“A horse, a horse! my kingdom for a horse!”: “Horse” as a character in the Japanese and Chinese versions of *Richard III*

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Abstract

Outline and the aim of the project（要旨と研究目的）

This essay attempts to compare the imagery of the “horse”in the Wuhan Opera version of *Richard III*（entitled *Yu Ma Ji*,《馭馬記》with the Japanese productions of Noda Hideki and Ninagawa Yukio. This is also a small part of a large project entitled “Shakespeare in Asia” which I have been working on since 2002, and I hope I can further develop my research in that context.

Keywords：*Richard III*, Shakespeare in Asia, horse, traditional theatre, Wuhan Opera

1. Introduction to the historical background

“My kingdom for a horse!” is a quotation from Act 5, Scene 4 of Shakespeare ‘s *The Life and Death of Richard the Third*（*Richard III,* in short）. At the end of the play, Richard, the villain-hero, has lost his horse in the battlefield and gives this pathetic cry, while he is hunted down by his opponent, the Earl of Richmond（Henry Tudor）, who will be enthroned as Henry VII after Richard’s death. The evening before this final battle in the Field of Bosworth, Richard has seen the ghosts of the characters he murdered, who cursed him and bade “despair and die!”

The historical records show that Richard’s body was thrown from a horse when he was defeated by Richmond（Henry）in the Field of Bosworth in 1885 and that his dead body was despoiled. Henry married Elizabeth of York, a niece of Richard, and became the symbol of the reunion of England after the War of Roses.

By the end of 1592, Londoners were entertained by the staging of *The Life and Death of Richard the Third*（*Richard III,* in short）. Shakespeare seems to have written this play shortly after the trilogy of *Henry VI parts I, II and III* with which he gained recognition as a playwright, and Richard as a character was already introduced in his earlier play as one of the York brothers who killed Henry VI. Those “history plays” were produced in the age of the Tudor queen regent Elizabeth,

the grand-daughter of Richard’s opponent Henry VII. Shakespeare created the role of Richard by modelling him on Vice, a figure from medieval Morality plays, but succeeded in giving depth to his character by describing him as a Machiavellian villain-hero who manipulate the emotions of other characters. Shakespeare also emphasized that Richard’s “discontent” and hatred to others were based on his “deformed” physical features, which made his mother fear and hate him, and all those characteristics made him a ruthless villain who planned to kill his brother and nephews in order to realize his ambition of ascending to the throne.

In spite of such alleged crimes and “deformity,” Richard is obviously the most popular villain Shakespeare has created, and throughout the stage history of *Richard III,* the audiences have tended to be fascinated by this villain-hero’s merry pranks, sympathizing with him, rather than with his victims. Are we not tempted to imagine what would have happened to Richard if he had got a horse in exchange for his kingdom in his final battle?

In 2012, Richard III’s bones were found under a car park in Leicester and this re-opened the grumblings about the king’s reputation being maligned and distorted by Tudor propaganda, which Shakespeare’s play was largely based on.

2012 was also the year when the Shakespeare’s Globe invited dramatic artists from 37 countries to perform 37 different plays by Shakespeare in their own languages to coincide with the London Olympics. The company invited from the Republic of China was the National Theatre of China, and the production they chose was *Richard III* (directed by Wang Xiaoping) . Since the details of this production are covered by Seto Hiroshi in his thesis, I will go back to the receptions of this play in East Asia, focusing of the cases of China and Japan.

2. The early receptions of *Richard III* in East Asia

Although Shakespeare plays were introduced to Japan and China since the latter half of the nineteenth century, *Richard III* was not among the plays that were first introduced to this region. Tsubouchi Shoyo translated this play into Japanese in 1918, and Yu Er Chang (虞尔昌), a professor of English in Taiwan, was the first to translate the play into Chinese, in 1957. In 1967, Liang Shi Qui (梁実秋) translated all Shakespeare plays into Chinese, including Richard III. Both Yu Er Chang and Liang Shi Qui translated the title of the play as『理查三世』, and it remains the standard Chinese title till now.

As for the productions of this of this play in East Asia, what we find in the record of professional theatre companies as the first production of Richard III is the one in 1962, by *Kurumiza* in Kyoto. According to the chart made by Senda Akihiko[1], it was then produced by twenty different Japanese theatrical companies by the end of the twentieth century, including the

production by Ninagawa Company, marking it as the most frequently produced "history play"by shakespeare in Japan.

