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Shakespeare and the South Korean Stage

by

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A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Warwick, School of Theatre, Performance and Cultural Policy Studies.

November 2014

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Margaret Shewring, for her patience, excellent guidance, generous support and inspiring advices throughout my PhD study. I wish to thank my two examiners, Dr Tim White and Professor Brian Singleton for their constructive criticism. Thanks to Ki Kuk-seo and Kim A-ra for their inspiring discussion about staging Shakespeare on the Seoul stages in the 1980s and the 1990s. I wish to sincerely thank to Professor Kim Jeong Ae and Professor Hong Jae Beom for their encouragements and supports. Many thanks to Choi Won Suk and Choi Jin Yeong for their supports. My greatest debt is to my parents, Tosun and my wife, Jihae.

Abstract

The primary contribution of this thesis is its survey of the history of South Korean Shakespeare performance combined with the specific critical perspective it elaborates. While there have been previous efforts to discuss the subject in the English language, these have not combined such a comprehensive synoptic historical and theoretical approach. This thesis, it is hoped, will therefore serve as an important step in allowing the Anglophone world to understand the varying socio-cultural contexts that have shaped Korea's reception of Shakespeare.

An Introduction explores a method of study (focusing on intraculturalism and 'gap') and offers a review of Korean Shakespeare study about performance. Part 1 provides an overview of the history of Korean Shakespeare performance, divided into three periods: the early years (1950-1970), the transitional years (1970-1990) and the contemporary period (1990-present).

Part 2 discusses three Shakespeare adaptations, *King Uru* (The National Theatre of Korea, 2001, directed by Kim Myeong-kon), *Romeo and Juliet* (Mokwha, 2001, directed by Oh Tae-suk), and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Yohangza, 2002, directed by Yang Jung-ung). These three productions have taken elements from Korean traditional performance arts (*talchum*, traditional dance, and *pansori*) in order to adapt Shakespeare's plays. Part 3 discusses productions that focus on reflecting contemporary political and cultural concerns including Ki Koo-Seo's *Hamlet* series (1981, 1982, 1985, and 1990, directed by Ki Kook-seo), Seoul Metropolitan Theatre's *Hamlet* (2011, directed by Park Geun-hyeong) and *Trans Sibiya* (*Twelfth Night*, 2002, directed by Park Jae-wan).

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Note

Most of my quotations are written in the Korean language. The translations of these Korean quotations are my own unless otherwise indicated. I have attempted word-for-word translations of the Korean reviews and interviews in this dissertation. Yet, if I felt a clearer explanation was needed, I have paraphrased them. In writing Korean names I have followed Korean convention so that the family name has been written first, followed by the given name. For example, the most well-known Korean name now (2014) is Kim (surname) Jong-un (given name). This order is currently used in English language newspapers and academic essays. I have used the Revised Romanization of Korean (2000) in representing Korean in English. However, Korean names that are already known in English are spelled as found in English-language publications. For example, ‘Kim Jong-un’ is not altered to ‘Kim Jeong-eun.’ The English names of Korean theatres and organizations are generally spelled in American English so, for the sake of consistency of the style of the thesis, I have amended those names into British English. For example, ‘theater’ is amended to ‘theatre.’ Long Korean quotations are accompanied by the original Korean language, but for the sake of brevity this practice has not been followed when providing short quotes. Quotations from Shakespeare’s plays are provided in brackets as comparisons with my translations of altered scripts. All Shakespeare quotations are from *The Oxford Shakespeare*, second edition (2005).

In this thesis, ‘Korea(n)’ indicates South Korea(n). On the few occasions on which North Korea referred to, this is indicated as ‘North Korea’.

Videos are available to watch at the website ‘Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive’ ‘<http://a-s-i-a-web.org/>’ (Yong Li Lan is the director of the website with two co-directors, Suematsu Michiko and Kobayashi Kaori). The following productions are discussed in this thesis and full performances with original and translated scripts are available to watch at the website: Street Theatre Troupe’s *Hamlet* (1996), The National Theatre of Korea, *King Uru* (2000), Yohangza’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (2002), Mokwha’s *Romeo and Juliet* (2005), The National Changgeuk Company of Korea, *Romeo and Juliet* (2009).

Introduction

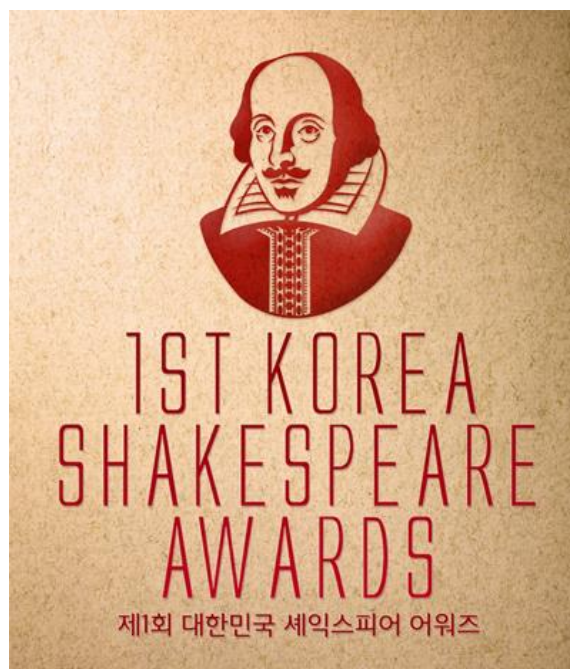


Figure 1. Poster of the 1st Korea Shakespeare Awards

On 3 June 2012 a publicity company, EZ Entertainment, hosted the ‘1st Korea Shakespeare Awards’ at the National Theatre of Korea in Seoul. The awards were organized by Shakespeare scholar and translator Shin Jeong-ok and by Cha Hyeon-seok, a theatre director and the CEO of EZ Entertainment. Shin has been a life-long admirer of Shakespeare, and her bardolatry is clearly reflected in her efforts to organize the awards. Cha has a similarly strong attachment to the Bard, and claims to be the reincarnation of Shakespeare, though whether or not this was intended as a joke remains unclear. The awards were given to outstanding Korean theatre practitioners who were involved with Shakespeare performances. There were eight categories: Best Director, Best Young Director, Best Production, Outstanding Production, Best Actors (male and female), Emerging Actors, Best Musical Adaptation of a Shakespeare Play, and Lifetime Achievement. Oh Tae-suk won Best Director and Best Production for Mokwha’s *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest*. Outstanding Production went

to Mabangjin's *Kalo Makbess* (a martial-arts-themed *Macbeth*). The Lifetime Achievement award was given to the veteran theatre producer Gu Ja-heung, current artistic director of the Myeongdong Arts Theatre in Seoul.¹ The awards failed to attract much interest from Shakespeare scholars, the media or the public, and it was a one-off event despite indicating '1st' in the title. However, the existence of such a ceremony certainly epitomizes Shakespeare's status on the Korean stage. There are now numerous Shakespeare performances on the Korean stages and his plays are now considered a part of the Korean theatre.

In the same year, 2012, two prominent Korean Shakespeare productions were invited by the two prestigious British festivals. In May, a Korean theatre company Yohangza put on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (directed by Yang Jung-ung) at Shakespeare's Globe in London as part of the Globe to Globe festival. In August, the Edinburgh International Festival programmed another Korean theatre company, Mokwha's *The Tempest* (King's Theatre, Edinburgh), directed by Oh Tae-suk. On the same stage, and in the same festival, a renowned Japanese director Ninagawa Yukio had introduced his *Macbeth* in 1985, when not only Korean renditions of Shakespearean plays but also Korean theatres were then almost unknown in the international theatre field. Both Korean productions in 2012 were well received by British critics and audiences. Koreans could expect that Oh, who is much admired in his home country and is in his seventies as is Ninagawa, would be also admired by the British like Ninagawa. Yohangza and Mokwha had already been invited by the Barbican Centre in London in 2006 with their *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*, respectively. Now it can be said that Korean renditions of Shakespeare's plays have achieved British recognition, which is believed to be a decisive factor of good standard. This thesis has been ignited by the current status of Shakespeare on the Korean stage. Shakespeare is now the most performed Western playwright on the Korean stage and, moreover, his plays have become a conduit through which Korean theatre can be acknowledged by the international audience.

The perennial question of this thesis is why Shakespeare is so important on the Korean stage. Undertaking this research, I have interviewed several Korean directors who

¹ Seong Cheon-mo won Best Young Director for his adaptation of *Hamlet* (2012). Best Actor went to Son Young-ho (male) for his role of Hamlet in Seong's *Hamlet*.

have directed a Shakespearean play and asked why Shakespeare matters in Korea. I did not receive a satisfactory answer to my question. The directors seemed to think that Shakespeare is already part of the Korean theatre experience and so staging Shakespeare's plays seems to be regarded as a natural activity for Korean theatre directors. However, there is a good answer from Kim Cheol-ri, a former artistic director of both the National Drama Company of Korea and Seoul Metropolitan Theatre. Kim, who directed *Richard III* (1994) and *Titus Andronicus* (2003) at the National Theatre of Korea, gave an account of the contribution of Shakespeare to Korean theatre.² He explained that Shakespeare's plays were in repertoires during the Korean War (1950-1952) when new scripts could not be written and so, subsequently, Shakespeare became an important part of work on the Korean stage. In the 1960s Shakespeare's plays become a measure for assessing the artistic achievement of theatre companies. Since the 1970s many theatre experiments were able to be attempted, thanks to Shakespeare. Kim's view is a reliable one that explains the early reception of Shakespeare's plays on the Korean stage. Yet current performances of Shakespeare's plays, which show variety in style in comparison to the past, need to be examined with a specific method that can encompass the history of performance and also offer synchronic analysis. This thesis presents such a method, analysing the 'gap' that demonstrates the innovation (from imitation to localization) in Korean practice of Shakespeare's plays. It will examine how Shakespeare matters on the Korean stage by offering detailed case studies.

Scope of Study and Chapter Breakdown

This thesis examines the entire history of South Korean staging of Shakespeare's plays with detailed analysis of six performances. The history is relatively short; the first professional performance of Shakespeare's work in South Korea (*Hamlet* directed by Lee Hae-rang in 1949 Seoul) only took place sixty-five years ago, which is relatively late in comparison to Japan (1885) and China (1913).³ The first part of this thesis provides an overview of the sixty-five years, exploring this history in the light of material conditions of the productions,

² Kim Cheol-ri, 'The Essence of Shakespeare', *Gongyeongwairon*, 4 (2003), 10-18 (p. 18).

³ Poonam Trivedi wrote that the first Korean performance of Shakespeare's play in 1929 (Poonam Trivedi, 'Introduction', in *Re-playing Shakespeare in Asia*, ed. by Poonam Trivedi and Minami Ryuta (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 1-18 (p. 2)). Trivedi refers to a students' production of *The Merchant of Venice* in Gyeongseong (then Seoul).

and demonstrating that the style of current productions is constituted by means of repetitive practice over a long period of time.

When investigating the history, I divide it into three periods: the early years (1950-1970), the transitional years (1970-1990) and the contemporary period (1990-present). The division derives from the phases of modernization that shaped Korean theatre, as outlined by the Korean theatre historian, Lee Mi-won: the imitation of Western theatre (1920-1960), the modernization of traditional theatre performances (1970-1990), and the development of a postmodern (intercultural) theatre (1990-the present).⁴ This history also traces the transition from Korea's self-alienation (that is to say, Westernization) to the recovery of its indigenous arts, traditions and attitudes. The word 'theatre', which is translated into Korean as '*yeonggeuk*' (연극), is a modern term that might have been adopted from Japanese. 'Theatre' generally refers to modern theatrical performances that were imported from the West. Korean traditional performance arts, whose origins lie in ancient ritual, can be referred to as theatrical arts in a broad sense and are generally designated as '*yeonhui*' (literally referring to the presentation of a performer). The surviving traditional performance arts are *talchum* (masked-dance drama), *gut* (shamanistic ritual), traditional dances and *pansori* (reciting a story with songs). However, from the 1910s to the 1970s, the Korean theatre directors of those years regarded these performance arts as out-dated and a 'low art-form', only enjoyed by people in rural areas where traditional culture was still influential. Meanwhile, theatre was regarded as 'high art' due to its Western origin. When theatre was imported during the 1920s, all the cultural imports (music, film, sports) from the West were regarded as culturally more advanced than Korean indigenous counterparts. The traditional performances had been losing popularity due to rise of TV and film in the 1960s; since then they have been raised to the status of 'high art' since the 1970s. Theatre is now considered to be either 'high art' (straight productions) or entertainment (musical theatre or comedy). Shakespeare performances have been seen as 'high art' thanks to the public conception of him as the greatest playwright of

⁴ Lee Mi-won, *Segyehwa Sidae Haechehwa Yeongeuk (Deconstruction of Theatre in the Age of Globalization)* (Seoul: Yeongeukgwangsan, 2001), pp. 10-15. Lee's periodization would be widely agreed as a similar classification can be found. For example, a comprehensive book on the history of Korean theatre, *Hankukyeonggeuk Baeknyeon (Hundred Years of Korean Theatre)*, also shows an identical periodization with Lee's. However, I disagree with 'the development of postmodern theatre' in the 1990s, as what were called 'postmodern experiments' originated from the previous decades (see Chapter 6). I suggest this period as resurgence of popular theatre and heyday of director's theatre (see Chapter 2).

the West. Yet popular productions of his plays existed in the 1950s and now Shakespearean plays are often seen on popular stages.

In dealing with each era, I attempt to clarify the key elements with fundamental questions about actors and directors (who performs a Shakespearean play and why?), scripts (how these are created?), audiences (who attend these performances?), and venues. Most venues for productions which are discussed in this thesis are located in Seoul except for the productions during the Korean War. I also provide a detailed overview of each era with a focus on changes in acting styles (from modest exaggeration to contemporary eclectic acting), venues, and the styles of costuming and scenography (from the imitation of British Shakespeare to more contemporary modes of presentation). Moreover, I also survey the Korean audience for Shakespeare productions. Although these productions attracted general theatregoers in the early years (1950-1970), it seems that recently general theatregoers are not interested in attending Shakespeare performances unless they are widely publicized and marketed as being ‘entertaining’. Shakespeare’s work is widely regarded as being a purely artistic experience, therefore too serious for casual theatregoers. However, increasingly since 2000, musical productions of Shakespeare’s plays are becoming popular with musical fans who are not really interested in Shakespeare per se. University students from English and Theatre Studies departments have always been the main audience for ‘artistic’ Shakespeare productions.⁵

During the early years (1950-1970) of Korean Shakespeare productions, directors excluded and marginalized elements from their own theatrical traditions; then, from the 1970s onwards, Shakespeare performances have gradually become concerned with Koreanness, whether in terms of traditional theatre or contemporary politics. Shakespeare has only become a favoured author of Korean directors after the 1990s, when the boom in Shakespeare performances around the globe inspired them. The case studies in Part 2 and Part 3 deal with six recent performances and demonstrate this boom on the Korean stage, which emerged as not only an increasing number of productions but also in the varied styles of performance. Koreans still attempt to imitate classical British performances (such as

⁵ The average ticket price of Seoul theatre was 1,300 Korean Won (KRW) (approximately, £0.76) in 1979. The current average ticket price for Shakespeare is 30,000 KRW (£17.56 at the currency rate between the Korean Won and the British Pound at 14 May 2013) for a small venue (up to 150 seats), and 30,000 to 50,000 (£29.26) for middle and big venues (more than 150 seats).

Laurence Olivier's film versions of Shakespeare); yet, they use Shakespeare in reinventing traditional theatre, or deconstruct his plays to express contemporary concerns. Such contemporary approaches to Shakespeare on stage, I would argue, are to intentionally distance Shakespeare from England, or more correctly, from the West.

The three chapters in Part 2 discuss three Shakespeare adaptations, *King Uru* (The National Theatre of Korea, 2001, directed by Kim Myeong-kon), *Romeo and Juliet* (Mokwha, 2001, directed by Oh Tae-suk), and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Yohangza, 2002, directed by Yang Jung-ung). These three productions have taken elements from Korean traditional performance arts (*talchum*, traditional dance, and *pansori*) in order to adapt Shakespeare's plays. The three productions are examples of pseudo-traditional theatre that have been invented by each director. I highlight the methodology used by each director to reinvent their version of traditional theatre and fuse it with Shakespeare's work. The three productions demonstrate the same tension that J.R. Mulryne has identified in writing about Japanese Shakespeare as occurring 'at the point of intersection between traditional theatre forms and the internationalism of a significant sector of contemporary performance'.⁶ The three productions discussed in Part 2 have been invited to perform in the West, and Yohangza's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has also subsequently toured around every continent of the World.

Another three productions, discussed in Part 3, focus on reflecting contemporary political and cultural concerns. What marks these productions out is the willingness of the directors to assume complete artistic freedom. So in Chapter 6 Shakespearean poetry was completely deconstructed in Ki Koo-Seo's *Hamlet* series (1981, 1982, 1985, and 1990), while the poetry has been constantly intervened in and re-invented by the director of Seoul Metropolitan Theatre's *Hamlet* (2011, directed by Park Geun-hyeong). These two *Hamlet* productions both reflect on the nature of political liberalism and democratization, and in Chapter 6 I seek to highlight the relationship between each production and its contemporary political reality (1980s and 2010s). In Chapter 7, *Trans Sibiya* (*Twelfth Night*, 2002, directed by Park Jae-wan) is discussed focusing on its reflection of transgender concerns and its possible challenge for the formal Korean gender order, although such a challenge might not

⁶ J.R. Mulryne, 'Introduction', in *Shakespeare and the Japanese Stage*, ed. by Takashi Sasayama, Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 1-11 (p. 10).

have been intended by Park. *Trans Sibiya* is a small-scale musical production and became the predecessor of the succeeding small scale Shakespeare musicals since its massive success.

Research Method

As a base for my research methodology, I referred primarily to western essays and books on foreign performances of Shakespeare but did not lean on any specific theory. Dennis Kennedy's *Foreign Shakespeare* (1993) was my initial inspiration. Kennedy's notion of Shakespeare's 'malleability' and his hypothesis that 'some foreign performances may have a more direct access to the power of the plays' encouraged me to undertake this research.⁷ It particularly supported me in looking at certain Korean performances, which did not transfer the poetry, with a more positive perspective. I had regarded those performances as just a futile appropriation of Shakespeare's plays by the ignorant directors who would not have read the works in the English language. Reading *Foreign Shakespeare* encouraged me to look more sympathetically at the process of cultural appropriation of Shakespeare's plays. I wanted to answer one of Kennedy's questions: 'What is it that endures when he [Shakespeare] is deprived of his tongue?'⁸ This thesis investigates this process of linguistic deprivation and its consequences on the Korean stage.

The notion of intercultural theatre has been avoided in the analysis of case studies.⁹ In my opinion, this seems to indicate that the audience could not fail to recognize the mixture of more than one culture on the stage, as an Anglophone audience will certainly do so when attending a foreign performance of Shakespeare's play. James R. Brandon positively suggests that 'local and foreign sources of authority coexist in performance, with neither authority

⁷ Dennis Kennedy, 'Introduction: Shakespeare without his language', in *Foreign Shakespeare*, ed. by Dennis Kennedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 1-18 (p. 5).

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 17.

⁹ In this thesis, I use the definition of Gary Jay Williams: 'Intercultural theatre may be defined as the practice in which theatre artists use the texts, acting styles, music, costumes, masks, dance, or scenic vocabularies of one culture—the 'source culture'—and adapt and modify them for audiences of another culture—the 'target culture'' Gary Jay Williams, 'Interculturalism, Hybridity, Tourism: The Performing World on New Terms', in *Theatre Histories*, 2nd edition, ed. by Philip B. Zarrilli, Bruce McConachie, Gary Jay Williams, and Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 551-564 (p. 552).

subsuming, or erasing, the other', in intercultural Shakespeare.¹⁰ However, it seems that such a positive coexistence can hardly be observed in the Korean performances of Shakespeare's plays; rather, an erasure of the opposite (either Koreanness or the classical Shakespearean quality) has been noticed in the performance history.

Unlike English-speaking countries, in which societies have long been moving towards becoming multicultural, Korea is still a homogenous country: the country has a single official language (Korean), has held the same territory for six hundred years, and possesses a strong national identity that has stemmed from two thousand years of relationships with China, Manchuria, and Japan. Although there have been cultural imports from her neighbours, these imports soon become familiar to Koreans, and so lose their distinctive differences and are then assimilated into Korean culture (for example, notably, establishment of Korean Buddhism, and the zenith of Confucian philosophy in the Joseon Dynasty, both imported from China). The most alien culture ever introduced into Korean history would arguably be Western civilization (including Shakespeare) and Westerners themselves (mostly Caucasian people) in the late 19th century; at the time when this introduction to the West occurred, most Koreans had never before imagined a person of a different race, with a different hair and skin colour (white or black). Yet, today, Korea is not only fully Westernized, but is also a developed country. This would indicate that Koreans think of themselves as affiliates of the First World, comparable to the Japanese. In a positive sense, we (Koreans) have not differentiated the foreign culture as an 'other'; but in a negative sense, it indicates that we do not endure otherness (or foreignness).

Caliban in Mokwha's *The Tempest* demonstrates this issue. It appears that the character has often been portrayed as being 'foreign' or the 'other', in performances in the West; for example, the white South African actor Anthony Sher played Prospero while the antagonist was played by his black compatriot John Kani, in the Royal Shakespeare Company's *The Tempest* (2009).¹¹ Yet, in the Korean production, the equivalent of Caliban, Ssangdua (which literally means 'a child with two heads'), was played by a pair of two

¹⁰ James R. Brandon, 'Other Shakespeares in Asia', in *Re-playing Shakespeare in Asia* ed. by Poonam Trivedi and Minami Ryuta (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 21-40 (p. 31).

¹¹ Also, in a film version (2010, directed by Julie Taymor) of the play, a black Beninese-American actor, Djimon Hounsou, played Caliban; and Prospero was portrayed by white English actress Helen Mirren.

whimsical and comical eccentrics and depicted as ‘a two-headed creature equipped with a kangaroo-like pouch containing his own captious elder brother’.¹² The audience would instantly recognize that the funny creature was being played by two actresses, and their acting would generate a comfortable laughter, which derived from the audience’s assurance that the two actresses were not abnormal.¹³ Such a portrayal did not show any explicit otherness derived from either a racial difference or an unseen deformity bearing an uncanny shape.

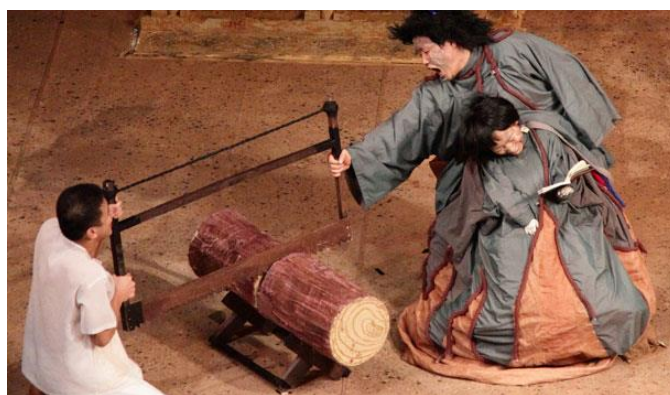


Figure 2. Ssangdua (right) cutting wood with a singer (left, non-character).

Instead, Korean adaptations can be examined in terms of intraculturalism, as Brian Singleton suggests.¹⁴ The case studies in Part 2 indeed suit the definition that Patrice Pavis proposes for intraculturalism: ‘it refers to the search for national traditions, often forgotten, corrupted or repressed, in order to reassess the sources of a style of performance, to situate it

¹² Michael Billington, ‘The Tempest’—Review’, *The Guardian*, 15 August 2011.

¹³ In addition, the depiction of Othello was a dilemma in a production (2003) at the National Theatre of Korea, in which I participated as Assistant Director. The actor playing Othello was highly sceptical of dark make-up (like Laurence Olivier’s portrayal of the Moor) which had not been previously questioned (see Sinhyeop’s *Othello* 1951). He considered such makeup to be ludicrous and, more importantly, old-fashioned.

¹⁴ Brian Singleton, ‘Intercultural Shakespeare from Intracultural Sources: Two Korean Performances’, in *Glocalizing Shakespeare in Korea and Beyond*, ed. by Lee Hyon-u (Seoul: Donging Publishers, 2009), pp. 179-198 (p.184). To be frank, the majority of intercultural analyses of Korean Shakespeare performances so far have been undertaken by Western scholars.

better in relation to external influences'.¹⁵ Mokwha's *Romeo and Juliet* demonstrates 'intraculturality' in the Korean context. The director, Oh, strategically picked up elements of the Korean traditions, and reshaped them in order to be used in staging the Shakespearean tragedy which was foreign to the Korean traditions. Shakespeare's play here functioned as a barometer, used to assess whether an aspect of traditional Korean performance would be compatible with the Westernized local stage and could thus gain international recognition. Such a perspective can also be applied to Yohangza's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which pursued both Korean and non-Korean elements together, paradoxically, in order to present a certain notion of 'Koreanness' claimed by the director Yang Jung-ung. This thesis explores the intraculturality of the above two performances along with *King Uru*, in Part 2.

Post-colonial theories are not very effective for the examination of the Korean staging of Shakespearean plays. Firstly, North and South Korea have never been colonies subject to Western imperialism. The Joseon Dynasty was annexed by Imperial Japan, the first Westernized East Asian state. However, the colonizer was highly familiar with the erstwhile Korean culture, and the Koreans had never considered the Japanese to be culturally superior, as the latter had also been equal receivers of the Chinese culture. More importantly, Shakespeare and Western culture were not Japanese, and hence Shakespeare was never 'resisted as a dominant figure of colonialism' on the Korean stage.¹⁶ In fact, the Japanese cultural hegemony during the annexation era was based on their representation of Western culture. Indeed, Koreans rarely attempted to learn Japanese traditional theatre, although their modernized forms (*shingeki* and *takarazuka*) were appropriated by Koreans on the popular stage before the Korean War. None of the case studies in this thesis, therefore, 'respond to the experience of imperialism, whether directly and indirectly'.¹⁷ However, it cannot be denied that Shakespeare still frequently implies the cultural superiority of the West in South Korea.

This thesis introduces a term 'gap', in order to explore the history of the Korean reception of Shakespeare. The notion of a 'gap' originates from traditional Korean

¹⁵ Patrice Pavis, 'Introduction', in *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, ed. by Patrice Pavis (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 1-21 (p. 5).

¹⁶ Alexander C.Y. Huang, *Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 26.

¹⁷ Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 11.

performances in which the division between the audience and the stage is always eradicated in order to create a spirit of togetherness at the end. ‘Gap’ is a translation of Korean word ‘*teum*’ which is a spatial concept. I have borrowed the concept of a ‘gap’ (틈, *teum* in Korean) from the drama theorists Lee Yeong-mi and Oh Tae-suk, who used it to describe traditional Korean theatre. According to Lee, a gap is a ‘rupture, or leaping-off point’ employed in two forms of traditional Korean theatre: *talchum* and *madanggeuk*.¹⁸ A gap is the moment when the dramatic illusion of a performance is questioned and the audience is invited to interrupt the proceedings. Oh Tae-suk described this as producing a ‘lacuna’. As discussed in Chapter 4, a gap (or ‘lacuna’) is constituted by an audience’s reaction to the actors’ efforts to involve them in the performance. Therefore, the purpose of a gap is to stimulate audience participation, which is crucial for Korean performances that have traditionally relied upon creating a spirit of togetherness (in Korean this is called *daedong*, literally meaning ‘big sameness,’ ‘unity,’ or ‘solidarity’). If the audience stays silent and stationary in the auditorium, then the performance will fail and remain incomplete. At many points during a production, audience members will be encouraged to talk with the performers and even to dance and sing together at the end. Such intimacy, which blurs the division between the stage and the auditorium, was the principal concern of traditional Korean performance. As shown in Part 2, the traditional Korean theatre space supported and encouraged this, and the object of a gap is to remove the boundary between the audience and the performance in order to merge the two.¹⁹

The most significant feature of a gap is its contingent nature. As seen above, a gap is only generated as long as it is recognised by an audience. Despite being prearranged, any element in the performance may *become* a gap as the result of an audience’s decision in a specific context. This suggests that it is the audience that decides to create a gap and, more

¹⁸ Lee Yeong-mi, *Madanggeuk Yangsikeui Wonriwa Teukseong (The Principle and Feature of Madanggeuk)* (Seoul: Sigongsa, 2001), p. 82.

¹⁹ From my own observations, English pantomimes display very similar features to *maddanggeuk*. The audience who attend pantomimes are definitely aware that they will be asked to join in with the performance at some point.

In a similar sense, Gareth White addresses gap in audience participation. He wrote, ‘But the interactive work is prepared so that it has gaps to be filled with the actions of participating audience members (as well as, of course, gaps for the coded participations of applause, laughter and other ‘normal’ audience responses) and gaps that require the thought and felt response of the audience to make sense out of its various material. So a significant part of the work of an interactive work consists of creating the structure within which these particular gaps appear, ...’ (Gareth White, *Audience Participation in Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.30.)

importantly, that the audience-members are the only ones able to truly perceive it. That is to say, a gap derives from the audience's desire to physically and verbally participate in the performance. Due to its contingent nature, a gap cannot be easily manipulated by the performers; instead its creation is completely dependent on the audience. Only once the audience has made its decision and begun to participate, can the actors harness the situation to develop the emergent gap. No longer a passive audience, they are more accurately described as audience-performers. To sum up, a gap is a break in a performance intended to create psychological and physical intimacy between the audience and the stage, for the purpose of encouraging the audience to participate directly in the production. Yet a gap can only be acknowledged by the audience. My intention to adopt the notion of a 'gap' is to highlight the active aspect of Korean Shakespeare reception.

Reception indicates 'passive' activity in a general sense. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the verb 'receive' also means 'to accept (something) as an authority, rule, or practice; to admit the truth or validity of [something]'. In terms of Korean Shakespeare performance, reception can mean that Korea, which is culturally remote from Britain, has nonetheless treated British performances as the rule, or standard, for staging Shakespeare. Therefore, to stage Shakespeare's plays, one can expect that the country ought to learn how to perform Shakespeare by observing British (or at least Anglophone) performances. This approach toward staging Shakespeare is likely to begin by imitating British performances such as the RSC's and Shakespeare's Globe's productions, which are thought to present Shakespeare in the most authentic way. Nevertheless, the authority and renown attached to British/Western productions have not been significantly challenged by Korean directors, principally because Shakespeare is seen as, in some essential sense, belonging to the British/Western culture.

I intend to apply the general relationship between the audience and the stage to the Korean reception of Shakespeare. By the expression 'general relationship', I refer to the silent audiences who watch and listen to the stage, those who are 'separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act'.²⁰ When Korean theatre was westernized, in the early years (1950-1970), theatre directors and actors did not have enough practical knowledge

²⁰ Jacques Rancière, Trans. Gregory Elliott, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 2.

about, or experience of, staging Shakespeare's plays. Therefore, Korea had to learn how to stage Shakespeare by imitating British or American performances. Indeed, Korea initially attempted to produce authentic (classical) performances, which resembled Laurence Olivier's film of *Hamlet* (1948). I have demonstrated that even though Koreans were initially the passive recipient of a British performance of Shakespeare's play, the pattern of this reception has come to develop its own stance in due course. Here, what Jacques Rancière says about the communication between the audience and the stage is relevant; 'from the schoolmaster the pupil learns something that the schoolmaster does not know himself'.²¹

It is my contention that gaps represent the otherness of Shakespearean plays that Korean directors discover when they take on Shakespeare. Confronting an otherness which cannot be understood by conventional knowledge, and which therefore mostly emerged as an obstacle for staging, Korean directors have incorporated Koreanness into their Shakespearean productions in order to explore the effect of interposing radical otherness into the original text. Thus, such productions will tamper with Shakespeare's plays in order to establish a consistent thematic and performative reference to Korean culture, either traditional or contemporary. The use of gaps, therefore, has been dependent on those aspects of a production that strike a director as affording the most creative imposition of otherness onto the source material. However, the otherness is not perpetual and has been historically conditioned according to the development of modern Korean theatre. In the early years (1950-1970), the otherness is Shakespeare's complete foreignness on the Korean stage. This was the time when Koreans regarded Western culture as new and spectacular. In the transitional years (1970-1990) and onward, Shakespeare's plays and Western drama/theatre became familiar to Koreans. Therefore, such foreignness has exposed Shakespeare's plays as being incapable of talking about Korean life, society and history. In this sense, I would argue that the evolution of performance styles has been conditioned by each generation's effort to deal with otherness.

South Korean Studies on Korean Shakespeare performance

A comprehensive book on the history of Korean performances of Shakespeare's plays is yet to be written in Korea. Nor does any such history exist in the West. I have, therefore,

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 14.

collected academic journal essays and newspaper reviews about Shakespeare performances in order to compose a history for this thesis. Only since the 1990s have stage productions of Shakespeare been an object of study in Korea. Unsurprisingly this emerged concurrently with a significant increase in the number of performances. One limitation of these studies, however, has been that they have sought only to analyse specific performances and not to develop a broader critical account of trends, styles or developments. These studies have usually been produced in two forms: master's dissertations or essays in academic journals. The dissertations show different perspectives depending on which department they originate in; graduate students from English departments normally pay attention to the relationship between a Shakespearean text and its rendition, while those from drama departments deal with the performance of Shakespeare's plays as a practice in Korean theatre. In contrast to these studies, those research articles published in academic journals are usually produced by professional scholars from English departments in such journals as *Shakespeare Review* or *Journal of Korean Theatre Study Association* (which is published by the Korean Theatre Study Association, the biggest and the oldest such body in South Korea).

Masters dissertations on the topic of Shakespeare in performance are more frequently written than PhD theses on the same topic. This would indicate that studies of performance are still not regarded as a serious area of research. However, the majority of MA dissertations concentrate on Korean adaptations of Shakespeare whose artistic value has already been recognised by both Korean and foreign scholars. As a result, Korean renditions of *Hamlet* have been favoured by graduate students; especially significant in this regard is the Street Theatre Troupe's *Hamlet* production. Thus, while there has only been one recent PhD thesis on this topic (which took as its case studies *Prince Hamyul*, Ki Kuk-seo's *Hamlet*, and the Street Theatre Troupe's *Hamlet*), there have in contrast been four MA dissertations devoted to exploring the history of *Hamlet* productions in Korea.²²

Only a handful of scholars have produced essays on Korean performances of Shakespeare. They mainly discuss adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. This research appears to have been buoyed by both the recent surge in intercultural theatre studies and by the growing success of overseas performances of Korean Shakespeare productions (particularly,

²² See the Korean dissertation section in the bibliography.

Mokwha's *Romeo and Juliet* and Yohangza's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). Lee Hyon-u and Choi Yeong-ju, both of whom teach in English departments, are the two most active scholars and critics in this field. Lee's research has concentrated on the relationship between Shakespearean texts and their performance in Korean traditional theatre. Much of this has elaborated on the significant use made of yards as a spatial environment in recent Korean Shakespeare productions and how this compares to *madang* (the equivalent of a yard in Korean traditional theatre).²³ Lee examines similarities in the relationship between the audience and the stage in both Shakespeare's Globe's performances and Korean adaptations (Mokwha's *Romeo and Juliet* and Yohangza's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). Lee also provides good statistical evidence concerning the qualities of Shakespeare performance in Korea.²⁴ Choi Yeong-ju is the sole scholar to have provided an historical overview of Korean Shakespeare performance. Working from the perspective of intercultural practice, Choi has suggested four historical phases (imitation, allegory, cultural hybridity, and globalization/commercialisation) to account for the variations in Korean performances of Shakespeare. Deriving her critical framework from an engagement with writings of Erika Fisher-Lichete and Patrice Pavis, Choi has written extensively about Korean Shakespeare productions and directors, virtually encompassing all the important Shakespeare performances since Street Theatre Troupe's *Hamlet* in 1996.²⁵ My dissertation is indebted to Choi's insights as they helped me to articulate a comprehensive historical overview of Shakespeare performance in Korea.

Essays on Mokwha's *Romeo and Juliet* and its director Oh Tae-suk include 'Dramaturgical Analysis of Mokwha's *Romeo and Juliet*' (2010) by Lee In-soon, and 'Performativity of Oh Tae-suk's Theatre' (2010) by Lee Sang-ran.²⁶ Both scholars studied theatre in Germany. Lee In-soon's essay discusses Oh's dramaturgical choice to transform Western tragedy into a piece of Korean traditional theatre. Lee Sang-ran interpreted the

²³ Lee Hyon-u, 'Shakespeare, Yard, and the Style of Traditional Korean Theatre', *Shakespeare Review*, 43.3 (2007), 519-546.

²⁴ Lee Hyon-u, 'Shakespeare Boom on Korean Stage', *Yeongeukpyeongron*, 21 (2001), 41-60.

²⁵ Her essays are collected in her book, Choi Young-ju, *GeuloDameunYeongeukSarang (Writing My Love for Theatre)* (Seoul: Jiseongeusaem, 2008).

²⁶ Lee Sang-ran, 'Performativity of Oh Tae-suk's Theatre', *Journal of Korean Theatre Study Association*, 41 (2007), 39-77. Lee In-soon, 'Dramaturgical Analysis of Mokwha's *Romeo and Juliet*', *Journal of Korea Theatre Study Association*, 40 (2010), 163-206.

gestures and signs of the actors in Mokwha's *Romeo and Juliet* by using performance theory. In contrast, Ki Kuk-seo's *Hamlet* series is not properly discussed in spite of its significance; there has been only one academic essay written by Kim Ok-ran. Kim discusses the political nature of the series in relation to the Gwangju Democratisation Movement in her essay 'Hamlet as an Epic 5.18 and Ki Kuk-seo's Position in Korean Theatre History'.²⁷ Musical productions of Shakespeare were reviewed by Kim Kang. In his essay, Kim provides documentary material about Korean Shakespeare musicals.²⁸

Not many works in the English language have examined Korean Shakespeare performance. Thus, while Chinese and Japanese Shakespeare productions have attracted much attention from both Asian and Anglophone scholars, Korean Shakespeare is relatively new in this field. So far then only a small number of Korean scholars have been able to publish their research on this topic in English. The first work in the English language appears to be a PhD thesis (1990) by Kim Dong-uk, which documents Korean performances of *Hamlet* between 1971 and 1989.²⁹ Kim's work is a good resource for looking at the eight important *Hamlet* productions of that period, which were mostly Korean adaptations of the tragedy. Kim provides various useful materials, such as interviews with the directors and Korean newspaper reviews. Even if he describes these performances within in a defined period, nonetheless there is no wider perspective taken on the issue of historiography. In recent years, Im Yeeyon has published an essay on Lee Yun-taek's *Hamlet* in the *Theatre Journal* (2008).³⁰ In this prominent essay, Im applies a post-colonial perspective to one of the most internationally and domestically acclaimed Shakespeare performances. The performance, which I myself saw, fused Shakespeare with Korea's shamanistic traditions. Im criticizes Lee Yun-taek's production by claiming that what it produces is not a Korean perspective on the universal applicability of Shakespeare, that in fact all it achieves is an insubstantial 'mirage' that fails to develop an authentic exploration of these issues. More

²⁷ Kim Ok-ran, 'Hamlet as an Epic 5.18 and Ki kuk-seo's Position in Korean Theatre History', *Hankookgeukyuesulyeongu*, 34 (2011), 223-66.

²⁸ Kim Kang, 'Shakespeare Sings!', *Yeongeoyeongmunhak* 21, 23.4 (2010), 25-64.

²⁹ Kim Dong-Wook, 'Hamlet in Korea: a descriptive study of selected productions from 1971 to 1989' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University, 1990).

³⁰ ImYeeyon, 'The Location of Shakespeare in Korea: Lee Yountaek's *Hamlet* and the Mirage of Interculturality', *Theatre Journal*, 60 (2008), 257-76.

recently, Lee Hyon-u wrote about shamanistic elements in Korean Shakespeare performance for *Asian Theatre Journal* (2011) and Kim Moran wrote an article on Mokhwa's *Romeo and Juliet* with regard to Japanese influence on Oh Tae-suk.³¹

Glocalizing Shakespeare in Korea and Beyond (2009), edited by Lee Hyon-u and written in English, is the first and only book on Korean Shakespeare performances in any language (including Korean). The book includes articles from non-Korean scholars, such as Brian Singleton, Maria Shevtsova, Ravi Chaturvedi and Kobayashi Kaori. Yet, it was published in Korea by a Korean publisher, Dongin Publishing, and has not been published in any English-speaking countries. In this volume, Maria Shevtsova discusses two Korean Shakespeare performances at the Barbican Centre, Mokhwa's *Romeo and Juliet* and Yohangza's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, based on her interviews with the two directors and her experience of attending the performances. Shevtsova also carefully documents Oh's workshop with BA Drama students at Goldsmith's College, the University of London. In the documentation she provides, Shevtsova talks about the 'reinvention' of Korean traditional theatre and Oh's dramaturgical strategy. Brian Singleton also gives an account of the same Korean productions, focusing on the 'intraculturality' of the performances, rather than their interculturality. Shevtsova and Singleton give a very helpful description of Mokhwa's *Romeo and Juliet* from a European perspective.

Much of the history of Shakespeare performance in Korea prior to the year 2000 was documented in *Sheikspier Hankugeh Oda (Shakespeare comes to Korea)* by Shin Jeong-ok, who is a leading translator of Shakespeare's work.³² The volume gives the history of Shakespeare publications and also documents nearly all performances that have taken place in Korea (this was possible due to the small number of productions). However, Shin's documentation is in fact unclear in many areas, and she did not even attempt any critical analysis of these productions. While it serves as a good source of information about

³¹ Kim Moran, "The Stages 'Occupied by Shakespeare'", in *Re-playing Shakespeare in Asia*, ed. by Poonam Trivedi and Minami Ryuta (London: Routledge, 2012), pp 200-220. As Kim discussed in this article, Oh has been accused of indicating 'Japanese colour' in his works and directions. 'Japanese colour' has been extremely hated by Koreans, due to the traumatic memory of the annexation era. Oh once strongly disagreed with the Japanese influence.

³² Shin completed her translation of the complete Shakespeare in 1986.

Shakespeare performance, Shin's work ultimately fails to provide a substantial intellectual engagement with the material, preferring instead to embrace an uncritical bardolatry.³³

Importantly, in addition to standard scholarship, I have also been able to provide detailed information about current productions from my own first-hand experiences. Consequently, in writing the case studies, the primary source of information is derived from my own attendance at these performances. I have attended most of the productions since 2000 that are discussed in this thesis, except for *King Uru* (2000), Ki Kuk-seo's *Hamlet* Series (1981, 1982, 1985, and 1990). I have watched the film-recording of *King Uru* on the website of the National Theatre of Korea. In writing about Ki-Kook-seo's *Hamlet* series and *Rock Hamlet*, I refer to essays and newspaper reviews that provide meticulous descriptions of each production. The performances in my case studies have attracted a good number of reviews, dissertations and academic essays. Those writings all offer good material for analysis. I have also been fortunate to collect all the scripts of these performances from their directors or actors. The scripts decisively support me in discussing not only the relationship between Shakespearean texts and their Korean renditions, but also in determining the difference between faithful translations and performance scripts. For this thesis, I have also undertaken five interviews with the five directors (see Bibliography for detail). Finally, my experience as an assistant director, dramatist and translator has allowed me to understand the challenge and interest in producing Shakespeare from the viewpoint of Korean theatre practitioners themselves. This is crucial because there is an important distinction between practice and academia in Korea's reception of Shakespeare.

The study of Shakespeare performances has recently begun to flourish in South Korea, with growing numbers of graduate students and scholars from both English and Theatre departments undertaking research in this area. I would like to emphasize that in such a flourishing culture of research and performance, the Korean perspective and experience of Shakespeare needs to be explored and made available for others to consider.

³³ I must, however, acknowledge my debt to this volume as it has provided a wealth of primary source material regarding pre-2000 performances.

Part 1

History of Korean Staging of Shakespeare's plays

Chapter 1 is intended to explore the historical context of Korean Shakespeare performance. It is a survey of the sixty-five-year history of Korean staging of Shakespearean plays, since the first full-length staging of *Hamlet* in 1949 to the present. This chapter is in fact a compressed version of the history of Korean theatre since its Westernization in the early 20th century in order to explain how Shakespearean dramas were staged at each phase in that history. Chapter 2 explores the contemporary mode of staging Shakespearean dramas in terms of actor, stage, script and theme. It provides an introduction for the case studies in Part 2 and Part 3.

Chapter 1

The Early Years of Shakespeare on the Korean Stage (1900-1990)

When Shakespeare was introduced into Korea at the beginning of the twentieth century, his plays were not yet able to be staged on the Korean stage, mainly due to the venues available. At that time, popular theatrical arts such as *pansori* and *talchum* did not utilize specific performance venues. They occurred in marketplaces or the living rooms of wealthy families, where a group of people could gather and watch. Koreans, without knowledge of Shakespeare's contemporary staging, would have considered that Shakespearean dramas necessarily demanded a Western stage with its formal division between reality and dramatic events – but there were no such venues available in Korea during this time. From this point of view, Shakespearean dramas were strikingly novel for Koreans, just as those of Henrik Ibsen or August Strindberg. This contrasted with China and Japan which both possessed long theatrical traditions of their own (Yuan Drama, Noh and Kabuki). It is even suggested that Chinese Yuan Drama of the fourteenth century and Shakespearean drama share the same dramatic methods in their staging and the establishment of a national dramatic literature.³⁴ *Noh* and *Kabuki*'s poetic language and stage conventions would mean that Shakespeare could be transferred to Japanese stages without exhibiting complete foreignness. Moreover, China and Japan also had traditional theatre venues that shared a similar separation of stage and audience with Western theatres. Without this affinity in style and content with the Western stage, in order to perform Shakespeare's works Korea had to fully adopt Western theatrical conventions and wholly break with its own traditions, most of all, the background of the actors.

³⁴ Xia Yang Zhang, *Shakespeare in China* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1996). In this book, Zhang discussed affinities between Shakespeare's plays and Chinese Yuan, Ming and Qing drama traditions.

<i>Pansori</i>	
	<p><i>Pansori</i> ('<i>Pan</i>' means place of performance and '<i>sori</i>' means sound) is difficult to define as a theatre genre. It consists of a singer and a musician who plays a drum in everyday wear. It can be regarded as a dramatic poetry and song recital with music performed by a singer who recites a very long song (up to eight hours) that has a story derived from folklore, to the tune of a drum. A full story is called <i>madang</i>, and it consists of speech (<i>aniri</i>) and song (<i>chang</i>). <i>Pansori</i> was popular for all social classes of Korea; it was performed in front of Korean Royal Family and aristocrats, at the same time in market place of rural village. The venue of <i>pansori</i> is versatile; it can be performed in a reception room or a yard where people can gather.</p>
<i>Talchum</i>	
	<p><i>Talchum</i> is masked dance drama ('<i>tal</i>' means 'mask', '<i>chum</i>' means 'dance') that had been developed in many local places. Virtually all parts of Korea have their own <i>talchum</i> such as Songpasandenori (Seoul), and Hahoebyeolshingut (Andong, Southeast Korea). <i>Talchum</i> can be categorised as a genre of dance but it has a narrative with themes of ridiculing the ruling class (<i>yangban</i>) or apostate Buddhist monks. Therefore, it is completely a people's performance art and can be called a 'theatre of the oppressed' in pre-modern Korea. Very satirical humour is common and the performance boasts of vivid atmosphere. Its masks usually represent typical social classes (<i>yangban</i>, skivvy, peasant, Buddhist monk and prostitute), supernatural being, <i>dokkebi</i>, (goblin) and animals (lion). <i>Talchum</i> is always performed outside; its venue is usually yard in market place. The performers can be either professional troupes that</p>

	<p>consist of clowns, one of the lowest classes in pre-modern Korea, or village people themselves. <i>Talchum</i> is not regular performance; it was generally performed on the festive days such as the First Full Moon Day, Chuseok (harvest festival) and also at community rituals such as supplication for rain, good harvest or heavy catching fish. Indeed, it includes a Korean shamanistic ritual <i>gut</i> that requires the audience to take part in the performance at the end. While <i>pansori</i> is a pure entertainment, <i>talchum</i> has a function as community ritual as well as amusement.</p>
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Table 1: Figure 3. *Pansori* and Figure 4. *talchum*.

Performers in traditional Korean theatre were drawn from the most humble classes of the Joseon Dynasty. The class system of the Joseon era was a simple hierarchy: the monarch, followed by the *yangin* and *cheonmin* classes. The *yangin* class was comprised of the majority of the population and consisted of different groups that were largely classified into four categories according to their profession: the governmental scholarly officials (the top of the Confucian hierarchy, also called *yangban*), farmers, artisans and merchants (the lowest strata in society). All *yangin* groups were theoretically equal; they were encouraged to study Confucian classics and to take the national civil servant examination (*gwageo*) to become a governmental officer. Meanwhile, the *cheonmin* class included shamans, prostitutes, actors (entertainers), Buddhist monks and butchers. In contrast to the *yangin*, the *cheonmin* class was fundamentally deprived of any opportunity for education; therefore, they could not improve their social class by any means. At the beginning of the twentieth century it was still simply unthinkable that traditional actors of the *cheonmin* class could perform the works of Shakespeare, a playwright who was praised as a sage of the West. It was necessary, therefore, that a considerable transition in the social status of actors take place before Shakespeare could be performed by professional actors in Korea. It is a notable sociological fact that acting was still largely regarded as a vulgar profession in Korean society until the end of the twentieth century. In the twenty-first century, acting has come to be seen as one of the most prestigious jobs in Korea due to the rise of the entertainment industry.

The first Shakespeare performance on Korean soil took place in 1909 at a Japanese-style (*kabuki*) theatre in Hansung (an earlier name for Seoul). This production was staged by a Japanese theatre company who put on a *kabuki* adaptation of *Hamlet* to celebrate the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1908). It is not likely that many Koreans would have attended the performance. Following the annexation of Korea (then the Korean Empire) in 1910, the Japanese Empire imitated the Western imperialists and attempted to transform Korea into their colony. As a result of the annexation, the Korean capital was forced to change its name from Hansung to Gyeongseong. Both Japanese and Western cultural influences quickly influenced Koreans in cities which the Japanese imperialists established for the purpose of colonial exploitation and, therefore, the people would have experienced modernization regardless of their own will to do so. While the colonized capital became Westernized, most rural parts of Korea remained as they had been during the Joseon dynasty apart from the new railway that was a symbol of modernization. During this period, few Koreans were able to study theatre or dramatic literature in the West. Instead, Western theatre and drama were imported through Japan: Korean students or practitioners who worked in Japanese theatre transferred a 'Japanized' Western theatre into Korea. This indicates that Korea did not draw Western theatre from the West itself, but from Japanese imitations of Western theatre, known as *shingeki*. The Korean equivalent of these imported Japanese *shingeki* was called *singeuk* and shared the same Chinese characters, which literally meant 'new drama'.

