression. It does not express joy or sorrow, nor does it laugh or cry. The molding should be uncomplicated, tranquil, and consistent. The Prince put on the mask along with his fellow students. The performers sing and dance while facing white paper scrolls that have old musical notations on them. They are flanked by verdant mountains and

bamboo groves. Wu Luan tries (in vain, but nonetheless) to lead a life like this in which he withdraws from the political disputes and conflicts at the royal court, builds solitude in the wilderness, and devotes himself entirely to music and dancing. This demonstrates the Crown Prince's belief that inaction is preferable to action. This demonstrates the Crown Prince's belief that inaction is preferable to action. The white mask gives off a lonesome, silent vibe. On the one hand, it releases any restrictions on the body and improves the performer's ability to manage his own body by turning off any facial expressions used to convey emotion. The organs occasionally twist and bend, and occasionally drop convulsively, creating a costumed dance that is incredibly enigmatic and symbolic and stands for dedication and loneliness. On the other side, a collective and depersonalized group of performers wearing the same masks and costumes has emerged. They are statues with attached mirrors. The divide between the royal and civil is absent in this group. Who the prince is and who is not is a mystery to everyone. Contradictions, conflicts, feelings, and desires don't exist. The only things one can have are music, dance, and inner balance. The black iron masks that the soldiers wear contrast sharply with the white masks that the actors wear when the newly minted Emperor Li dispatches his imperial guards to kill the Crown Prince in order to sit on the throne. The former is cold and dead on the faces of the black armored guards riding the black horses. They smell of ugliness, malice, and death. These masks' owners are merely auxiliary participants in the royal battles. They heed the Emperor's command to kill while concealing themselves behind metal masks. The latter are serene and calm on the artists' faces and blend with the performance's spirit. On one side, there is peace and beauty in the arts, while on the side, there is political ability and military deeds. The music and dancing continue as the slaughter starts. Each performer is the Crown Prince. Wu Luan is able to escape the assassin thanks to the depersonalizing masks.

## **Conclusion**

The Banquet by Feng Xiaogang is the very first adaptation of The Hamlet which was released in 2006. The Banquet is only sinicized but a bit of change has also taken place in characterization. It is a good quality of a director to adapt a play under the influence of his or her own culture to make the play far more attractive, beautiful, and impressive for the masses to enter the globalization and intercultural domains. Feng Xiaogang has added various changes to the play Hamlet for achieving his goal of making the play more Chinese rather than western culture. Martial art and the Nuo mask, as the beauty of Chinese tradition, have been added to the play by Feng. Good and positive meanings are associated with Wearing a mask in Islam too. In Banquet Feng depicts the very significance and importance of wearing masks during the performance to convey the hidden and complicated meaning.

EMPRESS WAN: Why do you wear a mask when you perform?

WU LUAN: It transports an actor to the highest state of his art. Without a mask, happiness, anger, sorrow and joy are simply written on his face. But with a mask, a great artist can convey to the audience the most complex and hidden emotions. (Feng, 2006)

As we know that wearing masks is an element of attraction in a film that's why Feng wants to create suspension and attraction in his adaptation by adding wearing masks. To talk of Nuo Mask, it not only creates suspension and attraction but also has a very powerful Chinese symbolic meaning which is used to eradicate evil omens. As is mentioned in The Book of Rites that "Fang Xiang Shi puts bear skin on his hands, wears a gold mask on his face, wields a spear and shield, and commands slaves to expel evil spirits." (Duan & Shi: 2003) So, we came to know that the play is made a bit Chinese on the land of China and has made the Chinese culture far more impressive, wise, optimistic, and healthy.

## References

- Bryman, A. (2015). *Social Research Methods* (5 ed.). London, England: Oxford University Press.
- Bassnet, S., & Lefevere, A. (1998). *Constructing cultures: Essays on literary translation*. UK: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Duan, Wei and Shi Kun. "Nuo, Nuo Mask, Nuo Ritual and Nuo Culture." *Chinese Ancient Crafts*. 20030604
- Hand, Richard and Katja Krebs. 2007. Editorial. *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance*, 1(1), 3–4.
- Krebs, K. (Ed.). (2014). *Translation and adaptation in theatre and film*. New York: Routledge.
- Newmark, P. (1987). *A textbook of translation*. Prentice-Hall International.
- Nida, E. and Taber, C. (1982). *The theory and practice of translation*. New York: Brill, Leiden.
- Nikolarea, E. (2002). *Performability versus readability*. *Translation Journal*, 6(4).
- Partovi T. K. (2013). *Adaptations of Hamlet in different cultural contexts: Globalisation, postmodernism, and altermodernism* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Huddersfield).
- Sanders, J. (2006). *Adaptation and appropriation*. London: Routledge.