

Drama: Cultural Diversity Under the Influence of Hybridization

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Abstract

In the context of globalization, cultural hybridization has become an ongoing trend. The rapid development of modern information technology has also promoted the emergence of cultural integration in various fields. Cultural diversity has thus developed. As a direct manifestation of cultural forms, the field of art has seen the emergence of numerous new artistic forms and expressive techniques. This paper takes drama as an entry point and studies the development of diversity in drama under the role of cultural hybridization.

Keywords: hybridization, cultural diversity, development of diversity in drama

1. Introduction

Transnational mobility of people, commercial products, information and culture has been growing dramatically, and they have deeply changed the world (Ritzer & Malone, 2001). The flow of globalization has been greatly accelerated with the development of modern transportation and the internet. Under the influence of globalization, cultural hybridization has become an ongoing trend that happens in cultural products and creates a large amount of new cultural forms (Wang & Yeh, 2005). This paper will briefly argue that hybridization prompts the diversity of the culture and make new cultural connections with one another. Firstly, the following content will summarize the different views about the impacts of cultural hybridization, and then explore three examples of hybridization occurring in the field of drama: *Turandot*, *King Oedipus* and *the Dreamer*.

2. Different Perspectives on the Impact of Cultural Hybridization

With the frequency of the global mobility, the world becomes more and more similar, which seems that people in different areas and countries tend to listen to the same music, watch the same television programs, make consumption of common worldwide branded goods and services (Prasad & Prasad, 2006). It perhaps indicates that the culture gradually becomes identical and homogeneous under cultural globalization. Moreover, hybridization arguably has led to the shrinkage of the identity of native culture and undermined traditional culture and customs, and even the cultural uniqueness is almost eliminated (Beck, 2000; Berger, 2002). This likely means that the local cultures would be affected by hybridization to a considerable extent. Similarly, Schiller (1976) and Ritzer (2010) claim that loss of distinctive cultural identity would be the key impact of hybridization. In another aspect, Barber (1996) mentions that it is sometimes not equal in the process of cultural exchange. To a certain extent, powerful countries tend to make strong cultural exports to developing countries because of the appearance of cultural hegemony. It is possible that more powerful cultures or even global cultures would shape and overwhelm the other cultures (Abderrahman & Giovanna, 2011). However, all these arguments appear to overemphasize the unity of the culture and the risk encountered by the local culture but ignore people's choice for culture and insistence on cultural identity in the dynamic hybrid process.

In contrast, Cowen (2002) argues that even though globalization has brought unknown to local and traditional cultures, it may also generate many positive changes. According to Wang and Yeh (2005) hybridization is the process by which cultures take on new forms and creates new links with each other, which is not the simple mixing and synthesis of ingredients from distinct cultures. This commonly means that hybridization could create

unique and new cultural products and practices rather than cultural homogenization. As for the process of cultural hybridization, there is a statement, ‘a third space’ within which different cultural elements would selectively absorb each other and shape to new forms, but they do not disturb the previous cultural elements existence (Papastergiadis, 2000; Young, 1995). From these perspectives, it is believed that cultural hybridization would prompt the diversity of culture as well as preserving previous cultures well. Meanwhile, the core value of the native culture and beliefs remain connecting deeply with the primitive culture content (Abderrahman & Giovanna, 2011). It probably indicates that the source and identity of the culture could let people retain their own native culture and select a certain element of the external culture to absorb. What is more, Appadurai (1996) and Pieterse (2004) mention that many local cultures usually have presented the ability to domesticate or resist foreign cultural impacts. Therefore, the native cultural elements which have been engraved into life are hard to replace, and those new cultural exchanges could generate various unique cultural forms and produce the diversity of culture under the influence of hybridization.

3. Cultural Diversity in Drama in the Context of Hybridization

Under the influence of cultural hybridization, the drama would possess numerous new inspirations from life and culture. Gerbner and Cross (1976) argue that entertainments such as drama and television are symbolic reflections of our environment and life. The following three examples of drama represent how cultural hybridization prompt innovation in drama.