The *singeuk* movement reached its peak from the 1920s until 1939. Like *shingeki*, *singeuk* aimed at establishing modern theatre by adopting the stagecraft of Western Realism or Modernist theatre. The movement was mainly ignited by Korean students who studied Western literature or art in Tokyo. The students mostly belonged to the upper ranks of Korean society, *yangban* or rich merchant families. The most important figures were Kim Woo-jin, Hyun Chul, Hong Hae-seong (1894-1957), and Yu Chi-jin (1905-1974). They were not sympathetic towards traditional Korean theatre. Hyun Chul even claimed that traditional theatre was no more than 'amusement or a gymnastics exercise in terms of the science of theatre'.³⁵ From this point of view, Hyun even declared that Korea had never had a true

³⁵ Kim Seong-hee and others, eds, *Hankukyeongeuk Baeknyeon (Hundred Years of Korean Theatre)* (Seoul: Theatre and Man, 2008), p. 132.

theatrical tradition. These *singeuk* pioneers found their role-model in Tokyo's Sukichi Little Theatre, where Hong Hae-seong performed in some eighty productions. They aimed to establish a new theatre that was director-oriented, whereas Korean traditional theatre was more specifically actor-oriented (in fact, the role of a director did not even exist in traditional theatres). In addition, they learned the Stanislavski system in order to create a more naturalist theatre in Korea. Gogol, Ibsen and Chekhov were frequently chosen for staging at the new venues built in Gyeongseong. Shakespeare would presumably have been regarded as unsuitable for such realist/naturalist theatre. It is not surprising to learn that during this period Shakespeare was only staged by college students.

After the liberation of Korea (1945) until the Korean War (1950), the Korean peninsula suffered from turbulent political ideological conflict between the left wing and the right wing (in fact, liberal nationalist/socialist versus former Japanese co-operator/conservationists).³⁶ In 1945, theatre practitioners formed a nationalistic and liberal 'Joseon-yeongeuk-dongmaeng (Korea Theatre Union)' which aimed at removing vestiges of the colonial period as well as the feudal system, and then establishing a democratic nationalist theatre. The Union cooperated with the socialist Namro Party (South Korea Labour Party) which consisted of socialists who were supported by the Soviet Union, but encompassed right-wing theatre practitioners who thought themselves to be 'democratic'. In 1947, the US Army military administration seized control of South Korea and prohibited any activity of the Namro Party in South Korea and, therefore, they retreated to North Korea where the Soviet military force had established itself and was busy orchestrating Kim Il-sung's rise to power. The Union also collapsed and those of a radical or left-wing persuasion passed the parallel towards Pyongyang, the capital of the North.

Those right-wing directors and playwrights, many of whom had once cooperated with the Japanese imperialists, were inactive until the collapse of the Union. Now they (those key personalities: Yu Chi-jin, Lee Hae-rang, and Seo Hang-seok) formed Jeonguk-yeongeuk-yesul-hyeophoe (National Association of Theatre Art) with staunch support of the American military government. Yu Chi-jin was appointed as the chair of the Association and became the most influential figure in the South Korean theatre. The aim of the Association was to support

³⁶ After Japanese surrender to the Allies, Korean Peninsular was occupied by American army (South) and Soviet Russia army (North) along the 38 parallel.

democratic principle, to establish pure theatre culture, and to reject commercialism. Although they declared theatre should contribute to establishing democratic principle, they strongly opposed theatre's involvement in politics, which was the legacy of the Union. The early activity of the Association was, therefore, focused on clearing away the political aspect of theatre. The dominance of the Association in this period was influential in the following decades to the present. The form of *singeuk*, which was realistic performance with well-written Western dramas, became a standard for a good artistic theatre, meanwhile performances reflecting contemporary political reality or adopting the comic nature of traditional comic performance (*talchum*) were not thought to be 'pure theatre' and, were often, regarded vulgar or commercial acts. Such a concept of 'pure theatre' later influenced an aesthetic arbiter of the stage censorship between 1972 and 1988 (see Chapter 6).

During the immediate period of post-colonial independence and national division, few if any professional theatre practitioners engaged with the work of Shakespeare. In fact, the first South Korean performance (1949) of *Hamlet* was achieved by students of Chungang University's Theatre Department, in which students were taught Western theatre. Although students made up the cast of the performance, the production took a professional theatre, Sigonggwang in Seoul, and that was directed by Lee Hae-rang (1916-1989). The production ran through all the acts and was based on the first Korean translation of the tragedy.³⁷ *Hamlet* was played by Choi Mu-ryong, one of the biggest film stars in the 1960s. Shakespeare became popular during the Korean War through the productions of Sinhyeop (literally, 'singeuk association'), the most influential theatre company of the period in South Korea. Sinhyeop was founded (1947) by Yu Chi-jin and Lee Hae-rang. As its name suggests, the company consisted of those who were involved in the *singeuk* movement during the Japanese colonial period and they retained the same theatrical style, which was to be much criticised as an archaic form of realism by later generations. Sinhyeop were nonetheless historically important for directly engaging with Shakespeare's work, staging versions of *Hamlet* (1951), *Macbeth* (1952), and *Othello* (1953) at venues in Daegu, Pusan and several cities in the southern region of South Korea that were less affected by the war. These three productions were the first professional performances of Shakespeare's work to present complete plays and were very successful in drawing large audiences. Park Um, one of their members, recalled

³⁷ Jung In-seop, an English literature scholar who had studied in the USA, translated the tragedy into the Korean language.

that Sinhyeop performed *Macbeth* four times a day in front of more than one thousand five hundred audience members.³⁸ Indeed, their *Hamlet* production was very well received by the displaced population who had been evacuated from the warzone; wherever the venue was, the audience was too numerous for everyone to be seated.

The intentions behind Sinhyeop's decision to perform Shakespeare are unclear. Perhaps they might have needed a script and Shakespeare was the only one that they had to hand. Or maybe it is also plausible that the tragedies were considered a good means of appeasing a traumatized people who left behind their home. It seems that the evacuated people needed some form of entertainment and these productions were the only opportunities for them to receive it. Yet, the theatre company played in front of the very different audience from their usual audience in Seoul. The audience in these venues were mixed of different classes and many of them were not familiar with the convention at theatre, that is to say, that an audience should be silent during the performance. It was said that the audience was occasionally riotous. Watching the evil characters, they shouted and booed at the stage, presumably, in a similar way to the English pantomime audiences. Moreover, they threw things at the stage when they were dissatisfied with the performance. Under such unusual circumstances realistic acting was not a viable option; the actors had to raise their tone and speak with a more musical voice. Kim Dong-won (1916-2006), who played Hamlet for the production, was famous for his rhythmic voice, especially when he spoke the verse 'to be or not to be'. His style of speech became an archetype for the portrayal of Hamlet in South Korea. After the Korean War, Sinhyeop did not produce another Shakespeare performance and instead focused on Korean or American realism dramas. Being one of only two theatre companies (the other was the National Drama Company of Korea, founded 1950) in the early and middle 1950s, Sinhyeop dominated Korean theatre until they finally split from it in 1961.

³⁸ Park Um, 'Hankookjeonjaenggwa Sheikspier (The Korean War and Shakespeare)', *Hankookyeongeuk*, 3 (1977), 35.



Figure 5. *Macbeth* (left) and Figure 6. *Othello* (right) by Sinhyeop in 1951

(the venue and the location unspecified)

The above photographs of Sinhyeop's productions are the earliest images of Korean Shakespeare performances. The venues and their locations have not been identified; though the venues could possibly be citizen's halls, where more than five hundred people could easily rally for a public ceremony. It is clear, however, that the venues were not equipped with a proper flying system. The scenography also looks fairly coarse. The backdrops seem to indicate the castle of Macbeth or Duncan (left) and the court of the Duke of Venice (right) with embroidered pillars. The primitive state of the scenography must have been due to the conditions of the War. Had the productions been on the Seoul stage (before or after the War), there would have been real doors and pillars. It is also apparent that the costumes look fairly ludicrous; the cast is attempting to look like the Shakespearean characters one might find in a contemporaneous British performance (or at least as the cast *imagined* that to be like). Here Othello wore an Arab costume and his face is painted black, his acting style appearing to be a mixture of realistic performance and exaggerated emotion.

During the 1950s, South Korea was ruled by the corrupt dictatorship of the then president Lee Seung-man, who was backed by the American government. South Korea, then poorer than North Korea, was heavily dependent on economic and military aid from the USA for her survival. America willingly assisted South Korea as its borders formed the frontier against the Communist bloc in Asia. American influences intruded on every part of South Korean life from politics to art; at that time the South Korean government imported the American political system, particularly, the powerful president and separation of the three

powers, and many among the society's elite chose to study at American universities in order to study about Western science, art and culture. American films were one of the most popular forms of entertainment for Koreans; theatres were often obliged to show American films due to popular demand. For all intents and purposes, it can be said that the USA gained an ideological hold over South Korea, a situation which can still be observed in Korean society today.

When the Lee dictatorship was overthrown by the April Citizen Revolution in 1960, Koreans briefly experienced a period of democracy until the 5.16 military *coup d'état* led by General Park Jung-hee in 1961. When Korea was politically stabilised after Park's ascendance, there emerged new theatre companies such as Silheom and Gwangjang, most of their members were from elite universities in Seoul. They studied either at theatre departments or learned their theatrical crafts at students' companies. The new companies adopted a wide range of Western theatrical styles, from realism to expressionism, and staged contemporary European and American plays as well as Shakespearean works. The audiences for these theatre companies were mostly comprised of university students and academics. The status of theatre as an art-form for the intelligentsia, who would have internalized Sinhyeop's idea of 'pure theatre', evolved at this time and persisted until the 1990s.



Figure 7. *Hamlet* (left) at the Drama Centre, Seoul, 1962 (dir. Yu Chi-jin).

Figure 8. Kim Dong-won (right) as Hamlet.

The version of *Hamlet* (1962) produced at the Drama Centre (now Namsan Arts Centre) in Seoul clearly shows a typical Shakespeare production of the 1960s. The Drama Centre, founded by Yu Chi-jin, was both a theatre company and drama school with its own venue (the first Westernized drama school in Korea). Yu, who was the president of the school, could establish this institute with funds from the Korean government and the Rockefeller Foundation (USA). The Drama Centre had an aim to stage only straight plays and refused to produce populist dramatic arts such as the comedic *akgeuk* (an early form of Korean musical theatre).³⁹ The venue of the institute introduced the semi-circular stage and vomitorium, which was a rare and unique structure in comparison to other Korean stages at the time. It derived from Yu's observations of Western theatre during his stay in the USA.

The tragedy was chosen for the opening production of the venue. Yu presumably hoped to put on one of the best Western plays in his new Western-inspired theatre. As seen above, the *mise-en-scène* was much improved from that of the previous decade. The props seem to have been carefully manufactured. The actors wore well-designed Western style costumes. However, it is obvious that the performance was only a more elaborate imitation of Western theatre. Thus it shows that Hamlet (Kim Dong-won) has been forced to look like a romantic hero as portrayed by Lawrence Olivier or John Gielgud; his hair has been dyed blonde and his makeup exaggerates the silhouette of his face. The theatre company believed strongly that Shakespearean characters should look like those in Western productions. Correspondingly, the *mise-en-scène* for these Shakespeare productions was supposed to indicate where the play happens. This attempt to visually replicate the look of Western Shakespeare productions came to be the rule for most future productions (except those few that sought to stage more experimental adaptations). In addition, this vision of Hamlet as a romantic hero has been the principal image of the protagonist for audiences ever since. Almost identical *mise-en-scène* and makeup are still found on Korean stages today, particularly in those productions which seek to be faithful to Shakespeare.

³⁹ I use 'straight plays' to refer to text-based theatre, as is used in the English context. However, the Korean word, *Jeonggeuk* ('straight theatre'), often implies artistic theatrical performance with a serious subject matter.

The Shakespeare festival held on the Bard's 400th birthday (1964) was a prominent event in the history of early Korean Shakespeare performance, and was the first such event to be held there. The National Theatre of Korea and the Drama Centre jointly hosted the festival and invited seven theatre companies to contribute: the Drama Centre, The National Theatre Company of Korea, Sinhyeop, Minjung, Silheom, Dongin, and Sanha. The festival had a programme of six plays (*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *Taming of the Shrew*) and involved more than two-hundred actors. Like Sinhyeop's wartime Shakespeare performances, the festival was hugely successful; the box office reached an audience of 40,000, which was an extraordinary number for theatre at the time. The audience of the festival was mostly composed of members of the general public rather than theatre fans; otherwise the record number would never have been achieved. However, it is still unclear whether the festival made Shakespeare popular with Koreans. Despite the huge success of this event, Shakespeare's work was not staged much during the 1960s. The theatre companies that took part in the festival seemed to be much more interested in contemporary plays. It also seems that there was no substantial demand of the general public to see Shakespeare again on the stage. This could be due to the fact that these productions, which were as serious as Sinhyeop's *Hamlet*, would not really please the general public who preferred cinema to theatre for evening entertainment.

During the period 1950-1970, Shakespeare's plays were also being adapted for the popular stage, in the form of *akgeuk* and *yeoseonggukgeuk*. The two popular forms had a large fanbase not only in Seoul but also in virtually every part of South Korea. *Akgeuk* (literally, 'music theatre') was a music theatre based on popular songs of the day that provided the basic narrative resource for the scripts. The performers of *akgeuk* were mostly pop-singers and comedians who did not receive higher education, in contrast to theatre actors. KPK Akgeukdan, one of the most famous *akgeuk* companies, staged a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1950, just before the Korean War. The script was translated by Seo Hang-suk, a scholar of German literature. Lee Nan-yeong, the most popular female singer at the time, played Romeo, on account of there being a shortage in male leading actors. Unfortunately, the details of the production, including other contemporary *akgeuk* productions of Shakespeare's plays, were not documented. However, it is assumed that KPK Akgeukdan's *Romeo and Juliet* was hugely popular amongst Korean people grounded upon the popularity of Lee Nan-yeong.

Yeoseonggukgeuk (literally, ‘female national theatre’) was the most popular theatrical act during the 1950s. Deriving the name from its all-female cast, *Yeoseonggukgeuk* produced a form of music theatre based on traditional Korean songs and folklore. One very notable example of a Shakespearean production in this style was the Imchunaeng Gukgeukdan theatre company’s adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, which was adapted by Im Chun-aeng and re-titled *Cheongshil Hongshil* (1950, *Blue Thread Red Thread*).⁴⁰ The adaptation largely followed the plot of the original, though it had a different ending: Romeo and Juliet went to heaven, where they were reunited, and, possibly, lived happily ever after. The intention behind adding the heaven scene has never been made clear. However, another Shakespeare production by the same company, *Heukjinju* (1961) (*Black Pearl*, an adaptation of *Othello*), featured a similar ending: after his suicide, Othello goes to heaven where he encounters Desdemona who has been waiting for him. Shin Jeong-ok has argued that these sudden happy endings show ‘the Western idea of tragedy was replaced by positive Korean ideas.’⁴¹ A deeper explanation is that such endings were devised as a way to retain the thematic features (always happy ending) of *yeoseonggukgeuk* and its grounding in traditional folklore. Furthermore, these two adaptations of Shakespeare might also be said to pander to the audiences’ tastes; the audiences were largely composed of women who had long suffered suppression under the patriarchal order of Korean society, and these productions offered fantasies of escape and hope from the burdens of their situation.

There is virtually no documentary evidence of these early popular Shakespeare productions. However, it can be assumed that these more populist performances of Shakespeare’s work would have pleased Koreans more than the rather serious efforts of Sinhyeop and other such artistic companies. The popular theatres were based on Korean popular music (*akgeuk*) or traditional music (*yeoseonggukgeuk*) and their themes were easy to understand. In contrast, ordinary Koreans would not comprehend the ideas behind Shakespearean tragedy if staged with the direct, word-to-word translation. At the time, Western tragedy was not familiar to Koreans, most of whom had not had the opportunity to pursue higher education. TV was not yet widely distributed, so Hollywood films and radio

⁴⁰ Blue and red threads are a symbol of marriage in Korea.

⁴¹ Shin, Jeong-ok, *Sheikspier Hankookeh Oda* (*Shakespeare Comes to Korea*) (Seoul: Baeksan Publishers, 1998), p. 208.

dramas were the only other sources of entertainment for Koreans. Therefore, tragedy would mean for them a sad story; comedy would mean a funny story. Shakespearean plays, despite their great complexity, would thus have been regarded as being either sad or funny stories by most Koreans. Under such cultural conditions, stage productions of Shakespeare would be an insufficient source of amusement when compared to the spectacle of Hollywood films. Undoubtedly, this helps to explain why Shakespeare was rarely staged during the 1960s. Indeed, until the 1990s, Shakespearean plays had been chiefly performed on university stages by student drama companies.

Transitional years: 1970~1990

A new generation of Korean theatre had begun since the 1970s when the South Korean economy was fully recovered from the Korean War and the post-war generation turned into their twenties. Many venues were built in Seoul, with the launch of big venues such as the National Theatre of Korea (moved to current location in 1973) and the Sejong Centre (1978), and a number of small venues emerged in the heart of Seoul at around this time too. This increase did not result in an increased audience however. Theatres were mostly attended by university students (female students often outnumbered their male counterparts) in the 1970s, and plays were normally regarded a serious form of Western art, therefore they were perceived as being difficult and uninteresting by ordinary Koreans. Many theatre companies were organized according to a *dongin* (which literally means ‘club member’ or ‘group member’) system, indicating a company consisting of members who shared the artistic ideals or goals of a particular group. The members were equal in their decision-making powers in all matters related to the business of the theatre to which they belonged. This *dongin* system provided an enduring, long-term model for the structure of Korean theatre companies that pursued ‘art theatre’.

During the 1960s-1998, the Korean government prohibited the importation of Japanese cultural products because of the two nations’ antagonistic history. As a result, the once prevalent Japanese influence on Korean theatre declined rapidly, with most students now journeying to the USA to study theatre. The Korean government also funded a few successful directors or writers to travel to New York. Many of them, including Oh Tae-suk,

chose to learn about American theatre at La Mama in New York. As a result of that programme, the American influence on Korean theatre became predominant; American realism and experimental theatre were regarded as the ‘genuine’ or standard form of theatre, and Broadway musicals were imitated on the popular stage. The old idea was still prevalent; theatre was Western, and Koreans should learn about it from the West directly in this time.⁴² The people who studied in the USA looked upon this as the source of all knowledge about ‘genuine’ theatre. These American-educated elites naturally assumed power and leadership over Korean theatre by becoming directors or professors, thus affecting all areas of the industry from the production system, to acting styles (particularly in the spread of Method Acting), to stage design. In this situation, Korean theatre practitioners experienced deep feelings of inferiority to American (and Western) theatre in the 1970s.⁴³

Ahn Min-su’s *Prince Hamyul* (1976, *Hamlet* adaptation, Dongrang Repertorie) exemplified the American influence. *Prince Hamyul* was the first production of the tragedy that fully revised and adapted it into Korean cultural traditions by employing martial arts and dance. The director, Ahn Min-su (b. 1940), studied for an MA in theatre at the Drama department of the University of Hawaii, which had built a reputation for Asian theatre studies.⁴⁴ So, Ahn would have been taught the American approach to Asian theatre and how to combine indigenous theatre with Western counterpart. *Prince Hamyul* might have been intended to be a Korean adaptation. Yet, despite the use of traditional dance and song, the production was criticised for its over-use of conventions from Japanese Noh theatre, which it was felt obscured the Korean elements of the production. Even, the place was a fictional ancient kingdom and the costume (Figure 8) suggested a long-gone past in an Asian country, which could epitomize American influence on Ahn. So, the production did not intend to indicate any particular stage of the Korean history, and its reference to the Korean history could hardly be recognized. *Prince Hamyul* is now praised as one of the earliest attempts to localize (or adapt) Shakespeare on a serious and art stage. As discussed above, there were even earlier Shakespeare adaptations on the popular stage in the 1950s. However, it is worth noting its historic importance as being the first Korean Shakespeare production to tour the

⁴² Koreans during the Japanese Annexation era learnt Western theatre from Japanese.

⁴³ Seo Yeon-Ho, *Dialogue with Tae-Suk Oh: 40 years of experiment* (Seoul: Theatre and Man, 2002), p. 186.

⁴⁴ The department is the publisher of Asian Theatre Journal.

West (between 9 March and 28 May 1977, the USA and Europe) and enchanted the Western audience with its ‘colour and movement’.⁴⁵ Indeed this was the first ever overseas performance of a Korean rendition of the Bard’s work. After 30 years, Yohangza’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* entertained a British audience at the Barbican Centre London in a very similar way.



Figure 9. *Prince Hamyul* (Jeon Mu-song played Hamyul)

Against this American influence on theatre, there was at this time a growing interest in traditional performances in the 1970s. Previously denigrated (by *singeuk* pioneers in the Japanese Annexation era) native art-forms like *talchum* and *pansori* were now being recognized as the fountain of Korean theatre in terms of form and spirit. The traditional performances were combined with modern staging in order to create a new form of theatre, and were reinvented from a modern perspective for the purpose of reflecting politics. The former direction manifested as the search for a new theatrical style; *talchum* and *pansori* were used as resources for either playwriting or acting. For example, Oh Tae-suk (b. 1940)’s *Soitukkinori* (1972) (play of Soitukki) borrowed a *talchum* narrative with Western dramaturgy.⁴⁶ On the other hand, *madanggeuk* was a reinvention of *talchum*. It was created

⁴⁵ Jennifer Dunning ‘Melancholy Korean’, *The New York Times*, 25 March 1977. The venues were La Mama (New York), Dallas Theatre Center (Dallas), Walker Arts Center (Minneapolis) in the USA, Mickery Theatre in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, and Centre Cultural De Rennes in Renne, France.

⁴⁶ Oh Tae-suk’s Moliere adaptation was well received by both the critics and the audience. Oh cleverly did not display traditional elements on stage, but found a way to juxtapose Korean traditional performance and modern staging without alienating either side. He developed his ideas from his experience of various local *talchum* and *gut* (shamanistic ritual), and

by university students (notably Im Jin-taek and Kim Myeong-kon) who trained *talchum* or *pansori* and highlighted the fact that *talchum* served as a satire of the ruling-class, and so could be harnessed as a symbolic weapon of resistance to the Park Jung-hee's totalitarian rule. The *talchum* revival attempted to fuse *talchum* and realist theatre to realistically represent how people were being oppressed.

Madangeuk is an outdoor theatrical performance in which music, dance, and drama are combined. The definition derives from its name; '*madang*' meaning yard and '*geuk*' meaning drama. Therefore, a different method of performance must be developed from that of indoor performance; this results in freedom from the unity of time and space in terms of dramatic structure, easy story and burlesque to gain the attention of audience. The characters are highly stereotyped: in many cases, the characters represent the social types, normally a dichotomy (rich and poor, dictator and revolutionaries). In enacting these characters, the performers should also be proficient in music and dance. The open space of *madanggeuk* requires specific audience behaviour. As it does not have any actual barrier between audience and performers due to its performance space, there is no specific space for the audience. Therefore the audience is able to choose a position for watching the performance, whether standing or sitting. The communal concern and freedom of place allows the audience to easily interact with the performance; this is the most important feature of *madanggeuk*. According to Ryu In-gyeong, '*Madanggeuk* does not make the audience the object of the performers (subject), rather it is a theatrical performance which would be recreated and changed by active audience participation'.⁴⁷ Hence, *madanggeuk* is often said to be a unique case that is deeply based on Korean traditional culture without any Western influence. Such features of *madanggeuk* have later deeply influenced Korean adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. The influence is discussed in Part 2. From the wider perspective of theatre history, *madanggeuk* was a marginal event at its inception, it nonetheless had a significant influence on the establishment of a distinctive 'Korean Nationalist Theatre' movement in the 1980s.

applied aspects of these in his direction. The substance of Korean traditional performances he found was the 'spirit of *nori* (play)', in other words, a comic aspect that derived from their theatrical structure (illogical arrangement of space and time, absence of Aristotelian plot, extreme black humour). His approach became very influential in defining a sense of 'Koreanness' in modern Korean theatre. I will discuss Oh's approach further in Chapter 4.

⁴⁷ Ryu In-gyeong, *The future of Korean Performance Art* (Seoul: Han'kook'moon'hak, 2005), p 289.

The period 1970-1990 witnessed both rapid economic growth and increasing social unrest; as a consequence there was a marked increase in student demonstrations and general strikes by Korean trade unions against the government and affiliated capitalist conglomerates that had supported the regime. Reflecting on this situation, radical theatre directors felt moved to propose the establishment of a 'Korean Nationalist Theatre' movement. According to Kim Myeong-kon (b. 1952), one of the key members of this movement, theatre should serve to 'rejuvenate the pre-modern performance arts of the Korean people, and continue the traditional performance's resistance tradition which started in the era of Japanese occupation, and thus regain our authentic theatre which is now at risk'.⁴⁸ Pointing to the resistance tradition, the movement demanded theatre (mostly university students' theatre clubs) to join the whole democratization movement and theatrical performance became a political propaganda, occasionally just before the demonstration. Yet the strategy of the Nationalist Theatre seemed, paradoxically, to receive various Western theatrical forms and plays and to mix them with *talchum*: *madanggeuk* was the product of this strategy. *Madanggeuk* shows Western dramaturgical elements: script writer, realistic characterization and costume. Accordingly, for the Nationalist Theatre movement, it was unlikely that Shakespeare would be readily welcomed on their stage under such a situation. Yet it is notable that this movement again became significant when the possibility of an intracultural appropriation of Shakespeare emerged in the twenty-first century. Indeed, Kim Myeong-kon himself, once he became the chair of the National Theatre of Korea in 2000, used Shakespeare to achieve his theatrical ideals.⁴⁹

The decade of 1970 saw the rapid decline of the once popular theatres of *akgeuk* and *yeoseonggukgeuk*, perhaps due to the obvious fact that the TV and film industries had become the most prevalent forms of evening entertainment. The popular actors of the stage were enticed, by the promise of higher salaries, to move to TV. Losing its stars meant that theatre had a dwindling audience. However, one theatre company, Gagyo, still endeavoured to stage Shakespeare in the style of the older popular approach. By the term 'popular approach', I indicate that their primary concern was to please audiences rather than attain any kind of artistic achievement. Gagyo is a *dongin* company and consists of alumni from Chungang

⁴⁸ Kim Myeong-kon, 'Gut, Minjokgeuk, Sasiljui (Gut, Nationalist Theatre, Realism)', *Hankookyeongguk*, 9 (1990), 97.

⁴⁹ See the case study in Chapter 3, *King Uru* directed by Kim Myeong-kon.

University Theatre department. Despite their elite education, and in contrast to most other contemporary theatre companies, they regarded theatre as a career or profession rather than an artistic activity. They had a wide-ranging repertoire that included everything from variations on folk-stories, to Shakespeare, to the latest modern Western plays. As well as performing at venues in Seoul, Gagyo also toured Korea in a coach and staged their work at famous beaches and rural schools. This was one way in which they continued the past tradition of travelling clowns (or troupes), who performed *talchum*. Achieving financial stability was fundamental to their activity. Thus, for example, they were able to acquire funding from Christian institutions in return for staging Biblical dramas. It is unclear whether Gagyo was active in the Nationalist Theatre movement, though it is obvious that from its inception Gagyo has paid strict attention to the folk heritage of Korean theatre. Gagyo did not explicitly state that they succeeded the tradition of popular theatres (*akgeuk* and *yeoseonggukgeuk*).

Their version of *The Comedy of Errors* (1971) was the first Korean musical production of Shakespeare. Lee Geun-sam (1929-2003), one of the most active Korean playwrights of the time, translated the comedy, while Kim Sang-yeol (1941-1998), one of the pioneers of Korean musical theatre, adapted the translation and wrote the lyrics for the production. Lee Seung-gyu directed the production and Jang Il-nam composed the music. It was staged at the National Theatre of Korea but only ran for four days. The production was a minor adaptation; the plot of the Shakespearean comedy was intact, only the setting and the location were transferred to the Three Kingdom Period (~660) of Korean history. The ancient kingdoms of Baekjae and Shilla substituted for Ephesus and Syracuse. This was a very effective choice for the Korean audience, because most of the audience would be aware that the two ancient Korean kingdoms were constantly struggling with each other until the eventual collapse of Baekjae. Although the production had an adaptor, the Shakespearean lines were directly translated into the Korean script. The language of the script was an archaic spoken form of Korean that could be heard in many traditional plays or historical period dramas. This indicates that the production was intended to be a popular production of Shakespeare for a general audience.

The costumes failed to specify any particular historical period, but suggested a long-gone past. The two noble masters wore silk robes and elegant hats to represent their upper-

class status. They were juxtaposed with the two servants who wore humble clothes with headscarves. The faces of the servants were painted white and given an exaggerated comic look, while their masters' features appeared more natural. The makeup style of the servants was borrowed from traditional Korean mask-dance dramas. The servant's name, 'Maltooki', is the name of a humble stock-character in traditional mask-dances. The stage design was not documented, but it would have been very simple and rough (as can be seen in the figure below).



Figures 10 and 11. Gagyo's *The Comedy of Errors* (top 1971, bottom 1979)

Though the band only played Korean instruments, the music for the performance was composed according to both the *minyo* style of Korean folk song and Anglo-American pop music. The lyrics did not derive from the Shakespearean comedy and were written especially for the performance to resemble the rhyme and quantitative metre of the traditional folk songs of Korea. The songs were usually placed at the end of a long speech from a given character, and served to mainly explain their emotions and encourage the audience's empathy, rather than to advance the story.

Gagyo had achieved a distinctively localized form of musical theatre, one that drew critical acclaim. A reviewer for the *Donga-ilbo* (a widely circulated mainstream newspaper) believed Gagyo's *The Comedy of Errors* was a landmark in the sixty years of Korean *singeuk* and that it shamed the efforts of most other Korean theatre practitioners who had been favouring Western theatre.⁵⁰ Gagyo indeed attempted to present those Korean elements (history, characters, and music) on the Westernized stage, when contemporary theatre companies pursued the style of Western performance. They did not seem to intend any purposeful historical investigation whether of ancient or contemporary history. It was, however, a significant effort that they engaged with Korean history in contrast to *Prince Hamyul* which blurred historical and cultural reference to the Korean context.

Gagyo's *The Comedy of Errors* was revived in 1979 and, although the same script was used, a new director was employed who aimed to create a rock musical version with modern costume and scenography. This revival marked commercial success and drew the second largest audience of 1979.⁵¹ This success seemed largely due to the fact that the production was made specifically for groups of middle- and high-school students. The adaptation has been revived twice (1990, 1997) by the original director Lee Seung-gyu who directed the production in 1971. The 1997 production also successfully drew a large audience. The director used the same translation, but adapted it into his own version. Lee attempted to deal with the issue of families that had been separated and displaced by the Korean War.

⁵⁰ Quoted from Yoo In-gyeong, *Hankookmusicalui Segye (The World of Korean Musicals)* (Seoul: Yeongukgwangsan, 2009), p. 301.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 310.

Gagyo can be regarded as a comedy company that incorporated Shakespeare into their repertoire. They staged *Hamlet* (1975), *As You like It* (1980, 1981), *Taming of the Shrew* (1982), and *Twelfth Night* (1983) all following a similar popular approach as their earlier production of *The Comedy of Errors*. Interestingly, even their *Hamlet* was a comedy version of the tragedy. The director Kim Sang-yeol wanted to create a 'comic *Hamlet*' as every theatre audience would know the play as a tragedy. This production would, nevertheless, be the first effort to appropriate *Hamlet* into Korean cultural traditions and idioms, adapting it to the perspective of Korea's own artistic traditions. Apart from *Hamlet*, though, their other productions were not creative adaptations in the mould of *The Comedy of Errors*; they did not change the setting or the language. Regardless, audiences were still fond of these performances, and they met with great success (particularly notable was their production of the *Taming of the Shrew* which proved to be a big hit). Gagyo is still active yet they do not stage any more Shakespeare's plays, rather they revived *akgeuk* since the 1990s.

Regrettably, Korean theatre scholars have not been interested in Gagyo's productions of Shakespeare's plays. I attempted to search for an article on Gagyo from the Korean theatre studies and Shakespeare study journals (*The Shakespeare Review*, *Journal of Korea Theatre Study Association*), but could not find any essay from those journals. This neglect seems to derive from the popular nature of the productions. Their works were not looked upon as artistic productions, so called '*jeonggeuk*', but as based on the general public's entertainment. Yet they pioneered a style in Shakespeare performance; Gagyo's staging can be seen as the early attempt to popularize Shakespeare on Korean stage. Their first attempt at a musical has now become a trend of performance of Shakespeare's plays on the Korean stage. Their popularization of Shakespeare, however, did not reflect any contemporary political and cultural concern.

The decade 1980s marked the emergence of political performance of Shakespeare's plays that attempted to reflect contemporary Korean politics. Under the Chun Doo-hwan military dictatorship from 1981 to 1987, theatre directors and playwrights were restricted by censorship, requiring permission before a script could be put on stage. This meant that any dramas that had the propensity to criticize the government, even to the slightest degree, could not be staged. However, *Hamlet*, which has been the most frequently performed work of Shakespeare's in South Korea, was chosen as the main vehicle for disclosing the violent

nature of the military rulers and the passive response of the individual. A young director, Ki Kuk-seo, and his leading theatre company, Chilyukdan, staged the tragedy five times (1981, 1982, 1985, January 1990, September 1990) in Seoul under the title of *Ki Kuk-Seo's Hamlet*. With each staging they partly rewrote (or deconstructed) the tragedy to reflect the changes in the political situation at the time of their production. Though the performances were acclaimed for bravely representing the political reality of then Korea, they were often criticized over the fact that Shakespeare's work was deliberately distorted or even absent. In fact, the fundamental elements of this famous tragedy were completely ejected due to Ki's politicized rearrangement and audacious rewriting of the material. I will discuss *Ki Kuk-seo's Hamlet* productions further in Chapter 6 with a subject of the tragedy mirroring Korean politics.

Another important development in this period (1970-1990), was the inception of Korean-British collaboration for staging Shakespeare's plays. In 1981, a distinguished Shakespearean actor Patrick Stewart was invited by the Korean Theatre Association and Hyeondae Geukjang (then renowned theatre company) to teach Korean actors the British acting method for Shakespeare. As part of the 100th anniversary of the Anglo-Korean diplomatic relationship (Britain-Joseon Treaty in 1883), a British director, Patrick Tucker, was invited to direct the *Merchant of Venice* (1983) with a wholly Korean cast.⁵² Tucker visited Korea again and directed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1986) with Korean actors. Unfortunately, there is not much documentary evidence left for either of these two productions. One can assume that the Korean practitioners involved would have been expected to be able to learn how to stage genuine Shakespeare from Tucker. Yet, Tucker stated that the very apparent language barrier forced him to concentrate on the possibilities of physical acting.⁵³ The second Korean-British collaboration followed much later in 2011.⁵⁴ In addition, a British theatre company, the London Shakespeare Group, had visited Korea four times. They were the first British, and indeed Western, theatre company to be invited to Seoul. The company staged *All for Your Delight: Scenes from Five Plays (The Merchant of Venice,*

⁵² Korea's first encounter with the British was a Royal Navy ship's landing at Geomun-do island in 1845. The British consulate was established in Hanseong (now Seoul), 1884. The first Korean diplomat was sent to London in 1901.

⁵³ Kyung, 'Hanyeoreum Bamui Ggumeul Yeonchulhaneun Paetrik Teokeo (Patrick Tucker directs *A Midsummer Night's Dream*)', *Maeil Geyongje*, 6 March 1986.

⁵⁴ Alexander Zeldin directed *Macbeth* with the Street Theatre Troupe.

The Winter's Tale, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*), which was directed by Peter Potter in 1970 at the National Theatre of Korea. They then later performed *Macbeth* with the same director in 1973 for the opening celebration of The British Council in South Korea, then followed this with *Romeo and Juliet* (1977) and *The Merchant of Venice* (1980). Also, Cambridge University's student drama group visited Seoul with *All's Well that Ends Well* in 1988. The British visits and their productions seem to have made virtually no impact in South Korea, which contrasts strongly to the legacy of the RSC's visits to Japan. These productions perhaps did not have the authority that the RSC commands, whose visits are widely considered as the genuine form from the homeland of Shakespeare. Indeed, reflecting on his experiences, the director of the London Shakespeare Group, has stated that their modern style of performance was not what Koreans had been expecting.⁵⁵ More importantly, it seems that Korean practitioners in this period did not really want to imitate British Shakespeare or the supposedly genuine Shakespeare in performance, possibly on account of the strong American influence.

⁵⁵ Anonymous reporter, 'Leondeon Sheikspier Grup (London Shakespeare Group)', *Kyunghyang*, 11 December 1973.

Chapter 2

Contemporary Korean Shakespeare production: 1990 to the present

During the 1990s, Shakespeare has become the most popular foreign playwright on the Korean stage. There have been more than one hundred and twenty Korean Shakespeare productions (from 1990 to present), in contrast to the rare productions (at most twice a year) in the 1980s.⁵⁶ The boom inevitably relates to huge changes in contemporary Korean theatre, revealing a deep transition between the 1980s and the 1990s. The change was summarized by theatre critic Kim Mi-do as the result of a number of factors including the growth of small venues (*sogeukjang*) and popular performance, the introduction and subsequent prosperity of a producer system in production which led to the collapse of the community system (*dongin*) of the past, the fall of political theatre and the ‘Nationalist’ movement, the increase of Korean-written scripts and the decrease of drama in translation.⁵⁷ Kim Seong-hee pointed out that contemporary Korean theatre featured advanced scenography and stage art, the decline of the political and social role of theatre, and a transition to directors’ theatre from playwrights’ theatre.⁵⁸ Indeed, the shape of recent Korean theatre was formed in the early 1990s and has since been sustained through the 2000s.

The changes in theatre derived from political and cultural transition in this period. The transition can be explained by the decline of the political (democratisation) movement according to the democratization and the rise of consumer culture thanks to the economic

⁵⁶ The number of Shakespeare productions is not published. I counted them myself by referring to various sources including the internet, newspapers and theatre data bases.

⁵⁷ Kim Mi-do, *Hankookyeongeukui Saeroun Paereodigm (The New Paradigm of Korean Contemporary Theatre)* (Seoul: Yeongeukgwa Ingan, 2006), 23.

⁵⁸ Kim Seong-hee, *Hankookhyundaigeukui Hyeongseong (The Forming of Korean Contemporary Theatre)* (Seoul: Yeongeukgwa Ingan, 2007), 462-463.

growth. South Korea's long-awaited democratization was achieved in 1993, when Kim Yeong-sam, former democratization leader, was elected as president. The shift from military to democratic government endowed Korean theatre practitioners with outright freedom to put on stage whatever they wanted, thanks to the termination of the stage censorship body. The Nationalist theatre lost favour with the young audience who showed less interest in political activity or cultural heritage. The 1990s marked a 'lost generation'. The 1980s' politicized university students had pursued either reunification of the Korean peninsula or Marxism to protest against the oppressive regime and its alliance with the US. The students always led the democratization movements; it was they who ignited the June Democracy Movement that caused the downfall of the military dictatorship. They now suddenly lost their political ideal or goal (liberation of people from the tyranny of the military dictatorship and shift into nationalistic democracy state) due to the democratization and the collapse of the Soviet Union. While the older generation were left disillusioned, the young generation in 1990s was the 'New Generation' who did not suffer from the military dictatorship and therefore did not experience the 1980s' political movement. They were uninterested in politics and history, rather they indulged themselves with film, music (post-punk, alternative rock and electronic dance music), and books of post-structuralism that had been unknown in the previous decade.

Such depoliticized circumstances and, also, rapid economic growth led to a change in the cultural status of theatre. South Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world in the 1950s, yet she has become one of the world's economic powers since the 1990s, developing the multinational corporations, such as Samsung, LG, Kia and Hyundai Motors.⁵⁹ The new economic wealth brought a boost to the entertainment and culture industries that appealed to many talented young people. The newly thriving culture industry reformed the old cultural status of theatre, a serious art form with political or philosophical ideas; now theatre was regarded by the general public as an evening entertainment with a love story and light comedy. Before the 1990s, there was not a theatre industry in Korea; a performance was produced by an artist community (*dongin*), in which members of a theatre company gathered for the same artistic ideal with equality in decision-making for theatre production. Now professional theatre producers largely replaced the community system of producing. They preferred profitable popular productions, so that the phenomenon of the new theatre

⁵⁹ South Korea ranked the 11th biggest economy in the World in 1997.

producers resulted in a boom of commercial theatrical performances such as musical theatre and romantic comedy, and, also, the end of the traditional artist community system. However, certain theatre companies still maintained the *dongin* system. For example, both Yohangza and Mokwha have their own producers who are equal members of the company. International exchange became more active than ever. Owing to the abolition of the International Trip Restriction (1989), there were more opportunities than ever to visit and see foreign theatres.⁶⁰ Moreover, many theatre students began to study in the West, which helped Korea to observe contemporary international trends.

Stages and actors

Korean theatre has expanded since 1990 in every aspect. The number of theatres has rapidly increased in the centre of Seoul. In 2013, there are approximately one hundred and fifty theatres in Seoul, approximately double the number in the 1980s (about seventy theatres).⁶¹ Korean theatre venues can be roughly classified into the three categories: big venues, middle venues, and small venues.⁶² Big venues are mostly public-funded theatres such as the National Theatre of Korea, Seoul Art Centre and Sejong Centre of Seoul city government. They usually have more than six hundred seats and a large stage of more than thirty metres width. Middle venues are both public and private theatres with between three hundred and five hundred seats, and smaller stages than the big theatres. There are thirty-one big and middle-scale venues in Seoul. Small venues are the most numerous and they are mostly gathered in the Daehangro area, where more than one hundred small theatres are to be found in close proximity. Daehangro can be called 'the theatre capital of Korea'. The formation of the area began with Arko Theatre, a public-funded multi venue with a big and a small theatre. When it was moved into Daehangro in 1981, small theatres were established near the theatre. Now small theatres generally have up to one hundred and fifty seats and their stage is at most

⁶⁰ Koreans had been able to travel to a foreign country only with a governmental permit before the abolishment.

⁶¹ I calculated the number of theatres in Seoul referring to the websites of Seoul Theatre Centre (<http://www.e-stc.or.kr/index.asp>) and Playdb (<http://www.playdb.co.kr/>).

⁶² From the cultural information website of the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism.

http://www.culture.go.kr:8800/performNexhibit/supportinfo/Viewing_Sub.jsp?ar_vvm_cd_seq=8647

fifteen metres in width. They are usually located in a rented space, usually occupying one level of a building.⁶³ Most of them are located in the basements of buildings and are therefore charged smaller rent. The public-funded venues charge much less rent and have larger stage and better equipment (lighting, backstage, dressing room). It is very competitive to put on a production in the public theatres, as there are numerous applications for limited opportunities. A rental period for public theatres is normally short, at most a fortnight.



Figure 12. The façade of the National Theatre of Korea (left, founded in 1950 moved to the present location in 1973) and Figure 13. Sejong Centre (right, founded in 1978). The National Theatre is located on the slope of Namsan mountain, at the centre of Seoul. Sejong Centre is founded on Sejongro road which embraces many important buildings such as The First Integrated Government Building (to the right of the Sejong Centre in the photo), the Ministry of Culture and Namdaemun gate. The street is the most important street in Seoul, in terms of politics, history and economics.

Korean theatre now can be roughly divided into two types, ‘art theatre’ and ‘commercial theatre’ in terms of objective (whether money or art) and theatrical method.⁶⁴ Big and middle-sized venues generally programme commercial works in order to profit from the size of the audience. The National Theatre of Korea, Sejong Centre and Seoul Arts Centre

⁶³ Korean ‘small venue’ is equivalent to pub theatre in London in terms of size and location.

⁶⁴ This is a rough division only for the purpose of discussing my subject as simply as possible. The border between artistic and commercial has blurred. The division is only used by theatre practitioners. The audience do not care to address whether a production is art or entertainment.

(founded 1993 at Gangnam district) are the three most important public-funded venues in South Korea. The three theatres house three separate auditoria: big, middle and small stages. Yet, since 2000, the big stages of the theatres have been frequently rented for big, lucrative, musical productions such as *Mamma Mia* and *Phantom of the Opera*. Artistic productions take the middle or the small venues in the big theatres. Meanwhile small venues at Daehangro have been dominated by comic-sketch shows, musicals or romantic comedies. A successful production routinely occupies a theatre for a very long period. They attract more general audiences who willingly pay for the tickets. There are also several small theatres that only put on non-commercial and artistic productions. Yet such artistic works are staged for a short period of time due to the lack of public interest. The audiences for artistic productions are mostly student groups who are studying theatre or literature. To fill the auditorium, the unpopular artistic productions usually invite audiences who do not have to pay for their ticket. Therefore, artistic productions, which routinely fall short of budget and audience gross, tend to seek opportunities to put on their work at a public-funded venue. Under such circumstances, Shakespeare's plays (mostly belonging to 'art theatre') have been more often staged at the public venues due to relatively small budgets. A few commercially successful productions of Shakespeare's plays occupy a small venue for a long time, under the management of professional theatre producers.

The rise of the cultural industry made theatre/film education in universities flourish more than ever. Korean universities have looked to establish theatre and film departments, popular subjects for the 'New Generation' student as a result of the growing entertainment industry that embraces theatre, film and TV broadcasting. Before 1990, only six universities taught drama and film that were regarded as of lower importance compared to other humanities disciplines such as literature, philosophy and history. The majority of theatre practitioners had been members of student theatre groups. Recently, more than eighty theatre and film departments have been established and they have, in turn, created more than three thousand graduates each year.⁶⁵ Theatre departments provide practitioners and audiences for theatre (also TV and film industry).⁶⁶ It is now rare that theatre practitioners emerge directly

⁶⁵ Unfortunately, the job prospects of the students is very low (only ten per cent in 2008).

⁶⁶ It is common that theatre and film are joined as one department in South Korea. Unlike the UK, Korean theatre departments do not have link with Korean literature department. Korea does not have enough dramatic works for higher education.

from student theatre groups. If they did not study theatre as undergraduates, they go to graduate school for training.⁶⁷ It seems that Shakespeare's plays do not constitute a regular module in theatre departments.

Korean acting of Shakespeare's plays had been in a style of a moderate exaggeration of emotion in both gesture and speech that originated in the 1960s (for example, Kim Dong-won's Hamlet).⁶⁸ During the 1990s, Korean acting itself seemed to begin to be more realistic than ever before. This might have been a response to the preference of audiences, who were familiar with realistic acting in TV drama and films. Korean theatre actors are looking out for an opportunity to be cast in a TV drama or film in order to earn a better salary, and, therefore, they need to familiarize themselves with realistic acting. On the other hand, the direct import of the Stanislavski system from Russia in the 1990s could well have contributed to the rise of realistic acting on the stage. Under such circumstances, the old style of acting had to be modified. However, for many people it is still impossible that Shakespearean lines can be spoken in an entirely realistic style from the Korean context, as Shakespearean characters cannot be fully internalized by Korean actors. So, it can be said that current Korean acting for Shakespeare's plays has become an eclectic mixture of the new and old acting styles. The dialogue is spoken in everyday speech while soliloquies are spoken in an exaggerated manner. Directors who are adapting Shakespeare (for instance, Oh Tae-suk and Yang Jung-ung) occasionally invented their unique acting method that is based on gestures and movements of Korean traditional theatre.

Scripts

Until 1990, the scripts for Shakespeare performances had been mostly based on the translations of Kim Jae-nam (1955) which were written in an archaic style of the Korean language. Then, in 1989, Shin Jeong-ok finished her translation (1989) of all Shakespeare's plays. Shin did not mention which English edition she used as the basis for her work. Her translations were considered to be less archaic, compared with Kim's translation. Since its

⁶⁷ Particularly, the graduate school of the Korean National University of Art (established 1992) has produced many theatre practitioners who come from different major subjects at undergraduate level.

⁶⁸ This acting can be simply defined as unrealistic acting due to the foreignness of Western texts.

completion her translation has been widely used on the Korean stage. Yet, Shin's linguistic style is not colloquial language, but slightly archaic Korean with difficult conceptual words which are not in everyday use in contemporary Korea. For instance, terms for addressing the royal family in the Joseon period were used in *Hamlet* to Claudius, Hamlet and Gertrude. Such style has often been criticized for over-paraphrasing out of subjective interpretation.⁶⁹

Modern translations that are close to contemporary Korean have begun to emerge since 2000. Choi Jong-cheol's more loyal translations to the original plays (*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet*) as well as the four famous comedies (*Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) are favoured by young directors. Choi's translations, completed in 2005, are based on The Arden Shakespeare (second edition). He attempted to use contemporary Korean language and, at the same time, to apply the Korean verse system (three and four metre of syllable) in his translation.⁷⁰ In 2008, the poet Kim Jeong-hwan embarked on a project to translate Shakespearean plays for the stage, which is the first ever attempted. Kim's translation is based on The Norton Shakespeare. There has not yet been a Shakespeare production that has used Kim's translation to the present (October 2014).

Recently, many directors have created their own scripts based on published translations by Shakespearean scholars. They will edit a translation or draw on various translations to make a script appropriate for a particular approach to staging.⁷¹ In my interview with Kim A-ra who directed the *Hamlet project* (1999, 2000), she explained that she had read three translations (by Shin Jeong-ok, Lee Tae-ju, and Yeo Seok-ki) to write a script for her *Hamlet* production (2000).⁷² She chose Shin's translation as a main text and then referred to the other translations before rewriting the translation into her own version of *Hamlet*. She intended to create a script that could be easily conveyed to Korean audiences. She did not read Shakespeare in English as part of the process although she was preparing a

⁶⁹ I draw on a scholar's complaining in the class of Shakespeare and my experience of editing the script for *Othello* (2002).

⁷⁰ Oh Tae-suk also applied three and four metre for his Shakespeare production. See Chapter 3.

⁷¹ My own experience of working as dramaturg and assistant director for *Othello* (2002) at the National Theatre of Korea was similar to this. Yet, during the process, I used the second edition of *Arden Shakespeare* and attempted to reflect my reading into the script which had been arranged by the director.