In China, however, the only productions of *Richard III* in the twentieth century were those in 1986 (中国児童劇院 in Beijing) and 1989 (上海戯劇学院), and they were not repeated productions. We can assume that in twentieth century China, *Richard III* was still considered as post of the western Canon that the students and scholars of spoken drama (話劇) were experimenting on, while in the late twentieth century in Japan, there was some room for a variety of interpretations or adaptations of this play, as in the case on Noda Hideki, in which the imagery of the "horse" is developed.

3. The case of Noda Hideki's Sandai-me Richaado (Tokyo Globe Theatre and Osaka Kintetsu Theatre, October to November 1990)

Among the twenty productions Senda Akihiko listed as the Japanese productions of *Richard III* in the twentieth-century, Noda Hideki's *Sandai-me Richaado* (三代目りちゃあど), a wild adaptation inspired not only from Shakespeare's text but also from Anthony Burgess and Josephine Tay is the most imaginative and remote from Canonical Shakespeare.

Noda, an actor-playwright-director who has been leading *Yumeno-Yuminsha*, the theatre group which emerged from a student troupe, wrote and directed this play for the Tokyo Globe theatre just before he disbanded his troupe and went to England to work with Theatre de Complicite.

Noda seems to have overlapped his consciousness as a writer with his understanding of Shakespeare as a fellow-writer, and imaginatively fused the accounts of the relationship between William Shakespeare and his own younger brother Richard with the Yorkish Richard's alleged crimes.

Noda's mentor Takahashi Yasunari has once commented that *Sandaime Richaado* is not even an adaptation of Shakespeare's play, but it still reflects the Asian fascination with this villain-hero and what his last cry for a horse could have meant.

The opening scene of *Sandai-me Richaado* starts from the Field of Bosworth and Richard's famous line and the climax of the play, "A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse". But it takes the form of a radical departure from Shakespeare's text, for, with the galloping sound of horse hooves, Richaado's "defenders"appear on stage and a trial to repudiate his reputation as a villain

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[1] The chart of the production of Richard III after World War II is included in 松岡和子訳『シェイクスピア全集 7 リチャード三世』(筑摩書房 1999)

starts. A character named “Shakespeare” also appears in the trial as the author-and-prosecutor, and Richaado (Richard) ’s alleged crimes are re-enacted as a play-within-the play according to the record of the prosecutor.

In the course of the “trial”, Noda also reveals his basic idea on localizing western classics for the jury (Japanese audience) to visualize the social hierarchy, tradition and heredity of Shakespeare’s time. So he chooses the conflict of Japanese flower arrangement families as something equivalent to the War of the Roses for *Sandai-me Richaado,* and starts calling the kings “Iemoto”. Instead of the Tower of London, the prisoners in the play-within-the-play are led to the Tower of Kenzan, named after the metal base used in flower arrangement with spikes upon which flowers are arranged.

At the end of the play, it is revealed that what was imprisoned in the Tower were not the two lost princes, but the “playful adventure of boyhood”, which “Shakespeare” (as the character who appears in Noda’s play) and Richaado (who is, at this stage, regarded as one with William Shakespeare’s younger brother Richard) try to rescue, but climbing the “bamboo of wild fancy”.

Because of the limit of time and space, I will largely omit the interpretations of the complex layers of Noda’s work, but I must say that in the core of *Sandai-me Richaado* is Noda’s sympathy towards Shakespeare’s idea of creative imagination, and his idea of a villain-hero. In an interview, Noda explained that what he has in common with Shakespeare is “the love for the theatre that overcomes our grudge and hatred towards society.” Noda also explained that the main reason why he decided to adapt *Richard III* was the sympathy he felt for the villain-heroes in Kabuki plays.

> I meant to explain why Shakespeare’s villains are attractive. If the hatred to the society were greater, the author would have given heavier punishments to his villains… I feel the same way in Kabuki plays. Kabuki plays also include some morality and punish evil at the end, but they wouldn’t be interesting without villains. (Interview to Noda on May 1996)

To Noda, Richard as a villain represents the “playful adventure of boyhood” created by Shakespeare s “wild fancy” and love for the theatre, and this is all developed from Noda’s imagination from the line, “A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!”. We see that in Noda’s case, “horse” is the symbol of imagination, freedom and adventure.