Turandot (figure 1) shows the combination of traditional cultural elements from China and the spirit world from the west. It is an Italian drama that uses the western opera performance and drama structure. While the play is also blended with the Chinese traditional atmosphere and social background. It is this seemingly “collision” that creates a new form of stage performance. The whole performance begins with the leading character’s elegant dancing and gentle singing to represent a graceful and demure eastern woman. It depicts a princess with Chinese temperament who wears the fancy dressing and gorgeous crown standing for the royal identity in ancient China. However, it is a bloody story that the princess bravely used her wisdom to avenge her father behind this peaceful atmosphere full of extensive Chinese flavour. This independent and daring character seems to be completely different from the traditional Chinese women’s thinking thousands of years ago. It is commonly believed that this unique character is created by the hybridity of different cultures. In another aspect, these two different dramatic culture elements mix to create an unprecedented visual and auditory experience. There are plenty of colourful colours such as gold and yellow on the stage setting that stands for the power and glory in ancient China, which to a certain extent is in contrast with the sacred and solemn stage atmosphere at that period in the west. Moreover, the play combines the classic arias from the western and Chinese ancient folk-songs together, which is a blend of two cultural styles, solemnity and gentleness. The process of trans-local fusion and cultural mixing creates a unique cultural hybrid (Ritzer, 2010). Thus, the drama is dominated by western culture absorbing other China cultural elements to generate creative character expressions and a variety of performance styles under the influence of hybridization.



Figure 1. *Turandot* 2016. Photo by Marty Sohl



Figure 2. *King Oedipus* 2013. Photo by Zhejiang

King Oedipus (figure 2) combines the acting techniques of Chinese Peking Opera with the spiritual content of ancient Greece. It is an innovation at modern Peking Opera, which tells an ancient Greek tragedy through the traditional Chinese performance style. Compared with *Turandot*, the hybridity of this play is seemingly more powerful. Though the whole stage setting and costumes as well as the prop are traditional Chinese styles, the performers use them to represent the stories of ancient Greece. In the aspect of action, performers use wide-open action such as jumping, falling and tumbling which are classic skills in Peking Opera to portray the character's personality about endurance, resistance and struggle. Moreover, performers use the Chinese traditional water sleeves to perform the visual images that Oedipus's blood ejecting out from the eye socket. This kind of performance, which uses abstract Chinese elements to represent the concrete story images in western stories, is the concrete process of cultural practical activities under cultural hybridization. The softness and length of the Chinese water sleeves, accompanied by the power of the performers as they are released outwards, bring to life the violent and bloody scenes of the Greek tales. The contribution distinctively diverse cultures bring to the new and inventive shared common space (Pieterse, 1996). Exactly as the diversity of Peking Opera itself with the fascinating storyline from Greece offer many chances to innovate the dramatic forms. Therefore, to a certain extent, the whole play not only preserves the core value in Peking Opera but also shows the main substance of the foreign story. It is all displayed in a new practice of traditional Opera flavour and the character's spirit from the west under cultural hybridization.



Figure 3. *The dreamer* 2016. Photo by Xuefeng Yin

The dreamer (figure3) is a subversive theatrical experiment that blends western modern dancing with Chinese traditional stories. This play is inspired by the classic Chinese story *The Peony Pavilion* and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The whole play has no specific storyline, only shows a mysterious dream with a modern dance performance. The character, Du Liniang stands behind the screen not showing her true face, while the screen reflects her silhouette in the effect of light and shadow. This way of performance contains a Chinese traditional skill named Chinese shadow puppetry, which seems to be a performance style of implicit expression in China. However, behind the screen, the physical expression of the character is at times violent and at times subtle revealing the power of the body, which is the performance way from the western modern dance. It perhaps aims to integrate with the overall stage style, so control a balance between these two elements from distinct cultures. The other character, Helena unabashedly immerses herself into dancing to release the whole desire and other actors all leave the screen rushing towards Helena with passion. Some actors are topless and some are full of provocative movements. This expression of raw physical strength and inner desire is the performance of western dancing. Thus, this combination of the unrestrained and bold dynamic expression of western modern dance and the subtle and soft expression of traditional Chinese techniques creates a variety of possibilities for interpreting classic stories. It is under the influence of cultural hybridization that different cultural elements collide with each other in the creation of new works, thus creating newer and more experimental ways of dramatic expression.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has summarized different views of the impacts of hybridization either through cultural homogeneity, the loss of local cultures or the diversity of the cultural forms. It then examined three examples of drama to indicate that there are numerous innovations and practices under the influence of cultural hybridization. These analyses demonstrate cultural hybridization can lead to a constant interaction of different cultural elements - cultural practice - and this process of practice can stimulate the creation of more connections between cultural elements and promote the development of cultural diversity. How these influences will develop in the future needs people to do long-time observation and exploration.

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