⁷² 22 April 2011, Seoul.

script for a new production. She stated her strategy in writing scripts: ‘We do not need the genuine Shakespeare. Our knowledge about Shakespeare has just been written after his death. We cannot understand Shakespeare emotionally. Therefore I have focused on what can come outside the language’. However, her remark about ‘emotional understanding’ has been a central issue for contemporary Korean Shakespeare. By ‘emotional understanding’, she would indicate the elements that can be linked to Shakespeare from a Korean perspective. Therefore, if translations are considered to be incomplete or inappropriate, she would have ruthlessly cut off those. Then Kim’s words fill where the words have disappeared. Korean actors who should embody the language with full understanding would welcome Kim’s edited and revised script since they could never feel comfortable with difficult linguistic expression.

Below is a description of the process of producing a script for Yohangza’s *Hamlet* (2008) which sets out a different approach to establishing their performance script. The production adopted Korean shamanistic ritual in order to present the encounter between Hamlet and the Ghost.

<햄릿> 연습기간은 총 4 개월 동안 진행되었다. 극단 여행자의 연습과정은 공동창작의 집단시스템으로 단원들과 연출이 자유롭게 아이디어를 내놓고 여러 가지 시도들을 통해 첨가하고 수정을 거치며 결과물들을 도출해간다. 첫 달은 원작의 작품해석을 위한 독해단계였고, 두 번째 달은 극단의 다른 레퍼토리 공연을 하는 동안의 휴식기, 그리고 마지막 달에는 한 달간 원작 재현 단계를 거쳐 그 달 말에 대사를 하나도 삭제하지 않고 런스루를 하였다. 9 월부터는 곳을 접목시키며 장면들을 수정을 시도하며 여러 가지 방향으로 즉흥을 하였다. 이러한 다양한 시도들을 거쳐 마지막 10 월은 약속과 변형을 거듭하며 완성의 단계를 거쳤다. 원작의 대사와 장면은 충실하게 재현하면서 런닝타임을 세시간을 줄이기 위해 부분적으로 삭제 변형되었다. 대사의 삭제와 변형 및 첨가는 배우들과 상의하여 최종적으로 연출이 결정을 하였다.

The rehearsal period for *Hamlet* was four months. Yohangza’s rehearsal is the process of collective creative work, in which the members and director discussed and agreed the

blueprint of production. We began with reading the original tragedy (translated) for the first month, then, we enacted the original play with all the words during the second month. When we fully understood the dramatic situations and the relations amongst the characters, we attempted to apply shamanistic ritual to the original tragedy in the third month. In the last month, we cut the scenes and the lines according to our strategy. The lines were deleted and rewritten by the final decision of the director through discussion with the actors.

Table 2. The process of producing a script for Yohangza's *Hamlet* (2008).⁷³

What is clear is that every production will have a different use of language and there will always emerge a distance between Shakespeare and the recently devised scripts. All the Shakespeare productions share a few famous lines in a similar translation such as Hamlet's 'to be or not to be' and Macbeth's 'Tomorrow, tomorrow and tomorrow', to be identified as a rendition of Shakespeare. Hamlet's line has been conventionally translated as 'to die or not to die' and it has been the most well-known line of any Shakespearean play in Korea. However, it should be noted that translation has been the source of individual directors' experiments. As in Kim's and Yohangza's case, directors have given themselves freedom to cut and revise the translated text as key to their artistic strategy.

Furthermore, it became a fashion of staging Shakespeare to reconfigure the texts with director's subjective interpretation. The female director Han Tae-sook's *Lady Macbeth* (1998) has been repeatedly staged, and explores the female protagonist of the tragedy. The production began with Han's question that 'had Shakespeare been a woman, what would have happened to the character Lady Macbeth'.⁷⁴ Lady Macbeth has been isolated too suddenly in the middle of the tragedy. Han imagined what could happen to Lady Macbeth after the banquet and rewrote her part from the perspective of a woman. The production was a deconstruction of Shakespeare's script, based on an expansion of Shakespeare's Act 5 Scene 1, where Lady Macbeth and the Doctor were the main characters. *Lady Macbeth* is also

⁷³ From the company's unpublished script of *Hamlet*.

⁷⁴ Quoted from Choi Young-ju, *Geulo Dameun Yeongeuk Sarang* (Writing My Love for Theatre) (Seoul: Jiseongusaem, 2008), p. 284.

famous for its use of objects on the stage. Light and sound present the mind of Lady Macbeth. Indeed, the production has been more famous for its experimental elements rather than as a rendition of Shakespeare. It is in fact recognised as a creation of the director Han, rather than of Shakespeare.

More recently, Jugjug's *Macbeth* showed a similar approach to Han Tae-sook's *Lady Macbeth* in terms of experiments with theatrical objects on the stage. The director, Kim Nak-hyeong was a member of Chilyukdan, the theatre company of Ki Kuk-seo. Kim wanted to explore the psychology of Macbeth through the perspective of Korean shamanism. Yet there was not any ritual, *gut*, during the performance. Kim just adopted the idea, and the atmosphere, of the Korean ancient ritual. However, the production shared with Ki's *Hamlet* in terms of *mise-en-scène* and acting. The acting was raw and the *mise-en-scène* was almost empty. The performers, all wearing simple dark grey coloured costume regardless of sex, just used a desk, chairs and candles. The script was half Shakespeare and half Kim's creation. In the end, Macbeth was not slain. He was sentenced by Macduff to be expelled from the world where human beings lived and sent to drift in a barren land, which, from Kim's point of view, was a more severe punishment than death. The production was received very well in Korea and was awarded 'best production' at the 21st Cairo International Festival of Experimental Theatre in 2009.

There have also been recent Shakespeare performances for young people that could be classified as 'deconstructions'; for example, Dreamplay's *Waiting for Ghost* (2005) and Tuida's *Hamlet Contiable* (2008). Dreamplay's *Waiting for Ghost* was an audacious work in which Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was combined with Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The director and the writer of the script, Kim Jae-yup, studied Korean drama in a Korean literature department. The production was quite successful amongst audiences in their early twenties. In the production, the delay of Hamlet's revenge was replaced with the waiting to hear the truth about the death of Hamlet's father. Hamlet, accompanied by Horatio, was waiting for the Ghost standing next to a tree. However, their waiting did not conclude in vain; Hamlet was informed by Gertrude of the inevitable murder of Claudius, who loved Gertrude far more than Hamlet's father did. Having heard the truth, Hamlet abandoned his revenge, as he was realising how happy his mother was with Claudius. Likewise, the production completely removed tragic atmosphere and absurdity. As well as the two famous Western

plays, the production was also influenced by J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter stories. Hamlet was a pupil of school for magicians and Horatio was transformed into a dog by Hamlet's failure. *Waiting for Ghost* was awarded 'a best newcomer' award at the Geochang International Theatre Festival, Korea 2005. It was transferred to a venue in Daehangro and has been staged several times with generous commercial success.

Tuida's *Hamlet Contiable* was a Clown drama. Before taking on *Hamlet*, the theatre company produced *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in a Box, which made a puppet play of the comedy. The director Bae Yo-sup explained that when he wrote the script, he researched the shaping of the original tragedy. He then read Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. He asserted that his composing of the script was what Shakespeare did for the tragedy. In writing the script, he chose some lines and then the rest of the script was written through performance. Therefore performance determined the script. However, the performance itself was the company's deconstruction. Three clowns accidentally found the diary of Hamlet and the clowns played out the Hamlet drama. In the end, they appeased the unhappy ghost of Hamlet, that was presented as a big puppet manipulated by the clowns. Then Hamlet was sent to heaven by the clowns. Likewise, this rendition was indeed their version of *gut*. The clown's job was exactly what shaman did with unhappy spirits. However, the production did not show any traditional material.

The Korean Obsession with Hamlet

It is very noticeable that Korean theatre practitioners have been selectively choosing to perform only a handful of Shakespeare's plays since they first turned to his work in the 1950s. Thus it can be clearly discerned that *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet* have always been the favourite Shakespearean tragedies on the Korean stage. Indeed, one of these tragedies, *Hamlet*, has regularly been staged every year since 1990. As for the comedies, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has been the most popular production, having been often staged. Since 1990 it has enjoyed a considerable level of prominence, while *The Merchant of Venice*, *Taming of the Shrew* and *As You like It*, frequently put on in the 1980s, have lost their popularity. Since the surprising success of *Trans Sibiya* (*Twelfth Night*) in 2003 and 2004, *Twelfth Night* became another favourite Shakespearean comedy, with the comedy being

staged more than once a year since 2003. The Histories have been avoided by Korean theatre companies. This probably results from the fact that, apart from some details about King Henry VIII and his wives, early-modern English history is not well-known and would not be a subject of interest to Korean audiences.⁷⁵ Similarly, the so-called ‘Problem plays’ are not popular on the Korean stage either, possibly due to their dark tone. *Measure for Measure* has only been staged twice, but failed to entice audiences on both occasions. The Romances are better received; yet only *The Tempest* and *The Winter’s Tale* have been consistently chosen, while *Cymbeline* and *Pericles* were each staged only once.⁷⁶ This narrow selection from Shakespeare’s *oeuvre* has been determined by what was felt to be thematically appropriate in the Korean context, a situation which has been shaped by audience preferences and companies’ adherence to performance tradition. *Hamlet*, a play that satisfies both of these two factors, is an ideal play to examine in order to discuss the Korean taste for Shakespeare.

Since the first performance of the play in 1949, *Hamlet* has been the most popular Shakespearean tragedy on the Korean stage. According to Lee Hyoun-u, between 1990 and 2008, there have been 45 *Hamlet* productions, which accounted for 20% of the total number of Shakespeare productions (about 210) in Korea.⁷⁷ In 2011, the popularity of the play seemed to be growing ever greater, with not only the number of performances increasing, but also numerous styles being experimented with. Beginning with the Seoul Metropolitan Theatre’s *Hamlet* (directed by Park Geun-hyeong see Chapter 6) in April 2011, there was then a small *Hamlet* festival held at the Jeongbo Theatre Seoul in August under the name of ‘Hamlet Update’. At the festival, six short adaptations (or appropriations), each lasting about 30 minutes, were staged: *Let Them Talk* by Cheongu (dir. Kim Gwang-bo), *Hamlet Meditates on Death* by Baeksugwangbu (adapted by Kim Myeong-hwa, directed by Lee Seong-yeol), *Shamanistic Mediator Project 2—Hamlet* by Yohangza (adapted and directed by Yang Jung-ung), *Hamlet on the Road* by Golmokgil (adapted and directed by Park Geun-hyeong), *Hamlet Survival* by Poonggyeong (adapted and directed by Park Jeong-hee Park), and *Just Hamlet* by Jageunshinhwa (directed by Choi Yong-hoon). ‘Hamlet Update’ was succeeded by

⁷⁵ Despite the attraction of the story of the English monarch Henry VIII, the history play about him has not been staged in Korea.

⁷⁶ See Appendix for the production details.

⁷⁷ Lee Hyoun-u, ‘Shamanism in Korean Hamlets since 1990: Exorcising Han’, *Asian Theatre Journal*, 28. 1 (Spring 2011), 104-128 (p. 105).

another small festival, ‘Hamlet Project,’ at the National Theatre of Korea in November. ‘Hamlet Project’ was a collection of four different *Hamlet* performances across different genres: a musical *Hidden Conspiracy* (adapted and directed by Kim Ji-hoon), a more traditional theatrical *Hamlet* (adapted and directed by Cha Hyeon-suk), an operatic *Hamlet* (Ambroise Thoma) and a dance-performance of *Hamlet* (directed by Cha Hyeon-suk). Meanwhile, at a leading commercial venue, the Universal Theatre of Seoul, there was a musical *Hamlet* (composed by Jadek Ledecy) in November, while a comedic adaptation, *Return to Hamlet* (adapted and directed by Jang Jin), was staged in December. In addition, two local theatre companies in Incheon and Pusan put on the tragedy. For Korean theatre, the year 2011 can be remembered as the year of *Hamlet*.

The popularity of *Hamlet* on the Korean stage can be explained by the intrinsic flexibility the text demonstrates in being so readily adaptable to Korean culture, and perhaps also by the way it appeals to the Korean sensibility. For instance, the play has been repeatedly staged as a *gut*, a Korean shamanistic ritual. In a *gut*, a shaman summons holy spirits and, through being possessed by them, the shaman is then able to cure their patients (or bless certain human deeds, such as fishing or farming). The process is highly theatrical; a shaman often talks with holy spirits in the air and eventually the holy spirit that occupies the shaman will borrow the mouth of the shaman to talk to the gathered audience. Such *gut* has been suggested as the possible origin of Korean theatre by Lee Yun-taek, Kim Myeong-kon and Oh Tae-suk. Notably, all these directors have employed *gut* as an element in their performances. To them, the supernatural elements featured in Shakespeare are ideal for dramatizing Korean shamanistic rituals. In *Hamlet*, the prince meets his father’s ghost and thereby becomes aware of the murder; this reminds Korean directors of *gut* rituals, in which a shaman will call forth a holy spirit to discover what is wrong with an individual or their community. Therefore, Korean directors tend to treat *gut* as a close equivalent of Hamlet’s encounter with the Ghost. Consequently, there has emerged a distinctive form of ‘shamanistic Shakespeare (or *Hamlet*)’ performance in which a *gut* is prominently shown and a shaman figure features as one of the principal characters (most often Hamlet, but also occasionally Ophelia). The director and playwright Lee Yun-taek, who directed *Hamlet* for ten years, was the first director to argue that, because *Hamlet* presents a vision of the invisible world, it closely corresponds to Korean

shamanism.⁷⁸ In order to justify his creation of a Shamanistic *Hamlet*, Lee has based his unusual approach on wide-ranging historical and theoretical research.

Lee, an admirer of Shakespeare, started his theatre career in the 1980s, and although the scene was then dominated by Nationalist Theatre and political performance, these did not in fact strongly affect his work. While Lee was deeply sceptical of the political nature of the movement, he did take inspiration from the efforts of Nationalist Theatre to rediscover the lost forms of theatrical performance in Korea. Indeed, his ambition was to develop a new conception of Korean theatre, a task which inevitably required looking back at its whole history. In pursuing his goal, Lee firstly pointed out that the concept of theatre was introduced to Korea in the 1920s via Japan, and that this had noticeably excluded Korea's own traditional theatrical performances.⁷⁹ When the English word 'theatre' was imported and translated into Korean, it was understood to literally mean 'performing a drama'. The Korean word 'theatre' is 'yeon-geuk (연극)', a two syllabled compound word that consists of the two Chinese characters 'yeon' (a verb meaning 'to perform') and 'geuk' (a noun meaning 'drama or play'). The definition of the word should exclude Korean tradition theatre that lacks drama in a strict sense. Therefore, in this context, the expression 'Korean theatre' would have only indicated Westernised theatrical productions, while the older indigenous forms of dramatic performance were categorised as examples of 'traditional Korean theatre'.⁸⁰

Being dissatisfied, Lee denounced this view and argued that 'Korean theatre' did not simply have its genesis in the Westernized productions of the twentieth century. Korean theatre should be seen as rooted in past traditions and having continuously absorbed new elements from a variety of foreign influences. To defend his view, Lee has suggested that there are three important phases in the evolution of Korean theatre: 'shamanistic ritual (*gut*) as the prototype of Korean theatre, the adaptation of this prototype, and the development of contemporary theatre'.⁸¹ In this sense, Lee claimed that the prototype of Korean theatre had originated from *gut*, then, that this prototype was later adapted into the performing arts (such

⁷⁸ From my interview with Lee Yun-taek at a rehearsal room in Seoul, Korea on 21 August 2010.

⁷⁹ Lee Yun-taek, 'Mueosi Yeongeukjeokigo, Mueosi Hankookjeokkinga (What is theatrical, what is Korean-ness)', 21st *Century Literature* (1997), 463.

⁸⁰ I will employ this classification throughout the thesis as it has become a standard term.

⁸¹ Lee Yun-taek, 'Oneului Hankookyeongeuk (Korean theatre now)', *Hankookyeongeuk* (1990), 41.

as *talchum*). Lee indicated that his own work was also essentially an adaptation of this prototype and that his task was to cultivate ‘a meeting place where young audiences can encounter tradition’.⁸² Yet, Lee did not directly apply shamanistic rituals to his productions; instead, he drew theatrical ideas from *gut* and developed the notion of an ‘encounter between the visible and the invisible’ as a means for employing shamanistic elements in his contemporary work. This concept was the central concern of his *Hamlet* (first performed by his Street Theatre Troupe (STT) in 1996), which became one of the most successful *Hamlet* productions of all time in Korea, garnering both a positive reception from critics and a large number of audience.

Lee had directed this play in order to promote his vision of a ‘Korean Shakespeare’. That is, Lee had wanted to create a Korean Shakespeare performance that was not just imitative of Western productions, but which would also remain faithful to Shakespeare. In developing his ideas, he aimed to create a script based on a scholarly interpretation, but which would also harmonize with the shamanic aspects of Korean culture; by adding the *gut* ritual, he hoped that the performance would cease to be an ersatz form of Western Shakespeare, and yet also connect to the supernatural themes of the play. In composing the script, Lee worked closely with the Shakespearean scholar Kim Dong-uk in order to learn about the performance history of the tragedy and early-modern print culture in England. Kim collaborated in the translation of the tragedy by using the second edition of the Arden Shakespeare. The translated text is in modern Korean and has largely retained the plot details. Lee used a verse style in his script in order to transfer Shakespearean poetry into a Korean context. Yet, for the purpose of showing his shamanistic interpretation, Lee rewrote parts of the play, in the process altering several details. These differences marked Lee’s shamanistic interpretation of the tragedy, and can be seen, for instance, in his rewriting of Hamlet’s lines (1.4.39-57):

햄릿

내 당신을 덴마크 왕 햄릿이라 부르겠다.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 47. Oh Tae-suk shared this attitude. He called himself a translator of traditional theatre for a younger generation. See Chapter 3.

죽은 내 아버지의 이름이지
 알고 보면 인간이란 존재는
 거대한 자연의 작은 장난감에 불과해
 이 세상에는 인간의 지혜로는 풀지 못하는
 의문들이 얼마나 많은가?
 나는 지금 불가사의 세계와 만나고 있다
 왜 그대의 신성한 뼈는
 시체를 싣 수의를 찢고 나타났소?
 왜 그 무거운 대리석 무덤을 열고
 당신의 영혼을 다시 뱉어냈단 말ियो?
 무엇 때문에? 우리가 무엇을 해야 합니까?

Hamlet

I'll call thee Hamlet,
 King, father, royal Dane: O,
 How insignificant are human beings!
 We are nothing but dolls,
 How many unanswerable questions are left,
 Waiting for our wisdom to solve them?
 I am encountering the invisible world.
 Tell me why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death,
 Have burst their cerements; why the sepulchre,
 Wherein we saw thee quietly inurn'd,
 Hath op'd his ponderous and marble jaws,
 To cast thee up again. What may this mean,

Say, why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?⁸³

(Hamlet: I'll call thee Hamlet,
 King, father, royal Dane. O answer me!
 Let me not burst in ignorance, but tell
 Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death,
 Have burst their cerements, why the sepulchre
 Wherein we saw thee quietly enurned
 Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws
 To cast thee up again. what may this mean,
 That thou, dead corpse, again in complete steel,
 Revisitst thus the glimpses of the moon,
 Making night hideous, and we fools of nature
 So horridly to shake our disposition
 With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?
 Say, why is this? Wherefore? What should we do? (1.3.25-38))

Lee seemed to interpret 'fools of nature'(1.4.54) as referring to a 'doll'[puppet], indicating that human beings are insignificant and are ignorant of what is beyond their senses. Therefore, the supernatural aid given by the shaman is essential for obtaining the knowledge that 'insignificant humans' require. In this context, Lee imported the idea of a *jopshin* from *gut*. A *jopshin* is a shaman's spiritual contact, connecting the shaman with other ghosts or divinities during a *gut*. The shaman who performs a *gut* is in a trance state when she or he is contacting a spirit. The spirit takes over the shaman's body and speaks to other human beings through the shaman. What the spirit says through the shaman is normally an unexpected truth, or form of hidden knowledge that human beings could not have conceived of. In Lee's staging, Hamlet dances with the Ghost (normally played by the same actor who plays Claudius), who remains silent throughout. Whilst the Ghost says nothing, Hamlet looks as though he is

⁸³ Lee Yun-taek, *Facing Hamlet*, p30. (this book including the script was written in both Korean and English)

listening intensely to the apparition. Moments later, Hamlet suddenly proclaims that Claudius has committed an unforgivable crime, a fact which he could only have known about if the Ghost informed him of it. Such staging could not be imagined in the West. Lee noted that ‘For the Western tradition, it’s easy to think that the ghost belongs to another world’, but that from the Korean perspective the worlds of the dead and of the living are linked by the shaman.

Domestic success was not enough for Lee however, as his true ambition was for this uniquely Korean production of Shakespeare to be acknowledged on the international stage. Given its primitive energy, the very local aspects (i.e. the shamanistic elements) of the production constituted the main attraction for foreign audiences. Developing this idea, Lee has pointed out that ‘Western theatre originates in the Dionysian festival and the East Asian theatres (Korean and Japanese) originate in ritualistic festivals’.⁸⁴ Therefore, festive ritual is the archetype that should be openly shared by both Western and Eastern theatres. In this sense, Lee argues, ‘Whether Shakespearean drama, Japanese tradition, *gut* or shamanism, they all originate from the same source, and therefore, there must be a way for them to communicate with each other.’ Lee seemed to think that, thanks to each audience’s *a priori* understanding of the relevant prototype of theatre, if the characters in his production performed a ritual the meaning of this activity would be understood wherever the play was staged,. However, this claim by Lee is too simplistic and exaggerated to be plausible. It seems that Lee has been unduly influenced by the ideal of intercultural theatre, that is to say, he has emphasized universalism to the detriment of local historical and political perspectives. Ultimately, then, it can be seen that Lee wanted to establish a Korean perspective on intercultural theatre.

Lee’s shamanistic rendition of the tragedy was a milestone in the history of Korean stagings of *Hamlet*. However, shamanism and *Hamlet* had been a theme on the stage before STT’s *Hamlet*. The first shamanistic *Hamlet* was directed by Kim Jung-ok in 1993 and this was followed by Cho Kwang-hwa’s *Ophelia, Sister, Come to My Bed* (1995), a notable production in which Ophelia played the role of a shaman. This production is more relevant to the actual *gut*, as the majority of Korean shamans are female. Those two productions might have influenced Lee. STT’s *Hamlet* was staged in 1996, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005, and

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p45.

2010. Cho Kwang-hwa rewrote his script into *Rock Hamlet* (1999, 2000). Since 2000, there have been Kim Min-ho's *Crazy Hamlet* (2002, 2003, 2006), Tuida's *Hamlet Cantabile* (2005, 2007, directed by Bae Yo-sup), and Yohangza's *Hamlet* (2009, directed by Yang Jung-ung). Thuida's *Hamlet Cantabile* was a pseudo-*gut*; the shamanistic ritual was performed by Clowns who appeased the unhappy spirit of Hamlet and sent it to heaven. In my interview with the director Bae Yo-sup, we discussed why he chose to include a shamanistic ritual and clown performances in the production. Bae explained that *Hamlet* attracted him because of its supernatural elements and pointed out that the play linked our world with an unseen world.⁸⁵ He claimed that the supernatural appeal not only attracts Korean theatre directors but also interests Western theatre directors who recognize that their own dramatic tradition contains vivid supernatural elements too. His claim clearly resembled here Lee's universalist perspective. Yohangza's *Hamlet* focused on staging three *gut* performances in the frame of the tragedy. The scenography of the production resembled an actual *gut*, with the actresses playing shamans engaged in bringing forth the spirit of Hamlet's father. The director, Yang Jung-ung, stated this about his theme, 'Hamlet is the character who should receive a *gut*, because he has irresolvable *han* (grief and regret) due to his father's death. The dead and *han*, this is the point where *gut* should take place.'⁸⁶

A shamanistic *Hamlet* is obviously a recurrent phenomenon on the Korean stage, one that has normally been interpreted as an experiment in intercultural theatre from a Korean perspective. Yet Lee Hyoun-u has suggested that 'there is a degree of fellow-feeling between Hamlet and the Korean people'.⁸⁷ Hamlet's 'to be or not to be' sounds like 'a proposition about survival' to Koreans who had experienced hardships such as the Japanese occupation, the Korean War, and the long-lived military dictatorship (1961-1987). Korean audiences would therefore share in the agony of Hamlet. In this context, a shamanistic *Hamlet* would serve to 'exorcise the Korean problem of whether "to be or not to be"'.⁸⁸ This would indicate that shamanistic *Hamlet* productions draw from the communal experience of modern Korean history. Yet, while Lee Hyoun-u's account is able to explain the response of a certain section

⁸⁵ The interview took place at a rehearsal room in Seoul, 25 March 2010.

⁸⁶ Yang Jung-ung, 'Yeonchulga Noteu (Director's note)', *Yeonggukpyeongron*, vol 15 (2009), 175-183 (p. 183).

⁸⁷ Lee Hyoun-u, p. 105.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 106.

of the audience (those who directly suffered from hardship), it is not able to account for the popularity of the tragedy among the younger generation who did not experience the historical turmoil that existed prior to the 1990s.



Figure 14. Yohangza's *Hamlet* (2009) (top),
Hamlet in training clothes sits upstage while the shamans perform their *gut*.



Figure 15. Kim Geum-hwa performs a *gut*.
Kim is a Human Cultural Asset, widely known to the Korean public as 'national shaman'.

Shamanistic *Hamlet* productions could not easily be imagined outside of Korea. Given this, can it really be argued that Koreans have found hidden elements in Shakespeare,

and that this discovery will easily be understood by international audiences? The Korean directors discussed above (Lee Yun-taek, Bae Yo-seop, Yang Jung-ung) would argue that their authentic and unique approach was not a contingent (or arbitrary) discovery of equivalent aspects. However, it seems more plausible that presenting *Hamlet* (or Ophelia) as a shaman is an attempt to assimilate the Shakespearean tragedy into Korean culture. This act of purging the otherness of Shakespeare indicates that Koreans need to substitute what is excluded with something that is familiar to them. In this sense, the supernatural element of *Hamlet* seems to correspond directly to this logic of substitution: it clearly represents a way in which Shakespeare can be adapted for the local audience. Yet, I suspect that such shamanistic productions of *Hamlet* are also derived from a desire to create a distinctively Korean intercultural theatre performance, one which mixes together a world-famous text with a local traditional culture. Shamanistic *Hamlet* productions have only just recently emerged from the contemporary theatre world, and were not previously imaginable even for Koreans. However, amongst the *Hamlet* performances in 2011, only Yohangza's *Hamlet* took on this shamanistic element, suggesting perhaps that other directors were not attracted by the theme of the supernatural.

On the other hand, one could just as easily say that Koreans were attracted to *Hamlet* because it so readily seemed to uphold a Confucian ethic, something which still forms the psychological background of Korean lives today. In Confucian society, the *hyo* ('filial piety') given by a son to his father was the fundamental ethical relationship on which traditional society had rested. The concept of *hyo* is, despite great cultural upheavals and transformations, even today still held to be central to modern Korean society. From the primary school onwards, Koreans are educated about *hyo* and the concept is still fundamental to moral thought, which demands that the younger generation's behaviour towards the old generation be respectful.⁸⁹ In the context of *hyo*, someone who murders one's father is to be regarded as an enemy who cannot be allowed to live. The murdered father's son's mind is indicated as 'I cannot share the same sky with the enemy'. If a son is filial to his father, he should react appropriately to his father's murder. Therefore, the duty of a son is normally to kill his father's murderer in an act of revenge, something which is justified by the society as a

⁸⁹ The father-son relationship was presented in the *Samgangoryun* (The Three Bonds and the Five Relationships) as the rule that 'There should be affection between father and son'.

righteous deed. From the Confucian point of view, Hamlet can be said to practise this fundamental ethical precept of filial piety. Moreover, Claudius is manifestly an enemy of the Confucian ethic. The marriage of Claudius and Gertrude transgresses the basic principles of Confucianism. Rather, such an action was part of the tradition of the northern nomadic peoples, barbarians who had historically been the enemy of civilisation. In Korean *yangban* (aristocratic) society, it was never imagined that a man would take his deceased brother's wife.

Hamlet's revenge was not a private resolution of his resentment; rather it needs to be considered in the context of the common good. The Confucian ethic that maintains Korean society begins with a son's *hyo* to his father. The relationship is expanded onto the social and the political level; then *hyo* is expanded into *chungseong* (allegiance and fidelity to one's lord or country). A man who is loyal to his father must be filial to his senior in the workplace and, eventually, patriotic to the country. In this context, a son avenging his innocent father's murder should be looked upon as someone upholding societal justice. In this sense, Hamlet's line 'The time is out of joint—cursed spite! | That ever I was born to set it right' (1.5.188-189) would indicate his anxiety over his duty which requires the risk of his life, and, at the same time, express his mind set up for the dangerous task. The prince, because of his social position, is morally obliged to recover his country from the corruption that derives from Claudius' crime. The revenge executed by Hamlet would be considered a heroic deed that also saved his people. Hamlet's fulfilment of his duty and his subsequent death would be reinterpreted by Korean audiences as a release from the grief that they had experienced through colonization or military dictatorship. Claudius can be looked upon as a Japanese coloniser or tyrannical dictator who corrupted the nation. In this sense, we would expect the tragedy to be readily welcomed by Koreans since they have been deeply affected by the subconscious cultural ethos of the father-son relationship and its attendant responsibilities. North Korean interpretation surely demonstrate Hamlet's sacred task to some degree.

Yet, because of the emotional ambivalence and doubts expressed about the Ghost of Hamlet's father, this Confucian account of the play's popularity in Korea also does not seem fully tenable. A son who endeavours to avenge his father's death should not be sceptical about his duty or his beliefs. Rather, the emotions of the son ought to be *chung* and *ui*. *Chung* can be literally translated as 'a core of mind'. This indicates that their mind would not alter or

be discouraged by any external distractions or difficulties. On the other hand, *ui* means righteousness; any act performed by the avenger will be justified if undertaken with this emotion. These two concepts are described in many East Asian historical events or stories that deal with righteous or loyal subjects (whether samurai in Japan, or *yangban* in Korea). In many such stories, those people who are loyal to their lord will demonstrate their dedication by avenging their lord's death at the cost of their own life or that of their family. Therefore, if Hamlet was truly full of *chung* and *ui*, he would be unable to think of anything else but revenge. Yet, Hamlet delayed his revenge and was sceptical about the Ghost he had seen. It could be said that his mind lacked the sentiments of *chung* and *ui* which would have inspired virtuous behaviour. In challenging the conventional perspective of Confucian ethics, *Hamlet* might well provide Korean directors with a modern hero capable of overturning conventional moral wisdom in favour of an ideal of individual freedom. Therefore, it can be argued that Korean directors might well be attracted by Hamlet's potential to both protect the traditional ethical system and, at the same time, serve as a model for the rebellious modern individual.

The popularity of *Hamlet* could also be explained as, particularly since 1980, it has been a favourite play for those directors interested in theatrical experimentation. One director, Park Geun-hyeong, has suggested that '*Hamlet* is a great play because it offers us countless ways of acting and directing. Also, revenge is one of most interesting subjects for theatre'.⁹⁰ Since Ki Kuk-seo's revolutionary *Hamlet* production in the 1980s, the tragedy has been attracting many contemporary directors to experiment with their own approach. Shamanistic productions of *Hamlet* serve to demonstrate this. Experimental *Hamlet* productions have become a notable trend in recent stagings of the tragedy. For example, the 'Hamlet Update' festival mentioned above included several unusual approaches to the tragedy: *Hamlet on the Road* was a one-actor show; *Let Them Talk* took the form of an after-show scenario, with the dead characters discussing the cause of their death. In *Hamlet Meditates on Death*, Hamlet and Ophelia talk about death with a make-up artist who is going to die after the performance. In 2011, there was only one production that provided a plain rendition of the tragedy.

Why has this tragedy been chosen for so many of the experimental productions in Korea? Some directors had a specific purpose in staging an experimental *Hamlet*: for Ki Kuk-

⁹⁰ From my interview with Park Geun-hyeong at his office in Seoul, 25 August 2010.

seo it was politics, while for Lee Yun-taek it was the universal aspect of Korean theatre. Yet many contemporary directors do not appear to have specific purposes motivating their decisions, instead they argue that the play has simply been staged too often and that the audience would be bored if they had to see the same thing again. Moreover, they claim, the directors themselves would be fed up with simply repeating what their predecessors did, and that they prefer to take on a challenge. Since 1990, the challenge was ignited and enhanced by the post-modern trend in theatre. Likewise, the long-time repetitive productions indicate that a study of Korea's *Hamlet* productions would present the history of modern Korean theatre, as the play has been performed in every decade and enacted in every style intercultural, political, post-modern and popular theatre. Apart from *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* have also been preferred on the Korean stage. The supernatural element (the Fairies) of the comedy has provided a good material for Koreans waiting to adapt the comedy. Dokkebi, goblin in the wood in Korean folklore, must be no other than correspondent to the Fairies in the comedy (see Chapter 5). Therefore, a similar approach of shamanistic *Hamlet* can be easily applied to adapting the comedy. *Romeo and Juliet* has been encouraging various experiments owing to its frequent staging (this will be discussed in Chapter 4). Yet, the tragedy seems to contain such elements (i.e. shamanism) to be Koreanized as *Hamlet*.

Korean Fidelity to Shakespeare

Imitating 'authentic' British Shakespeare began in the 1950s with Sinhyeop's *Hamlet* and *Othello* productions and is still observed on current stages. There are Korean Shakespeare performances that adopt and pursue the style of the 'authentic' British Shakespeare performance (as it is thought to be by Koreans). Such productions aim at transferring Shakespearean plays on to the Korean stage without 'damaging' the plays to any degree and are expected to use Elizabethan/Jacobean style costumes and props. The script will have been taken from loyal translations (normally Kim Jae-nam's or Shin Jeong-ok's translation) that represent Shakespeare's plays in archaic style Korean language with the use of proper linguistic equivalents. In these translations the lines are not changed and the original plot structure is strictly maintained. These productions are intended to resemble classical British Shakespeare performance, from Laurence Olivier's film renditions, to the current productions

of Shakespeare's Globe, for their authority in representing Shakespeare. By imitating British Shakespeare production, it seems that Koreans would think that Shakespeare could not be 'Koreanized' due to its difference in language and history. When doing 'genuine' Shakespeare, a director should ignore Korean elements from her traditional theatre and history. If any Korean element is applied the production could not be authentic Shakespeare. The productions are treated as 'art theatre' because they contain serious ideas, in this case, the poetry of Shakespeare. Although the earliest imitated forms of Sinhyeop had been popular with their audiences, productions presenting Korean actors wearing Western costume and reciting the difficult lines are not popular with contemporary Korean audiences. Therefore, the productions in this category have been occasionally dependent upon funding from public groups or institutions that link to Shakespeare Studies. Recently, public-funded theatre companies, such as the National Theatre Company of Korea, are only able to produce these 'unpopular' productions in the name of 'classic' or 'art'.

The National Theatre Company of Korea (founded 1950) was a government-funded ensemble company until 2008. It consisted of full-time actors and designated artistic directors. The most famous Korean directors have worked there as artistic directors, for example Lee Yun-taek and Oh Tae-suk. Strangely, the National Theatre Company of Korea did not produce any Shakespearean work between 1964 and 1991. In 1992, they returned to Shakespeare with *Measure for Measure* (1992, directed by Kim Chang-hwa) then these productions followed: *Richard III* (1995, directed by Kim Cheol-ri), *Hamlet* (2001, directed by Jeong Jin-su), *Julius Caesar* (2002, directed by Jeong Il-seong), *Titus Andronicus* (2003, directed by Kim Cheol-ri), *Cymbeline* (2004, directed by Kim Cheol-ri), *The Merchant of Venice* (2005, directed by Park Jae-wan), and *Terrorist Hamlet* (2007, 2008, directed by Jens-Daniel Herzog). Their productions except *Terrorist Hamlet* have mostly been a repeating of a similar style of acting and scenography as seen Figure 9. It is noted that such costumes and props were almost the same as those Sinhyeop used in the 1950 and 1960s (see Figure 3 and 4). Indeed, the theatre company was infamous for its old approach in both acting and *mise-en-scène*.



Figure 16. National Theatre Company of Korea's *Hamlet* (2001), directed by Jeong Jin-su. Hamlet was played by the famous celebrity TV actor Kim Seok-hun (Figure 17. right). So, there were a number of female audiences who came to see Kim. The female audiences greeted him with hearty cheers.



Figure 18. *Titus Andronicus* (2011) directed by Yun Si-jung, an indoor replica of Shakespeare's Globe

Another example of Korean fidelity to Shakespeare is the Eurasian Shakespeare Company, led by a director and life-long Shakespeare admirer Nam Yuk-hyeon. Nam studied English in Korea for his MA and then moved to the UK for his PhD in English Studies at a college in the University of London. (He seems not to have finished his PhD.) His ambitious project is to direct all the plays of Shakespeare on the Korean stage. He has gained fame owing to the presentation of this project in the Korean press.⁹¹ He has been staging numerous Shakespearean plays since 2002 with *Two Gentlemen of Verona* at Chukje Geukjang, Seoul.

⁹¹ Song Hyeong-gi, 'A Man Who Devoted his Life to Shakespeare', *Newsculture*, 28 March 2011.

His contribution can be said to be that he has staged the plays that have been ignored by Koreans. For instance, *Richard the Second* (2008, The National Theatre of Korea), *All's Well that Ends Well* (2007, ESTC), *Henry the Sixth* (Part 1 in 2011 at Seoul Arts Centre, Part 2 in May 2012 at Art Centre K, Part 3 in September 2012 at Jeongmiso), *King John* (2010, Seoul Arts Centre), *Edward the Third* (2010, The National Theatre of Korea), *Henry the Fourth* (Part 1 in March 2009 at Cheongun, Part 2 in June 2009 at the National Theatre of Korea), *Timon of Athens* (2010, Daehangrogeukjang) have been only produced so far (April 2013) by the Eurasian Shakespeare Company. Yet, these productions only offered a Shakespearean text recited by actors in pseudo-Elizabethan costume. Nam used Kim Jae-nam's translation, which was written in archaic Korean. The scenography and costume have been produced to look like Elizabethan costume as closely as they can be. Yet the actors of the productions were normally poor and amateurish.

By comparison, the director Yun Si-jung really made an effort to represent Shakespeare's Globe theatre in London on the Korean stage. Yun had attended Shakespeare's Globe's *Titus Andronicus* (2006) and had been deeply inspired by it. He confessed: 'I had not been very keen on Shakespeare performance before. But when I was standing in the yard, I felt that this was what a theatre should be and afterward I wished to make such a production'.⁹² Encouraged by both the performance and Shakespeare's Globe's stage and auditorium, Yun directed the Roman tragedy in 2011 at public-funded Daehangro Art Theatre. The venue is a typical black box theatre without a built-in stage. Yun built a raised stage (height 1m 30cm) in the space, with a wooden-framed backdrop at the back of the stage. The backdrop had two exit doors and a screen was hung over the stage. The scenery was an obvious yet crude imitation of Shakespeare's Globe without the artworks on the underside of the 'heavens.' The audience seats were divided into standing and sitting, resembling the yard and the gallery of Shakespeare's Globe. Yet, the wooden-made stage was spilt and reassembled to a different shape during the performance. This work was done by the actors with a little help from the audience. The acting was supposed to be raw acting that dismissed any help of lavish stage setting and sound. In doing so, Yun required the actors to play an instrument or sing a song on the stage. These ideas would be also influenced by the performances at Shakespeare's Globe. However, the director himself praised his effort,

⁹² Quoted from Song Hyeon-gi, 'Yunsijunggwau Mannam (Meeting with Yun Si-jung)', *Newsculture*, 2 March 2012.

remarking ‘this was the most authentic Korean Shakespeare performance ever, as I adopted the exact stagecraft of what Shakespeare used’.⁹³

Whether it was just an imitated form of the staging at Shakespeare’s Globe or a faithful representation of Shakespearean performance, the production was well received by the audience. The first run at Daehangro Art Theatre was so successful that the production was revived twice in 2011 at different venues in the Daehangro area. In addition, Yun Si-jung won the Outstanding New Director award at Donga Yeongsang (theatre award) at the end of the year, which was one of the prestigious theatre awards in Korea. The success was quite remarkable. *Titus Andronicus* was scarcely known to the Korean public either as theatrical performance or film. The production did not use contemporary translation, rather, the language of the performance seemed to be Shin Jeong-ok’s translation. The actors consisted of one veteran actor, Lee Sang-jik (*Titus Andronicus*) who was the leading actor of the National Theatre Company of Korea, and young actors who are in their mid-20s and early-30s. The acting itself was not mature. Yun’s success seems to derive from the liveliness of the performance. The audience seemed to be fascinated to watch the spilt stages while standing and also be amused to take part in the performance by helping the actors. This atmosphere would be comparable to that at a live concert rather than in a theatre. Therefore, it can be said that Yun’s *Titus Andronicus* succeeded in both holding on to the Shakespearean value of the piece and presenting it in a lively way. Indeed, the production was more attractive for the Korean audience than the Shakespeare’s Globe Company’s performance at the National Theatre of Korea.

Popularizing Shakespeare

Since the late 1990s, Shakespearean dramas are now produced more frequently than ever purely in order to entertain the audience and achieve commercial success. The performances would be what general theatregoers would expect from any theatre experience. The audience expectation of Shakespeare has been of serious ideas that are difficult to understand, but, also of a tearful love story and revenge of a son or husband. Shakespeare’s plays have often been a

⁹³ Quoted from Park Gyeong-eun, ‘Sheikspier Mudae: Seoseobogi (Shakespearean Stage: Standing Seats)’, *The Khunghyang Shinmun*, 16 Feb 2011.

hindrance to selling tickets to general theatregoers due to the difficulty of the texts. So, it can be questioned why Shakespeare was chosen at all if Shakespeare was so difficult and has been known to be avoided by general theatregoers. The answer could be that everybody knows something about Shakespeare. So that, when Shakespeare is popularized, most of Korean theatregoers would know the story of a number of Shakespeare's plays. Therefore, the audience would not go to the theatre to discover the story; rather, they would have expectations of what the performance could provide for them in terms of spectacle or fantasy, laughter rather than complex psychology and dark humour. The task of popularizing Shakespeare has been to tell his stories without the complexities of the Shakespearean language, after all the audience surely do not expect fun from the poetry. This has resulted in productions of Shakespeare's plays performed in a popular style of theatre, such as musical theatre or romantic comedy.

Twenty years after Gagyo's music theatre rendition of *The Comedy of Errors*, musical productions of Shakespeare have boomed since 1999. *Musical Taepung* (*The Tempest*, 1999) was adapted and directed by Lee Yun-taek, and produced by the Seoul Performing Arts Company. Lee here showed quite a different approach from his *Hamlet* (discussed in Chapter 2) as he did not keep his principle of being faithful to Shakespeare. In this musical production, Caliburn wept for loneliness when the people left the island and Prospero said 'my name is William Shakespeare and I am going back home to read books in peace'. In the same year, Cho Gwang-hwa's brave adaptation, *Rock Hamlet*, was staged. In 2000, *Moonlight in Shilla* (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) was staged by the Seoul Metropolitan Musical Theatre. The production was adapted by Hong Chang-su and directed by Lee Jong-hun. Hong set the comedy in the ancient Shilla Kingdom period. He used Korean folklore, 'The Legend of Cheoyong' for the drama-within-the-drama show performed by the Mechanicals. Korean Goblins, *dokkebi*, replaced the fairies. *Dokkebi* also appeared in Yohangza's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The venue was placed in an outdoor garden with a fountain behind the Sejong Centre. The story ('The Legend of Cheoyong') and Korean Goblins are very friendly elements for the audience, particularly the children. Indeed the production was advertised as good family evening entertainment.

A French musical, *Romeo et Juliette* (2001 music and lyrics by Gérard Presgurvic), and a Czech musical, *Hamlet* (1999, music, lyrics and book by Janek Ledecky), were both

licensed and produced in the big venues during the 2000s. The two musicals were moderate commercial hits in comparison to the other licensed musicals from Broadway and the West End. Yet these were the biggest hits in terms of audience attendance and profit in relation to other Shakespeare-based performances. *Romeo et Juliette* (casted Korean actors) opened in 2002 at Seoul Art Centre. Then it has been staged in 2003, 2005, 2008 and 2012. The musical also toured around South Korea and attracted many local audiences. The Czech musical *Hamlet* opened in 2007 and then was staged again in 2011. The two musicals were quite extensively adapted from the original. They focused on the romance between the male protagonist and the female protagonist. Of course, romance was the inevitable factor for selling tickets. The commercial success of the two musicals derived from their satisfying the audience's fantasy for tragic romance. It seems that the audience, who were mainly female in their 20s and 30s, would not be discouraged by the fact that fidelity to Shakespeare was lost as long as they could watch the young, beautiful characters.

Meanwhile, small budget popular Shakespeare productions have been hosted by small venues in the Daehangro area. The first, and probably most successful production was *Trans Sibiya* (*Twelfth Night*, 2003) directed by Park Jae-wan. The commercial success of the production seemed to encourage directors who wanted to put on Shakespeare and, at the same time, imitate the stage-setting (night club atmosphere) of the production. Also, it showed that *Twelfth Night* had great potential on the popular stage that depended considerably on female audiences. Indeed a similar production, *Night Musical Sibiya*, was created in 2004. This production attracted audiences with its comic story of cross-dressing and with the dynamic dancing of the good-looking actors. Its stage-setting was a night club and the actors appeared to be the dancers or dissolute youth who could be seen in such clubs. The actors even played ushers within the night club so that the audience could feel that they had come into a hedonistic club in Gangnam area rather than a serious theatre in Daehangro. *The Donkey Show*, an Off-Broadway adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, was revived by a famous Korean comedian, Pyo In-bong, and staged successfully in Daehangro in 2007. *Club Sibiya* (2010) was another adaptation of *Twelfth Night* with a club setting. The production had similar setting, costume and marketing strategy to *Night Musical Sibiya*. The cast even included Korean popular music stars. *Taming of the Shrew* (2009~) by Kim's Comfunny was produced as a comic show in that the audience were constantly involved in the performance. For instance, they played guests at the wedding of Petruchio and Kate. This production is

famous for its all-male casting which seems to be aimed at being funny. It is certain that they do not attempt to adopt the Elizabethan tradition for being loyal to Shakespeare. The director, Kim Dae-hwan, commented that he was inspired by Augusto Boal.⁹⁴ Yet, the production seemed to have nothing to do with any politics. Audience involvement was their key strategy in terms of marketing. Indeed, audiences are fascinated by the fact that they become a part of the performance. The production has been so popular that it has been constantly running for three years.

Visiting Productions and Festivals

Along with the boom of Korean Shakespeare productions, more British Shakespeare productions by major British theatre companies have been invited into South Korea, all of them to Seoul, since 1990. The first British visit was that of the English Shakespeare Company. They staged *Macbeth* (1991, directed by Michael Bogdanov) and *Twelfth Night* (1991, directed by Michael Pennington) at Hoam Art Hall, then one of the most prestigious theatre venues in Seoul. Their productions were welcomed as ‘Shakespeare from his home town’ by the Korean press, probably because they were renowned British theatre company regardless of their reputation for experiment in the UK.⁹⁵ In 1996, the British experimental company Shared Experience were invited to stage their production of *The Tempest*. It was directed by their founding director Nancy Meckler. Unfortunately, this visit did not generate interest amongst the Korean press and audiences possibly because they were lesser known theatre company in the UK. The Royal National Theatre Company toured Korea in 1998 with *Othello* (directed by Sam Mendes), which was staged on the stage of Towol Theatre in Seoul Arts Centre. Sam Mendes and the actors of the Royal National Theatre were acclaimed by Korean critics and press.⁹⁶ Then, the Royal Shakespeare Company was invited by LG Art Centre and staged *Taming of the Shrew* (2003), directed by Lindsay Posner. This visit had been long awaited as the most authoritative Shakespeare company’s performance. The

⁹⁴ Dong Gyeong-hwa, ‘Review: *Malgwalyangi Gildeuligi (Taming of the Shrew)*’, *Jaegyeongilbo*, 15 Dec 2009.

⁹⁵ Anonymous reporter, ‘Bongojanghesoon Sheikspier (Shakespeare from His Home Town)’, *Maeilgyeongje*, 17 March 1992.

⁹⁶ Han Jeong-jin, ‘Yeongguk Yeongeuk Osello (British Theatre Othello)’, *The Donga-ilbo*, 17 February 1998.

National Theatre of Korea invited *Love's Labour's Lost* from Shakespeare's Globe (2005, directed by Dominic Dromgoole).

Those British productions were generally very well received by the Korean theatregoers and by Drama and/or Shakespeare scholars. Yet, it is difficult to measure their influence on Koreans. If the companies visited in the early period of modern Korean theatre, they would have influenced Koreans in staging Shakespeare in terms of both visual aspects (acting and scenography) and the use of Shakespearean language in performance. Yet, it seems that by the 1990s Korean directors had become too much accustomed to their own ways of staging. The British productions were certainly regarded as high quality performances but they could not guide Koreans to do similar work on local stages unless the Koreans wanted to imitate 'genuine' or 'classical' Shakespeare. Indeed, other foreign Shakespeare performances originating outside Anglophone countries are more likely to have influenced Korean Shakespeare. For instance, a Russian company with Yugo Zapad's *Hamlet* (1992) seemed to more deeply inspire Koreans in dealing with the Shakespearean canon. The Russian production was famous for symbolic gesture and scenography and, more importantly, language was regarded as secondary to the visual aspects. The experience of the Russian *Hamlet* was focused on their imaginative materialisation of the text rather than on how the language was spoken or expressed on stage. There is no doubt that many Koreans were more impressed by the Russian (or non-Anglophone) approach as they recognized that it would always be impossible to convey Shakespearean language as well as the British do. Certainly overseas Shakespeare performances both from Anglophone countries or non-Anglophone have been invited more often than the previous period.⁹⁷

Since the Shakespeare Festival in 1964, there had not been any successor with similar material until the 1990s. Now a Shakespeare Festival takes place almost every year since The First Shakespeare Sangseolmudae (open stage) in 1998. This festival collected several experimental productions in a small venue in the Daehangro area, mainly from small theatre companies.⁹⁸ Unfortunately, it did not really appeal to the general theatregoers. However, two more Sangseolmudae were held in 1999 and 2000. The National Theatre of Korea hosted

⁹⁷ See Appendix (1) for the list.

⁹⁸ See Appendix (1) for the information of the participation companies and their repertoire. The same applies to the following festivals.