4. The case of Yukio Ninagawa's *Richard III* (***Saitama,Tokyo, Niigata, Osaka and Kita Kyushu* 1999, 2003**)

Among the directors who have been initially trained in the straightforward *Shingeki* style, Yukio Ninagawa is known for his imaginative and stunning visuals, especially since he came back to Japan from his production on "Ninagawa Macbeth" at the Edinburgh Festival in 1885. He basically creates productions for a Japanese audience in Japanese, and unlike Noda, does not change any lines from Shakespeare's text, translated by those he trusts.

In the case of his production of *Richard III*, first produced in 1999, he used the newest translation by Matsuoka Kazuko, and did not use any oriental setting or costumes as in the case of "Ninagawa Macbeth" and some other productions. Instead, he shocked the audience in his additional three minutes scene in the opening, filled with the image of the "horse".

As the play begins, the audience is confronted with a three-story construction that will sometimes represent the Tower of London, open out into ramparts as the tale unfolds, or be shielded in parts by mirrors to create "rooms" on stage. A "horse" then wanders in, runs around the stage, and then drops dead. Next, from the ceiling, a dead horse, other animal parts and garbage rain down, crashing on to the stage. Then Richard (played by the ex-musical star Ichimura Masachika) appears, dragging his foot to show that he has a physical handicap, and starts his opening soliloquy. His describing of "this glorious summer' sounded ironic, suggesting that it was an aftermath of a violent display.

Finally, in the last scene when Richard is defeated by the Lancastrian force and the Earl of Richmond is about to proclaim his victory speech as King Henry VII, beginning with, "Inter their bodies as becomes their births," a horse appears, moves around, then drops dead. Then from on high "bodies" crash down on the stage, drowning out the victor's words.

Though Ninagawa and Noda use different methods to familiarize the target audience with this history play, it is obvious that the image of the "horse"they create (visually or in words) is meant to recall Richard's cry for help and pose the question of whether he really was an evil monster, or just a victim of the course of time.

5. Shakespeare adapting traditional Asian theatre

Richard III also remains popular in the 21st century including various Japanized adaptations, such as Nomura Mansai's *Kuni Nusubito* (国盗人), produced in 2007 and 2009, and Inoue Hidenari's *Natakirimari* (鉈切り丸) produced in 2014. Mansai's *Kuni Nusubito* focused on two actors; the Kyogen actor Nomura Mansai himself in the role of the villain-hero Akutaro (Japanized name for Richard), and the actress Shiraishi Kayoko who was in the role of all the female characters.

Inoue Hidenari’s *Natakirimari*, which changed the setting of *Richard III* to the Kamakura period of Japan, and cost prominent actors from various fields. In both productions, it tells Shakespeare’s story against historical Japanese background and fused modern artistic features.

Noda's *Sandaime Richaado’s* script was adapted by the Singaporean director Ong Keng Sen in 2016 and 2017 as a pan-Asian production. Noda’s script was already a complicated adaptation, combining ideas from Anthony Burgess 's "*Nothing Like the Sun*" and Josephine Tey’s The *Daughter* of Time, as well characters from Shakespeare's other plays, but Keng Sen further complicated the production buy juxtaposing various Asian traditional performance forms, including Balinese shadow puppets, Kyogen, Kabuki and the modern tradition of Takarazuka. All the actors were put into white surrealistic costumes to show Ken Seng’s idea of “New Asia”.

Noda’s image of Richard’s “horse”, which is the symbol of imagination, freedom and adventure, seems to have been changed to the freedom of re-editing and experimenting “Asian” tradition in Ong Ken Seng’s version[2].

As mentioned in the first section, In 2012, the London Globe, as a tie in with the London Olympics, invited dramatic artists from 37 countries[3] to perform 37 plays by Shakespeare, and a Chinese version of *Richard III*（『理查三世』）received high praise. After the premiere in London, it was then staged at the National Centre for the Performing Arts（NCPA）in Beijing and the National Theatre of China. After being invited to the United States, Denmark, Romania and some other countries, the NTC’S *Richard III* was also selected for the Sino-Korean exchange repertoire of 2016 on the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death.

As Seto Hiroshi points out[4], this production of *Richard III,* directed by Wang Xiaoping, was a production combining Spoken Drama elements with Beijing Opera. Though all actors were in traditional Han Chinese costumes and elements from Beijing Opera were visible, modern elements were fused in its character modelling, stage art, props and music.

