

EDITORIAL

Exploring Asian Drama/ Theatre Education: From Interculturality, Localization to Asia as Method

To call for a paradigmatic shift from the Western-centric mode of knowledge production, Kuan-hsing Chen (2006, 2010), a Taiwanese cultural studies scholar, has formulated the theoretical framework “Asia as Method”. The framework aims not only at studying Asia and applying Asian theoretical frames to resist Western ones, but also at transforming the imbalanced power between the West and the East in knowledge production. The ultimate goal of the proposed framework is to decolonize, deimperialize and de-cold war Asia. Chen advocates Asia as the subject of analysis, as such, reorienting the East as the centre. At the same time, he calls for our understanding and recognition of the diversity, heterogeneity and hybridity of what we call “Asia”. In this respect, Chen warrants our attention to the hybridization and assimilation that Western colonization has imprinted in Asia. Then the questions follow would be: Is it possible for Asia to cut the legacies of their colonizers off from itself, or should it do so? How could Asia work with those legacies? These are questions that Asian cultural studies scholars have to address.

In the past few decades, in the field of applied drama/drama education, western theories, practices and experiences were brought into various Asian regions. How do these Western cultural products and practices go into dialogue with Asian practices, and formulate critical thoughts and actions to decolonize, deimperialize and de-cold war Asia? At the same time, how would related studies and experiences in Asia inspire our peers in the West? Perhaps, we should also imagine an “Asian applied drama/theatre as method” proposition to explore answers to these questions.

“Asia as method”, Chen (2010) reflects, “is a result of practices growing out of the *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies: Movements* journal project, which has been operating since the late 1990s” (pp. 212-13). The journal aims: 1. To

centre Asia as the basis of critical knowledge production and circulation;
2. To initiate dialogues and links among critical circles in Asia (and beyond);
3. To serve as a platform for intellectuals to explore the interplay between academic knowledge production and social movements (Chen, 2006, p. 341). These are also what we, the editorial board of *The Journal of Drama and Theatre Education in Asia*, have always strived for and envisioned for our journal. The papers gathered in this issue could possibly help the imagining of “Asian applied drama/theatre as method” of knowledge production.

Phoebe Yuk-lan Chan and Julie Dunn have reviewed and concluded their experience as transnational partners in developing a masters programme in applied drama and theatre education. The masters programme was tailor-made by Australian experts for Hong Kong. It then developed into a self-sustained programme led by local instructors in Hong Kong. In their paper, we see not only the transfer of a programme and its principles from Australia to Hong Kong, but also the localization of applied drama and theatre education. At first glance, the programme development seems to have followed a similar trajectory as many other programmes always did in our colonial past — bringing in or borrowing from Western innovations and reforms. However, the authors illustrate for us that it is more than that. Applied drama and theatre education under the transnational partnership has been localized and is taking on a life of its own in Hong Kong. We can learn a few things from it. First, there is a need for clear goals and orientations. Why do we borrow such drama educational practices? Who does it serve? Then, it is crucial to set up equal collaborative relationships that could ensure active participations from both sides. The authors believe that “passion, partnership, power and persistence” are the critical factors. The case illustrates that an intercultural localization is more than just an imagination. According to the administrators, teachers and students, the programme flourishes both globally and locally between Hong Kong (the East) and Australia (the West), from within the institutions and beyond them... in dialogical relationships. As such, it transgresses the borders and extends the limits of all those involved in it.

Wan-jung Wang's paper delineates the rationale behind the planning and implementation of a programme offered by the Department of Drama Creation and Application of National University of Tainan. The programme borrows Western models and methods as frames of reference, and nurtures applied drama professionals for Taiwan. At the same time, it makes full use of the programme opportunities to empower various communities, by letting their voices heard. Wang points out that, in theory, dialogic creation, popular and civic aesthetics, critical pedagogy and service learning have much influence on the founding of the Department. In the area of drama education, the programme offers Creative Drama, Drama-in-Education, and Theatre-in-Education, and practices and approaches in applied drama, including Oral History Theatre, Life-Story Theatre, Playback Theatre, and so on. The wide range of dramatic forms and approaches are used in eclectic ways to address local needs. Western dramatic forms also fuse with indigenous performing styles like those brought by Vietnamese new immigrants. What is important is that the crossing over of Western and indigenous modes of cultural production has effectively created talents in Taiwan, made voices heard and invited reflection of their own histories. The praxes above have embodied the strategy that Kuan-hsing Chen (2010) has referred to as "critical syncretism" (p. 99). Critical syncretism, Chen maintains, proposes to rebuild local subjectivity so as to resist different kinds of oppression. Jonathan Neelands (2005) has shared his best wish for drama/theatre education in Taiwan: To be emancipated from colonial supremacy, and to shape its own way of thinking and doing democratic education (p. 88). The Department of Drama Creation and Application of University of Tainan is now taking its steps towards realizing this vision.

To date, there has been very few theatre-in-education audience studies conducted in Chinese-speaking regions. Muriel Yuen-fun Law's study about secondary school students' participation and responses in watching a museum theatre would undoubtedly inspire future research in this area. In her paper, Law draws on Adrian Jackson's framing in educational theatre and Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory of communication. She analyzes how the student-audience watched the show, and how they constructed

meaning out of the experience. Western applied theatre model and theoretical framework have facilitated local audience to resist government-led, mainstream ways of seeing and talking about local history.

Apart from papers on Asian experience, this issue also publishes Asterios Tsiaras' study of educational drama's influences on the social competence of nine- to eleven-year olds in Greece. Tsiaras reveals that educational drama benefits the development of children's social competence, regardless of age, culture and background of the participants. The author also points out that education policy in Greece has increasingly oriented towards cognitive development while ignoring the development of children's social competence. Advocating activities such as educational drama and examining the various effects of those activities would help promote students' well-rounded development. Back to Asia, the exam-oriented education system and culture seems to place us under even greater challenges. We probably need more efforts in promoting and researching drama at schools and in teaching.

Many Asian regions and countries have their colonial past that were influenced and dominated by Western cultures. Their colonial histories are often hybridized with Confucian legacies and their local cultures. To see Asia as a unitary entity would be problematic. In fact, different Asian countries and regions have travelled along different paths of cultural development. Each of them has its own cultural hybridity and power structure, and hence, its cultural specificity. So is the development of the applied drama/theatre in some Asian regions (Wang, Tam, Kim, & Kok, 2013). Take Hong Kong as an example. The handover of sovereignty over Hong Kong back to China in 1997 ended the one-and-a-half-century of British colonial rule in Hong Kong. Changes in and challenges to the local politics, society and culture in the post-colonial or post-97 Hong Kong vary greatly from those faced by the post-colonial Taiwan. We have to ask, "Who is Asia?" Chen's Asia as Method proposition has inspired subsequent discussions, new imaginings and practices including "Hong Kong as Method" (Chu, 2016; Chan, 2016), and "Taiwan as Method" (Lee, 2009). All of these thoughts, discussions and imaginations would probably inform the discussion and development of

applied drama and theatre in Asia, and bring into dialogue modes of Asia as method to the work of publishing this journal.

Reference

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