Shakespeare festivals on a larger scale, offering funding and venues: Shakespeare Love Festival (2002) and Shakespeare Nanjang Festival (2004, 2005, 2006). The Shakespeare Love Festival presented his plays relating to love. Shakespeare Nanjangs were more significant occasions than this festival. They collected the most important Shakespeare performances as valued by theatre critics and practitioners in each year, such as Street Theatre Troupe's *King Lear*, Yohangza's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Mokwha's *Romeo and Juliet*. The festivals in the National Theatre of Korea also came with academic conferences of the Shakespeare Association.

In 2005, the Shakespeare Association hosted a conference, 'From Page to Stage', as the basis for a programme for Shakespeare Nanjang Festival. This indicated that Shakespeare performance has been accepted as an academic module in Korean Shakespeare scholarship. However, the audience of the festivals were mostly university students from English departments or Theatre departments who would come to the theatre to learn about Shakespeare. Therefore, the tickets were usually sold as 'group sale' or issued by invitation. This indicates that the festivals did not contribute to any attempt to popularize Shakespeare among the general theatregoers. Since these festivals at the National Theatre of Korea, small and middle scale Shakespeare festivals have followed.

Part 2

Reinvention of Traditional Theatre with Shakespeare

‘I wanted to show how a small country in the East performs Shakespeare’s play’ – Oh Tae-suk, in his interview with Yonhapnews before his first UK tour in 2006.

This part looks at three productions, *King Uru*, Mokwha’s *Romeo and Juliet*, and Yohangza’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The three productions are relatively recent ones (since 2000) and have toured foreign countries including the UK, the home of the Bard. By the case studies, I will examine how the directors attempted to reinvent their pseudo-traditional performances. I also illustrate the way which the director composed their script in order to investigate the strategies of each director in borrowing materials from both the traditional performances and Shakespeare. I assess whether the three performances attempt to identify (or internalize) Shakespeare with Korean culture or to represent Korean culture by using of Shakespeare to the foreign audience (representing Shakespeare with familiar elements to the domestic audience).

Chapter 3

King Uru (2001)

King Uru, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, was created and directed by Kim Myeong-kon, who was president of The National Theatre of Korea (NTOK) between 2000 and 2005.⁹⁹ The production was not only the most expensive and large-scale event in the history of NTOK, but it was also the only production that encompassed all four of its resident companies: The National Changgeuk Company of Korea (NCCOK), The National Dance Company of Korea (NDCOK), The National Orchestra of Korea (NOOK) and The National Theatre Company of Korea (NTCOK). In total this meant that 120 performers took part in the production. The cost of this has not been disclosed, yet it is known that at least a quarter of the NTOK's annual budget was injected into the production. The creative team behind *King Uru* consisted of the finest traditional Korean performance artists. The famous *pansori* singer Ahn Suk-sun, a holder of Korea's 23rd representative of Intangible Cultural Heritage, wrote the songs, and Won Il, then a rising star in traditional Korean music, composed the music. Kim Myeong-kon himself wrote the script.

The intention of the creator was very explicit. Kim wanted to create a spectacle out of traditional Korean art that would appeal to the domestic audience and be representative of the nation on the world stage. A new form of traditional theatre should be invented to achieve this goal, since traditional Korean performances were not only domestically unpopular but also internationally relatively unknown compared to Peking opera and *kabuki*. Although traditional Korean performances, particularly, *pansori*, never lost its foreign fans, they have never attracted comparably great interest from the world as its Japanese and Chinese counterparts have. It seems clear for Kim that Korea should have a theatre form like Noh or Peking opera in order to be known on the world stage. He seemed to think that a hybrid, an

⁹⁹ I did not attend this production. I have watched a video of the production which is the source for my description. The unpublished script is also used. The video is linked from the website of the National Theatre of Korea. <http://archive.ntok.go.kr/category/movie_view.jsp?bbs=1&seq=1179&gubun=10> [accessed 20 August 2012]

invented or, deliberately Westernized (or modernized) traditional Korean theatre could achieve this.

Kim reflected on the unpopularity of traditional theatre more seriously than any other theatre director. As briefly noted in Chapter 2, Kim was one of the key advocates of the 1970s' Nationalist Theatre Movement and was involved in the formation of *madanggeuk*. He studied German language and literature at a university, and also learned *pansori* from one of the most famous singers (*myeongchang*). After graduation, he briefly taught German at a school. He soon quit the job in order to lead the theatre company Arirang, which mainly produced *madanggeuk* and *gut*-influenced performances. Kim was director, actor and script writer for the theatre company. Kim played the protagonist *pansori* singer in the film *Sopyonje* 1993, which brought wide public interest in *pansori*. Throughout his theatrical career, he devoted himself to renovating of traditional performances, rather than preserving them intact. His concept of Nationalist Theatre was that the movement continued to produce a worldview with various approaches in responding to contemporaneity (particularly, historical and political circumstance).¹⁰⁰ He was appointed as the chair of NTOK in 2000 and later (2006) became the minister of Culture and Tourism under the Roh Mu-hyeon government (2003-2008).

Kim's strategy in inventing a traditional-style theatre was to incorporate different genres and cultures, bravely overlooking the danger of collision. He accomplished this integration while inside NTOK; his position gave him the power to merge the four different national representatives in a single group. Thanks to this merger, *King Uru* encompassed traditional Korean music (NCCOK and NOOK), Western-influenced dramatic art (NTCOK) and modern dance (NDCOK). This brand new theatrical form was labelled '*eumakchongchaegeuk*' (literally, 'total music theatre' used in 2000) and also referred to as a '*gukak* musical' (literally, 'traditional Korean music theatre' used in 2001). These two terms for the production were invented by Kim himself. In the Korean context, '*chongchaegeuk*' refers to a theatrical performance in which different genres are organically structured with equal emphasis. A '*gukak* musical' indicated that the performance took the shape of Western musical theatre, yet substituted Western music for traditional Korean music (*gukak*). The

¹⁰⁰ Kim Myeong-kon, 'Gut, Minjokgeuk (Nationalist Theatre), Realism', *Hankookyeongeuk*, (1995) p. 100.

reason for the changing the name for this variety of production was in order to modernize traditional theatre, and also because, in terms of marketing, it would attract a younger audience who favoured musical theatre.

Shakespeare's *King Lear* was chosen because the tragedy was a fine vehicle for presenting a production to the world stage. More importantly, *King Lear* was the most suitable Shakespearean play for merging with a famous story from Korean ancient folklore, the legend of Princess Bari, which provided story structure of *King Uru*. It can be observed that there are at least two obvious similarities between the Korean legend and the Shakespearean tragedy: both are based on legends, and in both the youngest daughter saves her father. In the Korean legend, Bari was the seventh daughter of Great King Ogu who ruled ancient Korea. The King had six daughters and desperately wanted a male inheritor. When Bari was born, the King was enraged and, from his deep disappointment, asked his wife to put his new born daughter into a box and float the box into the West Sea. To her great grief, the Queen, Gildaebu, followed the King's cruel order. The box eventually reached the shore and Bari was raised by a kind elderly couple. Years later, the step-parents told Bari that she was a princess. Then, the King fell ill and only a miraculous medicine from the Western Paradise could cure him. Having heard the news, Bari went on a journey to the West to save her father. After passing several tests given by the deities, she married the keeper of the holy water and bore sons for him. She came back to her father's palace but the King had already died. She opened the coffin and poured the medicine into his bones. The King rose from his death. When Bari died, she became a chief patron of *mudang* (shaman). Kim structured his script so that Bari (Cordelia) was banished from the court of Uru (Lear), yet would save his life after a long and dangerous journey to the Western Paradise. However, in a real *gut* (shamanistic ritual) today, *mudang* often pleads to the princess Bari to grant them spiritual power. In *King Uru*, Kim attempted to show the spiritual power of the shaman's patron on the stage.

When *King Uru* was staged at NTOK, the performance took the largest venue, the Hae (sun) stage, which had 1,600 seats. The venue has a very large proscenium stage (depth: 23m, width: 22m) and an orchestra pit at the front. The orchestra consisted of thirteen members of NOOK, a percussion group Gongmeyong and a 'cello ensemble. In total, the orchestra had about twenty members. The music was a fusion of East and West. The

instruments were *kayageum* (a 12-string Korean instrument), *daegeum* (a Korean woodwind instrument), as well as 'cellos. The set design by Park Dong-woo was simple; there was a long and wide platform over the centre stage. This design might have been planned to give a surreal atmosphere, which corresponded to the unrealistic setting of the production. The costumes looked historical, yet did not define any specific period. The clowns were given the usual traditional Korean dress for humble singers in traditional theatre, and other characters wore fanciful costumes that offered a fantasy of the past. The clowns also wore the masks of genuine *talchum*. The acting of the production was eclectic; the NTCOK actors' realism-based acting juxtaposed with the NCCOK's traditional Korean acting style which based on *pansori*.



Figure 19 (left). *King Uru* at the National Theatre of Korea (left, 2000)

Figure 20 (right). *King Uru* at the Roman amphitheatre in Antalya, Turkey (right, 2003).

The performance began with a song, the 'Song of the Clown', to serve as a prologue and to be sung by the five Clowns (the actors are members of the NCCOK) who collectively took the part of the Fool from *King Lear*. The song contains an important leitmotiv; it is repeated throughout the performance and the lyrics hint at the theme of the production. This was the repeated part: 'Our life is a river. Let all the miseries flow on the water and, come here, dance and sing. Let's hear this comic and sad story.' Whenever King Uru (Lear) faced an ordeal, this was sung by Clowns. As a result the overall impression of the whole

performance was that of a tragicomic story. The opening scene also incorporated a quasi-Korean traditional dance, which was created and choreographed solely for the production, given by the NDCOK. The prologue paved the way to the first scene, ‘Bari’s (Cordelia’s) dream’, in which a singer (Bari’s dead mother, played by the famous *pansori* singer Ahn Suk-sun, one of the Human Cultural Assets) predicted the future: the country was going to be torn apart and people would kill each other.

King Lear	King Uru
Lear	Uru (played by Kim Seong-ki, a musical actor)
Cordelia	Bari (played by Park Ae-ri, a <i>pansori</i> singer of the NCCOK) ¹⁰¹
Goneril	Gahwa (played by Cho Eun-gyeong, a NTCOK actor)
Regan	Yeonhwa (played by Gye Mi-gyeong, a NTCOK actor)
Kent	Maeruk (played by Lee Yeong-ho, a NTCOK actor)
Gloucester	Gohul (played by Jang Min-ho, a NTCOK actor)
Edgar	Ulji (played by Kim Jin-seo, a NTCOK actor)
Edmund	Solji (played by Choi Won-seok, a NTCOK actor)
The Fool	Clowns (played by Kim Hak-yong, Yun Seok-an, Na Tae-ok, Ju Ho-jong, Han Seung-seok, all the NCCOK <i>pansori</i> singers)

Table 3. The characters in *King Lear* and their counterparts in *King Uru*

From the dream, Bari had a sinister feeling. King Uru announced that he was tired of ruling his kingdom, mainly due to his second wife’s untimely death (Bari’s mother). During a speech announcing his abdication of the throne, the Sun was suddenly eclipsed by the moon.

¹⁰¹ Bari was played by Park Ae-ri chief member of the NCCOK and a famous *pansori* singer. She also played Juliet in the NCCOK’s *Romeo and Juliet*.

Bari pleaded with Uru not to resign, telling him about her dream. Yet her two elder stepsisters, Gahwa (Goneril) and Yeonhwa (Regan), criticised her for being irrational. Bari and Maeruk (Kent) were banished from Lear's court. Bari asked Maeruk to look after her father secretly and he agreed with her. While Uru was humiliated by Gahwa and Yeonhwa, Bari was wandering the land and finally encountered a shaman. Her mother's spirit took over the shaman's body and bade her to go to the West Paradise and seek a medicine to cure the King, who was going to be very ill. Bari met a group of rogues in the barren land. These were personifications of the seven Jangseung's (scary deities). Being disguised, they tried to frighten her into going back, but she stayed and passed their test by throwing herself into an abysmal chasm. At last, she was given the medicine as a reward. Then, the keeper of the holy water declared that Bari was going to be a shaman who guided drifting souls into the land of the dead.

Meanwhile, Uru became a leader of the clowns and enjoyed himself with singing and dancing. His loyal subject, Gohul's (Gloucester) eyes were plucked out by the husband of Yeonhwa (Cornwall), as he attempted to evacuate Uru to the neighbouring Saro Kingdom. The Saro Kingdom invaded Uru's kingdom but was defeated by Solji (Edmund). Bari returned to her motherland and encountered Uru who was now struck with illness. She gave the medicine to her father and he woke up. Solji found them and sent them to prison. A disguised Ulji (Edgar) killed Solji. At the same time, Yeonhwa was poisoned by Gahwa and Gahwa killed herself. Uru and Bari were stabbed in the prison. Bari survived, but Uru died. Bari pleaded to Heaven that her body could absorb all their dead souls. The Heavens listened, and so Bari became a shaman and woke up the dead souls through her body, so that all the dead characters came back on stage. She performed a *gut* to appease them. Then they danced together, singing about a better life to come for future generations.

At first glimpse, *King Uru* did not dare to deconstruct the original plot of *King Lear* apart from the ending. It appears that the production rather plainly imports the legend of Bari into the story of *King Lear*. The scenes were arranged in the same order as the Shakespearean tragedy. The action and events occurred in the same way as in *King Lear* too, which indicates that the production did not develop its own logic. The madness of Uru was not sufficiently developed. Having been expelled by his daughters, Uru was enjoying himself without many difficulties. Then he suddenly became mad at the point where Lear becomes mad in *King*

Lear. The purpose of the invasion by the Saro Kingdom was to help Uru; yet, the leader of the Saro Kingdom did not appear at all. When Bari went to the West, Uru was not ill at all. After the scene in which she received the medicine, Uru was still playing with Clowns. Then, when Bari was about to meet him, Uru suddenly collapsed with an unexplained illness. These factors showed that the production heavily depended upon *King Lear* in terms of its story structure even if that structure did not fit easily with the elements of the Korean folktale.

Despite its dependence on the original tragedy, *King Uru* reduced the complexity and dignity of the Shakespearean characters by overemphasis and burlesque. The characters were polarised: good characters became extremely good, bad characters became very bad. The two bad daughters were explicitly evil and their behaviour resembled those of witches. For instance, apart from flattering of Gahwa and Yeonhwa to Uru for inheriting his land, the daughters kept speaking with an exaggerated high pitch voice in a manner not dissimilar to that found in English pantomimes. In addition, when they laughed at Uru, it was overtly scornful and evil. Meanwhile, Bari was a larger-than-life good character who was wholly concerned with expressing her patriotism and filial piety. She was only focusing on seeking the medicinal drug and saving her father, and did not seem to have any other objective. Likewise, Shakespeare's tragic characters were transformed into simple laughable characters in the production. The dignity of the royal family and the aristocrats was consequently removed, with many of them giving indecent speeches and provoking vulgar laughter. For instance, Yeonhwa and her husband shouted to Clowns 'Sod off with the old man, you useless imbeciles,' and laughed very meanly. This characterisation did not make the villains very scary; they were just looked to be despicable rascals from my point of view. Therefore a feeling of horror was not easily created when Yeonhwa's husband plucked out Gohul's eyes.

Light gabbling replaced the elegance of Lear's speech. After being betrayed by the two daughters, Uru continuously spoke abusive language to them. For example, he repeatedly addressed them as 'Foxes!'. In Korean culture, being called a fox is synonymous with being called a vile woman.¹⁰² The expression can be used both in witty and resentful sentiment. A man addresses a woman as fox implying that she has an enchantment attraction. Yet, a woman can be blamed as fox for the skill to seduce and ruin a man. So, fox can imply femme

¹⁰² Therefore, Uru's Fox does not have any link with the line, Regan's 'Ingrateful Fox'(3.7.28).

fatale or man-eater in the Korean context. When Uru was found by the blind Gohul, Uru was playing a childish game, killing a fox, with the clowns. It seems much resentment was felt, but Uru was not as sad or miserable. Uru even looked to be a merry old country man emancipated from the burdens of ruling the secular world. Consequently, his death might have evoked pity in the audience, yet, must have failed to create the solemn atmosphere, which can be felt in *King Lear*. Such a characterisation of Uru was buoyed with Clowns, who contributed to create laughter with their comic gestures and speech and were the main singers of the production, along with Bari. Clowns were intermediaries between the stage and the audience. They played the characters of Clowns who amused Uru, yet they also gave predictable or comic comments in their song at the beginning or the ending of each scene. When they sang the songs, they were not only being the characters, but also being the pundits of what was happening on the stage. Such roles for the Clowns derived from characters of *talchum*, in which the characters constantly talk to the audience about situations in the play.



Figure 21. Mad Uru and the Clowns

Such characterization affected the language of *King Uru*. The script for the production was written in a simple and slightly archaic style, such as is used in traditional theatre performances or period dramas. Kim composed lines and lyrics for Bari and rewrote the rest based on *King Lear*. His rewriting simplified the complexity of the poetry. For example, Lear's furious speech (3.2.1-24) was rewritten as a lyric for Uru's song. This is a good example as it shows how Kim abandoned the rhetoric of Shakespeare and exchanged it for plain and direct verse;

우루:

폭풍아 몰아쳐라. 사납게 휘몰아쳐라.
 어리석은 이 내 몸을 갈갈이 찢어라!
 검은 하늘을 가르는 번갯불이
 천지를 진동하는 뇌성벽력아!
 배은망덕한 자식을 만드는 계집의 뱃속을 불태워 버려라!
 천둥아 울려라! 폭우야 쏟아져라!
 오호라, 하늘에 신령들이 내 기원을 들으셨다.
 가슴속에 사악한 배신을 품고 사는 인간들아!
 무서운 신령들께 자비를 빌어라.

Uru:

Blow winds! Rage, blow!
 Tear apart, such a fool I am!
 Night-lighting thunderbolts,
 All-shaking thunder! (*sound of thunder*)

Burn the wombs of the bad women that produce ungrateful man!

Spit fire, spout rain! (*sound of rainfall*)

Praise heaven! Shillryeong¹⁰³ in heaven heard my petition!

You, I know you hide evil betrayal inside,

Pray mercy to the fearsome holy spirits!¹⁰⁴

(Lear: Blow, wind, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow,

You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout

Till you have drenched the steeples, drowned the cocks!

You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,

Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,

Singe my white head; and thou all-shaking thunder,

Smite flat the thick rotundity of the world,

Crack nature's mould, all germens spill at once

That make ingrateful man (Scene 9 1-9))

The whole script was written in a similar way to the quoted lines above. Kim interrupted every line of *King Lear* and inserted his own writing where he intentionally omitted Shakespeare's words. There were some lines directly translated from *King Lear*, yet those were just left in order to maintain the plot structure. Even those surviving lines were given different functions from the original tragedy. For example, Lear's line 'Are you our daughter?' (1.4.209) was spoken in a comic manner. When Uru spoke this, he formed the

¹⁰³ Literally, Shillryeong means 'holy spirit' yet it does not at all relate to the 'Holy Spirit' of Christianity.

¹⁰⁴ From the unpublished script of *King Uru*.

expression of a mischievous child. Gahwa responded to this line with contempt, ‘Father, do not forget you have a dignity as King!’ The audience laughed at this dialogue. The dialogue between Lear and the Fool about the ‘Seven Stars’ also appeared ludicrous. It seems that Kim took only the lines that could work in a comic manner. These pieces of dialogue had the potential to be used in a Korean context. Owing to such use of language and simplified character, it can be said, therefore, that *King Uru* was a comic adaptation of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*.

However, the comic atmosphere of *King Uru* juxtaposed with the serious supernatural powers belonging to the ‘Shillryeong in heaven’. Shillryeong refers to a Sky deity, known as the ‘great ruler of heaven’ (‘*okhwangsangje*’¹⁰⁵) in folk tales or shamanistic narratives. This could also be an allusion to the ‘*tao*’ (‘path’) or ‘The Mandate of Heaven’ in the contexts of Taoism and Confucianism. Whatever it refers to, the powerful supernatural agency in this performance was undoubtedly in control of the fortunes of the characters. There were several points at which this supernatural power was revealed – such as the eclipse during Uru’s abdication, which was a warning from the heaven. Uru’s line above shows that a spiritual power heard his petition to punish his daughters. The influence of this spiritual power also influenced the characterization. The characters never suffered from their flaws. For instance, King Uru did not think his fate was his own fault or a consequence of his sins. The characters did not reflect on their own deeds, but waited until a resolution came from above. This is in deep contrast with *King Lear*, in which no supernatural powers are dwelt upon.

Decisively, the supernatural power in *King Uru* was recalled during the shamanistic ritual at the end of the performance. In this scene, mediated by Bari, Shillryeong calls up all the dead characters on the stage and suddenly grants them the reconciliation with each other they were unable to achieve whilst alive.¹⁰⁶ This was the most important role of supernatural power in the performance. It turned the original tragedy into a tragicomedy with a hopeful ending. This depiction of a supernatural power derives from the conventions of traditional performances (especially *talchum* and *madangeuk*), in which a shamanic ritual is usually performed at the end. The purpose for the ritual is to bring a spirit of ‘*sinmyeong*’ (joyousness

¹⁰⁵ A Korean variation on the Chinese Supreme Divinity ‘Shangdi’.

¹⁰⁶ One would think this is similar to a ‘*deus-ex-machina*’, yet the production was closer to medieval religious dramas. Overall, it could be called a ‘shamanistic Lear’.

from being together), this normally brought out when the cast and audience mingle together in a dance at the end. Yet, the production strictly kept the barrier between the stage and the auditorium. The ritual in this production was pseudo ceremony (or theatricalizing of ritual), as it just required passive observation and not active participation. However, the pseudo ritual related to the main subject of *King Uru*.

Kim wanted to adapt *King Lear* into the context not only of Korea but of the East more generally.¹⁰⁷ By being 'Eastern', Kim intended that *King Uru* should represent an Eastern perspective that encompassed all East Asian views from the Chinese cultural belt (China, Japan, the Koreas, Taiwan and Vietnam). In the context of this ambitious aim, Kim's 'Eastern' perspective intended that the Shakespearean tragedy had to be interpreted according to the norms of traditional Korean art and, by means of that, the tragedy was reshaped and given a new theme: 'life and coexistence'. The theme referred to the resurrection and the reconciliation of the character's spirits at the end. The new theme contrasts with the concerns of *King Lear*, which was subjected to a deconstructive interpretation by Kim. A famous Korean philosopher Kim Yong-ok gave a good account of the production that the creator of *King Uru* would completely agree with:

리어왕은 남성적인 광기와 폭력과 야만과 배신을 주제로 하고 있다. 그러나 우루왕은 여성적인 모성과 희생과 탄생과 치유를 주제로 하고 있다. 바리는 인간의 욕정이 빚어내는 모든 폭력을 정화시키는 씻김굿의 상징이다. 우루왕의 클라이막스를 장식하는 안무도 해원상생의 상징이다.

King Lear was based on madness, violence, and treachery; those were the aspects of masculinity. Yet the idea of *King Uru* was sacrifice, birth and cure; those were feminine. Bari symbolizes a *sikimgut* that purges all the violence which came out of lust and desire. The dance during the final scene implied that there had been an 'overcoming of grudges and that the characters now lived in peace with each other'.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ In the publicity for the production, 'Eastern perspective' was highlighted. The phrase was repeated on their website and in the programme.

¹⁰⁸ Kim Yong-ok, 'Rebirth of the Ancient Roman Theatre in the Modern Era', *Moonwhailbo*, 12 June 2003.

The femininity of the production was also highlighted as a key theme in the publicity material for *King Uru*. According to the programme for the performance, the production is advertised on the basis that ‘femininity can save the world’. This indicates that Bari sacrificed herself for saving the people from their death and emancipating them from mutual hatred through the ritual. Yet, it should be noted that Kim did not intend to create an image of mysterious female, such as ‘veiled Oriental woman’ that stimulates voyeurism of Western male into Eastern women.¹⁰⁹ Bari was not intended to be a wondrous and mysterious figure in a visually and acoustically pleasing exotic performance for Western audience. Rather, it seemed that Kim wanted Bari to be clearly recognized as a shaman as spiritual saviour in any culture. Yet Bari played by an actress could not be seen even as a shaman at all. Even performed in Australia, a *gut* of a renowned Korean shaman (Kim Kum Hwa) was ‘consumed by her audience primarily as a form of popular spectacle’.¹¹⁰

Not many Korean critics reviewed *King Uru* positively. One critic (a specialist reporter), Kim Gap-sik from *The Donga-ilbo* newspaper, stated that ‘*King Uru* lacked a good story structure. The performance seemed like a sprinter who ran a 100m race’.¹¹¹ He pointed out that the performance simply juxtaposed the two stories (*King Lear* and the legend of Baridegi) in parallel. Kim So-yeon also pointed out the simple nature of this juxtaposition. She pointed out that ‘the performance lost any tension that could sustain the narrative by using this simple juxtaposition’, yet she positively commented on the spectacle of the *mise-en-scène* and music.¹¹² Choi Yeong-ju also stated that the plot of *King Uru* was ‘fluent’ in merging the two different stories. Yet, she felt that *King Uru* did not present the characters as having any psychological depth. However, Choi positively commented about the spectacular scale of the performance which combined all the National companies at NTOK on a single

¹⁰⁹ Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p 10.

¹¹⁰ Julie Holledge and Joanne Tompkins, *Women's Intercultural Performance* (London: Routledge, 2000), p72.

¹¹¹ Kim Gap-sik, ‘Review: *King Uru*’, *Dongailbo*, 19 December 2000.

¹¹² Kim So-yeon, ‘Review: *King Uru*’, *Chungdaeshinmun*, 3 September 2002.

stage.¹¹³ Likewise, generally speaking, Korean theatre critics were positive towards the attempt to create a Korean spectacle; yet, the adaptation was not really welcomed.

King Uru was not a success in attracting a domestic audience. The production was put on the main stage (Haeoreum, 1,563 seats) at NTOK and was included in several local festivals that were subsidised by the government. The director intended to attract both musical fans, who do not always wish to attend ‘serious’ performance, and theatre audiences, who willingly attend performance of Shakespeare’s play. However, *King Uru* was not such a hit as the small number of articles and reviews shows. It could not draw any wide interest from the general public and diverse theatregoers. The musical fans, who favoured Western musicals, could not be impressed by the production, because it lacked of star actors, catchy Western-style music and refined choreography. And those who wanted to see *King Lear* would have noticed the production had deliberately discarded the most important elements of Shakespeare: the subject and the poetry. On the other hand, *King Uru* travelled around the world thanks to the power of NTOK, which was then creating a network of national theatres across the world. In addition, the production’s ‘Koreanness’ attracted the attention of international festivals. In 2002, the production was initially invited by the City of Osaka for an event to celebrate World Cup 2002, which was co-hosted by South Korea and Japan. Then, *King Uru* opened the Israel Festival 2002 at Jerusalem, and, afterwards, was invited by Festival Ibero Americano de Teatro de Bogota (2002), Colombia. The production also visited the Netherlands (2003). This was to celebrate a Dutch sailor, Hendrick Hamel (1630-1692), who had been shipwrecked on the shores of Korea in the seventeenth century and who wrote the first book () written by a Westerner on Korea. Then the production was also staged at an ancient Roman amphitheatre at Antalya, Turkey (2003). Then finally, *King Uru* was invited by the International Carthage Festival, Tunisia (2004). Prior to Yohangza’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *King Uru* was the only Korean Shakespeare performance to travel across such a diverse range of cultural regions –from South America to Africa.

The foreign interest in *King Uru* derived from its exotic spectacle and, also, its Eastern perspective. The artistic director of the Israel Festival commented that he had invited the production due to its theme of ‘coexistence’. He said that ‘the production is most proper

¹¹³ Choi Yeong-ju, *Writing my Love for Theatre* (Seoul: Jiseongeusam, 2008), p. 301.

to our festival this year, whose theme is harmony and humanities and we have been too focused on Western arts, so it is a good turn around'.¹¹⁴ To Kim's delight, the president of the festival even remarked that the 'Korean legend and Shakespearean story are well arranged here, the conflict between Solji and Eulji reminded me of the story of Jacob in the Old Testament. I am impressed by the finale, which cries out [for] peace'.¹¹⁵ It seems that Kim's intentions were well-received by the Israelis. However, the Turkish reporters were primarily impressed by songs and dances and did not eagerly talk about the theme of 'coexistence'.¹¹⁶ It was also reported that Tunisian and Colombian audiences marvelled at the Korean spectacle.¹¹⁷ *King Uru* contributed to the spread of Korean culture around Tunisia, where Korea was only known as an industrialised Eastern country that contained Samsung Electronics and Hyundai Motor Company.

King Uru succeeded in achieving one objective: introducing Korean culture around the globe. The spectacle is surely attractive to foreign audiences. However, this one-off production did not continue to travel around the world. More importantly, it was staged in neither famous theatre festivals such as in Edinburgh or Avignon, nor in the world's great theatre centres such as New York, Paris, Berlin, or London where a production could have a huge cultural impact, which could lead to both public and scholarly interest from the Western universities. To be frank, *King Uru* just travelled to peripheral areas in the world of theatre. In addition, the production was ignored by the English speaking countries, where the audience would have been able to tell how *King Uru* opened another dimension of Shakespearean interpretation, as Ninagawa Yukio had done with his *Macbeth*. In fact, the production was fantastic in terms of its visual spectacle and rich Korean music. Yet, it is not clear whether the Eastern perspective of feminine sacrifice left as big an impact as hoped. Kim also admitted that he failed to produce 'a great work that can represent South Korea', when he retired from being the president of NTOK.¹¹⁸ The legacy of *King Uru* has been the creation of a new genre 'gukak musical'. New *pansori* or *changguk* companies now use this name to attract

¹¹⁴ An anonymous reporter, 'Israel praise for *King Uru*', *Maeil Business Newspaper*, 27 May 2002.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Kim Yong-ok, 'Rebirth of the Ancient Roman Theatre in the Modern Era', *Moonwhailbo*, 12 June 2003.

¹¹⁷ Kim Young-beon, 'Korean theatre welcomed by the World', *Moonwhailbo*, 22 July 2004.

¹¹⁸ Kim-ki, 'Interview with Kim Myeong-kon', *Ohmynews*, 14 December 2005.

contemporary audiences. Also, NCCOK's *Romeo and Juliet* derived much encouragement for its adaption thanks to their experience with *King Uru*. Kim seems to continue to pursue his dream of creating a national marvel under his belief in Nationalist theatre. He wrote and directed *Ophelia*, a musical adaptation of *Hamlet*, was staged at the Sejong Centre in May 2014. Yet the musical *Ophelia* did not combine the Shakespearean tragedy with traditional performances.

In summary, *King Uru* lacked consistency in its style and logic; it was just a large, lavish combination of traditional performances and modernized Korean theatre. It might be argued that *King Uru* indicates nostalgia for a pre-industrial past, when 'unscientific' shamanism ruled spiritual aspect of life. Moreover, *King Uru* can also be seen as a good Confucian ethic lesson for Korean younger generations. Bari was presented as an ideal daughter who protected her father, regardless of whether he himself was good or bad. *King Uru* was a one-off extravagance to produce an illusory representative performance from Kim's nationalistic ambition. When Kim resigned from his position at NTOK, *King Uru* was never staged again. By comparison, Oh Tae-suk and his theatre company Mokwha at least fully developed their logic and method in adapting Shakespeare's most famous tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*. Whether intended or not, Mokwha's rendition of the famous tragedy has been acknowledged as representative of Korean culture on the international stage, a status Kim failed to obtain.

Chapter 4

Mokwha's *Romeo and Juliet*

Oh Tae-Suk (born 1940) and Mokwha

Oh Tae-Suk is a prolific playwright and has been the sole head of the Mokwha theatre company. Having written more than twenty plays in his career, Oh is regarded as one of the greatest playwrights and directors in South Korea. After studying philosophy at Yonsei University, he started his theatre career in the late 1960s when Western expressionist drama and the Theatre of the Absurd were introduced into Korea. His early drama, *Ottogi Riding Roller-Skate* (1970), displayed the influence of Absurdist works by writers such as Samuel Beckett or Eugene Ionesco. Notably, Oh's work is not simply modelled on Western drama; as can be seen even from his earliest writings he paid close attention to the theatrical traditions of Korea. For instance, Oh adapted Molière's *Les Fourberies de Scapin* into a *talchum* performance under the title of *Soetookinori* (Soetooki Play) (1972). His most famous plays, *Tae* (1974), *Bicycle* (1983), and *Moonlight over Baekma River* (1993), took their sources and themes from Korean history. He has been teaching playwriting at the Seoul Institute of the Arts where he is Professor, and has also served as an artistic director for the National Theatre Company of Korea in 2009.

The Mokwha Theatre Company was founded by Oh in 1984. Mokwha means 'cotton flower', and the company has the following motto: 'Engage the theatre as if you were fabricating cotton at a spinning-wheel'.¹¹⁹ Mokwha's efforts have largely been devoted to staging Oh's plays and so the company functions, in effect, as his own private theatre company. Oh seems distinctly uninterested in directing the work of other playwrights, whether Korean or foreign. The only exceptions to this so far have been three Shakespearean plays (*Romeo and Juliet* (1995, 2001), *Macbeth* (2007), *The Tempest* (2010)) and A

¹¹⁹ Their motto is shown in their website, <http://www.mokwha.co.kr/> accessed 21 November 2010.

Threepenny Opera (1996) by Bertolt Brecht. While their Shakespearean productions have formed part of their regular repertoire, *A Threepenny Opera* was simply a one-off production. Mokwha's *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest* have been frequently invited to perform in foreign countries. Their *Romeo and Juliet* was staged in England 2006 at the Barbican Centre and, in 2010, at the Rose Theatre, Kingston. *The Tempest* was officially invited to the Edinburgh International Festival in 2011. Only their version of *Macbeth* has failed to make this transition abroad.

Mokwha and Oh have been praised for pioneering the rejuvenation of Korean theatrical traditions within the field of a more modern, Westernized theatre. Before Mokwha, there have been many attempts to transfer Korean traditional theatre into a modern context. Yet such efforts hardly amounted to more than the superficial borrowing of particular narratives or styles. Oh did not just make use of isolated elements taken from traditional theatre but instead devised a comprehensive approach toward understanding its legacy: he developed his own acting methods, modes of eye-contact with the audience, and barefoot performance styles. His task was to revivify and enrich Korean traditional theatre through the forms that he was inventing. In regard to his thematic concerns, Oh has been praised for challenging the modern history of Korea. Yet, despite his impassioned recovery of native dramatic forms, Oh did not entirely discard Western theatre. Consequently, his productions normally give the impression of being neither an authentic, traditional art-form nor a wholly Western form of theatre. It can be said that Oh adapted Korean traditional theatre in the context of Western influence in a way that balanced the characteristics of both.

Oh's achievement derived from his freedom from formal training and rules: Oh is a self-taught playwright and director. He did not receive any theatrical or dramatic training based on Western theatre. Nor was he trained by any Korean traditional theatre masters. Reflecting on this fact, Oh has stated that the main influences on him were: 'my hometown, grandmother, the *Five Pansori Madang* and the Korean novelists of the 1930s'.¹²⁰ As a result, his works are normally retrospective in tone, presenting what Korea had lost during its rapid Westernisation after the Korean War. Oh has further stated that his ultimate theatrical goal is

¹²⁰ Seo Yeon-Ho, *Dialogue with Tae-Suk Oh: 40 years of experiment* (Seoul: Theatre and Man, 2002), p. 237. The Five Pansori Madang refers to the surviving five pansori repertoires: *Chunhyangga*, *Sugungga*, *Jeokbyeokga*, *Heungboga* and *Shimcheongga*.

to search for those aspects of the Korean language that have been lost.¹²¹ It is Oh's belief that Koreans lost a deep grasp of their own language during the Japanese occupation and as a result had also come to lose the fundamental ideas of their own culture. Therefore, his task is to restore to health an original Korean mentality. Given this culturally-located endeavour, it is not surprising that Oh believed that Western forms of theatre could not efficiently convey the Korean psyche. Nonetheless, this project was daunting to him at first, and he had also initially lacked confidence in traditional Korean theatre because, until the 1970s, it had been so roundly dismissed as an art-form.

His confidence in traditional Korean theatre, ironically enough, was gained by his experience of East European theatre. During his government-funded first visit to New York in 1979, Oh watched *Dead Class* by Tadeusz Kantor, and the experience deeply changed his attitude towards traditional Korean theatre.¹²² Before the visit, Oh had been reflecting on what the authentic root of Korean theatre was, but he had been unable to resolve this question and so was left in a position of great doubt as to which direction he should move in. Observing the similarity between *Dead Class* and *talchum*, he recognized that the various forms of Korean traditional theatre were indeed the authentic roots of modern Korean theatre. The similarity between *Dead Class* and Korean traditional performance was to be found in a resolutely unrealistic form of theatre. Oh reflected that, 'In *Dead Class*, there was no proscenium arch, thirteen actors ran like basketball players. I instantly felt that this is our *talchum*. Their acting style, dramatic ground was none other than our *talchum*'.¹²³ This released Oh from his long-held sense of inferiority to those who had studied theatre in the US. It was widely believed that those who studied theatre in the US were doing 'genuine' theatre, as theatre itself originated in the West. When Oh came to New York, he recognized that non-illusionistic theatre could serve as the proper means to connect himself to the traditions of his homeland, and he could confidently believe that he was working in a valuable form of theatre. He expressed this moment in the following terms: 'Through this cultural prism, I see clearly

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p. 241.

¹²² In between the 1960s and the 1970s, the Korean government funded theatre artists' visits to New York to learn Western theatre. Mostly, the chosen directors studied theatre at La Mama Theatre, Off-Broadway.

¹²³ Seo, p. 220

that what we received from our past was something great'.¹²⁴ The New York experience gave Oh a concrete self-belief in the power and importance of traditional Korean theatre. With this confidence in Korean heritage, Oh established Mokwha and, at the same time, set out to develop his own theatrical methods and dramatic language.

Mokwha is famous for its very distinctive styles of speech that explore metre and dialect. Dramatic language on the Korean stage has normally employed a slightly exaggerated form of everyday speech, such as is heard in realist drama. Oh attempted to transfer the three and four metre system of classical Korean poetry into his dialogue. This poetic metre depends on the number of syllables. For example, 'Jan/deul/go Hon/ja/an/ja Meon/moe/reul Ba/ra/bo/ni' (from *Sanjungsingok (New Songs from the Mountain)*, 1642, written by Yun Seon-do). This imposes a very rigid set of rules for composing poetry, which was also mainly written in Chinese and sometimes mixed with Korean letters (known as Hangeul). Yet, because of the influence of Western literature, such strict formal rules had been discarded in the modern forms of Korean poetry and there had also been a concomitant turn away from the use of Chinese too. Oh adopted the classical style of poetry, but he used Korean letters.

In addition, Oh ruled that all the speeches should be spoken in Chungcheong dialect. Chungcheong is located in the middle-west part of South Korea. The region is famous for the slow tempo of its dialect. Oh is not a native to the region; he was born in Seoul – but he was evacuated to Chungcheong for three years during the Korean War. However, the Chungcheong dialect has normally been used as a source of humour due to its slowness. Therefore, it could be risky to employ this as the primary form of dramatic speech, as it would likely provoke instant laughter from the audience. Highly aware of this situation, it was just such a reaction from the audience that Oh seems to have been intending. He explained his use of this dialect in the following way: 'it was a shame that dialect was rarely used and that the language of Seoul dominated the stage ... when a dialect is heard on the stage, it creates a gap. This cuts the distance between the audience and the stage. Then, the audience might feel that they are talking with themselves'.¹²⁵ In short, the creation of such a

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 221

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 246.

gap seems to comfort the audience with familiar humour. However, such use of dialect is one of the important factors that differentiate Mokwha from other companies; it is very rare to use any dialect in Korean theatre.

By establishing Mokwha, Oh developed an acting method far from the realistic acting styles that were dominating Korean theatre at the time. His method involved eye-contact with the audience, and his actors performing bare foot. These traits seem to derive from the behaviour of Korean people in rural villages, where traditional culture is relatively preserved and influential. The importance of making eye-contact is said to come from Oh's observation of the behaviour of Korean farmers. In their conversation during their daily labour, they used to stare at remote mountains rather than watch each other. Oh also recognized that to go barefoot was a way that people traditionally touched the earth.¹²⁶ He believes that the energy of the earth flows from the bottom of the body to the head. Such energy is the basic source of movement in our body. Oh emphasised that this energy is also particularly related to the voices of the actors. Such a theory is derived from the philosophy of Korean Confucianism, where this form of energy is called *ki* (from the Chinese '*chi*') and is said to be the fundamental power that shapes and guides the universe. Even though his theories appear to allude to this Confucian background, Oh has never mentioned the relevance of this philosophy to his method. It is perhaps more plausible that Oh had taken this idea from the common practice of traditional performers in Korea who will go barefoot if they need to dance.

Along with these methods, Oh has cultivated four theatrical features in Mokwha's productions: 'lacuna, saltation (leap), hap (fortuity) and improvisation.'¹²⁷ These features have all been drawn from traditional Korean performance arts. Oh observed that 'Korean spectacles consist of numerous leaps in plot, time, setting, logic, a breaking beyond the fourth wall so that the spectators can draw the most fun out of the performance when they imagine something to fill the leaps'.¹²⁸ In order to recreate the leaps, Oh particularly used 'eye-contact'. He explains:

¹²⁶ Oh Tae-suk, during his talk with the audience at Rose Theatre (Kingston), 24 July 2010.

¹²⁷ From another Mokwha website <<http://www.aroong.com/>> accessed 10 December 2010. The four terms are written in English, possibly a translation of one of the Mokwha members.

¹²⁸ Seo, p. 11.

우리 연극에서는 시선이 끊임없이 객석으로 와서 관객을 자꾸 끌어들이라는 말이죠. 관객을 자기 쪽으로 잡아당긴다. 말하자면 적극적으로 봐달라고 권유하는 건데, 적극적으로 봐달라는 이야기는 배우가 관객한테 ‘내가 지금 굉장히 많은 부분을 생략하고 비약하고 있으니까 그것을 당신이 채워야 된다. 채우면서 봐야 재미있다’ 이런 말을 자꾸 하는 겁니다. 딱테다 눈을 주면 안 된다. 나만 보고 있어라. 왜 봐야 되느냐, 조금 전에 이야기한 틈새를 메꾸고 이어주고 그러려면 집중하지 않으면 안 돼지요. 그러면 자연히 배우와 관객 사이에 소위 넘나들, 피차간에 참견할 수 있는 여지가 생긴다는 말이죠.

In Korean traditional theatre, actors look at the audience in order to draw them into the stage. To draw, what I mean, is to say ‘look at me’. In doing this, actors are talking to the audience, ‘I am omitting and leaping-off many things, you need to fill-in those. This is the way you will be enjoying the performance more.’ And also, ‘Do focus on me, just me’. Why are the actors saying this? It is because the audience should fill the lacuna and connect with the performance. Therefore the audience should concentrate on the performance. Then, as a matter of course, an interaction will occur when performer and audience can tease each other.¹²⁹

This indicates that the performance is suddenly being cut off by the actors’ ‘improvisation’ or ‘saltation (leap)’. Then, there should be a ‘lacuna’ in the audience’s perception of the performance. The actors are looking at the audience and asking them with their eyes to fill the ‘lacuna’. The audience cannot then just sit on their seats, they will need to engage with the performance, otherwise they will feel uncomfortable. Oh does not insist that the interaction between the stage and the audience should be physical, as it is in traditional performances

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 284-285. At the start of this quotation, Oh said ‘our theatre’. In this context, his ‘our theatre’ obviously indicates traditional Korean theatre that showed such an audience relationship.

where audiences are encouraged to dance and sing together with the performers. Rather, the interaction that Oh is seeking is that the audience should be active in reconstructing a hidden meaning from what is being seen on the stage.¹³⁰ In this sense, the theatrical experience of the audience is only completed when they imagine what can be ‘filled-in’ in the given ‘lacuna’. Oh declared that ‘lacuna’ is the decisive feature of Korean traditional theatre. He argued that ‘Our ancestors must have been able to produce a highly stylised theatre like Noh or Kabuki. They simply did not want to do this because they hated any kind of mould that could confine them. A rigid form like Noh would not produce lacuna in which *heung* (inspiration) comes up.’¹³¹

Oh has also borrowed his concept of theatrical space from traditional Korean theatre. He has pointed out that the height of a traditional Korean stage is much lower than the Western proscenium stage.¹³² According to him, the Western stage has a ‘middle height’ that does not exist in Korean traditional theatre.¹³³ The ‘middle height’ indicates a height made when a person sits on a chair or lies on a bed. The ‘middle height’ induces social tension as it is socially predetermined. Yet Koreans traditionally either stood or sat on the floor. Therefore, from a Korean perspective, virtually any theatrical idea can be well expressed either through sitting on the floor or standing. Thus, Oh aimed to get rid of the ‘middle height’ when he established Mokwha. Since then, the actors of Mokwha have never made a gesture that could relate to the ‘middle height’. This logically affected the kinds of properties employed and the ways that they were used. The theatre company has never used a chair or a bed. Oh’s idea of height seems to have derived from traditional venues where an everyday space was temporarily taken over as a theatrical venue. In this sense, there was no visible border between the stage and the audience. In such a situation, Oh tells us, the audience and the actors ‘do not confront each other by being divided into spectator and performer’; rather ‘they actively interfere with each other’.¹³⁴ Oh has said that the standard space for Korean

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 13.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, p. 215. Such claim is not just Oh’s; the unique relationship between the audience and the performers has been argued for a decisive feature of Korean traditional theatre by many scholars.

¹³² *Ibid*, p. 10.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p. 276.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 306.

theatre should be the yard (*madang*) used in *talchum*.¹³⁵ So, he preferred Mokwha to perform in small theatres where he could rearrange the space for his own work, and where the distance between the stage and the audience would be the smallest.

It is natural that Oh focused on the comic nature (*'haehak'*) of traditional Korean theatre as he borrowed, or adopted, most elements from it. Belonging to one of the earliest generations of post-war (the Korean War) theatre practitioners, Oh had thought that theatre was fundamentally a serious and sentimental art-form. This perspective derived from the dominance of *singeuk* theatre during the period of Japanese occupation. *Singeuk* theatre specifically intended to provoke tears from the audience with its very sad stories that reflected the colonial reality of Korea. It was a common belief that drama provoked weeping and that the theatre was a place to which one needed to bring a handkerchief. Under these circumstances, it was the general view of drama that characters always faced a miserable fate from which they could never escape. In virtually all performances the characters were shown to be defeated by events; watching such misery aroused the emotion of *han* (literally 'grief'). *Han* is in fact widely acknowledged as a distinct communal mentality among Koreans who endured the hardships of the 20th Century. Theatre was the place where the audience gathered and experienced this emotion together. This view of the essentially melancholy nature of the theatre continued until the 1960s, so that the young Oh must also have readily assimilated it. Interestingly, Oh later came to think that the arousal of grief in the theatre should not be seen as part of a distinctly Korean mood or attitude. Instead, he argues:

나는 우는 것은 한이 아니라고 생각해요. 울 수 있는 것, 그건 곡이죠. 그걸 넘어서서 웃고 있을 때, 그때가 한이라는 이야기죠. 한을, 꼭 통곡하고 쥐어짜는 것으로만 생각하지 않는다고.

I oppose the idea of *han* as shedding tears. Weeping should not be *han*. *Han* is felt by laughter that comes up when grief is subjugated. Weeping or wailing is not *han* at all. *Han* is conquering the wailings.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 307.

Oh pointed out that when farmers suffer from their hard work, they sing an erotic song to conquer the hardship.¹³⁷ The farmers' wisdom lies in their sense of humour. *Han* arises in this context.

Another important and illuminating example of the experience of *han* is to be found in the traditional Korean funeral ceremony. It is observed that a Korean funeral, which would normally take three days, did not at any point have a solemn atmosphere; indeed, it even used to involve a humorous performance. The performance was prepared to amuse guests who were suffering from having to attend the funeral for such a long time. In light of this phenomenon, it is clear why Oh seems to make use of a concept of *han* that does not oppose the comic nature of traditional Korean theatre. This is one of the most important elements of his theatrical *oeuvre* and his direction. It is well known that Oh teaches and applies the concept 'spirit of play' to the performers under his direction. 'Spirit of play' is mainly embodied in mischievous behaviours of the characters and humorous gestures in the Korean traditional theatres, where a comic atmosphere dominates. Oh used to state that 'spirit of play' is a fundamental in Korean acting.¹³⁸

By developing such an alternative notion of *han*, we begin to see how Oh has consistently challenged Korean people's assumptions about the theatre. The theatre can no longer be encountered simply as a place where an actor exaggerates his speech and deals with a serious subject. Oh's work does not simply transfer the traditional theatre into the modern stage; he has *adapted* traditional theatre to a modern context. If Oh began with the modern Westernised Korean theatre, he nonetheless returned to its native Korean roots. To be clear, though, Mokwha's performance is not traditional theatre. While one can undoubtedly trace the similarities it is not simply reducible to these origins. Oh never wanted to simply copy traditional theatre or mix it with Western theatre. Instead, he has built upon the key elements of traditional theatre and contextualised it within the horizon of the present. Oh explains his task of reinventing or rediscovering traditional theatre:

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 214.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 214-15.

¹³⁸ From the actors who worked with Oh.

In a way, my job is to be a translator between tradition and younger audiences. The level of accomplishment attained by professional shamans and professional dancers—traditional dancers—is one-sided, so it is difficult for them to connect with young audiences. So, in a way, my job is to select and extract good elements, useful elements from the tradition—and bring them in a more fun-like, more exhilarating and in a more prosaic way to the audiences. My job is like that of a translator.¹³⁹

From this position, Oh clarifies his relation to the notion of tradition: ‘I don’t believe that changing or destroying tradition is a way of modernizing tradition ... I believe the job of the theatre is to bring the tradition closer to the young audiences so that they will rediscover their tradition.’¹⁴⁰ It is clear that Oh has re-interpreted traditional Korean theatre and reinvented it on the modern stage according to his own aesthetic taste that still makes use of Western stagecraft. This can be said to be the modern imagination of traditional Korea. Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* was perhaps then the most suitable material that could be used for Oh’s task, as the fate of the two young lovers has been much adored by many young people in Korea.

Romeo and Juliet (1995 and 2001)

When Oh decided to stage *Romeo and Juliet* again, he felt that it was worth attempting the adaptation of this Western classic into a Korean context.¹⁴¹ At the time he had a clear reason for doing this; Oh lamented the current corruption of the Korean language due to the prevalent use of the internet and phone texting amongst the young generation. The richness of Shakespearean language should, he hoped, help to revive the power of the Korean poetic language. Yet, he did not just transfer Shakespeare’s language onto the stage. Oh declared that

¹³⁹ Quoted from Maria Shevtsova, ‘Cross-cultural Fields: Korean Shakespeare Productions in Global Context’, in *Glocalizing Shakespeare in Korea and Beyond*, ed. by Lee Hyon-u (Seoul: Donging Publishers, 2009), pp. 157-78 (p. 167).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 168.