One characteristics of the villain-hero Richard in this Chinese production, is that Shakespeare’s depiction of him being a “misshapen”is ignored, and the protagonist, acted by Zhang Dongyu,

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[2] Honestly speaking, though some of Ken Seng’s Shakespeare productions such as *Lear* had its own beauty, I think his production of *Sandaime Richardo* was a chaotic failure, partly because he misunderstood Noda’s script, and also because he did not cast a Chinese actor trained in traditional theatre.

[3] From Japan, a futuristic production of Coriolanus by theatre company *Chiten* was chosen from Japan for this festival. Ninagawa’s *Cymbeline* was not included in the 37 plays produced at London Globe, but was invited to the Barbican Theatre the same year.

[4] See 瀬戸宏著 「中国国家話劇院《理查三世》」（紀念莎士比亜逝世 400 周年学術研討会暨中国外国文学学会莎士比亜研究分会年会 北京大学 2016.10.23 ）

stood erect, straight and handsome. This is different from the Japanese *Nadekirimaru*, which emphasized the villain-hero's ugliness and deformity, or even with Noda and Ninagawa versions, which both referred to the protagonist's "lame foot" as an important reason for his cry for a horse.

Since traditional Asian theatre often has a strong repertory of history plays or has a strong image that they are associated with historical tales. it seems quite natural for Asian directors to adopt the elements from local traditional elements when producing Shakespeare's history plays. What is significant about the productions I included in this section is that they are fusing shingeki or spoken drama（話劇） elements with traditional theatre（伝統演劇）. In some cases, as seen in the neo-kabuki by Inoue, they were showing a historical drama using actors for the modern theatre. Using such cos fusion or cosmetics may be an effective strategy when the target is the modern or international audience（and it was a key to success when staged in the London Globe）. However, there are some approaches from the other side, some attempts to adapt Shakespeare to the traditional Asian theatre which target audience is the local, which I will explain in the next section.

6. Asian traditional theatre adapting Shakespeare; The significance to the Chu opera version :Yu Ma Ji, 楚劇《馭馬記》Xinzhou Chu Opera Troupe of Wuhan, 2018

Librettist：Zhu Yongshan Director: Wang Zuquan Composer: Xia Bangguo

Adapting elements of traditional Asian theatre to Shakespeare productions is now more widely accepted as intercultural theatre but adapting a certain Shakespeare play to a certain genre of traditional Asian theatre is a more complicated issue, for various reasons. Each traditional genre has inherited a certain strong repertory and the target audience is different for each genre. For example, the production *of The Comedy of Kyogen*[5] is a successful adaptation of *Comedy of Errors* because the theme of mistaken identity matches the tradition of comic farce of similar themes in Kyogen itself, and *Shinsaku-Noh Othello*[6] and *Shinsaku-Noh* Macbeth[7] melted well in the tradition of Noh, for its repertoire of adapting historical tragedies from the *Tale of Heike* and other old tales within Japan and from China. The same intertextuality also worked well when *Richard III* was adapted in Chu Opera（楚劇）in 2018.

There are more than 300 different styles of traditional Chinese opera to cater for numerous different dialects, and all opera artistes have received strict training in codified role types since childhood and they do not perform straight or spoken drama（just as in the case of Japanese Noh actors）.

Chu is an alias of the central Chinese provinces of Hubei and Hunan, which breed numerous

genres of traditional Chinese theater. Chu opera, a genre which originated in north Wuhan, capital of Hubei, features folksy *O-He* tunes dating back to the Daoguan reign of the Qing dynasty（1821-1851）. Combined with synchronic dancing, acrobatics and other theatrical conventions, the aria is sung with the chime of a chorus whose function is now largely taken over by the orchestra of two-string melodic fiddles and percussive drum and gongs. The performers are codified into *Sheng*（male）, *dan*（female）and *Chou*（clown）role-types. Regarded as one of the cultural treasures in China in 2006, Chu opera boasts of 15 professional troupes in Hubei and has spread nationwide in areas of Hunan, Shaanxi, Chongqing, Xinjiang and Shanghai.