¹⁴¹ Hyeon Yun-gyeong, ‘Oh Goes to the UK’, *Yonhapnews*, 17 November 2006.

‘Our Shakespeare translations, and the performances of them, have been academic renditions mediated by the scholars’ perspectives. Shakespeare’s plays need not be as difficult to understand and stage as the translations have made them. These texts were originally meant for an audience who just went out for shopping and drinking’.¹⁴² Therefore the goal of Oh here was to show his perspective on a genuinely ‘theatrical’ experience of Shakespeare: ‘A Korean Shakespeare should have a conversational form rather than ...be like hearing a tale in a warm room’.¹⁴³

Therefore, Oh attempted to revive a genuine performance of Shakespeare’s work on the Korean stage. Yet, in his 1995 production, Oh seemed to simply copy the performances at Shakespeare’s Globe, which he tried to defend with the excuse that he wanted to imagine how the performance was in Shakespeare’s own time. He claimed that Shakespeare was able to write so many scenes with confidence that the audience would have understood the scene changes.¹⁴⁴ This suggested to Oh that interaction between the stage and the audience was also not just a distinct feature of East Asian theatre but had parallels with elements of the West’s dramatic heritage too. Therefore, for Oh, to take on Shakespeare would also mean engaging with Korean theatre. Regardless of this attempt at justification, and even though Oh changed the ending from reconciliation to massacre (with the purpose of highlighting the enduring hate between the two families), the production was nothing more than an imitation of performances at the Globe (especially in terms of its scenography and costume-design). Consequently, the production did not achieve what Oh had been expecting it would.

In 2001, he radically reformed the production and presented a more ‘Koreanized’ *Romeo and Juliet*. Since the first performance, this production has become a main stay of Mokwha’s repertoire, being staged almost every year on either a Korean or an international stage. Mokwha’s *Romeo and Juliet* was one of two Korean Shakespeare performances (the other being Yohangza’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*) that travelled around the world thanks to its visual spectacle and comic nature.

¹⁴² Hyeon Yun-gyeong, ‘Oh Takes on Shakespeare’, *Yonhapnews*, 16 October 2007.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Seo, p. 270.

The script for the production was adapted by Oh.¹⁴⁵ It seems that Oh did not translate the English text for himself; rather he just rearranged a previous translation. The story structure of the original was maintained except for the ending (in which the two families now killed each other). In early productions the characters were given Korean names; the surname Gu was given to the Capulets and the family name Moon was given to the Montagues. Yet, in the later performances that I attended, the characters became anonymous and referred to each other with nicknames or generic forms of address such as ‘*doryeong*’ (unmarried gentleman) and ‘*agassi*’ (lady). The use of nameless characters is a feature of traditional Korean theatre where the characters represented different elements of contemporary society. In this production, under the premise that the audience would recognise the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, Oh intentionally abandoned the use of names in order to transfer the atmosphere of traditional Korean theatre onto the stage. This resulted in the audience being less emotionally involved with the characters.

One major feature of the production was the focus on the musical element of Korean language. Oh himself remarked that he intended to enhance the musicality of the language when he had written the script.¹⁴⁶ In doing so, Oh used three and four, or, four and four, metre (Korean traditional rhyme) to make the lines be heard poetically. He also attempted to compose a poem in the style of Korean classical poetry. For instance, a famous ancient poem ‘Gasiri’ (‘Will you go away?’) was rewritten by Oh. When Romeo and the Nurse discuss the wedding, the ensemble began to sing. Oh wrote this using a four and four metre.

모두:

가시리 가시릿고 (Ga/si/ri/i Ga/si/rit/go)

바리고오 가시릿고 (Ba/ri/go/oh Ga/si/rit/go)

날러느은 어찌살고 (Nal/reo/neu/eun Eo/zi/sal/go)

¹⁴⁵ The script was exclusively sold to the audiences at venue. It includes an English re-translation of the script. Kim Ah-jeong and Paul Matthews are the co-translators. My quotations from the script are from their translation.

¹⁴⁶ Seo Hyeon-ju, ‘Korean Romeo and Juliet in Japan’, *Yonhapnews*, 17 July 2006.

바리고오 가시릿고 (Ba/ri/go/oh Ga/si/rit/go)

All (singing)

Would you go away, away now?

Abandon me, abandon me?

How shall I, how shall I live now?

If you go, you go away.

The audience would not fail to recognise the famous classical poem that was being borrowed here as it is standardly taught in Korean high schools. Here, Oh's strategy is clearly to demonstrate the beauty of the Korean language and to accentuate the sad atmosphere. However, it needs to be pointed out that Oh is here not only adapting a Shakespearean tragedy but also a Korean classic. Yet it was somewhat awkward to combine the two. The poem has nothing to do with the Shakespearean tragedy and could even hinder the consistency of the plot.

Oh felt very free to add his own figurative language to the production. Thus, for example, when Romeo falls in love with Juliet, Oh added an erotic allusion to be issued by Mercutio in a mocking tone: 'At her inner thigh, there is a pomegranate, a pomegranate opens its mouth and is waiting for you!' In this line, 'pomegranate' is a clear reference to female genitalia. This particular figure of speech is not a reference to Korean literature, but a sheer invention of Oh. The whole script was written in this way: what he wrote in Korean was not really a genuine reflection of traditional Korean culture. Thus, Shakespeare's poetic language was largely removed and replaced with Oh's writing, though some original lines still maintained in the script. For instance, the reference to the 'sin and kiss' between Romeo and Juliet survived, although any reference to pilgrimage was removed. Yet, such surviving lines were always intermingled with Oh's own writing.

My documentation here describes the two most recent performances of Oh's *Romeo and Juliet* at the Drama Centre (now Namsan Arts Centre), Seoul, South Korea (20 October 2007) and the Rose Theatre Kingston, UK (16 July 2009). The Seoul venue has 480 seats,

and the size of the Seoul venue is smaller than that of the Rose Theatre (899 seats). However, both could be said to be an ideal venue for the production, for its thrust stage and for encouraging audience involvement. The performance ran to ninety minutes without any interval. The cast consisted of six middle-aged actors and about ten younger actors. The older actors naturally played the older characters: Capulet, his wife, Montague, his wife, the Duke, Friar Laurence, his fellow priest, the Nurse. The younger actors played Romeo, Juliet, Mercutio and Tybalt. And other young actors played the ensemble, without being assigned specific characters. Romeo (played by Kim Byeong-cheol) and Juliet (played by Kim Moon-jeong) looked young and attractive according to classically Korean standards of beauty. Consequently, they do not look like the tragic couple whom the contemporary audience would imagine (see Figure 35 and 36). The omission of several minor characters served to create lacunae in the plot. For instance, the exiled Romeo read a letter that informed him of Juliet's death, but the sender of the letter was not identified.

The costumes suggested that the performance was set in the late period of the Joseon Dynasty or the early years of the Japanese occupation, both were the eras of transition between pre-modern and modern society. The presence of two Christian priests also suggested that this was the production's setting (under the rule of the Joseon Dynasty, Christianity had been forbidden until the late nineteenth century). The stage had a big round yellow grass carpet in the middle of a wooden floor. The grass carpet seemed to be designed to accommodate the actors who were working barefoot. This feature also helped in transforming the modern stage to look like a traditional theatre space. Upstage, there was a wall in the shape of a Korean *yangban* (nobleman) house, *kiwagip*. At first sight, the stage seemed to be an imitation of the Korean traditional stage's *madang*. The audience could see the stage as soon as they entered the theatre. There was a small ramp connecting the auditorium and the stage.



Figure 22. Romeo (played by Kim Byeong-cheol) and Juliet (played by Kim Mun-jeong) (left).

Figure 23. Romeo and Juliet in a popular musical version (2003, right)



Figure 23. Party at the Capulet house

The performance began with a sword dance featuring actors in green (Montague) and brown (Capulet) dresses. The sword dance had in fact been a form of entertainment at the Korean royal court in the past. Here the sword dance was originally just a part of Mokwha's rehearsal process, but it was soon included in the performance itself. The background music to the dance was melancholy, which does not fit the dance's gestures very well. It predicted

that the performance would present a sad story. Accordingly, the overall tone of the beginning scene was dark. The bleak atmosphere of the opening was suddenly eclipsed by the spectacular dancing scene, the party of the Capulets. This sudden switch of atmosphere seemed to employ the ‘saltation’ method of the company. The dance and its music derived from Korean masked dances and *nongack* (farmers’s music). Actors played instruments (chiefly hand-held drums) during the performance. In this scene, the actors attempted to involve the audience in the performance. In the Korean venue, the actors put on the masks of animals representative of the twelve animals of the Chinese Zodiac. They came to individual audience-members and asked when they were born before giving them a small gift. At the Rose Theatre, the actors gave fans to the audience, as it was summertime. Yet, it was noticeable that on the British stage the actors and the audience did not interact very well due to the language barrier and the audience’s expectation. Presumably, the audience at the Rose Theatre would not have expected the actors to come down the stage and talk to them.

The pleasant atmosphere of the dancing scene was succeeded by the sexual joking of the characters, a development that immediately broke the audience’s expectations about seeing a pure love story. When Romeo saw Juliet, he declared: ‘I will cut off her hair knot’. In the Joseon dynasty, women always wrapped their hair into a knot. On the first night of marriage, men untied the knot. This act therefore became the symbol of marriage, yet also a reference to the first sexual experiences for women in Confucian society. Therefore, Romeo’s line could be considered vulgar, because, educated *yangban* men and women in the Joseon Dynasty were not allowed to experience sex before marriage. In this scene Romeo is criticized for being a womanizer by his friends. The use of this sexual expression seems to create a lively atmosphere, evoking the bustling freedom of a market place. There is, however, precedent for this kind of ribald performance in Korean history which Oh is likely to have borrowed from *talchum* that always included both references to sex and actual simulations of sex, as the traditional theatre need to grab the attention of its transitory audience.

The following scene enhanced the laughter. One of the most romantic scenes in theatre history, the first encounter between Romeo and Juliet was here filled with funny acts and laughter. They kissed each other in the middle of a group dance. The kiss itself was not seen by the audience. However, the other characters reacted to it in an exaggerated manner. When Romeo said ‘Give me my sin again’, a young man passed and said ‘Don’t talk too

much'. When Juliet said Romeo's line 'Thus from my lips, by thine, my sin is purged', all the actresses on the stage repeated the line. This could give an impression that not only were they young and shy, but that they were being playful. The laughter continued when Romeo came to know whose daughter Juliet was. He laughed and jumped, saying 'My life is my foe's debt'. There was no experience of despair or upset, Romeo here seemed to enjoy his bad fortune.

When Juliet was informed of Romeo's family, she did not show any grief either. She took a sword and began to sing with a simple sword dance, which could be a sinister sign. Juliet also spoke the line 'doff thy name' with the sword. She seemed not to be a tender girl but a very strong woman. Later, she even rode on Romeo's back and gave him a tip. And she boldly asked Romeo to marry 'Marry me! And leave here and go to somewhere'. However, this might disrupt the tragic moment of the text. In many other performances, Juliet's suicide would frighten the audience, as they would be thinking Juliet would not perform such a brutal act. Yet here, Juliet says to her mother 'let me die, then you will regret it!' Juliet then takes out a silver dagger and puts it around her neck. The silver dagger (*eunjangdo*) was a typical weapon of self-defence for women in the Joseon Dynasty. It was a symbol of women's fidelity, as a woman would stab herself if threatened with rape. Yet, as can be seen, the production is using the *eunjangdo* in the wrong context, potentially making Korean audiences laugh at the incongruity. However, the British audience also laughed at the sword, as it looked like a toy to them. Likewise, death continuously aroused laughter from the audience. This continued in the performance. When the Nurse came to the young men and asked where Romeo was, Mercutio joked that 'Tybalt killed him. He has been buried in the North Mountain'. Although the line could predict the imminent death of Mercutio, yet it was spoken with a very pleasant manner. The marriage rite of Romeo and Juliet was hindered by the presence of Friar John who gave the news of another funeral mass. The juxtaposition of death and life was in fact an important feature of *talchum* in which the death of a character is a source of laughter. In this production, the audience might be perplexed by the juxtaposition, as death was not a joking or laughing material in the original tragedy. Oh might here demonstrate his concept of *han*, in that death and life are tied to each other.

The fight scene (Act 3 scene 1) began with a dance (taken from *keomdo* a Korean martial art) and slow music that anticipated the tragic atmosphere of the duel. Yet, the duel

between Mercutio and Tybalt became a comic show in a bathtub. The two men were mingling with each other and singing and dancing before the duel. When they heard a church bell, they stopped and prayed. When Romeo was provoked by Tybalt, he did not react to it. Rather he went down to the auditorium and asked the audience: 'Should I tell him that we are now a relative by marriage or not?' He went around and concluded that 'if it should come, now is the best'. Romeo revealed his marriage to Tybalt and called him 'My dear brother-in-law'. Yet, Tybalt answered: 'how can you forget our hatred. Are you trying to dishonour the ancestors? I will tell you this. Your ancestor was a butcher! You are the son of a butcher'. To call one someone a butcher, or butcher's relative, was one of the most serious humiliations in the past: in the Joseon society, butchers ranked as the lowest class along with slaves, clowns and prostitutes. Despite the humiliation, Romeo disappeared and Mercutio instead became furious at Tybalt's words.

The death of Mercutio was emphasized in the performance more than his death is in the original tragedy. Oh wrote more lines and inserted them between the original dialogue to intensely express the grief of Mercutio. Such exaggeration of the emotion seems to show Mercutio's resentment towards his fate:

머큐소: 안 돼. 여기서 꺼내 줘. 나 이 구덩이서 구더기 밥 되기 싫어. 손 잡아 내 손. 손 잡아. 안 돼. 불공평해. 두 집안 다 망해 버려라. 날 구더기 밥으로 만들었어. 왜 하필 나야. (숨 넘긴다)

Mercutio: Please take me out of here! I hate to be here! I don't want to be worm meat in this hole. Get me out! Hold my hands! Hands! (weeps) No. It's not fair. A curse on these two families. They have made worms meat of me. Why should it be me? (dies)

Tybalt then shouts: 'It's very hot. Why it's so hot! We just played a game'. Romeo responded to this by exclaiming: 'No mercy'. The scene looked as if the young men never intended to kill each other. It had really looked like a game and Mercutio was killed accidentally. However,

the scene switched from a pleasant game into a scene full of horror and blood. Romeo cried and shouted 'I still hear the sound of the marriage mass'. Then, the laughter was replaced by the funeral moaning and crying of the women. Montague's wife cried over Romeo's banishment. Capulet's wife was weeping for the death of Tybalt. A condensed version of a traditional Korean funeral march was performed for the death of Mercutio and Tybalt, carrying their coffins from houses of the deceased to their place of burial. The male cast raised the coffins of the two young men and marched across the stage, singing a traditional style of funeral song. The song was adapted from a traditional funeral tune, but the lyrics were Oh's own invention: 'Let the permanent closure of life end in paradise | They say death is far, but it is close | Climb over the mountain'. This is obviously not sung at a genuine Korean traditional funeral. The prolonged scene of the deaths of these two characters may as well imply the ill fortune of innocent young people in Korea. The Korean young generations are not responsible for the Great Division, which was the guilty of the old generations, yet they are suffering from the consequence (threat of war, hatred towards the opposite side without reason) of it. The funeral was filled with sad songs. Yet, the sadness was instantly replaced by joyous teasing of the first night.

Here another 'saltation (leap)' was applied to affect an abrupt switch from a tragic into a comic mood. The funeral crying was instantly replaced by Juliet's exciting line 'Come night, come Romeo'. Juliet played a simple hand game and ordered the audience to do the same thing as her. The Nurse suddenly said 'Give me some aqua-vitae' and she pulled out a bottle of *soju* (the cheap and popular Korean equivalent of vodka) from the inside of her robe. The Nurse drank the liquor at once and was soon drunk. Her drinking activity made the audience laugh constantly and they could forget the solemn atmosphere of the funeral. Even Juliet's despair 'And death takes my maidenhead' and her attempt to choke herself did not suspend the laughter from the audience. It was observed that even the British audience could not stop laughing at this scene, even if they would not be aware of *soju* and its cultural context. The constant laughter of the production derived from Oh's method of 'saltation' (the switch between the two different moods). Once the audience were familiarised with the laughter from the quick transition, they would be laughing throughout the performance at a similar moment. In this sense, the death of Romeo stimulated their laughter. This is Romeo's line at the moment of his suicide: 'Dear wife, let's leave, leave here without our name, the family name. (He vows to Juliet) The drugs are quick. Such a true Apothecary! (dies)'. Both

the Korean and British audiences laughed when Romeo was complaining about the honesty of the Apothecary in the last line. Even though Oh did not insert any comic line, the audience could laugh as they had become accustomed to. Oh seems to succeed in creating laughable tragedy, which would be demonstrating his concept of *han*. The first night of marriage, with the funeral of Mercutio and Tybalt, was a supplement to Shakespeare's text.

However, the production finally became utterly tragic and dark without any hint of a switch to a comic mood in the end. When Juliet recognised that Romeo was dead, she could not believe it. She made a bird's gesture and said 'rise and shine. Here is your home'. This comic gesture heightened the sadness of Juliet. When she stabbed herself, she did not die instantly; rather, she said: 'husband, get up, I am hurt, I am very hurt, my stomach is aching... husband' and then she died. Her death was instantly followed by the last scene.

신부: 여기 두 사람은 부부요.

몬태규의 아내: 화냥년의 딸을 누가 받아준 다더냐.

카폴렛의 아내: 저 백정의 집안과 사돈이 된다. 내 여기 내 딸 곁에
놓겠다.

몬태규: 내 아들의 칼을 받아라.

카폴렛: 하나밖에 없는 불쌍한 것. 내 저놈의 집안을 멸하리라.

영주: 말어 말어. 차라리 나를 칼로 내리쳐.

카폴렛: 전부 죽여라!

Friar Laurence: These are wife and husband!

Montague's wife: How could you marry our enemy's daughter!

Capulet's wife: I can't relate at all with the descendent of a butcher! I'd rather lay myself with my daughter!

Montague: (to Capulet) This is my son's sword. I am for you!

Capulet: My only daughter! How miserable you are! I will wipe away that family.

Prince: Stop, stop. It is my responsibility. Please rather kill me!

Capulet: Kill them all!

Everyone on stage is then killed. The actors did not engage with each other; they stood in their positions and swung their swords. One by one they all fell over on the stage. Then, the set collapsed accompanied by ominous music. Oh gives an account of why he chose this unusual ending: 'I intended for the ending to imply a modern Korean society in which revenge and killing has not ended. I depicted the senior characters being killed. They are hypocrites and lack any sensitivity, so they forced the young couple to commit suicide. I hope love between human beings would be what matters most'.¹⁴⁷ While on the one hand Oh seemed to punish the older generation who ruined the country, on the other he appears to bless the love of the guiltless younger generation. Even though Oh did not make it clear, the ending is clearly a metaphor for the situation of modern Korean history, the Korean War and the endless conflict between North and South Korea.

However, it should be pointed out that this ending did not cohere well with the alternation of the tragic and comic elements. The dark tone could embarrass the audience, who had been laughing throughout the performance. Moreover, the carnage at the ending would render the audience uncomfortable, especially those who would know the end of the story. This had a more alienating effect on foreign audiences, who have less knowledge about modern Korean history and could not easily grasp the implications of the last scene. Even younger Korean audiences, who would imagine *Romeo and Juliet* to be a sad love story about a beautiful couple, might fail to see the historical implication of this ending. Moreover, the usual ending of a story involving conflict between characters in traditional Korean theatre involves their eventual reconciliation. The darkness of the last scene was Oh's interruption of this tradition. Therefore, Oh not only distorted the original Shakespearean tragedy, but also traditions of Korean theatre too. Oh would argue that such ideal reconciliation is not possible

¹⁴⁷ Seo Hyeon-ju, 'Korean Romeo and Juliet in Japan', *Yonhapnews*, 17 July 2006.

in Korea, and that violence still continues today. Therefore, given this historical experience, love should be defeated.

The production, since its premier in 2001, has been well received in Korea. The most reviews from Korean critics and Shakespearean scholars are positive towards Oh's attempt to embody Shakespeare with elements from the Korean traditional theatre. The production has since been performed in Germany, India, China, Japan and the UK. It has been one of the most representative of Korean performances on the international stage. The effect of this international appeal is not to be underestimated; staging the first foreign performance in Germany gave Oh much confidence.¹⁴⁸ German audiences appreciated Oh, complimenting him by saying 'you rediscovered what we lost'.¹⁴⁹ Oh recalled: 'I was amazed at the enthusiasm of the German audience for the performance that did not even have subtitles. What I found from this experience was the superb "spirit of play" that our ancestors gave to us. I assumed that the audience marvelled at our traditional play and dance when we were doing a piece of Shakespearean tragedy'.¹⁵⁰ Mokhwa's German staging was picked up by John Russell Brown, who was an artistic director for the festival, who later recommended the production to the Barbican Centre. He commented 'The West and the East met in Shakespeare',¹⁵¹ which was a standard reaction to such an exotic production from the East. Obviously, it would not be what Oh would have expected, Oh would have been satisfied if his peculiar perspective (alteration of death and life, expressing the spirit of play) of his Shakespeare rendition was acknowledged by Western critics and scholars.

When he travelled to London to stage the tragedy at the Barbican Centre in 2006, Oh ambitiously explained that he wanted to show the British audience how Shakespeare has been absorbed into the Korean spirit.¹⁵² He claimed that there is nothing new in Western theatre now. Consequently, world theatre is seeking out a new direction in the traditions of Eastern theatre. In his production of *Romeo and Juliet*, Oh wanted to demonstrate the value of

¹⁴⁸ Kim Gap-sik, 'German audience applauded Korean Romeo and Juliet', *Donga-ilbo*, 8 May 2001.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Hyeon Yun-gyeong, 'Oh Goes to the UK', *Yonhapnews*, 17 November 2006.

Eastern culture, which could be a rich source for world theatre. He added, with a humble comment, that ‘the British audience would feel that Shakespeare is being loved in a small country in the Far East’.¹⁵³ However, it seems that Oh clearly intended to show the difference between the East and the West, and if the East just imitated Western theatre, there could not be any new value. Therefore, his task was to demonstrate how different the text could become, regardless of whether or not the British audience would understand, love or dislike it.

Mokwha’s *Romeo and Juliet* at the Barbican was given mixed reviews from British critics.¹⁵⁴ The visual spectacle and the comic nature of the production were praised. ‘Most attractive, and its speed and vitality are refreshing...The production swirls by in a whirl of vividly coloured costumes and disciplined traditional dance and movement. The fight scenes become skilful martial dances; the ball is a perfectly accomplished, giddy ritual’.¹⁵⁵ In addition, ‘The company mixes the ritualistic and experimental. Passages of text are decorated with colourful Korean dance and surreal theatricality’.¹⁵⁶ Yet the loss of the poetry and the tragic nature were criticised. *The Times*’ critic Sam Marlowe gave the harshest comments to the comic nature of the production, ‘the play’s key scenes are often rather crude, with a prevalence of curiously judged comedy obliterating any sense of romantic or tragic power’.¹⁵⁷ Marlowe concluded that ‘the passion and power of their story have somehow been lost in translation’. In response to Marlowe’s criticism, Oh would undoubtedly have answered that Korea did not have a notion of tragedy, and that the only comparable dramatic mood would be that of *han*. Yet, crucially, for Oh, *han* necessitates the mingling of both laughter and tears. This is the only possible form of tragedy from within a Korean perspective. However, it seemed that no British reviewers were aware of the ‘spirit of play’ at work here, which Oh was very keen to present on the Barbican stage and the Rose stage. The spirit, at most, seemed to look like humorous material and the idea behind it was ignored by reviewers, much to Oh’s disappointment. Indeed, the criticism and the praise over the spectacle of the

¹⁵³ *Ibid*

¹⁵⁴ The production was reviewed by *The Times*, *The Independent*, *The Financial Times*, *The Evening Standard*, and *The Observer*. Sam Marlow of *The Times* (Sam Marlow) gave two stars, *The Financial Times* three stars, and *The Evening Standard* four stars. Their performance at Rose Theatre in 2010 did not receive any press reviews.

¹⁵⁵ Sarah Hemming, ‘*Romeo and Juliet*’, *Financial Times*, 17 November 2006.

¹⁵⁶ Kieron Quirke, ‘Smiling in the Face of Tragedy’, *The Evening Standard*, 27 November 2006.

¹⁵⁷ Sam Marlowe, ‘Review: *Romeo and Juliet*’, *The Times*, 29 November 2006.

performance would indicate that Oh's endeavour was simply to show the Korean spirit to be a kind of comic show. International success seems to depend on visual spectacle and comedy, rather than on communicating a Korean emotional perspective. This production was even wrongly described as being a form of 'dance-theatre'.¹⁵⁸ Unless one knew the exact context, Oh's ideas could not be understood. Even Koreans who are unfamiliar with Oh's unique methods would not understand.

It needs to be pointed out that Oh was in fact indebted to the original tragedy for realizing his theatrical method via Shakespeare, due to its comic elements during the original tragedy. Oh attempted a similar approach (using the alternation of tragic and comic, saltation, and lacuna) for his rendition of *Macbeth* (2008). But the production was not received well in Korea and has never been invited to foreign venues. Briefly speaking, the production completely ruined the tragic and poetic nature of the original play. The funny *Macbeth* was just stuttering on the stage with mischievous yet silly characters. It was more a cartoon than a work of drama. However, Mokwha's *The Tempest* (2010) was another successful adaptation after *Romeo and Juliet*. Oh stated that his adaptation of the Romance took material from an ancient Korean history book, the *Samgukyoosa*,¹⁵⁹ yet, in fact, the adaptation was another creation of Oh's imagination. The production again could boast of its visual spectacle. It was a Korean version of a story of a 'fairy isle', in which Caliban was played by two actresses. Having received domestic acclaim, the production was invited to play at the Edinburgh International Festival in 2011 and was positively received by British critics, indeed more so than the previous production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Amongst the critics, Michael Billington, reviewing for *The Guardian*, remarked that 'In fact the whole production, with its Brookish bamboo canes, Shakespearean plot and Korean music and dance, is an eloquent testament to the fusion of the best of east and west.'¹⁶⁰ In this review, Billington projected his experience of Peter Brook's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1970, the RSC) into the performance and Shakespeare's text. Oh's biggest success seemed to be treated as a fine equivalent of a renowned Western Shakespeare performance, therefore ultimately denying its originality.

¹⁵⁸ Luke Jennings, 'Less Really is More: Balanchine and a Small Scale Korean Production Outdo Lavish Sets', *The Observer*, 26 November 2006.

¹⁵⁹ Korean ancient history book, written in thirteenth century by a Buddhist monk and scholar Il Yeon.

¹⁶⁰ Billington highly praised the performance, giving it a four star rating. Michael Billington, 'The Tempest—Review', *The Guardian*, 15 August 2011.

Therefore, his rendition might have been received as just another fine exotic show from East Asia. It appears that Yohangza would have more success in demonstrating ‘the Korean spirit of play’ with their *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* on the international stage.

Chapter 5

Yohangza's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Yohangza¹⁶¹ was established in 1997 by the director and playwright Yang Jung-ung (born 1968), who had studied creative writing at the Seoul Institute of the Arts, the famed alma mater of many great Korean actors and theatre directors. Before the formation of Yohangza, Yang had been a member of the Lasenkan International Theatre which is based in Japan and Germany, and so consists of multi-national members from both Asia and Europe. Yang was an actor when he joined Lasenkan, and with them he performed in Spain, Japan and India. This experience, doubtlessly, gave him a deep insight into the possibilities of intercultural theatre practice. However, when he established Yohangza, Yang advocated 'Koreanness' and developed a theatrical style by using thematic, visual and musical elements taken from traditional Korean theatre. After several years of developing their own performance methods, Yohangza gained a reputation, both in South Korea and abroad, as an outstanding experimental theatre company. Their most highly praised works include: *Karma* (2001), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2002), *Mee-Shil* (2003) and *The Good Woman of Seoul* (2005, an adaptation of Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan*). *Karma* was awarded the Best Production prize at the Cairo International Festival of Experimental Theatre (2003). Yang is now said to be one of the most internationally acclaimed theatre directors in South Korea, along with older maestros such as Lee Yoon-taek, and Oh Tae-suk. Yohangza was funded by the Korean Art Council in 2006.

The reputation of Yohangza mainly stems from their unique approach to movement. Yohangza is famous for its hard training regime for physical theatre. Their training method was mainly designed to create images on the stage based on 'Koreanness'. In doing this, gestures from Korean dance, such as those of the *talchum* and *Hak* (crane) dances, were individually isolated and extracted out of their original contexts. Yang developed these

¹⁶¹ Literally means 'traveller'.

gestures into unique movements and made it look contemporary. Therefore, the movements do not form genuine Korean dances and so the audience would not recognize that any influence from traditional dance was involved, unless this fact was explicitly remarked upon. Yang intended the rootless gestures of his theatre company to help in creating an image on the stage. He explains his aim as follows:

나의 무대는 이미지로 채워질 것이다. 나아가 이미지를 미장센으로 발전시키려고 한다. ...그 효과는 서양연극이 서양철학의 사유처럼 인간의 반쪽을 추구한다면 동양연극은 감성적이며 미지의 것이고 비논리를 추구한다고 본다. 궁극적으로 즉흥적이고 순간에 살아나는 체험, 논리적, 직관적, 감성적인 표현양식을 추구하고자 한다.

My stage will be filled with images. I will develop the images into a mise-en-scene. ... The effect will show an Oriental theatre that is characterised as emotional and as lacking logic, whereas Western theatre pursues the rational half of man, like Western philosophy. Ultimately, I pursue an expression of improvisational experience, that is to say, a logical, intuitional and emotional mode of expression.¹⁶²

It is not certain whether Oriental theatre (or at least Korean theatre) can be defined as a 'theatre of emotion' as Yang claims. However, emotionality and the absence of logic were often regarded as the main features of Korean theatre, whether traditional or modern.¹⁶³ Such a 'theatre of emotion' would conventionally refer to *singueuk* productions that contain material specifically designed to elicit extreme emotions from the audience.¹⁶⁴ However, it appears

¹⁶² Yang Jung-ung, 'Yohangza's journey with Shakespeare', *Gongyeonggwaeeron*, 4 (2003) 19-24 (p. 21).

¹⁶³ Lee Young-mee, 'About the aesthetical background of Korean theatre', *Yeongukpyeongron*, 27 (2002) 32-49. My selection of the English terms.

¹⁶⁴ Also *sinpageuk* (new wave theatre) of the 1930s showed extreme emotionality.

that Yang did not want to make his audience cry, as *singeuk* had done, rather Yohangza's productions involve more light comedy rather than tearful tragedy. His 'theatre of emotion' would indicate a theatre in which language does not play as central a role as it does in Western theatre. To Yang, Western theatre, is the 'theatre of ideas', and so tends to be language-centred and aimed at conveying ideas. In contrast, Yang's 'theatre of emotion' does not intend to impose any ideas on the audience. Therefore, Yohangza's language does not feature any major ideas to be conveyed, but rather serves to heighten emotionality. Such language also of course does not contain any references to history or politics. Consequently, Yohangza's image-centred productions can be enjoyed by any theatregoer regardless of any language barriers or differences in cultural background. Yang seems to think that the so-called 'Oriental approach' is the only means to achieve this. This confidence in Oriental theatre is obviously also shared by Kim Myeong-kon and Oh Tae-suk in a different way. The difference between the three directors could be suggested as Yang emphasised upon the visual aspect of Korean traditional theatre, Kim did on the idea (life and coexistence), and Oh on the logic and method.

From the very beginning of their career, Yohangza took on Shakespeare as their main repertory; this seemed due to Yang's admiration for the Bard.¹⁶⁵ Their first Shakespeare production was *Romeo and Juliet* (1998), which was quickly followed by *King Lear* (1999), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2002), *Hwan* (2003) (meaning 'fantasy', an adaptation of *Macbeth*), *Twelfth Night* (2008), and *Hamlet* (2009). All these performances were directed and adapted by Yang. The first two productions failed to attract any attention when compared to the wide success of the following two. *Hwan* introduced a plotline concerning a homosexual and incestuous relationship between King Hae (Duncan) and his cousin General Gin (Macbeth). King Hae, played by an actress, portrayed a very weak man who wanted to be a woman. King Hae loved his strong and masculine General Gin, but was betrayed and murdered. Despite the controversial content, *Hwan* was not a radical adaptation of the tragedy; the narrative of the original remained untouched, the only difference being that the characters were given Korean names borrowed from ancient Korean philosophy. With less effort put into the drama, Yohangza was more focused on creating images.

¹⁶⁵ In my interview with him (30 November 2008), Yang stated that he wanted to stage all the plays of Shakespeare.

According to Yang, it was Theseus' line 'The lunatic, the lover, and the poet / Are of imagination all compact' (Act V, Scene 1, 7-8) that motivated him to stage *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.¹⁶⁶ He initially adapted the comedy into Korean culture to make the most of Korean acting styles. The Athenian forest was replaced by a Korean woodland in a past which was difficult to identify, although the costumes of the four lovers hinted at the play being set during the Shilla dynasty (57 BC – 935 AD). It seems that the production adopted the feel of a Korean fairy tale. The most obvious borrowing from Korean folklore is the *dokkebi* (goblins) which played the roles belonging to the fairies in the original text. In Korean folklore, *dokkebi* is a supernatural being who is believed to dwell in a forest and are notorious for being naughty (though rarely harmful toward human beings who are lost in wood). This feature of Korean goblins is directly used in the performance to tease other characters and even the audience. All the fairies were renamed after *dokkebi* in this production: Gabi (Titania), Dot (Oberon) and Duduri (Puck).¹⁶⁷ The Athenian lovers turned into wealthy young people named Hang (Lysander), Roo (Demetrius), Byeok (Hermia), Ick (Helena). These names were taken from the brightest stars in the four directions of traditional Chinese astrology.¹⁶⁸ Bottom was substituted by an old woman, Ajumi (which literally means “wench” in Korean), who is a herb collector looking for wild ginseng (which is rare and very precious). It is not clear that the names of the lovers worked well, as Yang might have been hoping to remind the audience of their shared, ancient culture. Modern Koreans are not very familiar with Chinese constellations, and are actually more likely to know Western ones. However, it is at least certain that the Korean audience, who are obviously familiar with *dokkebi* and herb collectors, would be easily pleased, since these often function as comic characters in Korean culture.

¹⁶⁶ Lee Tae-joo, 'The problem of adaptation-where is Shakespeare?', *Yeongeukpyeongron* 49 (200) 199-213 (p. 208)

¹⁶⁷ *Dot* means 'fire' and *Gabi* as 'father'. *Duduri* is an old term describing the activity in the using of mortar and pestle. The word 'Dokkebi' is a modernized term for 'Dotgabi' which was used in the past.

¹⁶⁸ *Hang* (亢) – One of the seven mansions in the Azure Dragon of the East.

Loo (婁) – One of the seven mansions in the White Tiger of the West.

Byeok (壁) – One of the seven mansions in the Black Tortoise of the North.

Ick (翼) – One of the seven mansions in the Vermilion Bird of the South.



Figure 24. Duduri pair and Ajumi (middle)



Figure 25. The stage of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Myeongdong Arts Centre, Seoul, August 2011.

Despite this arrangement of the characters according to a Korean theme, other elements of the production did not remain distinctively Korean. The music was mixed with Korean folk songs being sung by actors, and included both traditional instruments and modern electronic background music. The costumes divided into those of the lovers, which seemed to be from no particular time or place, and the clothing of Ajumi and the *dokkebi* which was reminiscent of typical peasant garb from the Joseon period of Korean history. The white make-up for the *dokkebi* seems to have been an influence taken from Kabuki. Such

make-up has never existed in Korean theatre before. Moreover, the minimalistic stage is a combination of traditional Korean theatre and Kabuki. Below is Yang's description of the stage:

The empty space in the middle of downstage hints at being a *madang*, which is the stage of a traditional Korean theatre. Actors and actresses create many spaces by means of various acting styles. The musicians' seats are supposed to be located upstage. In that section of the stage the actors and actresses will enter and exit. Along with acting, they will also play tunes for the scenes. There will be various kinds of traditional instruments, such as symbols and drums, prepared for them. According to the environment of the theatre, the corridor can be made in both the wings, and a pillar with the image of an old tree shrine or exit can be added upstage.¹⁶⁹

The performance space seems to blend the stages of three different theatrical forms: *pansori* (the musicians' seating), Kabuki (the use of a corridor), and *talchum* (the *madang*). Yohangza deliberately adopted the *madang* because of the liveliness it brings; the *dokkebis* would tease the audience in their seats during the beginning and the intermission, and Dot (Oberon) would speak to the audience several times.¹⁷⁰ The actors were able to engage directly with the audience as if they were watching *madanggeuk* or *talchum*. However, as long as Yohangza perform in a modern theatre that strictly divides the audience's seats from the stage it remains impossible for them to make the audience fully engage with the performance in the same manner as would occur in traditional theatres. Yohangza simply attempted to create an atmosphere of openness similar to that found in *madang* because it suited their performance style. However, the performers' efforts to tease the theatregoers might embarrass international audiences as they are unfamiliar with this tradition.

¹⁶⁹ From the unpublished script of the performance.

¹⁷⁰ For example, Dot would speak to a female audience-member and ask her: 'Do you fancy a drink with me?'

The script for the performance was written by Yang. Yohangaza's adaptation can be regarded as a compact version of the comedy. The performance runs for about ninety minutes using a new arrangement comprising six scenes. Although the original text does not enlist many cast-members compared to other Shakespearean plays, only eight characters remain in this adaptation: Theseus and Hippolyta were omitted and only Bottom has remained from the Mechanicals. This results in the cutting of Act Five and the Mechanicals' rehearsal scenes. The script has no trace of Shakespearean poetry and is completely rewritten in slightly archaic but very simple spoken language. No poetry is to be found here except for the lyrics of the songs. Below is an example of this from the script:

Hang: Let's meet at one in the morning, under the wooden guardian!

Byeok: I can't!

Hang: I can't let you go like this! We must run away.

Byeok: Daddy will beat me to death.

Hang: Will you do everything as he orders?

Byeok: Give me more time.

Hang: You marry tomorrow. Will you get married to the man you don't love?
Heaven will help us.

Byeok: (stares Hang) One in the morning, under the guardian! I pledge it to
your star. Heaven will help us.¹⁷¹

This is the first scene of the performance after a light show involving the *dokkebi* and a dance given by the whole cast. These lines cover 128-179 of Act 1 Scene 1 in the original text. The other lines are written in a very similar style to this. The shortening of the language might derive from the awareness that Shakespearean language would be hardly compatible with

¹⁷¹ From the unpublished script.

their stage, which is focused on the physicality of their actors. However, language has become a significant issue; Yohangza has often been criticised for wholly disregarding the poetic qualities of the text.

Despite the sacrificing of the beauty of the language, the turbulent love story of the Athenian lovers has not entirely changed. It can be observed that the narrative amongst the four lovers is almost intact from the original. Meanwhile, the fairy world has suffered a fundamental change. Oberon and Titania have now swapped genders. Gabi (Titania) is the husband of a *dokkebi* wife, Dot (Oberon). The conflict between these two *dokkebi*'s derives from the womanizing of Gabi. Below is the first scene in which Gabi and Dot are encountered:

Dot: Look, look, those eyes, full of lust. Whom will you flirt with today?

Gabi: I can't cheat my nature. Beautiful human girls excite me to shake my hip, waist and dick!

Dot: Hopeless!

Gabi: (to audience) Hey, you Cardiff¹⁷² Dokkebi's! My wife is jealous!

Dot: What a humble being we are, but we must behave according to the law of nature! How on earth are you, Dokkebi, fooling around young human females!¹⁷³

According to Yang, the gender swapping reflects the traditional Korea perspective of gender roles, where it is the men who are more inclined to 'go off track' and the women who are house-bound.¹⁷⁴ The Korean audience would not be comfortable if they see that a mother

¹⁷² The name of town varies according to where they play.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Rivka Jacobson, 'Interview Jung-Ung Yang - Dream from the East', *The British Theatre Guide* (2006) <<http://www.britishtheatreinfo.org/otherresources/interviews/Jung-UngYang.htm>>[accessed 19 November 2008]

leaves her home – even when this is done in a comic spirit. This is purely due to an old, but still common belief regarding the sacred role of the mother in the family. Yang might be invoking the value of Confucian ethics against contemporary moral hazards in Korea. Yet any further ethical implication is not found in their adaptation; what happens to Dot and Gabi is just seen as a familiar funny story of a clever wife who punishes her playboy husband. Moreover, Yang's characterisation of the *dokkebi* would make it impossible to imply any complex psychological or ethical dimension that they could have developed within Korean philosophy. Unlike the fairy king and queen, the *dokkebi* here are unable to affect the human world and are far from being noble creatures; rather, they look vulgar compared to the four aristocratic lovers. It seems that Yang just intended to take the audience into a cosy old world.

Yohangza's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can be regarded as their most successful performance so far, moreover, it is the most loved production of the comedy in South Korea. The Korean audience received the production very well when it was first staged and it was the recipient of several national awards. Still it is one of the most popular and acclaimed Shakespeare performances, and has been invited to many local community festivals where the audience might never have seen Shakespearean plays on stage before. After their successful premiere at the Edinburgh Fringe (2005), Yohangza toured from Asia to Europe: Barbican Centre (June, 2006), Gdansk Shakespeare Festival 2006 (Poland), Sydney Festival, January 2007 (Australia), Taipei Art Festival 2007 (Taiwan), Chapter Art Centre (2008) (Cardiff, UK), The Hindu Metro Plus Theatre Festival 2008 (India), and at Shakespeare's Globe, London (2012). As can be seen, no other Korean Shakespeare performance has been so frequently invited by foreign countries and festivals. The performance itself may well be regarded as a fine example for Korean intercultural theatre practice.

Yohangza's success on the international stage is largely due to its eclectic quality, an embodiment of a world-famous English comedy combined with unique visuals, Korean dance, acting and music, as well as elements influenced from Japanese Kabuki make-up and staging. Curiously, though, this eclecticism is somewhat in contradiction to Yang's initial pursuit of 'Koreanness'. It could be argued that Yohangza are just exploiting the resources of traditional Korean culture for the sake of gaining international attention. Thus, it is notable that there are several elements borrowed from Korean tradition and culture that are treated irreverently and simply for a superficial comic effect. For example, the slapstick in the duel between Hang

and Loo is borrowed from *taekgyeon*, a traditional Korean martial art (supposedly the root of modern day taekwondo). Likewise, it seems that other elements such as the gestures taken from *talchum* and folk music were displaced and disposed into a chaotic assortment. As a result, both Westernised Koreans and foreign audiences would find it truly difficult to encounter any 'genuine' Korean art in this production. Moreover, whether intentional or not, it is plausible that the production deliberately avoided any reflection on Korean history on account of the text's historico-political content. In summary, it can be argued that Yang exploited traditional Korean theatre and Shakespeare in making an exotic spectacle as a means of garnering international success. Yang would defend himself against this view however: indeed, he has indicated that his localization of Western plays represent an effort to 'pursue an integration of tradition, present, future and the world' in their appeal to both domestic and international audiences.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, the success of Yohangza's output seems to mainly derive from its neutral pastiche of the past and present, the East and West, conducted in such a way as to never challenge any audience by asking them to learn about history or diverse forms of art. Yohangza's staging at the Globe seemed to be the most exciting occasion for them, as the venue would be the ideal place for their production, as the venue has been praised as 'an audience's theatre'.¹⁷⁶

Yohangza at Shakespeare's Globe

Yohangza was chosen by Shakespeare's Globe to stage their adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Globe to Globe Festival, part of the lead up to the London Olympics of 2012. Yohangza were there to represent Korean culture on the stage, a fact of which Yang was deeply proud. In fact, almost all the renowned Korean directors would envy Yang, as most would consider the Globe as the 'home of Shakespeare'. Yohangza's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was scheduled to perform only twice, on 30 April and 1 May 2012. The second performance was sold out and many people were queuing for returns. I attended the

¹⁷⁵ Yang Jung-Ung, 'Yohangza's journey with Shakespeare', *Gongyeonggwaeeron*, 4 (2003) 19-24 (p. 20).

¹⁷⁶ Mark Rylance, 'Research, Materials, Craft: Principles of Performance at Shakespeare's Globe', in *Shakespeare's Globe*, ed. By Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 103-114 (p. 108).

performance on 1 May. The weather was quite pleasant. It was not very cold and there was no rain that evening. This was in fact ideal weather for the performance at this open-air theatre.



Figure 26. Dot (Oberon) and two Duduri (Puck), this photo was taken from *The Guardian* website

When the audience came in, they could see that the musical instruments (two Korean drums and two Korean xylophones) were put on the stage prior to the performance. Korean traditional music was played via a speaker system. The music had a pleasant and catchy melody; it was the kind of tune that one can hear at a traditional Korean theatre or Korean restaurant. The background music was unusual; normally, productions at the Globe theatre did not play any music before the performance began. However, the pre-performance music was Yohangza's strategy to build up a friendly atmosphere and the anticipation of seeing a pleasant show. With the use of two large screens, the story and the names of the characters were briefly explained. The audience filled both the Yard and the Galleries. About a fifth of them were Koreans and the rest were British or of another international background. The audience looked excited with an expectation of a good comic performance; they were going to watch a well-known comedy, so that they could assume every moment of the performance according to the original comedy. The role of the Korean audience became important during

the performance. They obviously understood all the comic implications that could not be fully understood by the international audience. The laughter always began from the Koreans and then spread over the space.

Yohangza did not make any substantial amendments to their performance for this occasion. They retained the same costumes, music, props and acting style. All the features of the production, including its engagement with the audience, were almost identical with those that I had attended before (Cardiff, the Barbican Centre, and Seoul). The performance began with an opening show consisting of music and dance. The beginning was signaled by the entrance of two actors who were going to play the instruments on the upstage. Then, Duduri came on stage and bowed to the audience. They said in English: 'We are very happy to be here, the home of Shakespeare' and asked the audience to turn off their mobile phones and not to take any pictures of them. This is a routine sequence in Korean theatres. However, the Globe audience laughed at this scene. Then, all the actors entered from the doors in the Yard and went up onto the stage. They sang the main theme of their performance and accompanied it with a dance. During this opening show, the actors threw fluorescent rings to the audience. The audience did not show a great interest in trying to grab them at this point. This situation changed completely during the intermission.

Despite the language barrier, this performance seemed to be Yohangza's most successful engagement with an audience. The British and international audience seemed to understand the slightly amended story of Yohangza's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* without any need for subtitles. This might be due to the well-known plot of the original comedy. However, in many cases where a language barrier is present, foreign audiences still require subtitles to understand what is being shown on the stage. Yet, in the Globe to Globe Festival, the subtitles were giving basic information regarding the scene and the plot. Therefore, the audience could see the correspondence between what they were watching and listening to the Shakespearean text. That is to say, the audience could imagine the Shakespearean text while being confronted by the foreign language. This also indicates that the audience needed to identify the characters who were speaking in the foreign language as being particular characters from Shakespeare's work. Yet, Yang's script did not refer to any Shakespearean language; therefore Yohangza did not propel the audience to imagine the Shakespearean text with their performance.

Yang wrote a few more simple lines in English here than he had done for their Cardiff and the Barbican performance. So every scene had at least one simple piece of English dialogue. The moments when English was used were during the climax of the each scene, or during the funniest moments. For example, when Hang and Byeok slept, Byeok told Hang ‘Don’t change your mind’ then Hang replied ‘Change? No, you are my heart’. Also, when the fight between Hang and Roo erupted, which was the funniest moment of the performance, these two characters said to each other ‘Hey, Come on!’, then asked Ick to wish them luck. In addition, Gabi asked Ajumi ‘What do you want to eat?’, then Ajumi answered ‘Fish and Chips’. These simple snippets of English dialogue would have been intended to keep the audience attending to events on the stage. In fact, this was a very successful strategy. Other foreign productions invited to this festival did not appear to accomplish the same level of audience involvement as the Globe audience did not seem to adapt well to foreign languages; nonetheless Yohangza did not suffer from this situation. With their simple use of English, the international audience reacted well even to the Korean speech when it was combined with slapstick. Thus, it might be argued that Yohangza were successful in creating a unique experience that stood out from the shadow of Shakespeare’s text and presented a performance that was not only full of vitality, humour and innovative syntheses but could also communicate to audiences of all kinds – exactly what Yang had been aiming for.¹⁷⁷

Yohangza always declares that their *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is happening ‘right here’, wherever they have visited. The method for this was using the language of the target audience or performing a familiar act. This is clearly derived from *talchum* and *maddangeuk*, in which a troupe or a theatre company begins their performance by declaring that they were going to perform ‘right here’. The purpose of the declaration is to create a communal spirit. Although Yohangza uses the method often, it seems that they would not really attempt to build a community. Rather, what is generated is the communal experience of belonging to their audience. This traditional method creates an intimacy between the audience and the performance. However, when they did this during their British tour, the declaration seemed not to work as well as had they expected due to the place. The stage of Shakespeare’s Globe seemed to offer Yohangza an ideal place for creating intimacy between the audience and the

¹⁷⁷ During the Globe to Globe Festival, the British and international audiences became active when they heard English being spoken. For instance, during the Chinese *Richard III*, when the two murderers murdered Clarence, they said ‘who are you?’, the audience laughed. They also did this when Richard exaggerated his hypocrisy.

stage. This was mainly due to the Yard where the players could come down and mingle with the audience. The Yard has occasionally been a temporary extended stage for the performances produced by the Globe. For example, in *Titus Andronicus* (2006), the actors entered from the side gates and forced the audience to make way for them. During the speech of the two princes, the audiences were addressed by the speakers, so they could imagine themselves as Roman citizens. Likewise, the presence of the audience is always a feature of the performance as they reveal themselves to the actors and the fellow audience members. Attending performances at the Globe gives the audience a different experience, in which they have become members of community playing a role in the performance. In this sense, Mark Rylance explains: 'In the Globe the audience is being played upon by each other as well, and one often had the feeling as a player that the consciousness of the audience as a whole was larger than the consciousness of any individual audience member or actor. This is where the Globe's spirit as a building comes into play'.¹⁷⁸ The communal spirit of the Globe seemed to successfully reveal itself in Yohangza's performance.

The Globe's unique relationship between the audience and the stage is always a central source of the audience's amusement. For example, most of the laughter was stimulated when Yohangza's actors attempted to communicate with the audience who were standing alongside the stage. Indeed, it seems that the Globe's audience might anticipate the collapse of any separation between the auditorium and the stage; that is to say, the audience always laughed at the breakdown of the border between the fiction on stage and the reality of the Yard. Yohangza seemed to benefit the most from the audience's expectation of such disruption; they were effectively able to use the Yard as a section of the stage, a situation which helped to open the psychological borders of the performance. The actors used the auditorium door as an entrance gate. For instance, the Duduri pair hid themselves amongst the audience when Dot was angry at their foolish mistake. The pair spoke their lines in the Yard. Ajumi wandered into the Yard looking for herbs and she talked to the audience, asking them to give way so she could pass. These actions surely offered the audience much comedy, as a result of which the audience might feel that they were themselves now present as fellow performers.

¹⁷⁸ Mark Rylance, p. 109.

The intermission also created a festive atmosphere. Before the second act, the Duduri pair picked up a female audience member in the Yard and took her onto the stage and gave her a big fluorescent ring. Then the pair again threw more rings into the audience; this time the audience members were eagerly grabbing them as they had become familiar with the actors' style of engagement. This indicated that the audience was ready to respond to the actors. When the performance finished, Yohangza exited by the gate in the yard to the sound of the excited audience's applause. This broke the convention of the Globe; the actors normally exited by the stage door. The performers then waited for the audience in the lobby to take a picture with them. Even during this event immediately following the performance, all of the actors remained in character. All these disruptions of the border between the stage and the auditorium were prearranged and have been repeated many times. Yet, it has never been as successful as it was at the Globe, an environment which has a very similar stage to that of traditional Korean theatre venues; the success of the production seemed to mainly derive from a space in which Yohangza could fully engage with the audience. Also, it needs to be mentioned that Yohangza met the right audience who would enjoy their performance and respond in ways that the theatre company had anticipated.

The British reception of Yohangza's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* differed depending on whether the performance was held at the Barbican or at the Globe, regardless of the fact that the performances were almost identical. In fact, the Barbican production did not receive any positive attention from British critics. Yohangza received only a lukewarm review remarking on the lightness of the production: 'What's entirely missing is the poetry. ... Those seeking substance beneath the jocularity, though, will search in vain'.¹⁷⁹ In this sense, Yohangza's performance was only treated as an exotic amusement for an evening out or 'another instance of the ubiquitous fusion of East and West'.¹⁸⁰ The Globe performance was also only reviewed by *The Guardian* and an internet review website (Theartdesk.com). The reception was now much more positive than it had been six years previously. Brian Logan of *The Guardian* mentioned that the production was a 'thoroughly entertaining abbreviated Dream', and he remarked on the loss of the poetry as 'fair exchange' for 'clownish gaiety'.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Sam Marlow, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', *The Times*, 3 July 2006.

¹⁸⁰ Ian Bartholomew, 'Messing about with "The Bard"', *Taipei Times*, 26 Oct 2007, p. 15

¹⁸¹ Brian Logan, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream—Review', *The Guardian*, 2 May 2012.

Alexandra Coghlan, in her review of the production, remarked on ‘how close it is in spirit to the Globe’s own productions’.¹⁸² Coghlan’s review is exactly what Yang would want to hear from a British critic. Yang once made it clear that ‘I am intending to rewrite Shakespearean plays’.¹⁸³ Yang directed and adapted Yohangza’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* with the aim of creating a new work rather than a fine rendition of Shakespearean comedy. The mood he has drawn from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is a comic one, which was maximised in his production. In doing this, it can be pointed out that he obviously reduced the complex dimensions of the text to a simple piece of light entertainment. Yohangza’s performance at the Globe was remarkable for the way in which the traditional ‘spirit of play’ in Korean theatre was able to manifest itself and intermingle with the Globe’s own communal spirit.

¹⁸² Alexandra Coghlan, ‘Globe to Globe: A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Shakespeare’s Globe’, *TheArtsDesk.Com*, 1 May (2012) <<http://www.theartsdesk.com/theatre/globe-globe-midsummer-nights-dream-shakespeares-globe>> [accessed 21 October 2012]

¹⁸³ Yang Jung-Ung, ‘Yohangza’s journey with Shakespeare’, *Gongyeonggwaeeron*, 4 (2003) 19-24 (p. 19).

Part 3

Shakespeare and Contemporary Korean Theatre

After all, Shakespeare does not belong to us. – Ki Kuk-seo

This part looks at three productions that attempted to stage Shakespeare's plays from the Korean perspective of Korea since 1980. Ki Kuk-seo's *Hamlet* series emerged from the decade of 1980s when political theatre dominated the stage. Seoul Metropolitan Theatre's *Hamlet* succeeded the series in terms of its strong implication of the contemporary politics. The tumultuous history of South Korea was well reflected in both productions. In Chapter 7, *Trans Sibiya accidentally* engaged with Korean gender politics, because it swapped the gender of the characters in *Twelfth Night*. The production is one of the most successful renditions of Shakespearean comedy in terms of profit, and influenced on other popular staging of Shakespearean drama.

Chapter 6

Political *Hamlet* on the Korean Stage

Productions of Shakespeare's revenge tragedy *Hamlet* have engaged with Korean politics from the 1980s to the present (2014). The inception of politicizing *Hamlet* was Ki Kuk-seo's rendition of the tragedy in 1981: at a time when a playwright must jeopardize his or her life to write about contemporary political realities. Even if a playwright attempted to address contemporary political issues, such a script could not pass the stage censorship. However, any Western classic work was unlikely to be suspected of being used for a contemporary political purpose, at least, from the perspective of governmental officers. So *Hamlet* was the safest vehicle for disclosing what was hidden by the then authoritarian government. This chapter investigates the Korean political context in the 1980s and shows how a politically safe text became a dangerous one. Ki's *Hamlet* reflected Chun Doo-hwan's early reign of terror with its portrayal of Hamlet as a defeated young man. This chapter examines Ki's approach in deconstructing *Hamlet* in order to more closely reflect Korean politics and culture. After democratization in 1987, *Hamlet* with such political concerns was scarcely seen on the stage until Seoul Metropolitan Theater's *Hamlet* of 2011, directed by Park Geun-hyeong, that triggered public memory of the suicide of ex-president Roh Moo-hyeon who had recently become a symbol of democracy under the presidency of right-wing ex-Hyundai CEO Lee Myeong-bak.

When Ki Kuk-seo's *Hamlet* was staged at the small venue in the National Theater of Korea in 1981, the audience was alarmed at Ki's brave attempt to refer to the Gwangju Democratization Movement in the previous year (1980). The production, however, did not explicitly depict the massacre by the martial law army in Gwangju; the characters on the stage just implied an army commander through the costume (that of Claudius) and the extras appeared to be the victims killed in Gwangju. However, even this attempt to guide the audience's interpretation was not safe at that time, as the Chun government strictly prohibited

the public expression of any material concerning the Gwangju upheaval. If there had been the slightest attempt to depict the upheaval, a play would have been immediately censored by the Korea Public Performance Ethics Committee (KPPEC). In this circumstance, the director Ki was only able to speak for the victims of the movement by staging none other than the famous Shakespearean tragedy that had been often seen as one of the finest Western classical works. Ki chose the play because of his speculation of the relevance between the conflict in *Hamlet* and the then Korean political situation. Moreover, Ki knew that a Shakespearean drama could not fail to pass the stage censorship. Therefore, the emergence of a political interpretation of *Hamlet* in Korea was a reaction against both contemporary politics and stage censorship.

This chapter also looks at Seoul Metropolitan Theater's *Hamlet* that suggested the people's mass protest against rebounding politics of the strong right-wing for Park's *Hamlet*. Both productions discussed in this chapter attempted to portray Hamlet as one of us (Koreans). As discussed in Chapter 2, there were numerous *Hamlet* performances in 2011. Amongst them, the Seoul Metropolitan Theatre's *Hamlet* could possibly be the most acclaimed and successful production of the Shakespearean tragedy in the year. This production attracted great attention from the media, which was quite a rare phenomenon for a Shakespeare performance in Korea. In addition, the production was well received by the audience; most performances were almost sold out, and the actor who played Hamlet told me that 'they said people liked *this* Hamlet production'.¹⁸⁴ Many critics pointed out that the production dealt with the contemporary politics with its implication of the suicide of the former President Roh Mu-hyeon and the people's mass demonstration against the Lee Myung-bak government in 2008. Certainly, the performance seemed to be a successor of Ki's *Hamlet* in terms of its embrace of the contemporary politics. Yet, this time, the director, Park Geun-hyeong, did not have to feel the constraint of censorship as Ki did in thirty years ago. The performance itself was not radical adaptation compared with Ki Kuk-seo's *Hamlet* series. However, like Ki's, the production reflected the past political incident that should be remembered by the audience. In order to understand the significance of these two productions of *Hamlet*, it is important to understand, first, the rigid censorship that became legally

¹⁸⁴ From my personal conversation with Kang Shin-ku on 11 April 2011.

binding from 1948 and that was to become increasingly strictly enforced, as well as the political turbulence of the second half of the twentieth century.

Stage censorship under gongyeonbeop during 1961-1988

The first stage censorship in South Korea was ‘*hankuk-heunghang-chuije-gyuchik*’ (Regulation of Stage Entertainment, 1948) that was legislated in the same year in which the South Korean government was established by right-wing politicians backed by the USA. The regulation enforced the pre-censorship of plays in the way that this had existed under the rule of the Japan Empire. A director or a dramatist had to submit their script to the censorship authority before they put the play on the stage. The play had to be licensed by an officer in the Ministry of Culture and Education; otherwise the performance of the play must be prohibited. If a play was thought to express praise for socialism or to include sexual implications (whether exposure of body or obscene language), that play must be banned from any stage. The regulation intended to suppress left-wing theatre artists, who still remained in South Korea.

After the 16 May coup led by General Park Chung-hee (1917-1979) in 1961, the short-term military government (until Park Chung-hee was elected as the president in 1963) amended the Korean Constitution in order effectively to control culture and the arts. The first Korean Constitution (1948) had assured the freedom of art on stage by Article 18: ‘all citizens shall enjoy the freedom of speech and press and the freedom of assembly and association’. Yet, the new Constitution (1962, the Fifth Amendment) added a new line to Article 18: ‘films and entertainments may be censored in order to maintain public ethics and social morality’.¹⁸⁵ Therefore, restrictions in the freedom of speech and expression were recognized as constitutional, which allowed the government to set up censorship authorities and to take action on what were presumed by the government to be ‘rebellious’ arts works (film, popular music, theatre and TV entertainments).

Stage censorship became legislation in the *gongyeonbeop* (Public Performance Act, first legislated in 1961). Theatre practitioners were regulated according to three categories:

¹⁸⁵ My translation. The other quotes used here from the Korean law are translated by the Ministry of Law of South Korea.

performer, stage, and performance. It was enacted that a performer, mostly a theatre company, should be registered to the local council according to the address of the performer. If the registration was successful, the council issued a registration certificate for two years before its expiry. A performance must be notified to the mayor or governor who was in charge of the city or province council where the theatre was located. A performance could not be held after 11pm. The council could cancel a performance based upon their decision that the performance was violating the Act or was immoral from the viewpoint of public ethics (in those days, it indicated that it was protecting liberal-democracy and Confucian customs). Pre-censorship of a script was added to the first amendment of the Act (1963). Under the 1963 Act, the following process must be taken: a director or producer should apply to the local council to perform a script; if the script was approved, then, a licence for performance would be issued. The director could then rent a theatre for the performance of that script as it was licenced. However, according to article 17 of the Act, a performance could be cancelled by the local council, if the performance diverged from the script that had passed the pre-censorship. In 1967, the role of pre-censorship was undertaken by a non-governmental organization, Yeryun (Korean Arts and Cultures Morality Committee), that consisted of senior artists and university professors. Yet, there was a limit in the role of Yeryun; although Yeryun undertook censorship, the committee was not given a legal power to ban the performance of the censored script. The committee just gave an opinion to the legal authorities that the script was not appropriate to be staged.¹⁸⁶ The government and local council still held the power to cancel any performance. Yet, it was simply impossible for the government to monitor all cultural works including films, popular songs, and theatrical performances.

Having marginally won the presidential election in 1971, President Park Chung-hee declared a presidential emergency in October 1972. Subsequently he dissolved the National Assembly and suspended the Constitution (finally amended in 1969). Martial law was declared and all the media (newspaper, TV, and radio) were under complete control by governmental command. The totalitarian Yushin Constitution was approved through the referendum in November 1972 (91.5 percent ‘yes’ vote) and this marked the inception of the

¹⁸⁶ Anonymous reporter, ‘Legislation of Public Performance Act’, *Kyunghyang*, 3 May 1976.

Yushin regime (as it is now called by historians) of seven years.¹⁸⁷ The regime was overtly dictatorial; it gave the president the constitutional right to dissolve the National Assembly in an emergency (decided by the president). The president could even designate one third of the National Assembly. Freedoms of speech and of the press were suspended, grounded upon the new article 18: ‘All citizens shall enjoy the freedom of speech and the press, as long as the law permits it’.¹⁸⁸ The president was elected for six years but without any limit on re-election (which therefore enabled president-for-life) by vote of the National Council for Unification (established in 1972 according to the Yushin Constitution).¹⁸⁹ Park Chung-hee was again elected as the president in 1973 by the vote of the Council (2,357 ‘yes’ of 2,359 turnout). Two years later, the Yushin dictatorship took the 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th Emergency Measure, which resulted in the brutal suppression of any art work that could be interpreted as ‘rebellious’ by Yeryun.¹⁹⁰

The Public Performance Act 1963 was amended in December 1975. The amendment only added a line saying that the Act was to maintain the fundamental order of the Yushin Constitution, which strongly advocated national security and public order. Yet it forced theatre practitioners to conform to Performance Ethics Conduct, which primarily obliged them to maintain the constitutional order and make a contribution to glorifying the nation. Another significant change was the establishment of the Korea Public Performance Ethics Committee (KPPEC) which was the governmental censorship authority until its dissolution in 1988. The former censorship authority, Yeryun, had been dissolved into KPPEC, which now had legal force to censor a script and to watch it after censorship. The committee could prohibit its performance if it was discrepant with the censorship. The minister of Culture designated the chair and the vice chair (both had two years tenure) of KPPEC, who were mostly university professors and journalists. Notably, Yoh Seok-ki, who was the first Shakespearean scholar concerned about performances, was the vice chair for eight years

¹⁸⁷ The name ‘Yushin’ (literally means rejuvenation, or restoration) derived from the Meiji Ishin of Japan, sharing the same Chinese characters. Park wanted his self-coup Yushin to resemble the Meiji Ishin that recovered the power of the emperor.

¹⁸⁸ My translation.

¹⁸⁹ The member of the Council was elected by the people. Yet, any member of the opposition party could not be elected. The council just worked for electing the president.

¹⁹⁰ The censorship of popular music was at its peak in 1975. 772 popular songs had been forbidden, and the ban was only lifted in 1987.

(1980-1988), therefore it can be assumed that Yoh's decision was influential in the process of theatre censorship. KPPEC enacted the Regulation of Performance Arts, which was a slight revision of the Performance Enforcement Regulations 1963 Act. The new regulations were applied to every script for theatrical performance since its enactment in 1976 until 1988 when the current Constitution of the Sixth Republic was ratified. The pre-censorship of scripts before performance was abolished in 1988 according to the Constitutional Court's decision that the pre-censorship violated the Constitution. These nine years marked the most significant political incidents in modern Korean history.

The number of censored theatre scripts reached a peak under the 1976 regulations during the Yushin regime and its successor the Fifth Republic of Korea (1981-1987).¹⁹¹ Most banned scripts were from the years between 1976 and 1980 (forty-six out of sixty-seven) under the Yushin regime and the Fifth Republic of Korea. Yeryun rejected forty-one scripts between 1966 and 1975; thirty-three cases out of forty-one were censored in the last three years (two in 1973, eight in 1974, and twenty-three in 1975) of Yeryun. Meanwhile, KPPEC was more active in censorship than its predecessor; the committee banned sixty-seven scripts between 1976 and 1987 (five in 1976, ten in 1977, thirteen in 1978, five in 1979, and thirteen in 1980). Then, just one script was censored between 1981 and 1984. The number grew in 1985; four scripts were banned, then seven scripts in 1986 and six in 1987.

Year	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975
Rejected script	2	1	0	2	0	2	1	2	8	23

Table 4. Annual number of scripts rejected by Yeryun

Year	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Rejected script	5	10	13	5	13	1	1	1	1	4	7	6

Table 5. Annual number of scripts rejected by Korea Public Performance Ethics Committee

¹⁹¹ For the full detail of the 1976 regulations see appendix 2.

It is remarkable that the most scripts were censored in 1975 under Yeryun and in 1980 under KPPEC. 1980 was the most turbulent year in South Korean political history. The Yushin dictatorship was abruptly terminated in October 1979 by the assassination of President Park. In the aftermath, there was a short period of hope for retrieving democracy before the emergence of another military dictator, Chun Doo-hwan (1931-) who was a favourite army officer of the late Park. The major general Chun led a military coup in December 1979 and seized control of the Korean army and, subsequently, of the government. Chun violently suppressed university students' democratization in April 1980 and, then, committed genocide (606 people died) in Gwangju, the biggest city in the Southwest of Korea and a stronghold of Kim Dae-jung (1924-2009, later the 8th President of South Korea from 1998 to 2003) who had been presidential candidate in 1971 and one of the most prominent political opponents of Park and Chun.¹⁹² The genocide in Gwangju was reported to the Koreans outside the city as a violent unrest committed by the ferocious mob that consisted of the minor impure elements of society (far-left radicalized students and tramps).¹⁹³ In August 1980, Chun was elected as President by the vote of the National Council for Unification, as Park had been. The Chun government established the Fifth Constitution which was less suppressive compared to the Yushin, with diminished power of the president and the single-term system for the presidency. The 1975 Performance Act was amended in 1981; seemingly it now gave more freedom to the theatre artists. The principal change was to the theatre registration; a theatre company must be granted its status by the governmental office before 1981, now a theatre company could be established just by registration. Yet the military government brutally repressed any art works that were thought to be relevant to anti-governmental movements and to the Gwangju massacre. So, from 1981, there were few attempts to be political on the stage.

As seen in the 1976 regulation (appendix), the rationale of stage censorship was to protect national security, the dignity of the president and to maintain people's piety for the nation, and renouncement of illicit and decadent life style (solemnity in life). In South Korea, national security has always been the most effective means for the right-wing to suppress

¹⁹² The exact death toll in Gwangju was still controversial.

¹⁹³ Anonymous reporter, 'Gwangju Uprising', *The Donga-ilbo*, 31 May 1980.

their political opponents. The deepest fear for South Koreans was war with the communist nations due to the memory of the Korean War and the ongoing Cold War. Located at the frontier against the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, South Koreans are always wary that if a war breaks down again, everything will be destroyed again as it was during the Korean War. Therefore, an individual must have identified the national security with personal survival. One would feel that if the government were weak, it could not protect the people from the atrocious and powerful enemies. Under such circumstances, the rule of a strong leader (euphemism of dictator in this sense) must have been thought to be compulsory. It was very easily justified that the national security should be backed by a strong law (the National Security Act, which was legislated in 1948 and has been the most effective means to maintain the social order). A seemingly unjust enforcement of the law did not entail objections from the people, had the matter been concerned with national security.

The early brutal censorship also derived from the unpopularity of the self-appointed President Chun who was not elected by popular vote. President Chun was just an unknown general rather than politician. Moreover, most Koreans expected democracy after nine years of the totalitarian Yushin rule. Chun must have terrorized any potential political opponent in order to strengthen his power, and otherwise the Fifth Republic might have been overthrown by democratization movements. However, although the Chun government suppressed any political arts and protests, the new dictatorship alleviated the solemnity of the Yushin, which forced ethical and pious life onto the people. For films, sexual descriptions were strictly prohibited under the Yushin, yet, now, partial exposure of the body was permitted, as was the depiction of sexual activity in films. Such permission resulted in a boom of erotic films in the 1980s; those could not be seen in the previous decade. In addition, the government developed a sports industry with the foundation of the Korean professional baseball league in 1982, the most popular sport in Korea. Such cultural policy was criticized as '3S policy (spreading of sex, screen, sports)' in order to prevent the people being interested in political ideas. It can be said that the ultimate aim of the cultural policy of the Chun government was to depoliticize arts and cultural products.

However, the intention of stage censorship was claimed as a contribution to the development (into high art) of theatrical art. This was vaguely stated in an essay by the Shakespearean scholar Yoh Seok-ki, the vice-chair of KPPEC. Yoh argued that censorship

had as an objective the ‘realization of a just society’, which was the slogan of the Chun government.¹⁹⁴ Yoh confessed that there was not any specific measure in the process of censorship, yet also claimed that the measure of censorship should be based on ‘healthy thought’ which should benefit the artistic advance of theatrical art.¹⁹⁵ Without doubt, a theatre performance which lacked artistic merit should be regarded as ‘bad’ as most vulgar popular or political works were regarded. Therefore, the banning of such works was justified. Likewise, artistic merit was a most effective measure; as it could be claimed that being political would mean losing artistic quality. Political theatres were regarded as trying to stage vulgar propaganda performances from North Korea or communist countries. It can be said that a theatrical work should be either light entertainment, yet maintain basic morality, or high art. Although films were permitted to include partial nudity and depiction of sex, the stage could not present such unethical and vulgar scenes. However, Yoh’s deep admiration of Shakespeare would be an important factor when it came to the staging of Shakespeare’s plays, including Ki’s *Hamlet* series.

Under such a vague standard, a performance could be easily censored according to the KPPEC’s decision, which would carefully consider on behalf of the government. The above regulations could be applied to any work including a critical idea if the KPPEC wanted to do so. Any kind of critique of the government could easily be claimed to be anti-state. The Gwangju Democratization Movement could not be portrayed on the stage, nor could any work from the Soviet Union or other communist nations. These were completely banned, as they were the enemy states. Even, all the works of Bertolt Brecht were completely prohibited, to be read or to be put on the stage, as Brecht was regarded communist. For the same reason, Maxim Gorky’s works were totally banned.¹⁹⁶ Unreasonably, in a performance of Georg Büchner’s *Danton’s Death*, the performances were forced to alter the French pronunciation of ‘Danton’ to the English counterpart, as the title would imply the death of the president. French nasal vowel ‘ton’/ɔ̃/ could be heard as ‘tong’ of *daetongryeong*, the Korean word

¹⁹⁴ Yoh Seok-ki, ‘Opinion’, *Weolgan Gongyeonyulri (Performance Ethics Monthly)*, February 1981, p. 8.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 8.

¹⁹⁶ Yet, Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* was published, as the novel was seen as anti-communist.

meaning the President.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* was not staged in 1981 because it could be politically interpreted, although the play was never prohibited to be read. The protagonist of the play, John Proctor, might be seen as a dangerous character, rebellious hero, who questioned the authority of the government. Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* was refused by KPPEC on account of its portrayal of the immorality of the working class people in London. Under such circumstances, it was very risky to present a work critical of society and the state, because any work could be suspected of being rebellious. Playwrights and directors were afraid of torture and even execution, as there were several deaths of democratization movement leaders under suspicious circumstances in the early 1980s. Therefore, putting on Western classical plays were the safest as these would not be looked upon as overtly political.

Yet such cultural policy resulted in the radicalization of youth culture, which was once liberal and less political. During the 1970s, the 1960s' liberal (Hippie) youth culture of the West was more frequently imported and it influenced Korean youth culture, particularly in terms of music and life style. Korean youth wore jeans, played acoustic guitars and drank pints of lager. More importantly, rock and roll music became popular. American and British rock bands were introduced into Korea and their records were enjoyed by university students in music-listening clubs. The 1970s was the era in which Korean youth, the post-Korean-War generation, were culturally westernized and became more liberal. They were romantic and peaceful. Despite their liberal romanticism and love for peace, the austere Yushin government regarded such youth culture as decadent and threatening to the 'healthy' state of culture. So they brutally suppressed it. The state interfered with all aspects of its citizens' lives, leaving little room for alternative sub-cultures or freedom of expression. For example, the government regulated men's hair length; police stopped at will any men with long hair, instantly taking them to a police station to have it cut off. KPPEC actively cooperated with the aim to be 'healthy' and banned many Korean and Western popular songs that were suspected to be bad influences (politically motivated songs or sexual or violent lyrics) on the

¹⁹⁷ In the same context, a popular song 'Sunja's autumn' was prohibited airplay, because 'sunja' was the given name of the wife of the President Chun.

Korean youth.¹⁹⁸ The Chun military government inherited such policy over the youth culture.¹⁹⁹ Therefore, 1980s university students who always formed a majority of the audience must have been either politically active or showed apathy towards politics at all.

Many banned works were secretly distributed via underground groups and illegal publishers. If a script failed to pass the censorship of KPPEC, any performance of the script was prohibited at conventional theatre venues. Yet, a script with political content could be secretly performed at either a small theatre or a non-theatre space in front of an audience of university students or labourers on strike. Performances of such dramas occasionally described themselves as part of a seminar or an assembly in order to avoid being watched by secret police. Until 1990, it was common that secret police and spies watched ‘dangerous’ students in university campuses; an actor or director who took risk to perform such a dangerous text was often put on a wanted list or, at least, was secretly watched by the Agency for National Security Planning. For example, in 1980, when Chun terrorized his people as well as his opponents, *Deoksangol Iyagi (Story of Deoksan Valley)*, which portrayed the tragic story of a poor evicted man who accidentally killed officers and was put to death in 1977, was secretly performed at a small venue, Chilyuk, in the Sinchon area that was populated with university students. A then young director, Ki Kuk-seo, was deeply impressed by the sheer bravery of the performers, who could have been prosecuted for putting on the script.²⁰⁰

Freedom of expression on the stage was only gained in 1988 when the Supreme Court found the pre-censorship of theatre scripts unconstitutional. The notorious pre-censorship in theatre was abolished thereafter. Freedom of speech is assured by the current Korean Constitution (last amended in 1987). According to Article 21, it is written that ‘all citizens shall enjoy the freedom of speech and press’ and ‘censorship of speech and the press shall not be recognized’. Therefore, under the constitution, a theatrical performance is not censored by an authority anymore and, so, any script is permitted to put on stage, regardless of its degree

¹⁹⁸ Many Western popular songs were also banned from radio airplay and longplay records. The Beatles’ ‘Revolution’ and John Lennon’s ‘Working Class Hero’ for being left-wing. The Rolling Stones ‘All about You’ for obscene lyrics. Queen’s ‘Killer Queen’ for violence. Pink Floyd’s ‘Another Brick in the Wall’ for immoral lyrics.

¹⁹⁹ It was witnessed by many spectators of a professional baseball game that a drunk spectator shouted ‘Mr President, Homerun!’ at a bold-headed power hitter, instantly, the unfortunate spectator was dragged off by secret policemen. Policemen were everywhere.

²⁰⁰ In my interview with Ki, he recollected that the author of the story was on the run during the time when the play was staged at Chilyuk.

of sexual expression. Yet, it should be noted that theatre practitioners themselves did not attempt to force this freedom by their own fight. It was gained as a part of the broad democratization with Chun Doo-whan's capitulation to the June Democracy Movement in Seoul, 1987. The consequence of the abolition of censorship was, ironically, an overflow of nudity and sensual description on stage for commercial purposes. However, the National Security Act still holds its influence over the arts and it is still illegal to publically praise North Korea and their Kim leaders. In fact, no theatre director or playwright would willingly intend to do so. Political (Nationalist) theatre lost the interest of audiences and so has dwindled rapidly since 1988.

Ki Kuk-seo's Hamlet series

Such turbulent political incidents in the late 1970s and the early 1980s were the context that Ki Kuk-seo (born 1952) intended to reflect on in his production of *Hamlet* in the spring of 1981. Ki used *Hamlet* to engage with political realities in the light of his speculation that the usurping of Claudius in the Shakespearean tragedy and Korean politics resembled each other at that moment. In 1981, Ki was a promising young director who grew out of the liberal 1970s youth culture that favoured liberal Western youth culture. Having been a literature connoisseur, Ki was influenced by Western plays. Ki's *Hamlet* series and his production of Peter Handke's *Offending the Audience* (1978~) were viewed as among the earliest radical experiments that influenced future generation in terms of freedom in interpretation grounded upon Korean reality.

Ki possessed no formal training in the dramatic arts. He studied Korean literature at Chungang University. He only became involved in theatre when he joined the theatre company Chilyukdan (literally Seven Six company), of which his younger brother, Ki Jubong (born 1955, now a famous stage and film actor), was already a member. Rather Ki Jubong had experienced theatre in his school days. In the beginning, Chilyukdan consisted of young amateur members who were in their early or middle twenties and who only had experiences of school or university stage productions. Chilyukdan was initially located at Sinchon area where three universities had been established. They had their own small theatre with their rehearsal space, which was rare at the time. Ki, reflecting on the early days of

Chilyukdan, stated that ‘Our underground room was like a paradise in such scary times. We dreamt of doing something and planned it. I loved this feeling. I loved freedom’.²⁰¹ The desire to pursue freedom indicated that the members of this theatre company would become political. Upon their founding, Chilyukdan announced their doctrine: ‘We pursue ultimate freedom... We will not observe and be a critic of what happens in the world. We will create and deconstruct. We will have sharp teeth and hands to protect us’.²⁰² Ki was even described as being like ‘a leader of an anarchist or egalitarian group’.²⁰³

Ki took charge of the company from 1977, when he directed his first work, Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape*, before producing the Korean premier of *Offending the Audience* (1978). Chilyukdan continued to put on *Offending the Audience* during the next decade, with its latest performance in 2008 being well received by both audience and critics. Following his first productions, Ki’s early interest centred on European Avant-garde theatre due to its political nature. Ki explained: ‘I chose these plays as they suggested a conspicuous way to shock the audience and the society in which the audience lived’.²⁰⁴ This differentiated him from the then mainstream of Korean theatre that posited itself as an artistic activity, being apathetic to politics. From the political perspective of Ki, mainstream Korean theatre ignored the oppressive reality of the Yushin dictatorship and the daily sufferings of Koreans under such an illiberal system. He wanted people to face the truth (that is to say, how they were being deceived by the government’s propaganda) and Handke’s play was the perfect vehicle for achieving that. Simultaneously with this development, the Nationalist theatre movement of the 1970s would likewise share the same political concerns. However, in contrast to Ki’s focus on Western theatre, the Nationalist Theatre movement dedicated itself to reviving traditional Korean theatre. As a result, Ki distanced himself artistically from this movement, preferring to utilize a canon of foreign playwrights as a means to comment on the circumstances of Korean life.

²⁰¹ Quoted from Lee Jae-seong, ‘Thirty Years of Chilyukdan’, *The Hankyoreh*, 21 February 2006.

²⁰² Quoted from Kim Jong-woo, ‘A Study on Ki Kuk-seo’s *Hamlet*’ (unpublished masters thesis, Chungang University, 2002), p 25.

²⁰³ Quoted from Lee Jae-seong, ‘Thirty Years of Chilyukdan’, *The Hankyoreh*, 21 February 2006.

²⁰⁴ Quoted from Kim Jong-woo, ‘A Study on Ki Kuk-seo’s *Hamlet*’, p 57.

Two of the most significant political events in modern Korean history, the assassination of President Park and the massacre of Gwangju citizens, motivated Ki to stage *Hamlet*. Ki intended to use the play as a means to confront Korean audiences with these two historical events. Ki explains his motivation as follows:

햄릿을 연출하게 된 계기는 박정희의 암살과 광주민주화운동이다. 나는 그러한 정치적 상황 속에 햄릿을 선택해야 했다. 물론 나는 젊은 연출가였고 연극미학에 근거해 이 작품을 다루고 싶었다. ... 어쨌든, 유령과 왕의 살해는 정치적으로 중요하다. 그것들은 항상 학살을 암시한다. 역사는 언제나 시작되는 지점으로 돌아간다.

Park's assassination and the 5.18 Gwangju Democratization Movement encouraged me to direct *Hamlet*. I should choose the tragedy under such political circumstances. Of course, I, as a young theatre artist, also intended to deal with the tragedy in terms of theatre aesthetics. ... However, the Ghost and the regicide in *Hamlet* have political significance. They always evoke massacres. History always returns to its beginning at any such occasion.²⁰⁵

In Ki's *Hamlet*, Park's death and Chun's emergence were evoked by the death of Hamlet's Father and Claudius's subsequent usurpation of the throne. The Ghost also paralleled the civilian victims of the Gwangju Democratization Movement. Hamlet was primarily a witness who was listening to the call of the victims for justice. It could be expected that Hamlet would be portrayed as a people's hero who dared to take revenge on a dictator. Yet, in fact, Ki depicted Hamlet as a defeated hero who had avoided confrontation with his historical circumstances, and then, was called by the Ghost to respond to the past. That is to say, he became a non-heroic protagonist. This was the main aim of Ki's first three *Hamlet* productions (1981, 1982, and 1984).

²⁰⁵ Kim Jong-woo, 'A Study on Ki Kuk-seo's *Hamlet*', p 73.

The first *Hamlet* production was entitled *Ki Kuk-seo's Hamlet*. The title was the idea of the producer Shin Young-cheol, who had been a theatre journalist for a newspaper *Sina-ilbo* but lost his job due to a merging of media enterprises that was forced by the Chun military government in 1981. Ki and the producer Shin knew well that Ki's script could not meet the censorship regulation of KPPEC. Therefore, they submitted Kim Jae-nam's *Hamlet* translation to KPPEC instead of their script. At that time Western classics were always regarded as politically safe by the committee, thus virtually guaranteeing that Ki would be allowed to stage his production. After permission was granted, Ki used his own script for the performance.

Ki rearranged *Hamlet* into eighteen scenes without changing the original plot.²⁰⁶ However, he made the performance more compact by cutting many scenes and characters. Thus, for example, Fortinbras was wholly omitted from the script. He also removed the elements in the Shakespeare's play that could make the performance looked like happening in Denmark. That is to say, Ki did not want the audience to feel that what they were watching was happening in somewhere remote from contemporary Korea. The most peculiar aspect of the production was the final scene in which the duel between Hamlet and Laertes was repeated three times. At first, the duel and the ending were almost identical with the original play. In contrast, during the second duel, Hamlet was killed by Laertes. Following this, Horatio and several others, including Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, joined together and killed both Claudius and Laertes. Finally, during the third duel, subsequent to Hamlet's death, Horatio, who had been walking around the audience's seats, suddenly jumped onto the staged and shot Claudius with a pistol. Reflecting on this unique triple staging of the play's climax, Ki has indicated that the repeated duels reflected his reaction to the death of President Park.²⁰⁷ He was shocked by the fact that the dictator was murdered by his henchman rather than by a public uprising. In response to this event, he wanted to find a means to present on stage the continuous cycles of violence that had beset Korean history in the twentieth century. Observing that one dictator was so rapidly replaced by another dictator, Ki was greatly discouraged that the death of Park did not result in any political change for Korea. That

²⁰⁶ Unfortunately, Ki and the actors destroyed the script after their last performance, which was theatre convention at that time. It is impossible to refer the script of *Ki Kuk-seo's Hamlet* and *Hamlet 2*.

²⁰⁷ Quoted from Baek Ro-ra, 'Korean directors since 1980,' in *History of Korean Modern Theatre*, ed. by Chae Seung-hoon (Seoul: Jipmoon, 2009), pp. 170-209 (p. 193).

discouragement seemed to be reflected in the Epilogue. After the three endings, a young man passed amongst a pile of corpses without any words or emotions. The Epilogue seems to be what Ki ultimately intended to show. He explains: 'I did not intend to represent the tragic history of the ancient Danish royal family. I wanted to emphasize the onlooker, who is just strolling around history and does not realise that history has just been made. I attempted to accuse them of how selfish and foolish they are via Shakespeare's *Hamlet*'.²⁰⁸ Therefore, it seems that Ki imposed a question on the audience: whether they too would take part in remembering the history or ignore it. This is representative of what Korean political drama did in the 1980s; they presented the reality of the situation and asked the people not to ignore it.

The production did not only demonstrate political shock. It became famous for its experiments in casting and *mise-en-scène*. The main cast of the production consisted of the members of Chilyukdan, yet the director hired a group of amateur actors who were university students. They were supposed to play spectators of the political events during the performance. Ki anticipated that they could be involved in the performance, with a hope of producing a documentary effect. Yet, due to the lack of rehearsal time, the amateur group looked just like a 'normal audience'.²⁰⁹ Nonetheless, they at least made themselves look like a protesting student group on the stage.²¹⁰ The *mise-en-scène* was almost revolutionary for a Korean performance of *Hamlet* at that time. For *Hamlet*, it had been a convention that the stage and the costumes must indicate the solemn atmosphere of the royal court, whether it was a direct adaptation or not. Yet, Ki, here attempted to remove dramatic illusion by means of a simple stage. The space was not filled with any props and looked like an ordinary space in the everyday world. The lighting was only basic white light. The auditorium was also lit during the performance, thus weakening dramatic illusion. The costumes corresponded to the minimalism of the scenography. Most actors wore t-shirts and jeans in order to indicate contemporariness. Guildenstern was given a military uniform, which made him look like a lieutenant of President Chun. Furthermore, Claudius even imitated the look and speech of

²⁰⁸ From director's note in unpublished script of *Hamlet*.

²⁰⁹ Kim Jong-woo, 'A Study on Ki Kuk-seo's *Hamlet*', p 65.

²¹⁰ Kim Ok-ran, 'Hamlet as an epic 5.18 and Ki Kuk-seo's position in Korean theatre history', *Hankookgeukyuesulyeongu*, 34 (2011), 223-66 (p. 253).

Chun himself. The *mise-en-scène* of the production was very raw in comparison to other contemporary theatre productions. However, such raw quality was regarded as a vehicle for creating the feeling of liveness in a Korean theatre production.

One year after the first production, Ki directed his second *Hamlet* under the title of *Hamlet 2* with a subtitle ‘age of madness and terror’. He submitted Kim Jae-nam’s translation again to KPPEC in order to pass the censorship. Ki was aware of the fact that an inspector from KPPEC attended a performance of *Ki Kuk-seo’s Hamlet*.²¹¹ KPPEC must have noticed the difference between the script and the actual words on the stage. Also, *Ki Kuk-seo’s Hamlet* had clear elements that could be interpreted as a dangerous text that implied the Gwangju Democratization Movement. The committee would have foreseen what Ki would do; he never intended to put on the Shakespearean tragedy as translated by Kim Jae-nam. Yet, despite Ki’s fraud, KPPEC granted a license to the script and he repeated the same process: securing KPPEC’s permission and, then, revising the script afterward. An inspector must have watched *Hamlet 2* as well and recognized the discrepancy between the censored script and the performance, yet they did not cancel the production. Ki thought it as even KPPEC could not cancel a production that was already performed on the stage, and they could not help but permitting a very elementary freedom of expression.²¹² Here, I suspect that the vice-chair of KPPEC, Yoh Suk-kee, Shakespearean scholar, might have granted permission to Ki, unnoticeably.

With *Hamlet 2*, Ki attempted to disclose the moral corruption of Korean society under the military dictatorship. He believed that where the dictator rules, there must be madness and terror. In fact, the Chun government ruled the Korean people not only by repressing them through the police and army, but also by distributing low entertainment, such as sex films and sports, in an effort to pacify dissent. Ki wanted to show how citizens went mad under these circumstances. He indicated that ‘where politics disappeared, there came decadence’.²¹³ To reflect decadence, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were presented as being homosexual and

²¹¹ From my interview with Ki Kuk-seo, 12 June Seoul, South Korea.

²¹² From my interview with Ki. Yet, it does not seem so. In 1984, a theatre company Yeonwoomudae should take six month suspension of any performance due to their *Naui Saldeon Gohyangeun (My Country Home)*. The theatre company revised a part of lyrics of a song ‘Ah Daehanminkook (Oh great Korea)!’ that was praise for the government and extremely aired almost to be known by all the Korean people.

²¹³ Kim Jong-woo, ‘A Study on Ki Kuk-seo’s *Hamlet*’, p 71.

violent in the production. They tortured Hamlet and intoxicated him with drugs to remove his political ideas. At that time, homosexuality was an issue to indicate how licentious Korean society had become by the influence of the media.²¹⁴ Gertrude and Ophelia were upper class women who enjoyed a luxurious life being apathetic to politics. However, the performance itself did not provide any artistic innovations when compared to its predecessor, especially in terms of *mise-en-scène*. Other notable differences between the two productions are that Ki did not use the amateur group any more, and that he changed the line ‘to be or not to be’ to ‘true or false that is the question’, in order to question the falseness of the corrupted society. Ki suggested this was a mirror of Korean society that then indicated moral crisis intended by the military government. Yet, despite these differences, the performance was regarded as a failure by the popular press of the time. This was largely due to the unrefined acting of the theatre company members, crude staging and badly handled textual adaptation.

In 1984, Ki embarked on a very ambitious project, merging *Hamlet* with Jean-Paul Sartre’s *The Flies*. He attempted to present the devastated soul of Hamlet and the political will of Orestes together on the stage. According to the programme of the performance (1984), he wanted to examine the question ‘What can classic tragedy do in this modern world?’. By means of this question, he seemed to problematize the negative outcomes of Western classical tragedy, in which tragic heroes always fail to achieve their goals and are left defeated. He intended to juxtapose the frustration of Orestes and the revenge of Hamlet in order to claim what was needed on the Korean stage in the 1980s was a tragic hero who was also a revolutionary, one that would fight against military dictatorship.²¹⁵ Therefore, in this production, Hamlet shouted to the audience ‘To join (the students’ protest against the government) or to look on, that is the question’. This was obviously designed to urge the audience to think of the politics. Ki intended to show how frustration could turn into a desire to act in the world. Along with this political end, Ki also challenged the concept of theatre space. It was planned so that *Hamlet* was performed in the theatre and, when it finished, *The Flies* would begin in the lobby of the theatre. The audience were supposed to move from the auditorium to the lobby. In doing this, Ki attempted to create a communal spirit. However, the

²¹⁴ In my interview, Ki said that he did not know about homosexuality when he wrote the script. He just referred to the moral anxiety.

²¹⁵ From my interview with Ki.

audience was reluctant to see the performance in the lobby; therefore, *The Flies* could not be performed as intended. Moreover, the theatre allowed only one run of the production because it presented a security issue. Despite this explanation, it was suggested that the real reason for the production's limited run would have derived from its political nature. Three police buses had parked outside the theatre without clear reason; when Ki and Chilyukdan put on the performance, there was not any student's demonstration in the area. This indicates that the Chun government regarded the production as a danger to their rule.

Hamlet and Orestes

조명이 들어오기 전, 라디오에서 나오는 것처럼 대화가 들린다. 꿈처럼 몽롱하지만 뚜렷하다. 이 대화는 햄릿의 광기로 이해되어야 한다. 마치 소리가 들리는 환영이나 강박증. 이런 소리는 공연 내내 들린다.

“거기누구요?” “먼저대답하십시오!”

함성, 자동차소리, 군인들의행진, 총소리, 함성.

조명.

햄릿등장. 새벽이다. 몇몇의 시체가 무대 위에 있다. 인부들이 시체를 나른다.

서치라이트가 지나간다. 호레이쇼 입장.

인부들이 라디오를 튼다. 장송곡이 연주된다. 무대 오른편의 티브이가 켜진다. 왕의 대관식 연설. 인부들은 라디오를 듣는다. 햄릿은 인부들이 있는 곳을 서성인다. 그는 알코올 중독자로 보인다. 호레이쇼의 모습도 나타난다. 새벽.

Before the lights turn on, a dialogue is being heard as if coming from a radio. It is dreamy but clear. This should be understood as the madness of Hamlet. Like an auditory hallucination, or obsession. This is heard during the performance.

“Who’s there?” “Nay, answer me!”

Roaring, horn sounds, marching of soldiers, sounds of gunshot, roaring.

Light.

Hamlet is seen. Dawn. Several dead bodies lie on the stage. The builders are carrying the bodies. A searchlight passes. Horatio enters.

The builders turn on the radio. A requiem is played. A TV at the stage right (or left) is turned on. It is the King’s coronation speech. The builders listen to the radio. Hamlet walks around to where the builders are. He looks like an alcoholic. Horatio is also seen. Dawn.

Table 6. The opening scene of *Hamlet and Orestes* from the unpublished script
The scene alludes to the citizens murdered during the Gwangju Democratization Movement.



Figure 27. Hamlet being tortured by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in *Hamlet and Orestes*

After six years, Ki adapted and directed *Hamlet* twice more in 1990. The political implication of the former productions was removed. This transition obviously linked to the socio-political changes between the late 1980s and the early 1990s. The less repressive Roh Tae-woo government replaced the military dictator Chun by direct election in 1987. South Korea held the Seoul Olympics in 1988, which gave huge pride to the people. Koreans were also more affluent than they were in the early 1980s. It seemed that South Korea was already democratized. The Korean people were less interested in political issues and became more concerned about culture (either artistic or commercial) and the economy. However, Ki decided to adapt *Hamlet* again after hearing the news that a skeleton was discovered under a railway bridge in a rural area with its hands tied behind it.²¹⁶ The skeleton was thought to be a young man who had protested against the Chun government. It seemed that Ki was still recalling the deaths that followed from the Gwangju Democratization Movement.

The two productions were titled *Hamlet 4* and *Hamlet 5*; yet, each was based on the same script. This time, Ki wrote his own script, just taking several lines and the characters' names from the Shakespearean tragedy. The script had a subject of encounter and consisted of six independent episodes: Encounter with the Ghost, Love, Violence, Theatre, Capitalism and Philosophy. Ki did not intend there to be any narrative continuity amongst these episodes. In the first episode, Encounter with the Ghost, Hamlet meets a ghost in his nightmare, which he thinks is as a projection of his guilt. This is the opening in the unpublished script:

햄릿: 죽었는 줄 알았는데..... 벌써 오래 전에 돌아가시지 않으셨던가요?
 내가 지하실에서 시체를 꺼내서..... 비닐봉지에 쌓인 당신의 시체
 참 그래, 벽 틈에도..... 여기 저기 비닐봉지더미들이 있었어.....
 무더기로..... 그 중에 맨 밑에 있었던 것 같아... 그런데 거기에
 살아서..... 이것은 무슨 일일까? 꿈인가? 아냐, 분명히.....
 만지기도 끔찍할 만큼 부패한..... 그래서 손도 못 대고..... 또,
 오랫동안 미루어오던 죄의식까지 겹쳐서 손도 대지 못하다가.....
 결국 결심해서 제가 메고..... 어디론가..... 멀리..... 기억이 잘 나지
 않는군요..... 그러나 저러나 그렇게 살아계시니 건강은

²¹⁶ Kim Ok-ran, 'Hamlet as an Epic 5.18 and Ki kuk-seo's Position in Korean theatre history', p. 241.

어떠신가요? 한 십 여 년 이상 더 사실 것 같은데..... 그때 또 돌아가셔도..... 그땐 끔찍하지 않겠는 걸요.....

유령: 저 벽을 보아라. 저기도, 저위도, 저기 구석도, 그리고 네가 돌아가는 길목에 여기 저기 많은 주검 들이 보일 것이다. 무서워하지 말고 그들을 수습하도록 해라. (시계를 보며) 시간이 자꾸 가는군. 점점 시간이 다가와. 어떡하지?

Hamlet: I thought you were dead... You passed away a long time ago, didn't you? ... I carried your dead body from the underground room... Your dead body in the plastic bag... Yes, in the chasm on the wall... There were many plastic bags of dead bodies... a bunch of them... I remember yours was at the bottom... But you come back alive from there... How does it happen?... Is it dream... No, no... too decayed to touch... I did not dare to... This guilt long delayed... yet I carried you to somewhere... far away... I don't remember well... But you are alive... How are you? You could live another ten years... If you died... No more horror.

Ghost: Look at the wall, there, over there, that corner. Every corner of the road you will take, you will see the dead bodies. Don't be frightened. Carry them over. Time passes. Time goes. What can you do?

Hamlet attempted to dispose of all the dead souls that stayed with the ghost; otherwise he would continue being haunted by the ghost in his dreams. In the second episode, Love, Hamlet is a political activist who is dating Ophelia, but they get into a dispute over Hamlet's pessimism and involvement with political affairs. During this episode the characters play out the nunnery scene of *Hamlet* with two puppets. In the third episode, Violence, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern bury the dead bodies of university students whom they have killed. Yet, they are shown to suffer from pangs of guilt over their acts. In the Theatre episode, actors present a scene depicting the Gwangju Democratization Movement. Following this, in the Capitalism episode, Hamlet meets Gertrude, who represents a corrupted upper-class woman.

Finally, in the Philosophy episode, Gravediggers converse about death. After the six episodes, there follows an Epilogue in which Claudius is shot dead three times by Horatio, and Hamlet is tortured to death by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. During this sequence, Ophelia is also dragged off from the stage by the two torturers, with her rape and death being hinted at. In these closing scenes, whenever Claudius was shot, he would rise again and shout 'A dictator always returns. A Fascist never dies'. Then, in the final scene, Hamlet rises again and asks 'Where am I now?'.

Ki stated that *Hamlet 4* and *5* explored an aspect of the contemporary Korean mentality, and he argued that the character of Shakespeare's Hamlet, particularly his compound thought and indecisiveness, could explain the inner side of Korean intellectuals in the 1990s.²¹⁷ What Ki showed through these two productions was the pessimism of the intellectuals who had lost the will to fight against reality and had consequently embraced disillusionment. With regard to this aspect, the then leading theatre critic and a German literature professor Lee Sang-il commented that 'Ki could be suffering from inertia derived from the nightmare of the past decade and the loss of his political drive as he lost his main foe (the bygone Chun government)'.²¹⁸ Kim Ok-ran also suggested that '*Hamlet 4* presented how Ki has been deprived of a political subject matter that had been grabbing him previously'.²¹⁹ However, the productions were not well received by either the audience or the critics. Lee Sang-il criticised the production because 'it showed the situations only and failed to show the the unconscious forces motivating them; therefore, the audience did not understand very well what they were seeing'.²²⁰ A theatre critic and theatre studies professor, Kim Sung-hee reviewed the production and argued that 'it was clear that the director attempted to reflect politics from the context of contemporary Korea; yet, the production was very crude in style and immature in acting'.²²¹ Another theatre studies professor, Kim Bang-ok also criticised it (1991) on the grounds that 'Even though they pursued disconnectedness

²¹⁷ From director's note in the unpublished script *Hamlet 4*.