Chu Opera（楚劇）features the local dialect and other colorings, and the choreography follows time-honored *Kun* opera, writing meaning into their body language in highly conventionalized ways. According to Xiong Jieping , “Anybody who understands stage performance of one genre can understand another. And anybody who understands Mandarin should be able to understand Chu opera, whose arias follow the local dialect, also a northern dialect where Mandarin belongs.”

However, when the show was performed in the vernacular Chinese of Wuhan in 2018,

both Chinese and English subtitles were shown on screen to avoid the language barrier of the audience[8].

Unlike the Chinese production in 2012, the Chu Opera version, entitled *Yu Ma Ji,* was an adaptation which simplified and changed Shakespeare’s play itself to fit into their tradition. The synopsis is as follows:

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[5] Comedy of Kyogen is an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors* , written by Takahashi Yasunari and produced by the Nomura Mansaku family of Nomura Kyogen at the London Globe in 2001.

[6] *Shinsaku Noh Macbeth* is a classical Noh version of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, written by Izumi Noriko in 2004 and produced and starred by Tatsumi Manjiro since 2005 in Osaka, Shizuoka, and Tokyo.

SYNOPSIS of *Yu Ma Ji*, 楚劇《馭馬記》adapted from William Shakespeare's *Richard the Third*

In ancient times, Prince Wu (Richard) follows his crown brother Xuan (Edward) on a warring expedition and captures a precious horse which would be dedicated to the king upon their triumphal return. With the support of generals, Xuan alone glorifies the dedication and the trophy is proclaimed as a royal horse. Wu deplores his loss of the glory and, as a horse of desire (impersonated) emerges in his heart, pledges to ride the horse to the throne. When the king falls fatally ill, Wu spreads a rumor to ruin his own brother, double-talks his sister-in-law (Lady Anne) into marrying himself, murders all his rivals and usurps the kingdom. However, he fails to wrangle the horse of his own desire. The denouement reveals his forsaken defeat. He is deserted by all the generals and killed by his nephew (Richmond) in the battlefield after his desperate cry to trade off his kingdom for a horse in vain.[9]

As in the case of Noh, or even in the case of Noda's adaptation of Richard III, the plot as well as the number of the characters in this Chu Opera production is simplified. Also, as in the 2012 Chinese version directed by Wang Xiaoping, the villain-hero (Wu, in this case) was not described as being a hunchback or lame. The greatest characteristic was, as shown in the title itself, they made it clearer that the "horse" is the symbol of ambition and glory, and even the motivation of his murders. of his brother. The horse of desire (impersonated by an actor) emerges and gallops around, but it does not come to his side when Wu cries for him in the last battlefield.

Unlike Ninagawa's stage, in which two men in a horse costume made the audience believe that it is a real horse, the one in the Chu opera was an actor hanging a sign that says "horse" from his neck, which was even more visually stunning.

The production is expecting international tours, and the response from the international audience is awaited.

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[7] Shinsaku Noh Othello is a classical Noh version of Shakespeare's Othello, written by Izumi Noriko in 2013 and produced and starred by Tatsumi Manjiro since that year in Osaka, Kyoto and Tokyo.

[8] Three Japanese, including myself and two Europeans were among the audience.

[9] From the pamphlet of 楚劇《馭馬記》. The English translation was done by Xiong Jieping.

7． Temporary conclusion

As seen in the various cases of the productions and adaptations of Shakespeare’s *Richard III* in China and Japan, the “horse”that appears in the last cry of the hero-villain tends to be emphasized and/or visualized in both countries. Whether it has to do with the changing interpretation of the historical Richard or the tradition of Asian theatre, is yet to be analyzed.

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「馬だ！馬をよこせ！代わりに俺の王国をくれてやる」：『リチャード三世』の上演に見る「馬」の表象と日中のシェイクスピア受容

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要　旨

この研究は、2002年度以後取り組んできた「アジアのシェイクスピア受容と上演」というプロジェクトの一環であり、西欧演劇のCanonとして考えられてきたシェイクスピア劇と、東アジアの土着の演劇・芸能における受容と上演を比較分析することを基盤としている。

この小論（研究ノート）では、特に、武漢で観劇する機会のあった、「楚劇」版『リチャード三世』《馭馬記》と、主として日本の蜷川幸雄および野田秀樹による同作品の舞台との「馬」のイメージの比較を試みる。

キーワード：リチャード三世、アジアのシェイクスピア、馬、野田秀樹、楚劇