²¹⁸ Lee Sang-il, 'Ki kuk-seo's Hamlet 4', *Hankookyeongeuk*, 1 March 1990, p. 13.

²¹⁹ Kim Ok-ran, '*Hamlet* as an epic 5.18 and Ki kuk-seo's position in Korean theatre history', p. 258.

²²⁰ Lee Sang-il, p. 14.

²²¹ Kim Sung-hee, 'Review- Hamlet 4', *The Weekly Chosun*, 15 February 1990, p. 120.

and exaggeration as a theatrical method, an art work should be cohesive and elegant'.²²² Ki had a clear idea of what he wanted to express, but he did not fully develop or polish his theatrical method to carry that out. Likewise, the raw quality of the productions juxtaposed Ki's political consciousness. He and Chilyukdan were in fact more criticised than praised by their fellow theatre practitioners and academics. As seen above, most criticisms coming from mainstream theatre and the academic field centred on their dislike of the crude production values and Ki's audacious strategy for reconstructing Shakespearean tragedy. In fact, his *Hamlet* productions were regarded as amateurish adaptations of the tragedy that lacked the key elements which Shakespearean productions should have.

Ki's *Hamlet* series was undoubtedly a milestone in the history of Korean Shakespeare. Ki pioneered a radical way of adapting and rewriting Shakespearean drama by reflecting on contemporary Korean politics. In the series, politicizing the tragedy was to recall the past, which was hidden by the unjust ruling power; Ki constantly summoned up the memory of the Gwangju Democratization Movement. In addition, Ki placed Shakespeare into small theatres with limited budgets, rather than those of mainstream theatre. The smaller venues came with cheaper set design. The raw acting was also ground-breaking. Previously, to act in a Shakespearean role had meant that an actor should be very experienced in the theatre. Against this convention, Ki did not require any high skill or great experience from his actors. Thus, it can be argued that Ki's productions were very democratic. Shakespeare was for everybody and anyone could direct or perform Shakespeare. In this respect, Ahn Chi-woon has explained that 'Ki Kuk-seo opened up a new direction in Shakespeare reception, which began to contextualize Shakespeare in Korean society in terms of its style and theme'.²²³ Indeed, the legacy of these five *Hamlet* productions is substantial in terms of acting, scenography and script composition. Ki's productions were the prototype for many later *Hamlet* adaptations in Korea. Indeed, the Seoul Metropolitan Theatre's *Hamlet* in 2011 could arguably be seen as the direct successor of Ki's work.²²⁴

²²² Kim Bang-ok, *YelinYeongeukuiMihak* (Seoul: Moonyemadang, 1997), p. 333.

²²³ Ahn Chi-woon, 'Shakespeare in Korean Theatre', *The Hankyoreh*, 14 December 1996.

²²⁴ After twenty years, Ki directed the tragedy once again in the title of *Hamlet 6* (2012) at the Namsan Arts Centre, Seoul. Jugjug's director Kim Nak-hyeong, who directed *Macbeth*, took part in the production as a collaborative director. It was said that Ki maintained the structure of his former production and modified the characters. Here, Hamlet, a wounded worker, was fired from a factory for the participating in his fellow workers' industrial action. Hamlet suffered from poverty and post-

Seoul Metropolitan Theatre's Hamlet (2011, Sejong Centre, Seoul)

The Seoul Metropolitan Theatre, established in 1997, is a public funded company under the full financial sponsorship of the Seoul Metropolitan Government. Their official aim is to present high-quality artistic theatre performances to Seoul citizens; they have been staging Western classical dramas from Sophocles to Arthur Miller. They produced the following Shakespeare plays: *The Merchant of Venice* (2001), *Othello* (2003), and *The Winter's Tale* (2009, under the title of 'Shakespeare for school children'). For their *Hamlet* production, the theatre company hired the director Park Geun-hyeong who is not a member of the company. He was chosen by the artistic director Kim Cheol-ri, of Seoul Metropolitan Theatre, because of his innovative approach. Taking on this role, Park described his particular approach as follows: 'Western classics are about Western countries, yet I intend to make a Western classic talk about Korea'.²²⁵

Park Geun-hyeong (born 1963) has been seen to be one of the leading directors and playwrights of *ilsanggeuk* (literally, 'everyday drama'), which has been one of the prominent trends in contemporary Korean theatre since the 1990s. He wrote almost twenty dramas, most of which he also directed. Park could be regarded as an inheritor of the political realist theatre of the 1980s, especially taking into account his theatrical background. At nineteen years old, Park failed his university exam and began his theatre career with Chilyukdan, where Park learned theatre directing and acting under the influence of Ki Kuk-seo. The most important influence of Ki seems to have been showing Park how to harness the rebellious potential of theatre, that is to say, he learned how to deal adventurously with the classics, draw in parallels to Korean politics, and cultivate the power of raw acting performances. The lack of formal drama education might have also affected Park's approach to theatre. He did not study canonical Western plays or any established theatrical methods. His directing and writing are completely based upon his own experience of the stage, without any clear influence from

traumatic stress disorder. Like his predecessors in the *Hamlet* series in 1980s, Hamlet spent his days in a state of torpor. In his dreams, he was being haunted by the innocent victims who were killed by the power of the government or the greed of capitalism. Ophelia was his lover yet she should sell her body to earn a basic income for food. Horatio was a theatre director and he performed improvisation pieces to please Hamlet and Ophelia.

²²⁵ Quoted from Kim Seul-ki, 'Park Geun-hyeong directs *Hamlet*', *MaeilGyeongjae*, 8 April 2011.

famous directors either Korean or foreign. Consequently, it has been said that actors under his direction often provide unrefined performances devoid of stylization. Park's theatre is said to present a 'strange familiarity' by juxtaposing two opposing components such as the imitation of both cartoonish and realistic modes of representation, comical exaggeration and *sinpa* (Korean sentimentalism), festive lightness and heaviness of being.²²⁶ In addition, Park was famous for challenging the conventions of the theatre industry, casting an unattractive and overweight actress for traditionally beautiful characters.

Park became famous with his early work, *Cheongchoonyechan* (*Viva the Young Ones*, 1999): the rawness of the production was a milestone for *ilsanggeuk*. As its name indicates, *ilsanggeuk* focuses on describing the ordinary life of common people, and so features few dramatic moments. It occasionally takes a hyper-realist style in order to present a fragment of reality; for instance, everyday behaviour, such as eating food and drinking water or liquor. In terms of dramaturgy, *ilsanggeuk* rejects the portrayal of intense conflict between characters, causal story structures, and clear themes, which are all generally regarded as mandatory components of drama. The genre sometimes rather intensified the emotion of the characters when they confront each other. While the realist theatre of 1980s and its successors intend to indicate ideology and history, *ilsanggeuk* suspends judgments about what is happening on the stage.²²⁷ Park's theatre company Golmokil (literally, 'backstreet') reflected the idea of *ilsanggeuk*, he wanted to show the life of the people in the backstreet. Therefore, his plays are normally about the deprived people of Korea society. In particular, he often explores the theme of broken families in his dramas.

Park staged *Hamlet* (2008) with Golmokgil before he worked with the Seoul Metropolitan Theatre. This production was his second staging of Shakespeare after *Othello* (1998). Park wanted to direct *Hamlet* after he had realized that there was great acting material that could be drawn from the tragedy.²²⁸ In addition, Park confessed that 'my writing and *Hamlet* share a same story. That is to say, everybody in the world is lonely, they just hide

²²⁶ Kim Seong-hee, 'New Dramatists and Ilsanggeuk', in *100 Years of Korean Modern Theatre*, ed. by Kim Seong-hee (Seoul: Yeongeukgwaingan, 2008), pp. 439-62 (p. 447).

²²⁷ Kim Hyeong-ki, 'Mapping Contemporary Korean Theatre', in *100 Years of Korean Modern Theatre*, pp. 411-419 (p. 417).

²²⁸ I have used my interview with Park in April, 2010, in writing about Golmokgil's *Hamlet*.

it'.²²⁹ He was attracted by the depression of Hamlet, especially as this emotion was very typical for dramatic characters. Having experience of several *Hamlet* performances, Park remained unconvinced that they had managed to touch on the true subject of what the tragedy was about. He decided to focus on the family aspect of the tragedy and on the relationship between Ophelia and Hamlet. He believed that the story of Hamlet is nothing less than revenge of a prince who had lost the chance to be a king. Therefore, the prince should restrain his love for Ophelia to fulfil his plans for revenge. Through this, Park thought, Hamlet's love would be heightened. Park commented that he could not find the aspect of love in other *Hamlet* productions, which encouraged him to explore this emotion more deeply.

Despite his specific focus on the love between Hamlet and Ophelia, Park did not intend to deconstruct the original tragedy. Rather, his aim was to take away what could not be understood by a Korean audience. Jeong Jin-su's translation was chosen because, for Park, the language of this translation was the most succinct and the story was the most easily understood.²³⁰ The English text was not referred to. Once the translation was fixed, Park then polished the language with more lived, everyday Korean expressions in order to make his rendition of *Hamlet* approachable for ordinary Koreans. Where it felt awkward, he rewrote the line to be easier to comprehend. For instance, Park did not really comprehend why Ophelia remained calm when confronting Hamlet's wrath at the nunnery scene. Therefore, he wrote Ophelia's line as 'I will go to the nunnery. Please stop it'. This line certainly weakened the tragic atmosphere, yet generated a stronger sentimentalism. However, he argued that that is how the Korean audience would understand the tragedy. In this sense, he ultimately intended to translate the tragic hero of *Hamlet* into an ordinary man that ordinary Koreans could sympathize with. Indeed, commenting on this transformation, Park asserted that, '*Hamlet* collected love, revenge and hatred, these are the last stage of emotions that a human being could experience. An audience would sympathize with Hamlet in at least one scene, if not the whole play'.²³¹ That is to say, he intended to create an *ilsanggeuk Hamlet*.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ Jeong's translation has not been published.

²³¹ Quoted from Kim Hee-yeon, 'Two different *Hamlet* productions', *Kyunghyang*, 28 January 2008.

Golmokil's *Hamlet* (2008) did not use any stage-setting or props, which could be regarded as Ki's influence. The stage was almost empty; there was only a chair-like object in the middle.²³² All the actors wore black clothing with minimal makeup. Park intended that his rendition would be a language-oriented performance without any dependence on lavish stagecraft. His aim was to create a theatre that would showcase his actors' performances and convey the language of Shakespeare intact to the audience. However, he clearly remarked that he was opposed to the recent deconstructions of Shakespeare, which is somewhat ironical.²³³ As seen above, he already edited the original tragedy to generate the script, which could not be called a faithful rendition of Shakespeare. He might have indicated that the production at least retained the key features of the original tragedy. However, Golmokil's *Hamlet* was not as much of a success as Park had expected. The setting was too rough and the acting was too raw and crude. His casting was also peculiar; for example, Polonius was played by an actress, which was seen as quite absurd. The intention of this gender-blind casting did not make an impact beyond the presentation of a female actor playing the part of the old man with harsh voice. His *ilsanggeuk* approach to *Hamlet* seemed not to work effectively here. Therefore, when Park took an opportunity to direct *Hamlet* with the Seoul Metropolitan Theatre, he confessed that 'I think we need a tragic character at the moment, characters in *ilsanggeuk* cannot explain this rough world we are in now'.²³⁴ His change obviously derived from his failure with Golmokil's *Hamlet*.

In 2011, Park was offered a good opportunity to take on *Hamlet* again with a very generous budget. The public-funded Seoul Metropolitan Theatre could support him to realize the scenography and the music he was conjuring up. However, this financial relief also brought responsibility. The director was under an obligation to produce an artistic piece that could please ordinary Seoul citizens, rather than theatre fans in the Daehangro area. In this sense, Park was the ideal director to put on *Hamlet* for people. Park's strategy in creating *Hamlet* for the ordinary people of Seoul meant that he had to revise his former vision, and work with a more polished *mise-en-scène* and acting. For the theme, Park stated that he had been fascinated by the line 'For anything so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose

²³² I attended their performance at a rural theatre festival (Milyang, South Korea) in 20 July 2009.

²³³ From my interview with Park.

²³⁴ Kim Seul-ki, 'Park Geun-hyeong directs *Hamlet*', *MaeilGyeongjae*, 8 April 2011.

end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature' (3. 2. 19-22). Here, his aim was to explore the life of Koreans in the twenty-first century through *Hamlet* and to present a tragic figure in the contemporary context, as his predecessor Ki had done in the 1980s.

Seoul Metropolitan Theatre's *Hamlet* appealed to its audience by saying 'Forget about all the *Hamlet* performances so far!' as printed on its poster. The theatre company argued that their production differentiated itself from past [Korean] *Hamlet* performances because it was 'reinterpreted and had speedy progression of story and modernism'. It is indeed quite a short version of the Shakespearean tragedy. The performance only took two hours, even without omitting any scenes; usually a running time for a Korean *Hamlet* had been two and a half hours or more. By invoking the term 'modernism', the production did not mean to associate itself with Western modernist drama. Park simply intended to direct the tragedy to talk about Korea now rather than medieval Denmark (or England). He indeed remarked that 'I don't want to let the classic remain a classic'.²³⁵ Again, the script for the performance was based on Jeong Jin-Su's translation (1998). Park stated again that Jeong's translation was the most suitable translation for the performance, more so than any other previous translation, which had been too literary to be used on stage.²³⁶

The venue, the M Theatre of Sejong Centre, is equipped with six hundred seats. The audience seats are spilt into two levels, stalls and balcony. The stage of the venue has a generous space that is similar in size to the Lyttleton stage of the Royal National Theatre in London. However, the setting for the production, designed by Yeo Sin-dong, was simple; there was only a big shipping container located upstage. The container was spilt into two levels and had doors at the bottom level. The actors used these doors during the performance. The top of the container was also used as an acting space. This stage design was clearly intended to evoke memories of a demonstration in Seoul in the year 2008; this involved a shipping container which was located on Sejongro, in front of the venue. Seoul Metropolitan Police put the container on the road in order to divide the demonstrators who were protesting against the Korean government's decision to import beef from the USA and the police who

²³⁵ Quoted from Park Bo-mi, 'To live or to die, Hamlet in our age', *TheHankyoreh*, 12 April 2011

²³⁶ From the programme of *Hamlet*, Seoul Metropolitan Theatre.

were struggling to control and disperse the crowd. The container was a symbol that implied the disconnection between those in political power and the people.



Figure 28. The last scene - Hamlet (centre, played by Kang Sin-gu) is giving his last speech.
Claudius (played by Hwang Seong-dae) stands next to the chair on stage right.
The players stand on the first level of the shipping container.



Figure 29. Protesters on the shipping containers in front of the Sejong Centre in 2008.
Police buses beyond the containers.

However, by putting it on the stage, the audience, the majority of whom would live in Seoul, would think the performance was going to invoke the demonstration of the previous year. Yet, when the audience came in, the container was not easily noticed by the audience. Instead, they could clearly see the letters spelling out the word '*Hamlet*' on a screen between the stage and the audience's seats. Showing the title on the screen had been a convention of Korean musicals. It seems that Park intended to give the audience an impression that they were going to watch a performance that was as interesting as a musical. The screen was raised up when the performance began.

There was a recurring melody that was entitled 'Ophelia's Theme'. The theme was played at the beginning, at the entrance of the Players, and during the finale. In addition, Ophelia sang a song to the tune of the theme, with lyrics that were written by Park. The theme was composed by Atmosphere, a team renowned for their film and TV soap opera scores. The tune of the theme was melancholic with a catchy melody, which would be more suitable for film or TV drama. The costumes were designed to strengthen the contemporary feel of the performance. Hamlet wore a dark coloured trench coat with a black shirt and trousers; these hinted at funeral dress. Ophelia was also dressed in black; all her garments, and even her shoes, were black. The couple shared this blackness in common with Golmokil's Hamlet and Ophelia. In contrast to the dark colour of Hamlet and Ophelia, Claudius wore a vividly coloured jacket with a blue scarf, and Gertrude wore a lavish dress. These costumes presented a very noticeable juxtaposition between the two couples. Other characters wore modern suits; these costumes looked like ordinary clothing that could easily be worn on the street.

The acting was primarily realistic with exaggeration in soliloquy, as well as following the typical 'raw acting' style of Park. The actors consisted of regular members of the Seoul Metropolitan Theatre and a few other freelance actors who passed the audition for the production. There was no longer a romantic hero (for example, as he had been played by Laurence Olivier); nor did Hamlet look like a noble Western man. Hamlet (played by Kang Sin-Gu) looked like an ordinary man in Seoul who might live next door to any of the audience members. In addition, Hamlet was portrayed as a weak character, given to much sighing and crying. In contrast, Claudius (played by Hwang Seong-Dae) was a powerful character who looked like the head of a criminal gang. Hwang even dominated the stage with

his big and low voice. By this contrast in appearance, the audience might well consider that Hamlet looked much weaker than Claudius. Yet, there was a serious issue in casting. Kang is actually six or seven years older than Hwang. The age gap was not hidden by the makeup and the audience was able to see the discrepancy; Hamlet seemed to be an uncle of Claudius. Moreover, Laertes looked older than Claudius. Gertrude looked a similar age to Hamlet. By this appearance, therefore, the audience could not believe that Hamlet and Claudius were nephew and uncle, or that Gertrude was Hamlet's mother. However, apart from the three main characters, the casting at least was normal compared to Park's previous *Hamlet*. The characters looked as they have appeared in most *Hamlet* productions in Korea. Polonius was played by a senior member of Seoul Metropolitan Company. Ophelia was played by a young actress and Gertrude looked like a middle-aged coquette.

The performance ran for only two hours, without intermission, despite including virtually all the scenes (except for Act 1, Scene 1). In the Korean theatre there is an unwritten rule that a performance should not run for more than two hours, in order to keep the audience from being bored. The short running time was possible through the relentless cutting of characters and lines from the original text. The omitted characters were Osric, the Gravedigger, and Fortinbras. A lot of dialogue, and many long soliloquys of Hamlet, were replaced by short, plain expressions. This inevitably resulted in an abandoning of the poetry in the original text, which should indicate the loss of the complex psychology of the characters. Indeed, the lines which survived were just functional for the plot. Then, Park inserted his own writing where the poetry was cut. His rewriting was not only to reflect contemporary Korean politics, yet also, more importantly, to transform the Shakespearean tragedy into a sentimental drama, in which a tragic hero suffered from an evil power and was finally defeated. In comparison to Golmokil's *Hamlet*, the Seoul Metropolitan Theatre's production by Park seemed to revive *sinpa*, an emotional attitude manifest in much early twentieth century Korean theatre that had long since been derided and criticized because it came to be seen as old-fashioned and melodramatic.

The beginning of the performance was a soliloquy spoken by Hamlet which was written by Park. Hamlet came onto the downstage and mentioned the container on the upstage.

햄릿 (시작 독백): 깊은 악몽 끝에 나 햄릿은 눈을 떴다. 앞이 캄캄하다. 길을 걸었다. 여기는 광장. 내 아버지의 죽음이 있던 곳. 저 컨테이너 성 속에 매일 밤 불꽃놀이. 넌 누구냐. 난 누구냐.

Hamlet: After a long nightmare, I, Hamlet, opened my eyes. Darkness is all I can see. I walk. Here is a square. My father's death is remembered here. On the container, there are fireworks all these evenings. You, there, who are you? Who am I?²³⁷

This line also has some political implications, 'fireworks', and a 'father's death', that would be easily noticed by the audience. 'Fireworks' would indicate the candles of the protesters in 2008's demonstration, which was protesting over the Korean Government's decision to import American beef (which was suspected of being taken from cattle suffering from BSE). The people's demonstration was also described as a peaceful festival. The people did not vandalize any police cars; they sang songs and watched the improvised comic performances of their companions. Despite such wide-spread opposition from the people, the Korean Assembly, of which majority was strongly held by Grand National Party (the President Lee himself was member of the party), endorsed the beef import from America to the despair of those people involved in the demonstration. One year later, Roh Moo-hyeon, the ninth president of South Korea (in office 2003-2008), committed suicide when he was on the verge of being prosecuted for bribery and fraud. Many Koreans ascribed responsibility for this suicide to Roh's successor, Lee Myung-bak, a former businessman and the tenth president of South Korea (2008-2013). Lee had been blamed by Korean public for his strenuous pro-American and pro-capitalist policy. He was accused of seeking political revenge against his predecessor and engaging in a witch-hunt in order to destroy Roh's popularity and reputation. Subsequent to his death, the deceased president Roh has become a symbol of democracy and freedom. While it is not clear whether or not Park intended this, the audience might well look

²³⁷ From the unpublished script of *Hamlet* Seoul Metropolitan Theatre 2011.

upon the death of Hamlet's father in relation to Roh's suicide. The director did not confirm his intention but this possibility was too explicit to be unnoticed.

The Players were also a means to explore the current Korean politics as 'the abstract and brief chronicles of the time' (2.2.520). Park tasked the Players with the exploration of the relationship between theatre and society. They entered the stage by dancing weirdly to music. The leading player shouted: 'A small flame can light up this dark world!' Then Hamlet asked the leading actor:

햄릿: 자넨 잠깐 날 좀 보세. 그대는 "곤자고의 살해"를 연기할 수 있겠나?

배우: 무고하게 학살당한 백성들을 얘기하려 했습니다만 곤자고를 준비하겠습니다.

햄릿: 그럼 내일 그걸 공연하기로 하세. 내가 몇 줄 새로운 대사를 써주면 그걸 삽입해서 연기할 수 있겠나?

배우: 새로운 대사를 넣는다고 해서 비극 한편이 시대를 깨끗하게 만들 수 있다고 생각하십니까?

햄릿: 그게 예술가들의 몫이지.

배우: 사람들은 필요할 때만 예술을 논하지요. 곤자고 준비하겠습니다.

Hamlet: Can you play The Murder of Gonzago?

Player: We intended to play innocent people who were massacred. But we will do it.

Hamlet: We will have it tomorrow night. You could if needed study a speech of some lines, which I would set down and insert in it, could you not?

Player: Do you believe that a tragedy can purify this corrupted world with some added lines?

Hamlet: That is what art should do!

Player: People cry for art when they need it. We will do The Murder of Gonzago.²³⁸

(Hamlet: (to Players) Follow him friends. We'll hear a play tomorrow. Dost thou hear me, old friend? Can you play the murder of Gonzago?

[Players]: Ay, my lord.

Hamlet: We'll ha't tomorrow night. You could for a need study a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines which I would set down and insert in't, could ye not?

[Players]: Ay, my lord.(2.2.538-545))

From the Korean perspective, the massacred 'innocent people' could provoke an association with the victims of the Gwangju Democratization Movement, especially if Ki Kuk-seo's influence on Park were considered. Moreover, the Lee Myung-bak government's authoritarian policies were reminiscent of the military dictatorship in the past. With these lines, Park might intend his audience to recall Ki's *Hamlet* series and to emphasize that theatre should contribute to a greater understanding the contemporary political reality, which has still been manipulated by invisible power. Therefore, Claudius contemptuously told the Players 'Gwangdae (clown) is the cancer of our age!' after Mousetrap scene; in response to this line, the Leading Player replied 'Power is the tumour of the world'. Yet, these were the only direct political reference of the performance and they were soon forgotten in the melodrama that followed.

It seems that Park was more focused on examining how Hamlet would react to his fate if he lived in contemporary South Korean society. In the original tragedy, the prince succeeds in avenging his father's death, and dies bravely and heroically. Yet, Park seemed to

²³⁸ From the unpublished script of *Hamlet*, Seoul Metropolitan Theatre, 2011.

suggest that in the Korean context Hamlet should be seen as a coward and daydreamer. This Korean Hamlet avoided his duty out of fear over Claudius' power. This would be a portrait of the fear of common people who are facing the overwhelming power of their government or a ruling class. Therefore, such a feeble Hamlet could not say 'That ever I was born to set it right.'(1.5), rather, he falls into self-loathing 'What am I? I am just a shameful coward, just indulging myself with daydreams'. The daydreams mentioned here might be his desire for earthly pleasures, such as his love relationship with Ophelia, which is able to pull him out of the anxieties he has about his duties. Hamlet's mental agony was well expressed by the famous soliloquy, which is also a good example of Park's rendition of the poetry.

햄릿: 사느냐, 죽느냐 이것이 문제로다.

알 길 없는 운명의 화살을 참고 견디느냐,

아니면 고난의 바다와 맞서 싸우다 허우적대며 빠져 죽느냐.

죽는 것은 잠드는 것,

잠이 들면 마음의 고통과 술한 육체의 성가심도 사라지는 것.

이야말로 진정 바라던 바가 아니냐.

죽는 것은 잠드는 것, 그런데 잠이 들면 꿈을 꾸겠지.

여기서 걸리는구나!

육체의 짐을 벗었을 때 이 죽음의 잠 속에서 무슨 꿈을 꾸게 되는 것이
두려워

구차한 삶이나마 질질 끌게 되는 것 아닌지.

그러나 죽음 뒤에 찾아올 가보지 않은 미지의 나라,

아무도 돌아온 적이 없는 그 나라에 대한 두려움이

우리의 의지를 꺾고 비굴한 현세의 삶을 견디게 하는 것이다.

이런 생각이 우릴 비겁하게 만들며

건강한 의지는 무릎을 꿇고 행동을 저버리게 되는 것 아닌가.

사느냐 죽느냐 이것이 문제로다.

아, 나는 무섭다. 이 세상에 나는 혼자다.

가만, 오페리아, 나의 요정. 그대가 기도 중이면 내 죄도 함께 물어주오.

Hamlet: To live or to die, that is the question.

To bear the slings and arrows of unknown fortune,

Or, to take arms against a sea of troubles but finally to drown.

To die—to sleep, no more;

By a sleep we end the heartache and the physical annoyance.

‘Tis a consummation devoutly wished.

To die, to sleep, yet to sleep, perchance to dream.

There’s the rub!

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,

Must give us pause—there’s the respect

That makes our humble life too long.

But that the dread of something after death,

The undiscovered country, from whose bourn

No traveller returns, puzzles our will,

And makes us rather bear our humble life.

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,

And lose the name of the action.

To live to die, that is the question.

Oh, I am scared. I am alone in this world.

The fair Ophelia! My fairy, in thy orisons

Be all my sins remembered.

(Hamlet: To be, or not to be: that is the question:

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,

Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,

And by opposing end them? To die, to sleep—

No more; and by a sleep to say we end

The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks

That flesh is heir to— 'tis a consummation

Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep.

To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub,

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil

Must give us pause. There's the respect

That makes calamity of so long life,

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,

Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,

The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay,
 The insolence of office and the spurns
 That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,
 When he himself might his quietus make
 With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
 But that the dread of something after death,
 The undiscovered country from whose bourn
 No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have
 Than fly to others that we know not of?
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
 And thus the native hue of resolution
 Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
 And enterprises of great pith and moment
 With this regard their currents turn awry,
 And lose the name of action. Soft, you now,
 The fair Ophelia!— Nymph, in thy orisons
 Be all my sins remembered.(3.1.58-92))

'To be or not to be' has been clearly translated as 'to live or to die, that is the question'. There has been another suggestion that the line should be translated as 'to exist or not'. The former, 'to live or to die' has been prevalent on Korean stages, largely due to its dramatic quality that

usually stems from much heightened emotion of the actor who plays Hamlet. In this production Hamlet is concerned about whether he would take the challenge to fight against the mighty Claudius at the risk of his own death. The repetition of ‘to live or to die’ at the end could point out the growth of his anxiety. Then, Hamlet acknowledged that he was the only person who knew the evil nature of Claudius. This fact obviously troubled and distressed him even more.

This easy rendition of the complex soliloquy helped the audience to comprehend the reason for Hamlet’s sudden attack on Ophelia afterwards, which had not always been clear. Here, Hamlet could not share the truth with other people. He might wish Ophelia could stand up for him, yet she was just a weak young girl without any political power. Therefore, Hamlet asked Ophelia ‘Can’t you see my pain? Can’t you feel the atmosphere?’ and then suddenly began to sob. Then, Ophelia held Hamlet and attempted to appease him, ‘Please don’t cry my prince. A prince does not cry. That is what a prince should be’. Such a sentimental atmosphere in the performance was elevated even more by Ophelia. Park repeated Golmokil’s Nunnery scene here. When Ophelia was told to go to a nunnery by Hamlet, Ophelia answered ‘Yes, I will. I will go to a nunnery. I will go there at your wish. So, please, please stop this’. This line would cause audiences familiar with the original tragedy to burst into laughter because of its plainness. However, it seems that Park would not understand why Ophelia stays calm and solemn after Hamlet’s brutal speech. He would think that his revision would be more realistic in terms of his *ilsanggeuk*. Yet, such melodramatic sentimentalism could not be founded on a genuine reading of the tragedy or any Western production of Shakespeare. This would not, however, be hindering the attention of the audience; rather, they must have felt more compassion with Hamlet, as they were more emotionally familiar with melodrama than Western tragedy.

Along with sentimentalising Hamlet, the director also intended Ophelia to be a beautiful character in the performance.²³⁹ In doing so, Park also wrote poetic lines for Ophelia, which he believed would make her look more beautiful. His writing was prominent in Act 4. Ophelia sang a song with new lyrics, ‘I uncovered your cold face, lying in the coffin you’re looking at me, flood of tears, farewell my darling ...’. The lyric was written about the

²³⁹ From my interview with the actors of Seoul Metropolitan Theatre. The interview took place in Seoul, 7 April 2011.

death of Polonius and the absence of Hamlet. When Ophelia came back on stage, she also recited the following story:

오펔리어: 아저씨, 기억나요? 옛날 우리가 살던 그 동네. 겨울 되면 눈이 참 많이 왔어요. 기억나죠, 아저씨? 하얗게 쌓인 눈을 제일 먼저 밟아보겠다고 아저씨랑 나랑 맨발로 뛰어나가곤 했었는데... 우리 동네는 봄이 와도 눈이 녹지 않았잖아요. 아저씨, 올해는 겨울이 언제 와요? 눈은 또 언제 내리죠? 아저씨, 저 부탁이 하나 있는데요. 나 여기가 너무 아파서 숨을 못 쉬겠어요. 저 여기 좀 고쳐주세요. 아저씨! 아저씨! 내가 이렇게 부탁하잖아요. 나 여기가 너무 아파. 숨이 안 쉬어져요. 나 좀 도와줘요. 숨을 쉴 수가 없어. 너무 아파.

Ophelia: Mister, do you remember the town we lived when we were young? Always heavy snow in winter, you remember? We ran with barefoot on snow. But snow did not melt in spring. Mister, when does winter come this year? When will it snow? Mister, can you do me a favour? I have a pain in my chest. I can't breathe. Please do something about this. So hurt, can't breathe. Please help me, I can't breathe. It hurts so much.²⁴⁰

These lines replaced 185-197 (4. 6). Ophelia here did not give flowers to other characters. She just recited the story in a sad voice and, at the end of her speech, started to sob. Yet Laertes's exclamation remained the same as the original tragedy. Obviously, none of Park's interpolations related to the original text at all, nor to the plot of the performance. In terms of the consistency of its dramatic structure, the lines were too illogical and should be removed. Park was confident that the absurd story would increase the sad and beautiful atmosphere around Ophelia. Moreover, he seemed to wish to put his personal sentiments into the character for the purpose of transforming Shakespearean tragedy into his full rendition.

²⁴⁰ From the unpublished script of *Hamlet*, Seoul Metropolitan Theatre, 2011.

Park also presented an unusual yet sentimental ending to the performance. Such a weak Hamlet could not be expected to achieve his task. However, having been informed of Claudius's plot, Hamlet rushed toward Claudius to stab him with a sword. Yet, his effort resulted in nothing other than the king very easily disarming Hamlet and knocking him over with physical superiority. Following this, Claudius then poured the poison into Hamlet's mouth. All died, but the evil conspirator survived; observing this situation Claudius declares 'look at him. A rebellious thought killed Hamlet'. He then also mocks the unhappy prince:

클로디우스: 정직한 자는 항상 게으르지. 그 아비에 그 아들이로군. 독약 맛이 어떠냐?

햄릿: 난 할 수 있는 건 다했소. 이게 그 보답인가? 아 어머니, 당신은 여자였습니다. 배우들이여! 내 이야기를 해다오. 누군가 말했지. '나는 피를 흘리지만 죽지 않는다'고. 나는 햄릿으로 살고 싶었네.

유령: (갑자기 등장) 불쌍한 아들이여. 이 이런 험한 나라에서 태어 났어야 했을까? (암전)

Claudius: The honest are always lazy. You are the very son of your father. Was the poison good to drink?

Hamlet: I did everything I could. Is this a reward for that? Oh, my mother. You are just a woman. Players! Please tell people my story... Someone said 'I bleed but am not killed'... I wanted to live as Hamlet.

Ghost: (suddenly appearing from the upstage) Poor son. Why should you be born in this miserable country? (Black out)²⁴¹

Park has given an account of why he staged this ludicrous ending of the performance. In response to a question about the ending, Park asked: 'How could a king who had come to

²⁴¹ From the unpublished script of *Hamlet*, Seoul Metropolitan Theatre, 2011.

power through a conspiracy be killed so easily?’ In addition, he pointed out that ‘In reality, evil always wins’.²⁴² Park clearly intended to reflect on the political reality of South Korea. Even if there had been a popular grassroots protest against the policy decisions of the government, nothing had been changed. The corrupt politicians maintained their seats and the people stayed dissatisfied. A revolutionary hero who could change the world did not exist in reality; it remained only in the romantic fantasies of the people. Hamlet’s revenge, therefore, should be overpowered by Claudius’ ambition. Indeed, Claudius had appeared superior both physically and mentally to Hamlet. The prince even looked like an ordinary middle-aged man, whereas his uncle looked like a charismatic politician. In this sense, the production presented a defeated hero who could not achieve anything; therefore, the death of the hero could not be looked on as sad and glorious, as he is in the original text.

Hamlet’s last speech was also bizarre. It seems that Park unexpectedly quoted Iago’s line (*Othello*, 5. 2. 294) and gave it to Hamlet. Though the director seemed to adore this line, the quotation did not contribute to any interpretation in this context. Hamlet suddenly admitted that Gertrude had been a woman filled with sexual desire and he forgave her marriage to her brother-in-law. Then he confessed to want to live the life of Hamlet, in this context, a man of valour and intelligence. Here, he seemed to regret that his psychological weakness had resulted in his failure to achieve revenge. This bizarre ending is in fact a typical one from the Korean perspective. In many popular sad films or dramas, the protagonist dies and brings about a sudden reconciliation with, and forgiveness of, his/her opponents and enemies. This could be seen as a feature of *sinpa* drama, in which the protagonist shows a specific pattern of sadness:

주인공은 아무리 자신의 욕망을 지닌다고 해도, 결국 세계의 압도적인 질서에 저항할 수 없다. 그는 굴복하고 그 질서에 따른다. 그는 자신의 패배와 고통의 이유를 굴복할 수 밖에 없는 자기 자신으로 돌린다. 이때 자기 혐오와 자기 연민이 뒤섞여 나타나기 시작한다. 그는 그 정서를 깊은 슬픔으로 표현한다. 그렇기에 울 수밖에 없다.

²⁴² Kim Seul-ki, ‘Park Geun-hyeong directs *Hamlet*’, *MaeilGyeongjae*, 8 April 2011.

A hero, even keeping his desire, cannot resist the dominant order of the world. He only succumbs and conforms to that order. He attributes his defeat and pain to his weak self that cannot help but to succumb. An emotion that mingles with self-loathing and self-pity arises in him. He discloses the emotion by deep lament. Then he cannot resist weeping.²⁴³

The above *sinpa* feature can be applied to the characterisation of Hamlet in this production.²⁴⁴ Hamlet frequently scolded himself and came to hate his inertia. Yet, he could not easily dare to take on the mighty Claudius. Therefore he at last loathed himself and the lament derived from this self-loathing. The lament finally earned pity from the audience. To gain the audience's pity, Hamlet would have wept or nearly wept so frequently in the performance. Thanks to this tearful Hamlet, the production engaged with the audience in this familiar way. Through the pity, the audience would easily identify themselves with the simple Hamlet. Normally, the character was not identifiable for Korean audience due to the peculiar behaviour stemming from his complex psychology. Likewise, 'the tragic character for our age' was a sentimental and powerless hero.

Seoul Metropolitan Theatre's *Hamlet* was a hit in terms of both ticket sales and critical responses in early 2011. The production attracted positive attention from the Korean media thanks to Park's fame. They generally gave high praise to the production's rendition of Shakespeare and to its political orientation too. One newspaper reporter from *The Hankyoreh* commented that 'the biggest charm of this production can be said to be that it is a serious and difficult classic that has been made approachable'.²⁴⁵ Theatre critic Lee Gyeong-mi acclaimed the political dimension of the production too, 'Park's *Hamlet* poignantly investigated current Korean politics; it showed how an artwork took the responsibility of reflecting history and society'.²⁴⁶ Yet, Jeong Da-hoon criticised the production saying that it

²⁴³ Lee Young-mi, 'The Attitudes towards the World of Sin-pa Style,' *Daejungseosayeonggu*, 9 (2003), 7-33 (p.16).

²⁴⁴ 'Sinpa' literally means 'new wave'. *Sinpa* drama refers popular theatre during the Japanese Annexation era, in which a female audience faced ordeal and the audience often cried over the heroine's fate. Yet it indicates intensive sadness in the contemporary context.

²⁴⁵ Park Bo-mi, 'To live or to die, Hamlet in our age', *TheHankyoreh*, 12 April 2011.

²⁴⁶ Lee Gyeong-mi, 'Seoul Metropolitan Theatre's *Hamlet*', *Arko Magazine*, 9 May 2011.

‘failed to show what Park had been achieving with his family dramas’.²⁴⁷ Jeong pointed out that the production focused too much on entertainment.

Park seemed to achieve his goal ‘*Hamlet* for ordinary people’ when he took on *Hamlet* again. Yet, his success was based on the sacrifice of Shakespearean poetry and the complex psychology of the characters. With a clear purpose, Park did not dare to show on stage anything that a Korean audience might not understand or find to be boring. With a familiar pattern taken from Korean melodramas and an incorporation of political implications, the audience would feel that the production was not only the easiest to grasp, but also the most emotionally involving *Hamlet*. It was also possible that the audience could have become more interested in Korean politics by attending these performances. However, the performance overall seemed to repeat Park’s *ilsanggeuk* in this production in terms of scenography and characterization. His task to represent a classical tragic hero with a contemporary hint resulted in presenting a sentimental and powerless Hamlet that somehow resembled Ki Kuk-seo’s defeatist Hamlet. However, while Ki successfully showed the despair of Koreans with his *Hamlet* series, Park’s *Hamlet* failed to represent the anxiety and the distress from which contemporary Korean people are suffering. Those sufferings seemed to have derived from cruelty of a Western-imported neoliberalism and collapse of the old family relationships. Indeed, Park’s *ilsanggeuk* is more capable of presenting the tragic situation of Korean rather than his rendition of *Hamlet*.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ Jeong Da-hoon, ‘When Park Geun-hyeong meets Hamlet’, *Segye*, 19 April 2011.

²⁴⁸ After Seoul Metropolitan Theater’s *Hamlet*, there followed two politically motivated renditions of the tragedy. In 2014, Korean guitar manufacturing workers who were unfairly dismissed from their guitar manufacturing company produced their *Hamlet* in the title of *Guilman Hamlet (Nine Day Performance of Hamlet)*. They never performed any theatre before, yet, were suggested to put on *Hamlet* by a cultural activist, who thought that the tragedy was the most enjoyable text to play with even for the amateurs. One of the workers, who played Hamlet, indicated that ‘I found we and Hamlet share the same emotion’ (from their video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YACc-6p9c5U> [accessed 10 October 2014]). They also interpreted Claudius as capital’s exploitation of labour. In July 2014, the legacy of the late president Roh was explored in *Babo Hamlet (Hamlet the Idiot)*, directed by Kim Gyeong-ik, who played Hamlet with Street Theatre Troupe. In this production, Roh’s life and political idea was recalled in the soliloquy of Hamlet.

Chapter 7

Popularizing Shakespeare: *Trans Sibiya* (2002~2004, 2008)

So far the most popular Korean *Twelfth Night* rendition is *Trans Sibiya* adapted and directed by Park Jae-wan. *Trans Sibiya* is a milestone of Korean Shakespeare performance in the early 2000s, when farces and musical comedies became the most popular theatrical acts in Korea. *Trans Sibiya* was initially staged at the National Theatre of Korea under the title of *Sibiya* (literally ‘twelfth night’, ‘sibi’ means twelve, ‘ya’ night) as a programme in the National Theatre of Korea’s Shakespeare Love Festival (November, 2002), which was a one-off event that collected five Shakespeare plays that were thought to be love plays by the directors of each production: *Othello*, *Twelfth Night*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Taming of the Shrew*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. Amongst those productions, only *Sibiya* was recorded as a sell-out success, and the same production transferred to a venue in the Daehangro area the following year (2003), with the revised title *Trans Sibiya*. The production proved itself a mega-hit in that year. There was always a long queue outside the theatre each evening, and its four months of performances were almost sold-out. *Trans Sibiya* ranked the second highest in terms of audience numbers in 2003, and it was successfully (in terms of audience attendance) revived again in 2004 and 2008. *Trans Sibiya* has been the most popular performance of any Shakespearean comedy in Korea so far. This chapter investigates the cultural context of the success of *Trans Sibiya*. The productions were created in response to issues about transgender and homosexuality. Those issues were firstly introduced to the general public at the beginning of 21st century.

Trans Sibiya was not a radical adaptation. The productions maintained the narrative and the characters, but swapped the sexes of the characters in the original text. This explains why the word ‘trans’ preceded ‘sibiya’ in the title. The male characters in *Twelfth Night*

became female characters and vice versa in *Trans Sibiya*. This idea of sexual swap derived from the fact that the director, Park Jae-wan, and the actors had not been able to fully understand Viola's need to disguise herself during their reading the original comedy.²⁴⁹ They regarded Viola's purpose for disguising herself to be unnatural and awkward. After watching the film *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), they learned that only male actors were permitted to play on stage in early-modern England. They concluded that the boy-actor convention had made Viola's disguising obligatory. This knowledge, however, encouraged them to change the sex of Viola. Once Viola was made into 'Vike', a man disguised as a woman in the name of 'Sesa', other characters could be amended accordingly (female characters became male). The director Park mentioned that 'then, everything went on very well'.²⁵⁰ He also wrote a line to be spoken by the Captain, 'Osia (Orsino) does not hire any male attendants' (Captain) in order to clearly explain Vike's cross-dressing to the audience. It seems a notable coincidence that a similar line was added in Trevor Nunn's film version (1996) of the comedy. It is unknown whether the director of *Trans Sibiya* watched the film.

Having been aware of boys playing female in adult male company in the Elizabethan era, they might have concluded that the Shakespearean comedy had been written exclusively for men to play and, then, Viola's lines were originally intended to be spoken by a male actor. Therefore, it should be natural that a male actor could play the part of Viola. Moreover, from the contemporary Korean perspective, Viola as played by an actress is not definitely categorical; a young woman does not have to take the role of man in order to survive in Korea in the 21st Century. Meanwhile, ironically, such disguise would have been plausible in the 19th Century when Neo-Confucian ethics strongly confined women's role in society to that of a virtuous wife in the house. Korea women are now theoretically equal with men and compete in exams and job prospects, although there has been rampant inequality in work places and even in the family. However, if their aim was to find a proper motive for Viola based on a relevant, contemporary South Korean cultural and sociological context, the context would certainly be the emergence of transgender issues in the Korean culture.

²⁴⁹ From the unpublished script, *Trans Sibiya*, 2003.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

The traditional Korean view about gender had been conspicuous with a clear social role for each gender: men work outside, meanwhile women work at home. A married Korean man was expected to be master of his family (in Korean word, *gajang*) and was commonly responsible for the means of survival for the family members. Meanwhile, married Korean women were expected to be in charge of domestic work (cooking, cleaning) and raising children. Such a view derived from the patriarchal social order of the Joseon society whose ethics were based on Neo-Confucianism which institutionalized hierarchy between king and subject, father and son, husband and wife. Such gender and political hierarchy is often blamed as ‘traditional’ and ‘outdated’, an old view that hinders the promotion of women’s rights in democratic society. However, it cannot be denied that such an ‘old’ view is still influential in the 21st Korean society. It is still quite common that women, despite their higher education and ability, retire from their jobs when they are pregnant in order to take care of their children. It is then the husband who remains at the work place, and the family depends on him, *gajang* for living. Likewise, the old division of gender role has not yet been deconstructed even compared to the Joseon society.²⁵¹ Korean men and women are instructed to be ‘masculine male’ and ‘womanly female’, firstly by their older family members, then, by school. For instance, I myself (male) was often told, in my childhood, ‘don’t get into the kitchen, that is the place for women’. Schools have been teaching students different subjects according to their sex: basic engineering and business for boys, housework and nursing for girls.²⁵² The mandatory military service for Korean men is the most effective institution in maintaining the gender segregation. It forces Korean men to be responsible for protecting their country against the existent enemies (South Korea, never signed an armistice, and so technically remains at war with North Korea). During military service, men are disciplined to be familiar with given roles in the strict military hierarchy. More importantly, taking military service, men can come to think themselves to be physically and honourably superior to women, as Korean women are exempt from the conscription. It is men who protect the country; from the perspective of men, women can at best take care of their husbands and children. A very clear dissection of the two genders has been likewise institutionalized by society, politics and culture.

²⁵¹ Ahn Byeong-cheol, ‘Changes in sex roles in Korean society: the present state and responses’, *Society and Theory*, 17 (2010), pp.257-277 (p. 259).

²⁵² Based on my school experience.

Under such cultural circumstances of gender segregation, transgender should be regarded as unnatural and subversive to the stabilized categories of man and woman. The common view of this minority group has been very hostile because transgender people could not be seen as normal from the perspective of normal, heterosexual, people. So, they were often regarded as promiscuous and immoral perverts. A group of Korean transgender women said to a women's magazine that they had been looked upon even as monsters by normal people and were often asked whether they are infected with HIV virus.²⁵³ Facing such hatred and bigotry, transgender people have to conceal their identities unless asked. Yet, the resident registration number of Korean nationals has been a huge obstacle in hiding their unique sexual identity.²⁵⁴ The number is given to all South Koreans when they reach 18 years old as typed in the resident registration card which includes a photo and finger print. The number indicates date of birth, legal name and gender. Koreans are always obliged to present the card (passport, driving license that also include the number) in all the legal documents for offices and banks. Transgender people are always obliged to identify themselves by the resident registration card.²⁵⁵ The discrepancy between their legal gender and their appearance must be instantly noticed. Transgender people are often considered as just transvestite, and so would be seen as sexual perverts (at best) in everyday life and as 'monsters'. They could not take normal jobs, so, instead they are only able to take risky jobs at gay clubs or, even, in brothels. Many transgender activists attempted to be recognized as their desired gender. Although they had taken sex reassignment surgery, the Korean courts hardly permitted them to change their legal gender until 2002.²⁵⁶

The topic of transgender had not reached the general public until the end of the 20th century. Then, it became the most controversial social and cultural issue in 2001 due to a very

²⁵³ Lee Yu-jin, 'What do you know about transgender?', *Lady Kyunghyang*, 8 (2013) <http://lady.khan.co.kr/khlady.html?mode=view&artid=201308121555251&code=4> [accessed 15 May 2014]

²⁵⁴ The resident registration number consists of thirteen digits. The first six are date of birth (yy/mm/dd) and the last seven indicate sex and century of birth by the first digit of the seven. The number of a man who is born in the 20th century is one (1), meanwhile two (2) is the beginning number of a woman who is born in the 20th century.

²⁵⁵ Harisu recollected her ordeal. 'My most embarrassing moments were when I have had to show my personal the resident card in public... I couldn't get a passport, visa or even my own bank accounts because I was legally a man'. (Um Ji-won and others, 'Landmark Legal Ruling for South Korean Transgenders', *The Hankyoreh*, 16 March 2013.)

²⁵⁶ Before 2002, only five exceptions were made. Four of the five were due to the mutation in the combination of chromosome. One case was that the person had been taking female hormone for too long time, so the person could not live as man.

pretty transgender woman, Harisu (born 1975), who had sex reassignment surgery in 1995 at the Donga University hospital in Busan.²⁵⁷ Harisu gained public attention after modelling in a cosmetic advertisement, in which her feminine beauty was contrasted with an Adam's apple in the neck (that was actually a uvula of another male model). The advertisement itself attempted to present a new beautiful man (pretty, slim and feminized) that challenged the traditional male beauty (muscular and overtly manly). Harisu made her debut as a popular singer in the same year, although her music was not as popular as the advertisement. She was also cast to play a transgender biker and night club singer in the movie *Yellow Hair 2* (2001). The public view of Harisu was general hatred (for the transgender) or sympathy (for Harisu's adverse fortune). However, all Koreans would agree that Harisu was too pretty to be a man to the then accepted standard.

In November 2002, Harisu bravely filed a petition with Incheon District Court to amend her gender on the resident registration and to change her legal name as a male. The court found in her favour and recognized her as female in the next month. This was a milestone in the history of transgender rights in Korea. Then, in 2006, the Supreme Court of Korea recognized the sex change of transgender individuals who had undergone successful sexual reassignment surgery beforehand. More recently, in March 2013, Seoul Western District Court approved petitions from five female-to-male transgender individuals, who had not undergone the surgery, to alter their legal gender. Therefore, Korean law now permits gender amendment, and transgender people are less thought to be unnatural and abnormal perverts than before. Yet it must be noted that only male-to-female transgender people, who are very pretty, like Harisu, have attracted the media, while female-to-male transgender has never gained public attention.

²⁵⁷ Harisu is stage or screen name. Harisu's male name was Lee Gyeong-yup. After recognition, she changed the male name to feminized one, Lee Gyeong-eun. Yet, Harisu never used her real name in the media.



Figure 30. Harisu in a cosmetic advertisement in 2001. Harisu was even promoted as ‘Kylie Minogue of the East’ by her Taiwanese record label.

However, apart from gender issues, the Harisu phenomenon has contributed to the spreading of the new male figure, soft and pretty man, also known as *kkonminam* (flower boy), in the 21st century. It appears that the director, Park Jae-wan, adopted the word ‘trans’ to reflect the Harisu phenomenon in order to increase his production’s marketability. The English word ‘trans’ was at the time a colloquialism among Koreans as a means of referring to transgender people. Park certainly intended to have Vike (Viola in *Twelfth Night*) look like a pretty male-to-female transgender person. In this way, the other main male character, Olly, (Olivia in *Twelfth Night*) in *Trans Sibiya* was also an easy-going and tender man. Likewise, while the actors were portrayed woman-like, then the actresses should be deprived of feminine beauty and play the comic male characters in Shakespeare’s comedy. Therefore, it can be claimed that *Trans Sibiya* was a feminized version of the Shakespearean comedy. The actresses outnumbered the actors, which was a rare case for renditions of Shakespeare’s plays, as the works list more male characters than female counterparts. Even for the audiences, it would have been thought that Shakespeare’s plays present heroic and strong male characters who always lead with passive and vulnerable heroine, given that the popularity of the tragedies. Therefore, *Trans Sibiya* could challenge such an idea.

Aside from altering the gender of its principal characters, *Trans Sibiya* attempted to remain faithful to the dramatic structure of Shakespeare's text. Thus, with the exception of the dialogue between Viola and Feste in Act 3, Scene 1 which was omitted, all the scenes from the original were retained in this production. The order of the scenes was also maintained, apart from a slight adjustment in the opening scene in which the family background of Sebastian was explained to Antonio. The length of the performance was around one hour and forty minutes without an intermission. The language of the production was principally modern Korean. Since the script does not indicate the name of the translator, it seems that the director, Park, initially used a published translation and adapted it himself for his direction. The adaptation did not, surprisingly, abandon the poetry of Shakespeare's language. The allocation of the verse and prose in the original has been kept in several parts. The verse lines of Orsino, Olivia, and Viola were translated in a stylish language that can be found in the published translations of Shakespeare in Korea. For example, Viola's elegant address to Olivia, 'The heavens rain odours on you' (3.1.84-85) was literally translated. Meanwhile, the prose in the original was translated into an easy colloquial language. The more demotic or unrefined characters (Sir Toby and his company) used everyday speech. Likewise, following Shakespeare's text, distinctions between the characters were registered in the different kinds of language they employed.

Despite keeping the distinction between verse and prose, the script lost many elements of Shakespearean language. Needless to say, the Shakespearean pun is impossible to translate into the Korean language, usually due to its phonetic nature. The figures in the original were again unsuitable for the Korean stage. First of all, the geographical references (such as 'India') were not used, for the terms would hardly be as effective as it would be in England. References to bodily organs (such as the 'liver') were also omitted in the script for the same reason. In addition, although Shakespearean riddles occasionally worked well on the Korean stage (for example, Hamlet's riddles), it is unlikely that the Korean audience would take pleasure in the riddles devised by Feste. Normally, Shakespearean riddles can only be comprehended by a Korean audience if they are combined with a relevant action mimed by the actors. Moreover, the literal translation brought out a problem of reference. For example, Mavolio's line 'Not black in my mind, though yellow in my legs.' (3.4.25) was literally translated. Yet, this would fail to convey the allusion in the original to 'melancholy'. In the Korean context, the line is likely to mean 'my mind is innocent' as blackness of mind would

refer to ‘moral reprehensibility’. However, Shakespeare’s use of French survived and was spoken as it is for humorous effect.

The production retained Illyria as its setting, yet did not keep all the characters of the original text, even though they were already few in numbers. This directorial decision was seen as a minor adjustment. Curio and Valentine, and all their lines, were also omitted. The lines and role of Fabian came to Feste. Due to the gender transition, the characters needed to be given a name of the opposite sex. The naming seems to have been undertaken on the basis of finding apposite associations tied to the sound of a name. Yet, the new names were awkward as most of them did not sound English. But, since it is likely that Illyria and Messaline would be unknown to the Korean audiences, the awkwardness of the characters’ names would match this sense of unfamiliarity.

<i>Trans Sibiya</i>	<i>Twelfth Night</i>
Osia (female)	Orsino
Vike (male)	Viola
Sebas (female)	Sebastian
Olly (male)	Olivia
Sonya (female)	Sir Toby
Maris (female)	Malvolio
Bunnygirl (female)	Feste/Fabian
Ark (male)	Maria
Ansia (female)	Sir Andrew
Anne (female)	Antonio
Captain (female)	Captain

Table 7. Characters in *Trans Sibiya*

The class distinctions in the original also had to be slightly changed. Olly (played by Oh Dong-sik) logically turned into a count, but Osia became a female lord without a commission. The title 'dame' or 'baroness' is not familiar to Koreans, so Sonya and Ansia were no longer members of the nobility; Sonya was just an aunt to Olly and Ansia was a rich local woman. Maris was the steward of Olly and Vike was still a page to Osia. Maris wanted to become a peer by marriage to Olly. Yet, Ansia did not share the same goal with Maris. Ansia, a comic character, just loved Olly. Apart from this, the change in class was not a major factor in the production.

As briefly discussed above, the gender shift in *Trans Sibiya* affected both characterization and the relationships amongst the characters. The female characters that were played by the female actors were required to behave like men and look tough. The female actors should exaggerate their voice and gestures to display masculine behaviour such as drinking, duelling and quarrelling. Because of this perceived incongruence, the female cast were persistently able to elicit greater laughter from the audience. On the other hand, the three male characters that were played by the male actors looked calmer and gentler than their female counterparts. The less funny male cast actually led the story through their dramatic performances. This juxtaposition between the male and female cast presented a narrative in which strong women were shown to be pursuing men, a situation which subverted the gender order in the original comedy. Olly became an object of desire to the female characters, just as Olivia is under the gaze of the male characters in the original. In Korea, this would be uncomfortable for the male audience, whilst in contrast it would be a source of mirth for the female audience.

Yet, *Trans Sibiya* did not realize its potential to challenge or subvert the long-standing patriarchy in Korea. First of all, it exploited the female characters as a source of laughter. For example, the two strongest females, Maris (played by Yeon Bo-ra) and Sonya were portrayed as stereotypes of bad and foolish women. Maris was a tough spinster who had a bad temper and talked loudly. Sonya indulged in shopping and drinking, and lived untidily. Besides, both of them were presented as being physically unattractive to men. Therefore, the male audience would not feel that they were challenged by or in any way discomforted by these female characters. The production also betrayed its possible homosexual love relationship between Vike and Olly, which would have disrupted the conventional model of heterosexuality in the

established gender order. The disguising of Vike only involved him pretending to be a woman in an exaggerated way. Putting on a wig, the actor wore a cheap dress with a tight belt and high-heel shoes. He walked shaking his bottom and made a high-pitched sound. Therefore, the audience could not see any plausible femininity from Vike. They were aware of watching a female impersonator and could not help but burst into somewhat sneering laughter when Olly confessed his love to Vike. Indeed, such laughter could be regarded as a form of contempt for homosexual relationships. In addition, when Vike spoke his aside looking at Osia, 'I want to be your master', a line that replaced Viola's 'Whoe'er I woo myself would be his wife' (1.4.42), the traditional order of masculinity was rather reaffirmed than dismissed.

Along with the comic female characters, the production even presented women as sexual objects in a way that could potentially offend female audiences. Bunnygirl (Feste and Fabian) was an explicit sexual object for male audiences. The costume of Bunnygirl obviously hinted at her being a strip-dancer or pin-up girl. She wore a black dress that exposed her legs in black stocking, and wore a rabbit hair-band. Yet, her shabby makeup and low-quality costume made her look like a waitress or a singer who could be seen in a cheap nightclub in a poor neighbourhood of Seoul. All these factors contributed to making the character look both unintelligent and unattractive. She could, therefore, be perceived as a source of humiliating stereotypes by female audiences. However, the director, Park, intended Bunnygirl to encapsulate the sexual elements of his production. The director commented that sex had previously been a great taboo on the Korean stage, which had only ever allowed ethically correct subject-matters to be presented. By watching the film *Shakespeare in Love*, Park came to think that Shakespeare used sex to keep his noisy audience's attention on the stage.²⁵⁸ Then, as a result, Park focused on the sexual elements from his reading of the original text. It is unclear what the director precisely found in the original text, though it does seem that he intended to revive the 'festivity' of Shakespeare on the Daehangro stage. He asserted that 'Shakespeare was absolutely popular in his days' and his aim was to direct a Shakespeare performance in which the psychological distance between the audience and the stage could be discharged.²⁵⁹ The presence of such psychological distance indicated that Korean Shakespeare performances which strove to be serious art did not normally please

²⁵⁸ From the unpublished script of *Trans Sibiya*.

²⁵⁹ Ju Seong-won, 'Trans Sibiya...Overturn Shakespeare', *Donga-ilbo*, 25 April 2003.

audiences. The festive atmosphere of *Trans Sibiya* was created by transforming the theatre venue into something approaching a night-club.



Figure 31. Vike visited Olly's court (left).

Figure 32. Poster of Trans Sibiya (right) From left, Maris, Bunnygirl, Vike

Whether intended or not, the space for the production had been limited to small theatres. According to the script, the production should have a bare stage to be able to ensure quick movements and transitions in space and time. The first venue, Byeol (star), was a black box theatre. The theatre normally holds about one hundred seats and the stage does not support big set design. When the production was transferred to Daehangro, the size and facilities of the two venues were similar. The set design for the production was extremely minimal: only a painted screen was hung in the middle of up-stage. The screen seemed to be a decoration without any specific purpose. The props were daggers for duelling, plastic gold coins, empty liquor bottles and a paper letter for the trick. Apart from the letter, the props were intended to be ridiculous; the daggers were children's plastic toys and the gold coins looked too big to be carried. The bottles used to contain *soju*, a very popular Korean liquor famed for its potency and affordability. In the duelling scene, the cast initially wielded toy

daggers and then changed their weapons to the empty bottles. The audience instantly laughed at the change of props. The costumes also seemed to be designed to give a comic look rather than a period look or realistic look. As seen above, Vike's dress and Bunnygirl's costumes were solely intended to be humorous. Other cast-members wore similarly eccentric and crudely-designed costumes. Maris wore a jacket in order to look masculine, yet her jacket was what nightclub waiters would wear. The costumes for the other characters appeared to be wholly clownish. Olly and Osia were the only characters that wore more modest clothing. These props and costumes could have made the production look an amateurish farce. The director was aware of the danger, yet he sacrificed any seriousness for the benefit of inducing a festival spirit.

The music of the production was a collection of popular Western and Korean love songs. The songs were mostly sung by Bunnygirl and Sonya. The production did not have any musicians to play the music. The cast sang the songs with a microphone to karaoke music. The role of music was to support the build-up of a romantic atmosphere. The director intended to create a jazz café mood, which would let the audience reminisce about their own past love affairs. His intention was successful. The cast sang quite well, even though they were not professionally trained musical actors. The songs were well arranged and carefully co-ordinated with the action; they not only contributed to producing a café mood, but also explained the characters' mind-sets. This could be seen when Maris sang a sad song about broken love; the audience deeply sympathised with her despite her comic nature. Likewise, the use of music had enough potential that the production could have been developed into a musical comedy. Indeed, when *Trans Sibiya* was transferred to its Daehangro venue, they called the production a musical right up until it closed. Obviously, this was a clever choice as labelling it as a 'musical' would guarantee more ticket sales. However, *Trans Sibiya* was not a musical in the strict sense; as it used an eclectic mix of borrowed songs and there was no choreography.

It should be also pointed out that the huge success of *Trans Sibiya* was drawn from its vulgar and infantile components, which ideally suited small venue (*sogeukjang*) comedy. The production removed the dark atmosphere of the original comedy, the complexity of its characters and, needless to say, the nuance of its language. Therefore, it is doubtful whether the production realized the director's ambition to either transfer or rediscover festivity in

Shakespeare. Although the director would surely say that it was successful in these ambitions, as long as we consider the core of Shakespeare's comedy to be sheer amusement. From the perspective of contemporary theatre in Korea, a comedy should be funny and remove any dimension that could weaken its power to provoke laughter. As a result, it should be noted that how audiences can conceive of Shakespeare after attending this production. *Twelfth Night* is not a familiar story for many Koreans. Therefore, some audience members may well think that Shakespeare was a writer of comic stories just as much as he was a writer of bittersweet love stories. This situation may greatly discourage Shakespeare scholars, yet, some theatre companies will benefit from this new conception of his work.

Trans Sibiya could have put the gender order into question by means of showing that a male actor can play a female role without emotional resistance. Yet, the production only succeeded in presenting a softer and prettier male figure on the stage to its female spectators, who formed the majority of the audience. According to Choi Yeong-ju, Olly represented a contemporary young man who was gentler and more feminized, and similarly Vike also demonstrated a more delicate and emotional dimension.²⁶⁰ This type of man could make obsolete the traditional masculine ideal, of one who had to be physically and mentally strong and so present his dominance over any women. Therefore, Choi has argued that '*Trans Sibiya* focused on representing a new type of manhood rather than energetic female subjects.'²⁶¹ In this sense, the gender swap in *Trans Sibiya* only resulted in promoting the established gender order. Indeed, the most attractive characters in the production were the two male leads, whereas the outnumbered female cast were either presented as lacklustre (Osia) or silly. This also explained why the production was so popular with the female audiences; men were more beautiful than women in terms of appearance and manner. Moreover, the homosexual love between Olly and Vike created much laughter. The cast were neither real transgender nor, presumably, homosexual.²⁶² At least, none of the cast indicated their real ambiguous sexual identity from their look and behaviour. The spectators could easily notice that straight actors were pretending to be gay at the scene of Olly and Vike. This showed that *Trans Sibiya* used homosexuality as the abnormal factor for mocking, which has always been routine on the

²⁶⁰ Choi Yeong-ju, *Writing my Love for Theatre* (Seoul: Jiseongeusam, 2008), p. 336.

²⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 336.

²⁶² I personally know the actor played Olly. He is completely straight. I also attended a performance in which the actor played Vike has played a man in other performance. The actresses were

stage. It can be said that the production took the secret atmosphere of a gay club in Itaewon that people knew existed yet would not willingly visit.

In this sense, the title 'trans' rather implied that transition of a cross-dresser or gay into normal, straight man. Vike, who had been forced to do so, finally redeemed his life by winning a love of a wealthy woman. Olly, who had been misogynous, found his love through an attractive woman, Vike, who was superior to other genuine women. Therefore, this production never challenged to the gender order. What Jean E. Howard points out is relevant here.

The play (*Twelfth Night*) seems to me to embody a fairly oppressive fable of the containment of gender and class insurgency and the valorization of the 'good woman' as the one who has interiorized—whatever her clothing—her essential difference from, and subordinate relations to, the male.²⁶³

Here, *Trans Sibiya* could be a tale of a pretty boy who despite his look never lost the valour of a man. Although Vike appeared feminized and weak, he never lost his male identity. Indeed, Vike constantly showed his distress whenever being treated as the other sex. The happy end of the comedy, therefore, must have been the recognition of his real gender. On the other hand, female characters bravely attempted to marry to Olly, who was superior to them in terms of appearance and social rank, but they failed due to their wrong behaviour as women. Likewise the production embodied the oppressive gender order of Korea by ridiculing homosexuality and women who dared to earn man's love. What was successful here is that two men, one was not interested in woman, and the other was too poor to have a family, went through their initiation and established themselves as *gajang* that the Korean society always produces.

Trans Sibiya could be crowned as the funniest Korean rendition of any Shakespearean comedy so far. The audience laughed throughout the performance and they looked to be

²⁶³ Jean E Howard, 'Cross-dressing, The Theater, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England', in *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-dressing*, ed. by Lesley Ferris (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 20-41 (p. 32).

really enjoying the production more than any other comic show on Daehangro. Indeed, *Trans Sibiya* can be regarded as a milestone in the field of popular Shakespeare performance on the Korean stage. Its use of humorous material and comic elements in adapting Shakespeare was copied directly by many other productions, which utilized very similar *mise-en-scène* and musical arrangements. Moreover, the production seemed to have altered Korean directors' reverence towards Shakespeare. It proved that Shakespeare's plays could be enjoyed by everybody without any serious knowledge of the text or English culture. In other words, Shakespeare was not just the scholar's playwright; rather, he was now a people's playwright. Therefore, if something was too difficult to understand, the director could freely remove and replace it with something contemporary. This tendency has since been frequently observed in popular Shakespeare productions on the Korean stage. It cannot be argued that *Tans Sibiya* was the only source of this trend; however, it should be noted that the huge success of the production served to convince the Korean theatre industry that Shakespeare can still be profitable. *Trans Sibiya* at least contributed to popularizing Shakespeare's comedies on the Korean stage. Prior to this production, other than Gagyo's production in the early 1980s, *Twelfth Night* had rarely been staged. Since *Trans Sibiya's* success, *Twelfth Night* has been staged at least once a year, whether as a creative adaptation or a straight production.

The first successor of *Trans Sibiya* was *Night Musical Sibiya* created in 2004. This production attracted audiences with its comic story of cross-dressing and with the dynamic dancing of the good-looking actors. Its stage-setting was a night club and the actors appeared to be the dancers or dissolute youth who could be seen in such clubs. The actors even played ushers within the night club so that the audience could feel that they had come into a hedonistic club in Gangnam area rather than a serious theatre in Daehangro. *Club Sibiya* (2010) was another adaptation of *Twelfth Night* with a club setting. The production had similar setting, costume and marketing strategy to *Night Musical Sibiya*. The cast even included Korean popular music stars. *Taming of the Shrew* (2009~) by Kim's Comfunny was produced as a comic show in that the audience were constantly involved in the performance. For instance, they played guests at the wedding of Petruchio and Kate. This production is famous for its all-male casting which seems to be aimed at being funny. It is certain that they do not attempt to adopt the Elizabethan tradition for being loyal to Shakespeare. The director,

Kim Dae-hwan, commented that he was inspired by Augusto Boal.²⁶⁴ Yet, the production seemed to have nothing to do with any politics. Audience involvement was their key strategy in terms of marketing. Indeed, audiences are fascinated by the fact that they become a part of the performance. The production has been so popular that it has been constantly running for four years. For the above productions, it is observed that Shakespeare's language has not been source for popular performance. As discussed in *Trans Sibiya*, the productions took the familiar story structure of Shakespeare's plays and, then, filled the hollowed structure with their own lines. The name, Shakespeare, has been used as a label for the purpose of differentiating their productions from other popular comedy productions.

²⁶⁴ Dong Gyeong-hwa, 'Review: *Malgwalyangi Gildeuligi (Taming of the Shrew)*', *Jaegyeongilbo*, 15 Dec 2009.

Conclusion

‘If he had been forgotten, it had been as a gap in our great feast.’ (*Macbeth*, 3.1.12)

The Shakespearean corpus now forms an integral part of contemporary Korean theatre. Koreans might even declare that ‘Shakespeare is our own contemporary’. In the Korean context directors are not afraid of reconstructing Shakespearean plays (whether for purely artistic or political reasons). As demonstrated in the case studies, the directors self-consciously seek either to re-find or discard their links with Shakespeare. The scripts produced for the various adaptations of even a single play will involve radically variant translations, often altered according to the idiosyncratic demands of each director’s creative vision. Nowadays, faithful translations are rarely regarded as suitable scripts for performance. A faithful translation, one which is close to the English text, only inspires directors to rearrange it according to their staging strategy or ‘emotional understanding’ (as noted in Chapter 2 with regard to Kim A-ra). Such an approach would have been considered blasphemous in the 1950s, yet it is now widespread amongst directors who take on the Bard.

The history of Korean staging of Shakespearean plays has been a gradual process through which Shakespeare has been distanced from his Anglophone context in terms of his ‘theatrical language’. Stanley Wells suggests ‘it is in performance that the plays lived and had their being. Performance is the end to which they were created.’²⁶⁵ Such is true of Shakespeare for Koreans now, as this ‘performance life’ can be realized in the Korean theatre only when his plays are ‘Koreanized’. On the other hand, in productions that aim to deconstruct or popularize the Bard, directors have found increasingly challenging ways of dismantling the plays without any concern for resurrecting an authentic Shakespeare. Such productions use Shakespeare’s plays to present a Korean perspective on political and artistic concerns. As a result, these performances sometimes completely lose the poetry of their

²⁶⁵ Stanley Wells, ‘General Introduction’, in *The Oxford Shakespeare*, second edition, ed. By John Jowett and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. XLII.

source-material, and only the name 'Shakespeare' remains to identify the production. Indeed, audiences not familiar with Shakespeare would not have recognized the performances discussed in Part 2 as adaptations of Shakespeare, had they not been informed of his name. In this context, Lee Yun-taek argues that 'Shakespeare himself was a great adaptor; therefore, rewriting and reconstruction are nothing new. Rather, this was his way of working.'²⁶⁶ Indeed, most Korean directors would be pleased with Lee's statement.

The history of Korean staging of Shakespearean drama clearly demonstrates the passive receiver's transition to originator. During the half-century prior to the Korean War (1900-1950), Shakespeare was completely foreign for the Korean stage, and his plays were considered impossible to be staged due to the presumption that Koreans were not equipped with the proper stagecraft and Western style theatre buildings. So, in this period, all the elements of Shakespeare could be regarded as 'other' to the Korean theatre. In this period, as discussed in Chapter 1, Shakespeare was deemed more of a Western literary giant than a dramatist, and, consequently, his plays were rarely staged. During the early years, Shakespeare was still viewed as foreign, so that Koreans hardly dared to consider adapting or deconstructing his plays. Although there were two adaptations for *akgeuk* and *yeoseonggukgeuk*, these two forms of popular theatre were not considered to be examples of modern theatre. Directors at that time seemed to think that the very foreignness of Shakespeare still demanded a foreign form (Western theatre) in order to be staged. As a result of this prejudice, many imitations of British performances were seen during this the period. In this context, it can be said that Shakespeare was alienating Koreans. By alienating, I mean that Koreans would intentionally discard their own cultural roots. More specifically, Shakespeare's plays could not be staged using the elements of Korean traditional theatre: the stage (*madang* of *talchum* or living room of *pansori*), the acting, and the costumes (especially the attire of the Joseon Dynasty). Koreanness, which was regarded as foreign to Shakespeare by those directors, should be discarded when it comes to stage Shakespeare. In this sense, imitative productions suggest that Koreans transform themselves into an 'other' for the sake of copying the West.

²⁶⁶ Moon Hak-su, 'Isibilsegi Yeongeukeun Sheikspier (Shakespeare for the Twenty-first Century Theatre)', *Kyunghyang*, 14 August 2005.

Such self-alienation was challenged in the transitional years (1970-1990), which saw a great diversification of performance styles in stagings of Shakespeare's works. Various approaches to Shakespeare's plays emerged on the Seoul stages through young theatre practitioners who were more familiar with Western-style theatre than the previous generation. Thanks to the rapid and deeper Westernization of Korean culture, Shakespeare became closer to Koreans than in any previous period. Korea had now acquired all the elements that were indispensable to stage Shakespeare. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the Nationalist theatre movement opposed the rapid Westernization of the 1970s and instead aimed to recover the neglected traditions of Korean culture. The movement itself did not immediately affect Korean Shakespeare performances, though Kim Myeong-kon, one of the advocates of the movement, did later create *King Uru* (*King Lear*, 2000) in order to realise his ideal of Nationalist theatre. In addition, adaptations emerged in the same period including Gagyo's *The Comedy of Errors* (1971), and the Dongrang Repertoire's *Prince Hamyul* (1976). These two productions were the earliest attempts to adapt Shakespeare's plays into a Korean context. Political performances of Shakespeare's plays accidentally stemmed from the attempt to reflect on the bloody history of the 1980s (including the Gwangju massacre, suspicious deaths and torture). Ki Kuk-seo, created a version of *Hamlet* (1981, 1982, 1985 and 1990) in which Hamlet is a victim of a violent military government. Ki's brave experiment (deconstructing Shakespearean text to create his own script) influenced his contemporaries to look upon Shakespeare's writing as raw material that can be treated as a malleable aesthetic resource.

In the contemporary period (1990-the present), while imitative performances have occasionally been produced by those who were eager to preserve Shakespeare's plays, director's experiments with the works have become the dominant forms of production on Korean stages. Additionally, from the beginning of the twenty-first century, popularization has strongly established itself as a lucrative entertainment business thanks to the success of *Trans Sibiya* (*Twelfth Night*, 2000). Such tendencies have rendered Shakespearean poetry almost unrecognisable on the Korean stage. As discussed in Part 2, adaptations replaced Shakespearean poetry with Korean history or fairy tales. Mokwha's *Romeo and Juliet* (2001) borrowed the subject material of Shakespeare's tragedy, the hatred between the two noble Italian families, to reflect on the tragic modern history of Korea, the Korean War and the Great Division between the North and the South. Yohangza's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2002) translated Athenian fairies into the forest *Dokkebi* of Korean folktales, and even

removed the entirety of Act Five from the comedy. Complex psychology is replaced with simple and easy lines filled with mischievous jokes. The aim of this is to create a humorous old story that is capable of pleasing a modern Korean audience. In Chapter 6, I examined how the Seoul Metropolitan Theatre's *Hamlet* (2011), whose director is seen as Ki Kuk-seo's successor, was intended to indicate the state of contemporary Korean politics. The director, Park Geun-hyeong, even changed the ending to argue that evil always wins and that, to survive, an individual must succumb to the power that dominates them. In *Trans Sibiya*, despite preserving many lines from the original comedy, the gender of the characters was swapped because the director was incapable of understanding the nature of all-male casting in Elizabethan theatre. Yet, thanks to its contemporary feel, this act of gender swapping helped this performance become the biggest hit of the year.

The above contemporary productions show that Koreans now alienate Shakespeare in the process of performance. It seems that the Korean directors do not want to be troubled with Shakespearean poetry, which has always been considered impossible to be fully translated into Korean dramatic language due to the Shakespearean rhyme. The inadaptability of the language seems to encourage directors to replace it with Korean modern colloquial language, which seems to be more useful on the stage. The European settings of Shakespeare's plays are often maintained; yet, the costume and the scenography of the performances seldom imply any historical or geographical aspect of the original plays. The performances are intended to appear to be happening in present day South Korea. It can be said that what is other to Shakespeare has been forcefully inscribed into performances of his plays: that is the elements of Korean traditional theatre, contemporary politics and transgender issues. Such Korean elements were decided by the directors' subjective approaches to Shakespeare's plays. That is to say, it is difficult to notice any direct connection with the original plays. The result has been that Korean Shakespeare performances have lost any link with the English playwright, William Shakespeare.

Yet I would argue that such work is not simply replacing foreign with familiar. Rather, the foreignness is in order for Koreans to constantly *re*-think the link with Shakespeare. Jacques Rancière states:

It is not the transmission of the artist's knowledge or inspiration to the spectator. It is the third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists between them, excluding any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and effect.²⁶⁷

I would argue that 'gap' is where 'the third thing' is located. It addresses the fact that a meaning of a performance in one (Anglophone) culture is impossible to replicate in the other (Korean) culture, as discussed in Part 2.

I stated in the Introduction that 'gap' creates intimacy between the audience and the stage. Similarly, I argue that distancing Shakespeare from his Anglophone context paradoxically results in making the Korean performances closer to Shakespeare. It could be thought that imitations are mostly faithful to Shakespeare, as these performances largely maintain the language, the setting, and the costume of Shakespeare's plays. Yet, everyone involved in such performances acknowledges the fact that their performances cannot ever attest to their imagined 'authentic' Shakespeare. The simple fact is that Korean actors are not native English speakers. Moreover, even if they speak English on the Korean stage (or even on the stage of Shakespeare's Globe), one would never expect that they can do what British actors do. Koreans, wearing wigs and Elizabethan costumes, will confirm Korean actors' imaginary identification with the West. Hence, the early productions of *Sinhyeop* prove the distance between self (Koreans) and the other (Shakespeare). On the contrary, the performances in the case studies are the attempts to represent Shakespeare in the Korean context. Unlike imitations, those performances render Shakespeare's plays as if they are freshly written in contemporary Korea. Indeed, the directors of such performances rewrite Shakespeare's plays for their staging, each wanting to be 'the author' of their own Shakespeare rendition. As discussed in Chapter 5, Yang Jung-ung asserted that Yohangza's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* should be treated as his work rather than a rendition of the famous comedy.

Koreans seem to declare self-ownership of Shakespeare's plays by alienating and reconfiguring the decisive elements of the plays as their way of dealing with the foreignness

²⁶⁷ Jacques Rancière, trans. Gregory Elliott, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 2.

of Shakespeare on the contemporary Korean stage. Such an attitude can be viewed as pursuing otherness of Shakespeare in order to establish a new (modern) selfhood.²⁶⁸ His plays allow Koreans to reconstruct Korea ‘through the eyes of the Other (Shakespeare)’.²⁶⁹ Koreans are no longer receivers of foreign forms in order to modernize themselves; rather, they create a distinct, self-attributable form to release themselves from being passive receivers of Western culture. Furthermore, Koreans would be very much content that their staging could lead Westerners to becoming onlookers, thus reversing the long cultural relationship between Korea and the West. That is to say, as Kim Myeong-kon intended, Korean productions could teach the West through their rendition of Shakespeare. Or, at least, Koreans can ignore the more traditional relationship and ‘overturn that position of subservience’.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ In writing this sentence, I am inspired by two essays of Brian Singleton (see Bibliography).

²⁶⁹ Alexander C.Y. Huang, *Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 24.

²⁷⁰ Dennis Kennedy and Yong Li Lan, ‘Introduction: Why Shakespeare?’ in *Shakespeare in Asia* ed. by Dennis Kennedy and Yong Li Lan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 14.

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Author's Interviews

Interview with Kim A-ra, took place at Cafébene, March 2011, Seoul, South Korea.

Interview with Bae Yo-sup, took place at a rehearsal room, March 2011, Uijeongbu, South Korea.

Interview with Lee Yun-taek, took place at a rehearsal room, August 2011, Seoul, South Korea.

Interview with Park Geun-hyeong, took place at a rehearsal room, April 2010, Seoul, South Korea.

Interview with Yang Jung-ung, took place at a rehearsal room, June 2010, Seoul, South Korea.

Interview with Ki Kuk-seo, took place at a restaurant, July 2014, Seoul, South Korea.

Appendix (1)

Chronology of Shakespeare on the Korean stage

*The venues for the productions are all located in Seoul, otherwise the location is mentioned. For each production the name of the play is followed by the name of the performance company, in brackets, and then by the names of the venue. The chronology collects the productions that have been mentioned in the dissertation and those productions that are treated by Korean critics and scholars in their academic essays or books.

- 1906 Shakespeare was introduced in the journal *Choyang*. The journal contained parts of the Korean translation of *Self-Help* (1859) by Samuel Smiles. Shakespeare was mentioned in the book.
- 1909 The first performance of a Shakespeare play. A *Hamlet* performance by a Japanese theatre company to celebrate the victory in the Japan-Russia War (1908). The play was performed in the Japanese language and it was for the Japanese people in Korea. The name of the company was not recorded.
- 1919 Charles Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* was partly translated for a magazine, *Christian Youth*, by Ku Lee-byeong. This was the first contact between the Korean reader and Shakespeare.
- 1921-1922 Hyun Cheol retranslated *Hamlet* from the Japanese translation of Shoyo Tsubouchi. The re-translated tragedy was serialized in a magazine, *Gaebyeok*, from May 1921 to December 1922.
- 1925 The first Korean Shakespeare performance, *Julius Caesar*, at a hall in Seoul by a student theatre club of Gyeongseong College of Commerce. The student actors spoke English. Waseda-educated dramatist and critic Kim Woo-jin, who might have been taught by Shoyo, published an essay 'Shakespeare's Life', one of the earliest Korean articles on Shakespeare.
- 1929 Ewha College student union's performance of *The Merchant of Venice*, which was very popular at that time. The performance was the first Korean language Shakespeare. From the 1920s to the 1930s, Shakespeare's plays were mostly put on stage by college students.
- 1949 *Hamlet* was performed by Chungang University's Theatre Department which was the first drama department amongst Korean universities. The production was directed by Lee Hae-ran, and its venue was Sigonggwang, then a professional theatre. So, the production was noted as the first Korean performance of Shakespeare's play. Jung In-seop, who studied English in the USA, translated *Hamlet*

from English into the Korean language. It was the first direct translation (from English into Korean) of the tragedy.

1950 A German literature scholar Seo Hang-seok translated and adapted *Romeo and Juliet* for the music theatre company KPK Akgeukdan. Venue unknown

1951 Shinhyup staged *Hamlet* in Daegu and *Othello* in Busan, then the temporary capital of South Korea during the Korean War. These were the first productions by a professional theatre company. Lee Hae-rang directed both productions, using Han No-dan's translations. Venue unknown

The first Korean adaptation of Shakespeare, *The Story of Prince Ham-yeol (Hamlet)*, was adapted and directed by Han No-dan in Busan. Venue unknown

1952 Shinhyup's *Othello*, dir. Yoo Chi-jin and *Macbeth*, dir. Lee Hae-rang in Busan. Venue unknown

1954 A full version of *Hamlet* was translated and edited by a then acclaimed Shakespeare scholar, Choi Jae-seo. Choi referred to Furness' *Variorum Shakespeare*. This edition had once been popular in English departments in Universities. Choi also translated more Shakespearean dramas and his translations have been used in many Korean universities until the 1990s. Meanwhile, Han No-dan's translation was published under the title of *Three Plays of Shakespeare (Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth)*. Han's translations had been preferred on the Korean stages.

1961 *Heukjinju (Othello)* (Imchunaeng Yeoseonggukgeukdan), dir. Cho Gun. Venue unknown

1962 *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* (Drama Centre) at Drama Centre, dir. Lee Hae-rang. Drama Centre, founded by Yoo Chi-jin, was both an educational institution of theatrical art and a venue. It was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, USA. Later, the Drama Centre changed its name to the Seoul Institute of the Arts and trained many actors and directors.

1964 The first complete translation of all of Shakespearean plays (based on Dover Wilson's *New Cambridge Shakespeare*) into Korean by Kim Jae-nam. Later in the same year, a collaborative translation *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* was published. Many then famous Shakespeare scholars took part in this project. Among those, Yoh Suk-kee and Oh Hwa-sup have been very influential in the field of Shakespeare studies in Korea.

For the memory of the Bard's 400th birthday, there was a Shakespeare festival in Seoul. The performances were the Drama Centre's *Hamlet*, dir. Oh Sa-rang and *Othello*, dir. Lee Won-gyeong, *The Merchant of Venice* (The National Theatre Company of Korea), dir. Lee Jin-soon, *Othello* (Shinhyup), dir. Han No-dan, *As You Like It* (Minjung), dir. Yang Gwang-nam, *King Lear* (Shilhum Theatre Group), dir. Heo Gyu, *Anthony and Cleopatra* (Dongin), dir. Jung Il-sung, *Taming of the Shrew* (Shanha), dir. Cha Beom-suk. The festival was very popular amongst Korean audiences. It

- attracted two hundred actors and forty thousand people in the audience. The festival made Shakespeare known more amongst Koreans.
- 1971 *The Comedy of Errors* (Gagyo) at The National Theatre of Korea adapted by Kim Sang-yeol and directed by Lee Seung-gyu.
- 1975 *Hamlet* (Gagyo) at Yesul Geukjang, dir. Kim Sang-yeol.
- 1976 *Prince Hamyul* (*Hamlet* adaptation) (Dongrang Repertoire) at Drama Centre. This was the first Korean Shakespeare to be performed outside of the peninsula. Despite being a Korean adaptation, the performance adopted Japanese Noh Theatre. The director (Ahn Min-Soo), who was educated at the University of Hawaii USA.
- 1977 *Taming of the Shrew* (Gagyo) at Siminhoigwan, dir. Margaret Moore. Moore (Korean name: Mo Jin-joo) was an American Christian missionary. She was regarded as a pioneer of Christian theatre in Korea.
- 1979 *The Comedy of Errors* (Gagyo) at Sejong Centre adapted and directed by Kim Sang-yeol. This production was a musical version.
- 1980 *Twelfth Night* (Sanha and Minye) at Sejong Centre, dir. Son Jin-chaek.
- Julius Caesar* (Gohyang) at Sejong Centre, dir. Lee Won-gyeong
- 1981 *Hamlet 1* (Chilyookdan) at The National Theatre of Korea adapted and directed by Ki Kook-seo.
- 1982 *Hamlet 2* (Chilyookdan) at Arko Sogeukjang, dir. Ki Kook-seo.
- 1983 *Twelfth Night* (Gagyo) at Sejong Centre, dir. Margaret Moore.
- Othello* (Simin) at Sejong Centre, dir. Kim Yong-hwan.
- King Lear* (Sajo) at Sejong Centre, dir. Lee Hae-rang.
- Merchant of Venice* (Hyeondai) at the National Theatre of Korea, dir. Patrick Tucker.
- 1984 *King Lear* (Dongrang Repertoire) at Drama Centre, dir. Ahn Min-soo
- 1985 *Hamlet 3* (Chilyookdan) at Arko Daegeukjang adapted and directed by Ki Kook-Seo.
- Othello* (Company unknown) at Hoam Art Hall, dir. Park Yong-ki.
- Hamlet* (Company unknown) at Hoam Art Hall, dir. Lee Hae-rang.
- 1986 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Hankook Yeonggukhyphoe) at Hoam Art Hall, dir. Patrick Tucker.

- 1987 *Taming of the Shrew* (the National Theatre Company of Korea) at the National Theatre of Korea, dir. Kim Hyeon-gook.
- 1989 *Hamlet* (Korea Broadcast System) at Hoam Art Hall, dir. Lee Hae-rang.
- Romeo and Juliet* (Minjung) at Sejong Centre, dir. Jeon Joon-taek.
- Anthony and Cleopatra* (Shilheom) at Hoam Art Hall, dir. Yoon Ho-jin.
- 1990 *Hamlet* (Ugo Zapad, Russia) at Arko Daeguukjang, dir. Valery Belyakovich.
- Hamlet 4, Hamlet 5* (Hyundai, Shinhyeop) at Arko Daeguukjang, dir. Ki Kook-seo.
- 1991 *The Kingdom of Desire* (Dangdaejeonki, China) at the National Theatre of Korea. This was an adaptation of *Macbeth*.
- Ryuzanji's Macbeth* (Ryuzanji, Japan) at Arko Daeguukjang.
- 1992 English Shakespeare Company (UK)'s *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night* at Hoam Art Hall. The productions were directed by Michael Bogdanov (*Macbeth*) and Michael Pennington (*Twelfth Night*).
- Measure for Measure* (the National Theatre Company of Korea), dir. Kim Chang-hwa.
- A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Seoul Yesuldan) at Seoul Arts Centre, dir. Lee Jong-hoon.
- 1993 *Hamlet* (Jayoo) at Seoul Arts Centre, dir. Kim Jeong-ok.
- 1994 *King Lear* (Scot, Japan) at Seoul Arts Centre adapted and directed by Suzuki Tadashi.
- 1995 *Romeo and Juliet* (Mokwha) at Hoam Art Hall, dir. Oh Tae-suk.
- Michin Lio (Mad Lear)* (Chilyookdan) at Seoul Arts Centre adapted and directed by Ki Kook-seo.
- Ophelia my Sister Come to my Bed!* (*Hamlet* adaptation) (Cheongwoo) at Ultari adapted by Cho Gwang-hwa and directed by Kim Gwang-bo.
- Richard III* (the National Theatre Company of Korea) at the National Theatre of Korea, dir. Kim Cheol-ri.
- 1996 *Hamlet* (Street Theatre Troupe) at Arko Daeguukjang, dir. Lee Yun-taek.
- The Tempest* (Shared Experience Theatre, UK) at Seoul Arts Centre, dir. Nancy Meckler.
- 1998 *Lady Macbeth* (Mooli) at Seoul Arts Centre, dir. Han Tae-sook.
- The first Shakespeare Sangseolmudae (open stage) festival at Bukchon Changwoo Theatre: *Macbeth* (Jakunshinhwa), dir. Kim Dong-hyun, *Hamlet* (Nottle), dir. Won Young-oh, *A Midsummer Night's*

Dream (Sajo and Vipa), dir. Sung Joon-hyun, *Pericles* (Shakespearean'86), dir. Han Young-sic, *Romeo and Juliet* (Yohangza), dir. Yang Jung-ung.

Othello (the Royal National Theatre, UK) at Seoul Arts Centre, dir. Sam Mendes.

Othello (Dongsungmudae), dir. Park Guen-hyeong, Venue Unknown

- 1999 *Rock Hamlet* (Seoul Musical Company) at Jangchoong Cheyookgwan directed by Jeon hoon and adapted by Cho Gwang-hwa.

Hamlet 1999 (Theatre Yoo) directed by Kim Ara Venue Unknown. Kim also directed *Hamlet Project* (Mucheon) at a mountain village based on *Charles Marowitz's Hamlet*.

The second Shakespeare Sangseolmudae festival at Yohaemunhwa: *Neo-Romeo and Juliet* (Theatre Nori), dir. Sung Jong-hyun, *The Comedy of Errors* (Gukbaljeonyeonguhoe), dir. Cho Han-shin, *Hamlet* (Nottle), dir. Won Young-oh, *King Lear* (Yohangza), dir. Yang Jung-ung, *A Worker Bottom's A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Ban).

Musical the Tempest (Seoul Performing Arts Company) at Seoul Arts Centre, dir. Lee Yun-taek.

- 2000 *Hamlet From the East* (Nottle) at the National Theatre of Korea, dir. Won Young-oh.

King Uru (King Lear) (the National Theatre of Korea) at the National Theatre of Korea adapted and directed by Kim Myung-gon.

Moonlight in Shilla (A Midsummer Night's Dream) (Seoul Metropolitan Musical Theatre) at Sejong Centre adapted by Hong Chang-soo, directed by Lee Jong-hoon.

Taming of the Shrew (the Royal Shakespeare Company, UK) at LG Art Centre, dir. Lindsay Posner. This was the first visit of the company into Korea.

The third Shakespeare Sangseolmudae festival at Rhythm Gonggan: *Hwangya (Macbeth)* (Nottle), dir. Won Young-oh, *Macbeth* (Grimyeonguk), dir. Lee Hyun-chan, *Gwangbu Lear* (Yoki), dir. Hong Suk-hwan, *Hamlet Dream-within-Dream* (Ban), dir. Im Seung-choo.

- 2001 *Romeo and Juliet* (Mokwha) at Aroong Theatre adapted and directed by Oh Tae-suk. This performance was transformed from the former production in 1995. Oh adapted the tragedy into the Korean culture.

Hamlet (the National Theatre Company of Korea) at the National Theatre of Korea directed by Jung Jin-soo. It was a big hit due to casting of Kim Suk-hoon (Hamlet) then a famous TV star.

- 2002 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Yohangza) adapted and directed by Yang Jung-ung Venue Unknown.

Julius Caesar (the National Theatre Company of Korea) at the National Theatre of Korea, dir. Jung Il-sung.

Shakespeare Love Festival at the National Theatre of Korea: *Romeo and Juliet* (Soop), dir. Im Gyeong-sic, *Taming of the Shrew* (Joobeyonindul), dir. Seo Choong-sic, *Othello* (GTI), dir. Cha Tae-ho, *Troilus and Cressida* (Silheom), dir. Kim Seong-no, *Twelfth Night* (Gabyeon), dir. Park Jae-wan.

Musical Romeo and Juliet (Seoul Performing Arts Company) at Seoul Arts Centre, this was Korean production of the French musical.

- 2003 *Trans Sibiya (Twelfth Night)* (Gabyeon) at Changjo Concert Hall adapted and directed by Park Jae-wan.

Titus Andronicus (the National Theatre Company of Korea) at the National Theatre of Korea, dir. Kim Cheol-ri.

- 2004 Shakespeare Nanjang (festival) of The National Theatre of Korea: *King Lear* (Street Theatre Troupe), dir. Lee Youn-taek, *Club Hanul (A Midsummer Night's Dream)* (Dance Theatre Dongrang), dir. Park Il-gyu, *Hamlet from the East* (Nottle), dir. Won Young-oh, *Musical Sibiya (Twelfth Night)* (Root 21), dir. Park Jae-wan, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Yohangza), dir. Yang Jung-ung.

- 2005 The Second Shakespeare Nanjang of The National Theatre of Korea: *Hamlet* (Street Theatre Troupe), dir. Lee Youn-taek, *Romeo and Juliet* (Mokwha), dir. Oh Tae-suk, *The Merchant of Venice* (The National Drama Company of Korea), *Macbeth* (Kunauka, Japan), *Hamlet Cantabile* (Tuida), dir. Bae Yo-sup, *Juliet's Skivvy Loves Romeo* (Gamagol).

- 2006 Yohangza's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Mokwha's *Romeo and Juliet* were invited to the Barbican Centre, London UK.

The Third Shakespeare Nanjang of The National Theatre of Korea: *Waiting for the Ghost* (Dreamplay) adapted and directed by Kim Jae-yop, *Extreme Romeo and Juliet* (Ensemble), dir. Kim Jin-man, *Romeo and Juliet* (Mokwha), dir. Oh Tae-suk, *King Lear* (Chilyookdan), dir. Ki Kook-seo, *Die Tragoedie von Othello, dem Mohr von Venedig* (Nationaltheater Mannheim, Germany), dir. Jens-Daniel Herzog.

- 2007 *Terrorist Hamlet* (The National Theatre Company of Korea) at the National Theatre of Korea, dir. Jens-Daniel Herzog.

Love's Labour's Lost (Shakespeare's Globe) at the National Theatre of Korea, dir. Dominic Dromgoole.

Donkey Show (Company unknown) at Dongki Hall, dir. Pyo In-bong. Korean production of the Broadway adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This production had been running for two years and was a massive hit. The director, Pyo, is a famous TV comedian.

Twelfth Night (Cheek by Jowl) at LG Art Centre, dir. Declan Donnellan.

- 2008 Poet and theatre director Kim Jung-hwan began to translate all the plays of Shakespeare for stage based on *The Norton Shakespeare*.

Gertrude (Kokirimanbo) at Seoul Arts Centre adapted and directed by Bae Sam-sic. Bae is one of the renowned playwrights in his generation.

Macbeth (Jugjug) at the National Theatre of Korea adapted and directed by Kim Nak-hyeong.

The New Musical Hamlet (Company unknown) at Theatre S, dir. Wang Yong-beom. This was a Korean production of the Czech musical theatre *Hamlet* created by Janek Ledecky and Martin Kumzak.

- 2009 *Romeo and Juliet* (National Changgeuk Company of Korea) at the National Theatre of Korea, dir. Park Seong-hwan.

AMLETO Nella Carne il Silenzio (Hamlet) (Compagnia Laboratorio di Pontedera), dir. Roberto Bacci, *Hamlet* (Yohangza), dir. Yang Jung-ung. *Shakespeare in 1862* (Michoo), dir. Matsumoto Yuko. These three productions were programmes of The 9th Seoul Performing Arts Festival.

Twelfth Night (Yohangza) at Myeongdong Yesul Geukjang, dir. Yang Jung-ung.

Children's Shakespeare: *The Winter's Tale* (Seoul Metropolitan Theatre) at Sejong Centre, dir. Kim Suk-man.

- 2010 *Romeo and Juliet* (Mokwha) at Rose Theatre, Kingston, London UK. This was the second visit of Mokwha with the production.

Kalo Makbes (Macbeth) (Mabangjin) at Daehangro Yesul Geukjang adapted and directed by Ko Sung-ung.

Hamlet (Schaubühne, Berlin, Germany) at Namsan Arts Centre, dir. Thomas Ostermeier.

The Tempest (Mokwha) at Seoul Arts Centre, dir. Oh Tae-suk.

- 2011 *Macbeth* (Street Theatre Troupe) at Gerilra Geukjang, dir. Alexander Zeldin.

Hamlet (Seoul Metropolitan Theatre) at Sejong Centre, dir. Park Geun-hyeong.

Mokwha's *The Tempest* was invited to the Edinburgh International Festival.

- 2012 The First Shakespeare Award of Korea at the National Theatre of Korea
- Yohangza's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, London, as part of The World Shakespeare Festival.
- Hamlet 6* (Chilyookdan) at Namsan Arts Centre, dir. Ki Kook-seo.
- Romeo and Juliet* (The National Theatre Company of Korea and the National Theatre Company of China) at the National Theatre of Korea, dir. Tian Qinxin.

Appendix (2)

The Regulation of Performance Arts in 1976

A performance will be censored if that it indicates or includes, expect article 4

1. Disrespect for the national flag or the national anthem, or contempt for the head of the state.
2. Works of the enemy, or contents and expression which will finally advantage the enemy
3. Indiscreet praise for foreigners and neglect of national pride
4. Performance should respect national spirit and the traditions of allied nations
5. Disrespect for the dignity of the law court, and portrayal of the law-enforcer as powerless and incapable
6. Implication of anti-national behaviours, and instigation of masses of the public
7. Portrayal of violence and massacre therefore threat for public safety
8. Disrespect or derision for education system that was mapped by the democratic principle
9. Derogation of a specific person, occupation, devotee of a religion, region, or class
10. Presenting decadent or foreign work that is likely to damage the traditional art
11. Promotion of superstition or unscientific life style
12. Description of rape, adultery or prostitution in order to justify sex crime
13. Untrue representation of a specific person or thing that should be investigated according to the written history
14. Presentation of extreme pessimism, of arrivism, or of imprudent behaviour
15. Justification of maltreatment of adopted son or daughter.

16. Justification of crime, or detailed description of the crime method

- (1. 국가 국기 등 경건하게 취급하지 않았거나 국가 원수를 모독한 내용 및 표현
2. 적성국의 작품 또는 적성국에 유리한 결과를 가져올 내용 및 표현
3. 외국인을 무조건 찬양하고 우리 민족의 주체성을 잃는 내용 및 표현
4. 자유우방의 습관 풍속 전통 또는 민족적 감정을 존중한다.
5. 준법 정신과 법정의 존엄성을 해하고 법의 집행자를 무력 무능하게 묘사한 내용 및 표현
6. 반국가적 행동을 묘사하고 대중을 선동할 우려가 있는 내용 및 표현
7. 폭력 또는 군중학살을 묘사하고 공안을 해할 우려가 있는 내용 및 표현
8. 민주주의 제도하의 교육을 조롱 또는 모독한 내용 및 표현
9. 특정인 특정직업 특정종교의 신앙자 특정계층 특정지방민의 비방 왜곡 또는 모욕하는 내용 및 표현
10. 전통적인 민족예술문화에 악영향을 끼칠 퇴폐적 외래적인 내용 및 표현
11. 미신을 장려하거나 비과학적인 생활태도를 조장시킬 내용 및 표현
12. 강간 간통 매음 등을 묘사하여 성범죄를 정당화한 내용 및 표현
13. 역사적인 고증이 필요한 특정의 사람 또는 물건을 묘사함에 있어 왜곡된 내용 및 표현
14. 지나친 출세주의 및 염세주의 지나치게 물지각하다고 판단되는 내용 및 표현
15. 비존속의 학대를 정당화한 내용 및 표현
16. 범죄행위를 정당화 하거나 범죄 또는 범죄 수단을 지나치게 자극적으로 표현 또는 섬세하게 묘사한 내용 및 표현 등.)